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# An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign

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Admiral Harry D. Train, II, U.S. Navy (Retired)

**T**he profession of arms is not only a life of dedication, sacrifice, and frustration, it is a life of intellectual challenge. For you see, when we are called upon for combat, it means we have failed as a nation. When guns speak and blood flows, we have failed in our pursuit of the first and foremost political objective assigned the armed forces: that of deterring war. We should all be acutely aware that the Armed Forces of the United States has no life in and of itself. It exists for one purpose and one purpose only: to support the political objectives of this Nation. *What* that service shall consist of is determined by the people and by their elected representatives. *How* that service shall be performed, on the other hand, is the central element of the military profession. *How* we perform in our stewardship is the measure of our worth to the Nation.

Rather than expand upon that thought in a philosophical way, let me share with you a slice of relatively recent politico-military history—a tragic episode involving two nations, two friends whose interests coincide largely with ours. This history illustrates most of the points that need to be made.

In North America and in Western Europe it is called the “Falkland Islands conflict.” In Latin America it is called the “Malvinas conflict.” The British call it the “South Atlantic war.” By whatever name you wish to use, it is a classic case of the breakdown of deterrence. It is a war that should never have occurred. But it did and therefore presents a case study rich in political and military mistakes. Ultimately, the outcome of this war was determined more by British professionalism than by the balance of power or the application of such basic military principles as achieving air superiority prior to an amphibious landing.

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This article was delivered by the author as the first annual Hofheimer Lecture to the students, faculty, and distinguished military and civilian guests at the Armed Forces Staff College.

This is a conflict of particular interest to sailors and airmen because it involved the first use of modern cruise missiles against warships of a major navy, and because it was the first time since World War II that sustained air attacks were made against naval forces at sea. It also included the first use of nuclear-powered attack submarines and the first known use of vertical/short takeoff and landing aircraft in combat.

Yet, it is also of particular interest to infantrymen because the action in the Falklands once again demonstrated that the ultimate outcome of a war is determined on the ground. The Royal Marines and the British Army won on the ground. The Royal Navy could have lost the Falkland Islands conflict at sea, but could not have *won* it. Such is the nature of modern war.

### The Diplomatic Prelude

The diplomatic prelude to the Falkland Islands conflict contains such a wealth of material as to warrant an entire article by itself. As an essential element of the war's history, it contains lessons of which we military professionals ought to be aware. For after all, it was the failure of the diplomatic process, coupled with the breakdown of deterrence, which led to war. This is an oversimplification, but will suffice for our purposes here.

The diplomatic prelude to the Falkland Islands conflict spans an era of 150 years. I shall concentrate on the last few during which the major players were: the United Nations, the Falkland Islands Company, Foreign Minister Lord Chalfont, the Falkland Islands Emergency Committee, the coal miners in England, the Conservative government, Foreign Minister Lord Carrington, the new junta in Argentina, the Royal Navy, BBC Television, and an Argentine scrap metal dealer named Sergio Davidoff.

The United Nations passed U.N. Resolution 1514 in 1960 urging all colonial powers to divest themselves of their colonies and submit a list of those colonies to the United Nations. The British listed the Falkland Islands as a British colony; Argentina responded by claiming that the Malvinas Islands were no one's colony. The United Nations subsequently created a committee to negotiate the conflicting British and Argentine claims.

The residents of the Falkland Islands derived their livelihood from the Falkland Islands Company, a profitable operation involving the sale of wool produced in the Falklands. This company was particularly profitable because the British Government provided most of the overhead and logistics support for its activities. In 1968, following secret negotiations between Argentina and Britain and subsequent rumors of an imminent settlement of the Falkland Islands sovereignty issue, Lord Chalfont visited the Islands. This high-level visit so alarmed the Falkland Islands Company that they reacted by creating the Falkland Islands Emergency Committee. As a lobbying body, their purpose was to ensure the continuing existence of their unique profit structure.

In 1971 Great Britain and Argentina signed, under U.N. auspices, a communication agreement. Under this agreement, Argentina assumed from Great Britain the burden of communication support of the Islands and instituted air service between the Falklands and the mainland. The use of only a "white card" permitted open movement between the Islands and Argentina by both Argentine and Falkland Islands residents. The card contained no fingerprints, no nationality, and no expiration date. Educational opportunity on the mainland and the availability of medical care were essential elements of the communication agreement.

In the years following, talks that largely focused on the sovereignty issue were subject to periodic breakdowns. Then, in 1981, it appeared as though Lord Carrington were about to embrace a Hong Kong-type lease-back agreement with Argentina. The Falkland Islands Emergency Committee, with their emotions running high, embarked upon a blitz of Parliament and succeeded in obtaining a decision to discontinue all discussions of sovereignty in the talks with Argentina. Violent reactions in Argentina to this diplomatic setback prompted the British to begin dusting off and updating contingency plans for defense of the Islands, and the new Argentine junta began a similar updating of their contingency plans to invade the Islands.

