

Reassessing the Fighting Performance of Conscript Soldiers during the Malvinas/Falklands War (1982)(*)

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Abstract

While the idea is controversial, it is quite possible that, at least under certain circumstances, the fighting effectiveness of a conscript army can equal that of a professional army. For any army, fighting effectiveness is not only influenced by the degree of psychological cohesion among soldiers and officers, but also by the organizational culture of each particular service unit towards the preparation for war and the waging of the conflict itself. The Malvinas (Falklands) War of 1982 demonstrates this very well.

In this war, two different types of armies confronted one another: the British army, a professional and all volunteer force, and the Argentine army constituted principally of conscripted soldiers. In this regard, some analysts assert that the British concept was vindicated when a force of British professional soldiers defeated an opposing Argentine force of draftees twice as numerous. Analysts in general have rated the capabilities of the Argentine land forces as poor, although there were exceptions and some units performed very well. These cases deserve to be studied.

Notably, the most effective Argentine effort came from some small Army units and one Navy unit, the 5th Marine Battalion. For these units, two primary reasons account for the differences in fighting performance. First, small Army groups fought well because there was cohesion among their components, conscripts, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers, especially by the attitude of the latter. Secondly, in the case of the Marine battalion, its performance was the product not only of good training, but also of the different institutional approach to waging war that the Argentine Navy employed. These, in turn, improved cohesion. By focusing upon these units and their effectiveness, a rather new picture of the Malvinas War comes to light that differs quite substantially from those drawn in the immediate aftermath of the war itself. It should also make us rethink the “lessons” of the war, including those that surround the professionals versus conscripts controversy.

Introduction

Although controversial, it is quite possible that, at least under certain circumstances, the fighting effectiveness of a conscript army can equal that of a professional army. For any army, fighting effectiveness is not only influenced by the degree of psychological cohesion among soldiers and officers, but also by the organizational culture of each particular service unit towards the preparation for war and the waging of the conflict itself. The Malvinas/Falklands War of 1982 is an example of this situation.¹

In this war, two different types of armies confronted one another: the British army, a professional and all volunteer force, and the Argentine army comprised principally of conscripted