Meanwhile, the riots in England's coal mines and the Labor Party's exploitation of this conservative government's distress were creating pressures within the United Kingdom to seek a unifying cause. Also, the Royal Navy was dealt another setback when John Nott, Secretary of State for Defense, announced that one-quarter of the surface combatants in the Royal Navy were to be deactivated. If ever there was a service looking for a mission wherein lay the means to reestablish its value to its country, it was the Royal Navy in 1981.

Enter upon the scene one scrap metal dealer, Sergio Davidoff. Having purchased three abandoned whaling factories in the South Georgia Islands, he planned to bring "white card" workers to the Islands to dismantle the factories, and ship the scrap to Argentina. The Argentine Navy developed, then later cancelled, a plan to exploit Davidoff's mission by including military personnel among his workers. According to the aborted plan, these commandos were to be left behind in South Georgia after Davidoff had left for the mainland with his scrap. Misunderstandings between Davidoff and British Government officials regarding correct procedures to be followed in the performance of his mission, plus considerable diplomatic and consular incompetence on the part of Governor General Rex Hunt at Port Stanley, resulted in an electrifying report from the British Antarctic survey team in the South Georgia Islands stating that the "Argentines have landed." The stage was set for war. A further announcement on BBC Television that two British nuclear submarines had sailed for the Falkland Islands—a report which later proved to be incorrect—set in motion the events which led to war.

## The Breakdown of Deterrence

While previous Argentine governments may have considered the use of military force as a means to regain sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, ultimately such actions were deterred by their perceptions of Great Britain's *military capability* and its *willingness* to use that capability to defend its interests. However, prior to their commitment of the Argentine military force to occupy Port Stanley on 2 April 1982, the Galtiere-Anaya-Lamidoze junta did *not* believe that the British would respond with military force. What then prompted the shift in their perception of the British military capability and their willingness to employ it? Admiral Anaya, Chief of the Argentine Navy, cites the following sequence of British decisions as supporting the junta's analysis:

- their loss of Suez in 1956 and the associated loss of overflight rights and use of bases created obstacles to sustaining British deployments east of Suez;
- the 1957 British defense review resulting in cutbacks of Royal Navy and British Army forces stationed outside of the United Kingdom;
- the 1966 Labor government economic review resulting in a major reduction of British forces stationed east of Suez;
- the late 1960s mission reduction of the Royal Navy; cancellation for the construction of a new class of large deck aircraft carrier; and plans to deactivate all Royal Navy aircraft carriers, transferring the tactical air mission to the Royal Air Force—all cast doubt on the ability of the Royal Navy to support the vital interests of the United Kingdom;
- failure of the Conservative Party to alter this trend during their 1970-1974 stewardship gave a sense of permanence to these setbacks;
- the 1975 Labor government defense review sealed the doom of the aircraft carrier, retired amphibious ships, projected reductions in the size of the Navy and ordered further withdrawals from British overseas bases; and finally,
- the 1981 Conservative government announcement of the deactivation of one-quarter of the Royal Navy's surface combatants and simultaneous negotiations to sell one-third of their newly constructed class of miniature VSTOL carriers to Australia painted a picture of doom for the Royal Navy.

Admiral Anaya's interpretation was that the United Kingdom had become a nation lacking not only the means to defend its interests 8,000 miles from England, but also the national will to employ what little capability remained.

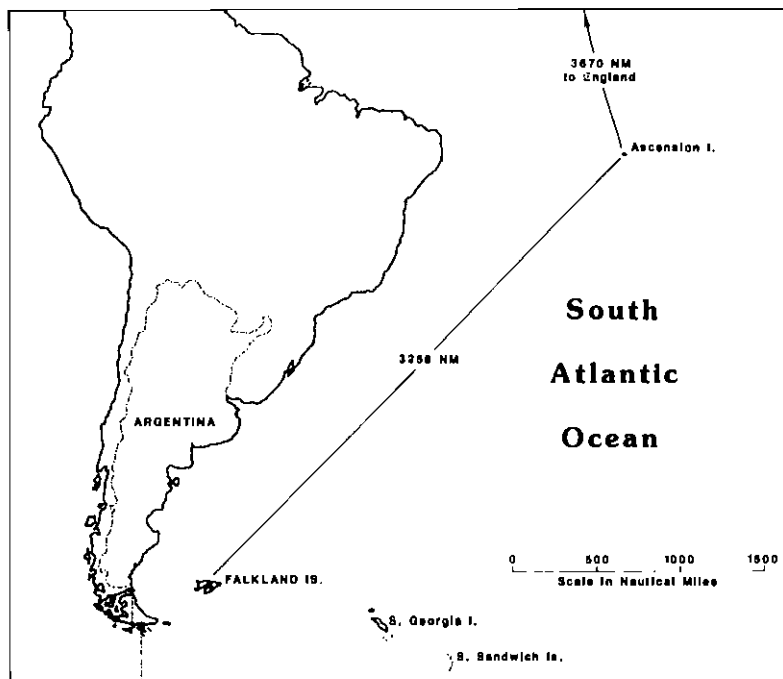
## The Argentine Invasion

When the BBC erroneously announced the sailing of two British SSNs on 26 March 1981 in reaction to events in South Georgia, Admiral Anaya faced a dilemma. Up to then his contingency planning had been as "academic" as

that of his predecessors. He even described the Malvinas contingency planning as "war college type planning," simply an exercise. The fact that it was being conducted in an aura of great secrecy by a limited number of carefully selected admirals and generals at a remote and secluded naval base argues against such a conclusion; nevertheless, such was his contention. Whether a war college level planning exercise or a fleet planning effort, the contingency plan called for execution no earlier than June. Argentine conscripts enter service on 1 February each year and do not reach acceptable levels of proficiency until June; Argentine Navy commanding officers assure their commands in February of each year. Another important consideration was the Falkland Islands weather which is miserable in the middle of the winter, thus favoring a defending force, especially against an adversary whose home base is 8,000 miles away.

Following receipt of the 26 March erroneous report of nuclear submarine sailings, Anaya concluded that whatever opportunity might exist for a successful invasion of Port Stanley would disappear when the submarines arrived. He calculated their arrival date to be 12 April. In a now or never frame of mind he directed Vice Admiral Lombardo, commander of the South Atlantic Theater of Operations, to execute the plan known as Operación Rosario at the earliest date possible. D-day was set for 2 April.

The landing was a casebook operation with 700 marines and 100 commandos executing an amphibious assault on Port Stanley on the morning



of 2 April. Their rules of engagement were to shed no British blood and avoid damage to British property. The operation was flawlessly executed. The marines and commandos were back-loaded the same day and replaced with a like number of army occupation troops.

From this point, until the sinking of the *General Belgrano* on 2 May, the Argentine leadership thought they were in a crisis management situation, while the British, on the other hand, believed they were at war. These disparate mind-sets dominated their respective decisionmaking processes. The Argentine leaders considered the invasion to be a mere military nudge to diplomacy and continued to seek a diplomatic solution for gaining sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands. Meanwhile, the British sailed their fleet, including ships taken up from trade, loaded out with paratroops and commandos, toward the war zone.

### The First Ten Days

The case can be made that Argentina lost the war between the 2 April invasion and the 12 April arrival of the British submarines. That is not to say the British *won* the war at that time, as they did not win it until early June, but the Argentines lost it early on. Let me explain. The Argentine plan was to occupy the islands with a small force and then negotiate from strength-of-possession. They did not plan to support this force with a major logistics effort since the Argentine leaders did not believe they would have to fight. By similar reasoning, the Argentines saw no reason to lengthen the runway at Port Stanley Airport to permit A-4s, Super Entendards, and Mirages to operate from the Islands.

The size of the British force which sailed from the United Kingdom surprised the Argentine leadership and led them to make hodgepodge decisions on troop reinforcement. They fed in additional regiments by air until their troop numbers reached 10,000. Yet, they took no measures to augment their initial decision to provide limited logistical support. During the period when merchant ships could have safely transited the waters between the mainland and the Falkland Islands—loaded with heavy artillery and mobility assets such as large helicopters, and with food, ammunition, and basic cold weather support gear—they sailed only four ships. They filled one of these ships with air field matting but failed to send earth moving equipment to prepare the rugged terrain for laying it.

Several regiments were sent to Gran Malvinas (West Falkland), rather than to East Falkland. Given that the Argentine Army would most likely have to defend Port Stanley, this decision to split their forces was not particularly helpful—as history proved.

Admiral Anaya says that the unplanned buildup was prompted by the size of the British force. Also, the expectation was that if the Argentines

reinforced to 10,000 men, the British would have to bring more troops. Bringing in additional British troops would require more time, and more time would permit additional efforts to achieve a diplomatic solution.

General Lamidozo, chief of the Argentine Air Force, claims that lengthening the air field was physically impossible. The fact that the British did so and had F-4 Phantoms flying from Port Stanley not long after the surrender would seem to invalidate his assessment. But he persists in that view to this day. Had the Argentines achieved the capability of flying A-4s, Super Entendards, and Mirages out of Port Stanley, the course of the war would probably have been quite different.

### The War at Sea

The Argentine naval leaders contemplated a number of alternate naval strategies. They considered interdiction of the sea lines of communication north of the Falklands with the aircraft carrier *Veintecinco de Mayo*, but then abandoned the plan as too risky. They considered using their surface combatants in port in the Falkland Islands as mobile batteries, safe from attack from British submarines, but they abandoned that plan as ineffective. They ultimately decided to employ a "fleet-in-being" concept. Conscious of a perceived need to maintain a reserve maritime capability to defend against Chilean postwar aggression, the Argentines decided against engaging in naval frontal battles, opting instead to fight a maritime war of attrition employing land-based tactical air. Their expectation was to damage the British landing force during the landing when their freedom of movement was limited. The Argentine leaders also believed a premature naval engagement, whether by submarine against merchant ship or combatant ship against combatant ship, would doom the prospect for diplomatic solution.

The British four-phase naval strategy was first to enforce the 200-mile maritime exclusion zone with submarines from 12 April until the arrival of the surface forces on 22 April. Phase two would then begin with the surface force establishing air and sea superiority in preparation for the landing. The third phase would commence with the landing and would include establishing a beachhead, supporting the troops ashore, and protecting them from air attack. The final phase would involve supporting the land war and protecting the sea lines of communication. As you will see, not all of those objectives or missions were achieved.

In committing the Argentine Fleet on 1 May, Vice Admiral Lombardo had in mind a specific tactic that he hoped would distract the British from support of what Argentine intelligence thought were preparations for a 1 May landing on the Falklands. His concept was to bring the *Veintecinco de Mayo* task group in from the north, outside the maritime exclusion zone, to attack the beachhead while simultaneously bringing the *Belgrano* task group in from the



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south in a move designed to divert attention from the carrier. This would result in a pincer movement intended to draw the British task force away from support of the landing on the islands. As the *Veintecinco de Mayo* was preparing for its attacks on the British task force, the winds became calm, and engineering casualties limited the carrier's speed to 15 knots. This speed reduction, together with the calm winds that were forecasted to continue for 24 hours, forced the *Veintecinco de Mayo* to download its A-4s from four bombs each to one bomb per aircraft. The odds for a successful air attack with such limited ordnance, together with a report that the British had not landed as expected, prompted the recall of both the *Veintecinco de Mayo* and the *General Belgrano* to the west toward the mainland.

Meanwhile, recognizing a quite valid threat to his forces, the British task force commander, Rear Admiral John Woodward, requested and some time later received authority from London to attack the *General Belgrano* outside the maritime exclusion zone—his objective was to neutralize an unacceptable threat to his force. At the time the nuclear submarine HMS *Conqueror* attacked and sank the *Belgrano*, the cruiser had been steaming on a westerly course for 14 hours away from the British task force and toward the mainland. (The ethics and morality of this act have been a subject for debate in British political circles ever since the South Atlantic war.) With the sinking of the *Belgrano* came an end to all hopes for a diplomatic solution as the war at sea began in earnest. The conflict centered around the first truly naval confrontation since the Pacific campaign in World War II.

The toll inflicted by Argentine Air Force and naval aircraft during the war at sea included the British destroyers *Sheffield* and *Coventry*, the frigates *Ardent* and *Antelope*, the landing ship *Sir Galahad* and the merchant ship *Atlantic Conveyor*. In addition, 2 British destroyers, 14 frigates, and 2 landing ships were damaged by Argentine air and missile attacks. Thirty-seven British aircraft were lost to various causes. The 14 unexploded bombs could easily have doubled the losses of British warships had the bomb-arming devices been correctly set.

The British task force lacked an in-depth defense. It required the type of tactical air support a large deck aircraft carrier could have provided with its tactical reconnaissance and airborne-early-warning aircraft. Instead, it was forced to rely on small, not too terribly well-armed combatants that were much more vulnerable to damage than larger, better armed, generally more capable ships.

A small force of Argentine diesel electric submarines created enormous concern for the British. It dictated, at least as much as did the air threat, the conduct of British naval operations and caused the expenditure of a vast supply of antisubmarine warfare weapons. Virtually every antisubmarine weapon in the task force was expended on false submarine contacts.

An equally small force of British nuclear attack submarines dominated Argentine naval leaders' decisions and held the Argentine surface navy at bay. It also controlled some of the earlier Argentine political decisions made at the onset of hostilities.

### Selection of a Landing Site

As the British invasion force steamed toward the Falkland Islands, one of the major decisions facing British military planners was where to make the initial assault on the Islands. Some of the more relevant considerations governing this decision were:

- political expediency—the perception on the part of the British Government of the need to engage the Argentines quickly to appease a British public, hungry for action;
- the rapid approach of winter in the Southern Hemisphere with its attendant environmental problems;
- the effects on the training, morale, and general physical fitness of ground forces subjected to a protracted stay on land in the already poor weather conditions;
- the logistics problems attendant with maintaining a large ground force ashore for a protracted period of time;
- the mobility problems attendant with moving a large ground force and its support for any distance over the rugged Falklands' terrain; and,
- the lack of intelligence regarding the willingness and/or capability of Argentine soldiers on the Falklands to fight.

In the end, British planners were faced with two diametrically opposed concepts for conducting the initial assault on the Malvinas Islands. The first was to conduct an opposed landing by massing all available forces and boldly storming ashore either at Port Stanley itself or at a site nearby from which the main objective of the campaign could be brought under direct attack by ground forces as quickly as possible. Or, secondly, to conduct a more or less administrative landing at an undefended site somewhat removed from Port Stanley in order to make it difficult for the Argentines to attack the fragile beachhead. The potential sites first considered by the British for an initial assault on the Falklands were:

- Stevelly Bay (Gran Malvinas), the farthest from the objective at Port Stanley and the least subject to counterattack by Argentine ground forces. The possibility of building an airstrip here to relieve the British VSTOL ships was also a consideration at one point;
- San Carlos, closer to the objective and still difficult for the Argentines to counterattack from Port Stanley;

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- Bluff Cove, closer still but also nearer to a response by Argentine ground forces from Port Stanley;
- Berkeley Sound, much closer to Port Stanley but also practically in the Argentines' backyard and almost certainly subject to a ground force counter-attack by the Argentines; and
- Port Stanley, rejected almost immediately as too hazardous.

It was finally decided to make the initial landing at San Carlos, a point where no immediate ground resistance would be met. The plan was for the initial force, under the command of Brigadier Julian Thompson, to consolidate the beachhead and await the arrival of augmenting forces en route from Britain. At this point, command of the entire land operation would be assumed by Major General Jeremy Moore. Both Thompson and Moore were Royal Marines.

The pros and cons facing planners in selecting San Carlos as the initial landing site were:

### Pros

- the protection from submarines offered by the restricted waters of the anchorage;
- protection from air attack which the surrounding high ground offered the landing force ships and its excellent potential for siting AAW Rapier batteries;
- Special Air Service (SAS) reports indicating a lack of enemy presence in the area other than infrequent patrols;
- Special Boat Squadron (SBS) reports indicating no presence of mines on the beaches and no evidence of mine-laying activity to seaward; and
- the delay that could be expected in enemy ground forces' response from Port Stanley due to the distance and terrain involved (approximately 50 miles of rugged terrain).

### Cons

- the distance and rugged terrain between the landing site and the main objective of Port Stanley which would have to be traversed in some fashion by the landing force;
- the proximity of a strong enemy garrison at Goose Green (13 miles to the south);
- the lack of suitable beaches for landing large quantities of men and supplies;
- the proximity of the surrounding high ground which could be used to advantage by the enemy in repelling or dislodging the landing; and
- even though unobserved by SBS patrols, there was the possibility of the Argentines having already mined the seaward approaches of the site because

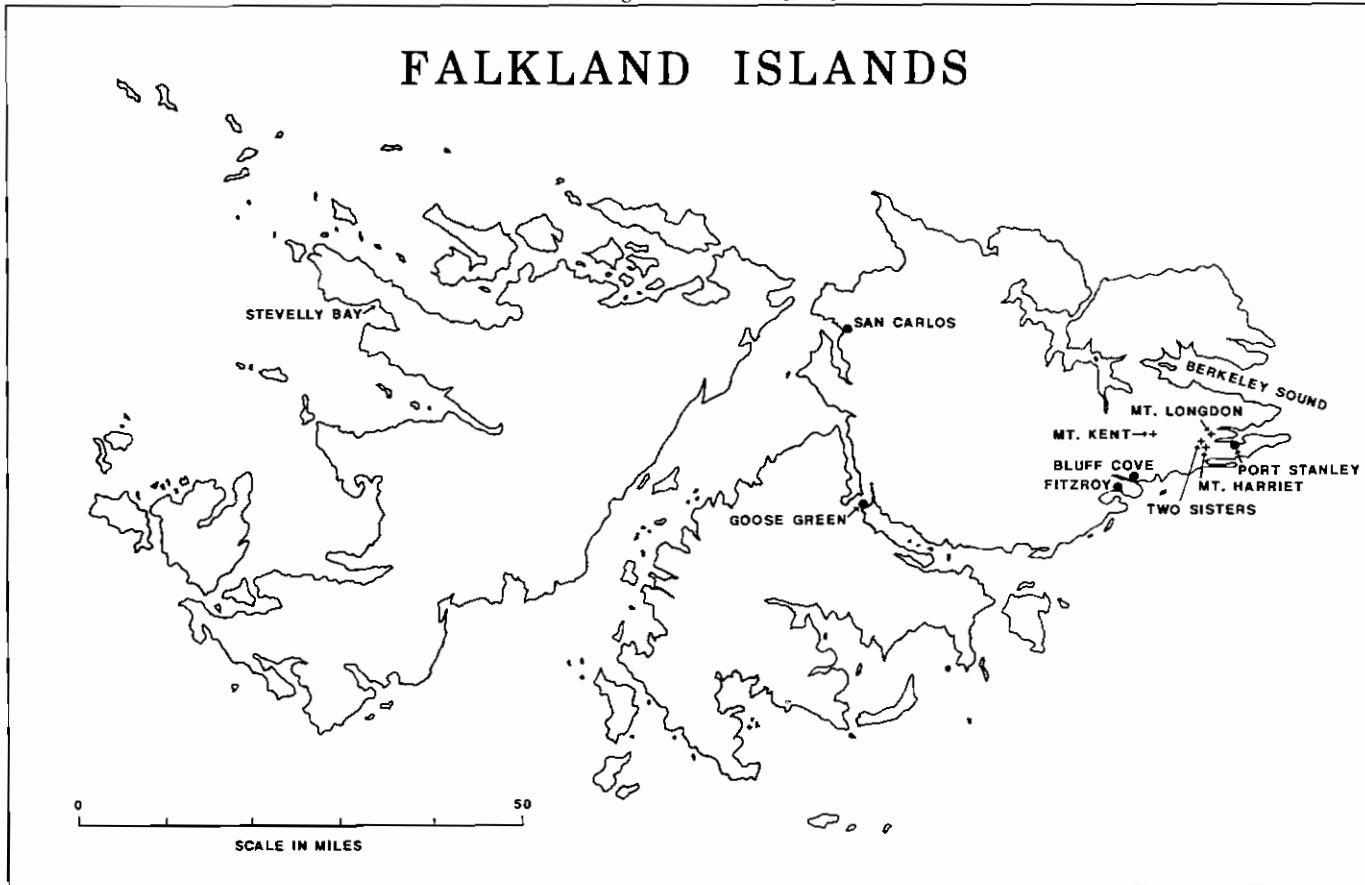
of its obvious potential for an amphibious landing—at least it was obvious to the British planners at the time. In retrospect, this perception proved to be erroneous; an Argentine study conducted prior to the conflict had concluded San Carlos to be an “impossible” site for a successful amphibious landing.

### Overall Argentine Land War Strategy

As the seat of government, the center of population, and the location of the principal seaport and air field, Port Stanley was the key to the campaign. The initial Argentinian concept was to defend Port Stanley against direct attack by deploying air defense weapons and ground troops. A follow-on measure was to erect defenses against a direct amphibious assault by deploying three battalions against a possible thrust from the south. Three other battalions were deployed facing west and north. The defensive perimeter was determined not only by the terrain, but also by the difficulty in supporting distant troop emplacements with the limited available mobility. Commanding heights dominated the inside of the perimeter and these points had to be occupied and defended. There were superior high points farther out that would still dominate the inside of the perimeter, however, the ground commanders did not believe they had the mobility to occupy and support these more distant high points, given the terrain and assets available to them. Could this have been a fatal miscalculation?

The Argentinian plan most likely deterred the British from a helicopter assault and probably deterred a direct amphibious assault on Port Stanley. This gave the Argentine ground forces time to bolster and adjust their defenses while the British searched for another place to land. Yet the time gained by the ground dispositions around Port Stanley was of little value because the political leadership in Buenos Aires was unable to bring about a diplomatic solution. The Argentine field commanders held the view that their defensive disposition gave the political leadership an additional 15 days in which to achieve a diplomatic solution. Despite the sinking of the *Belgrano* and the *Sheffield*, political leaders still kept faith in a negotiated solution; meanwhile, the field commanders viewed the *Belgrano* sinking as the point of no return, leaving a military solution as the sole option.

In the Army's view, this state of mind on the part of the junta restrained action and deprived the ground forces of their most important means of fighting, mainly, air power. Surrounding the island and while preparing for a landing, British naval forces conducted a war of attrition against Argentine land forces, and then landed with their landing force intact. It is the view of the Argentine Army commanders that the British landing was successful because the political authorities in Buenos Aires restrained the air force and navy from acting at their full capability. The army believes that if the navy and air force had persisted in their attacks against the naval transports and



carriers on 30 May, the outcome might have been different. As it was, the attack was too late, the beachhead had been formed, and British troops were able to move at will.

When the British landed, the Argentine Army considered modifying its defensive positions, with the notion of aligning them to the west—this realignment began *five days later*. They reinforced their western positions but refrained from moving farther west because of mobility and distance limitations. They intended to cover the distance between Port Stanley and San Carlos with commando patrols but, by the time they had made this decision, the British had already occupied the outer high points. The commandos offered some stiff resistance but were unable to slow the British advance.

### British Land War Planning

The British had their share of problems and faced some difficult decisions prior to the invasion of the Falkland Islands at San Carlos. Although the deteriorating political situation in the South Atlantic was being closely monitored in London, the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands still came as a distinct surprise. There is no question that the British demonstrated remarkable ingenuity and resourcefulness in putting together a task force of some 36 ships and sailing for the Falklands within 2 days of the invasion. But, their hasty departure precluded the landing force ships from being “tactically loaded,” and this meant that their stores could not be unloaded in the order needed by the landing force once it was ashore. This situation was somewhat remedied by making cargo adjustments while the force was delayed at Ascension Island for loading additional supplies. Nevertheless, there is little question that the load-out of the ships slowed the buildup of supplies ashore in the landing area at San Carlos.

### The Landing at San Carlos

For all the agonizing over the choice of a landing site and the worry over what could go wrong, the British landing at San Carlos was accomplished without incident. Their amphibious task force approached and arrived undetected in the objective area—aided by the cover of darkness, poor weather conditions, and diversionary actions conducted at Goose Green, Fanning Head, and sites on East Falkland. British troops wading ashore in the early dawn of 21 May met no resistance from Argentine ground forces and were able to move into their planned defensive position around the area without delay. As it turned out, the Argentine ground threat to the landing never did materialize. The military battle eventually fought at San Carlos was between Argentine tactical air, both air force and naval, and the ships of

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the amphibious task force. Much to their frustration, the British ground forces ashore found themselves playing the role of spectators. While awaiting word to move out, the main enemies to be overcome ashore were the environment, poor logistics support, and boredom.

Although not directly a part of the air versus ship battle that evolved at San Carlos, the forces ashore were affected by the results of the action. During day one of the assault at San Carlos, the British lost one frigate and had four others damaged by air attacks. In the days following the landing, British ship losses continued at an alarming rate. In the face of the Argentine air threat, the British were forced to change their basic logistics plan—they massed their supplies ashore vice supporting the ground force from afloat. This change in plan—plus an acute underestimation of helicopter assets required for logistics support, coupled with ship movements limited to night only—made the buildup ashore painfully slow. A near fatal blow to the British land campaign was dealt on 25 May when the *Atlantic Conveyor* was lost with three of its Chinook helicopters whose large cargo capacity was central to both the logistical and operational plans. The loss placed an even heavier strain on the remaining helicopters and virtually limited their use to the movement of supplies for the duration of the conflict.

### British Plan of Maneuver

The British plan for the San Carlos landing conspicuously lacked a follow-up land campaign strategy. The operation planned for the landing, but neglected to devise a land campaign. As one account somewhat drolly stated, the assumption was that once forces were ashore they would just go on and win. Perhaps it is more charitable to surmise that the British, either consciously or unconsciously, expected the Argentines to quickly oppose the landing with ground forces, and that the employment of British ground forces ashore would be more or less driven, at least in the short-term, by the defensive actions/reactions necessitated by this confrontation. When Argentine ground opposition failed to materialize, the British were at something of a loss for an employment scheme for their forces ashore.

**Goose Green.** With ship and aircraft casualties continuing to mount, the logistics buildup at San Carlos proceeded at a snail's pace. The British augmenting force was still too distant from the scene to warrant a major thrust against Port Stanley. The British Parliament perceived that public sentiment required a quick victory in the land war to justify the mounting ship losses in the Falkland Islands conflict. This perception eventually forced the political decision to attack the Argentine garrison at Goose Green. The decision was a clear example of politicians apparently not wanting to assume accountability for the direction of the war but unable to restrain their

political frustrations over the inaction of the ground forces ashore at San Carlos. The attack on Goose Green was keyed to the political imperative to engage and defeat the Argentines *somewhere* or *anywhere* as soon as possible. The simple fact is that as a target, Goose Green was strategically and tactically irrelevant to the overall campaign to retake the Falklands.

Prior to the attack on Goose Green, the BBC aired a broadcast with news of the impending approach of British troops to Goose Green. This resulted in the reinforcement of the area by the Argentines before the attack could begin. Such is an example of the growing problem of how to reconcile the role of the modern media and its instantaneous communications capability with the requirement for secrecy which has always been attendant to military operations.

***The Move to Mt. Kent.*** The unopposed move of the British on foot, with 100-pound packs over rugged terrain in awful weather conditions, from San Carlos to the unoccupied outer high ground on the outskirts of Port Stanley some 50 miles away, was remarkable. The lack of transportation to satisfy simultaneously both logistics and tactical mobility requirements eventually imposed the requirement to advance on Port Stanley either on foot or not at all. The planning that had been done for the offensive movement of ground forces was based on the implicit assumption that the advance of ground forces would be accomplished in leapfrog fashion, utilizing helicopters to move both troops and their supplies over the rugged terrain. The enormous demands placed on the limited helicopter resources for logistics flights—just to keep the landing force supplied—and the loss of the three large Chinook helicopters on the *Atlantic Conveyor* quickly made it obvious that the advance on Port Stanley would have to be accomplished by means other than helicopter.

***The Landing at Fitzroy.*** With the arrival of the 5th Brigade in the Falklands, the obvious question was how best to employ them in the advance on Port Stanley. They could either be held afloat as a reserve for the troops already ashore, or they could be employed as a second landing either to the northeast or southeast of Port Stanley, thereby opening a second axis of advance on the objective. Owing to lack of assets, primarily AAW, to support a second landing, this idea was for the moment rejected and elements of the 5th Brigade began coming ashore at San Carlos on 1 June. As often happens in war, unexpected events drove the decisionmaking process for employment of the 5th Brigade. The tentative plan was for the brigade to make its way from San Carlos to Fitzroy via Goose Green and to form a southern prong of the final advance on Port Stanley. Thought was given to movement of the 5th Brigade as far as Goose Green by helicopter. However, it was soon determined that this would be impossible, as all available airlift was needed to



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support the 3rd Commando Brigade which was already moving toward Mt. Kent and Port Stanley from the west-northwest.

In what could be termed either a bold move or a grossly irresponsible act, elements of the 2nd Paratroops, which had been resting at Goose Green after the battle there, moved via commandeered helicopters to Fitzroy and made an unopposed landing late on the afternoon of 1 June. This presented the British planners with a two-edged sword. On the one hand, the toehold at Fitzroy, obtained without casualties, represented a significant leap toward the final objective at Port Stanley. On the other hand, the 2nd Paratroops, miles from the nearest British support, were now exposed to attack. How to consolidate the 2nd Paratroops position at Fitzroy occupied British thinking for the next several days. Faced with insufficient helicopters to move the remaining elements of the 5th Brigade over the rugged terrain between San Carlos and Fitzroy and faced with the requirement to reinforce the position as soon as possible, the British reluctantly resorted to movement by sea. In effect, the British option to choose whether or not to make a second amphibious landing had been removed by the course of events.

The attempt to move troops ashore at Fitzroy turned out to be a disaster. The landing was eventually conducted using only naval auxiliary LSLs, with no support from major naval units for AAW protection. (Support was in fact deliberately withheld in compliance with orders from London to lose no more ships.) Command control was lacking due to the absence of coordination with units already ashore at Fitzroy. On the afternoon of 8 June, the unprotected LSL *Sir Galahad*, unloading troops in the harbor at Fitzroy, was attacked by Argentine air forces and 51 men were lost.

Given the British vulnerability at Fitzroy, one must ask the question, "why did the Argentine ground forces not take advantage of the successful Argentine air attack on the British forces at Bluff Cove and Fitzroy and conduct a counterattack?" The Argentine field commanders in the Malvinas rationalize their decision not to counterattack at Bluff Cove by pointing out that Bluff Cove was 16 km to the southwest, and an advance force of British troops was between Port Stanley and Bluff Cove. The Argentine Army, which was equipped with 105 mm artillery with a range of only 10 to 12 km, also had two or three 155 mm howitzers with a range of 20 km, but this was considered inadequate to support an action 16 km from the Port Stanley base. Moreover, it would have taken one battalion away from the defense of Port Stanley—the battalion could have been attacked by the British covering forces, and it could have been in front of the British battalion coming ashore. Finally, the Argentine battalion in position to make this move would have been the elite 5th Marine Infantry Battalion, which would have had to depart from their key position on top of Tumbledown Mountain.

***The Final Assault on Port Stanley.*** The British were now in position to mount the final phase of the attack on Port Stanley. They faced 33 enemy formations totaling some 8,400 men equipped with heavy guns and ample ammunition, dug into positions that they had been fortifying for 6 weeks. Even though the Argentines had been passive to this point, the British prospect of having to attack with limited mobility and nowhere near the overwhelming strength supposedly needed by an attacking force against a well-armed and entrenched enemy was less than appealing.

The British commenced their move on Port Stanley with a series of night attacks on 11 June against Mt. Longdon, Mt. Harriet, and Two Sisters Mountain. These positions comprised the next line of high ground toward Port Stanley. Some determined resistance was met by the forces attacking Mt. Harriet and Two Sisters, but the British were able to seize these two objectives with minimal casualties. The attack on Mt. Longdon met with far greater resistance, and the objective was taken only after fierce fighting and numerous casualties.

The final phase of the British attack began on the evening of 13 June with night attacks on a ridgeline just west of Port Stanley. The immediate objectives were Wireless Ridge and Tumbledown Mountain. Wireless Ridge succumbed fairly quickly to a preponderance of British firepower. Tumbledown Mountain was a different story and fell only after fierce fighting; once again demonstrating the spottiness in the quality of Argentine troop performance and the inability of the British to predict what kind of resistance they might expect in any given action.

Shortly after the British were finally successful in taking Two Sisters, the word was passed on the morning of 14 June that the Argentines were in retreat toward Port Stanley.

**A**pproximately 1,000 lives were lost in the Falkland Islands conflict (nearly one for every two inhabitants of the island), 30 combatant and support ships were sunk or damaged, and 138 aircraft were destroyed or seized. The “interests” of the Falkland Islands inhabitants were successfully defended by the British, and the efforts of Argentina to gain sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands were frustrated. The Royal Navy regained its stature in the eyes of the political leadership of the United Kingdom, and military rule in Argentina was replaced by an elected civilian government which remains in place today. The war that “did not have to be” was over. While the failure of diplomacy would soon be forgotten, the war would not be. Prisoner exchanges proceeded with efficiency and were done with those humane instincts which separate the West from some not so benevolent cultures.

The conflict has spawned a cottage industry in which military writers, historians, and analysts seek to describe dozens of “different” wars, including lessons learned and relearned. As the military professional studies this event

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he should not become too obsessed with the whole truth and nothing but the truth. There is a gold mine of lessons here. Also, here is an opportunity to examine a conflict—so rich in lessons learned—*without* the normal baggage of American human nature that prefers being ruined by praise to being saved by criticism. Such opportunities rarely occur.

In retrospect, the strategic dynamics of the Falkland Islands conflict were more of two ships passing in the night than a head-to-head politico-military confrontation. The Argentine political objective was to gain sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands *through diplomacy*. On the other hand, the British political objectives were to restore British administration in the Falkland Islands and to punish aggression. Throughout the conflict it was basic British military professionalism that surfaced and prevailed time and time again, even when the politico-military situation became murky and Clausewitz' fog of war overtook the principles of war.

Mass, firepower, and logistics support are still the essentials in a military campaign. (Occasionally the Holy Ghost deals himself a hand, the Battle of Midway being the classic example.) But war—and the deterrence of war—is built upon a foundation of military professionalism. We may not know how to measure it, how to analyze it, or how to quantify it, but we know what it is—it is *how* we go about doing the things that the people of this Nation and their elected representatives direct us to do with the assets they have provided us.

When, in the application of force, the military assumes the political leadership's role of deciding *what* to do with the armed forces, or when the duly accountable political leadership assumes the military role of deciding *how* the armed forces will perform their duties, the nation has a problem. The Falkland Islands conflict contained examples of both forms of transgression. But in the end it was British military professionalism that pulled the fat out of the fire.

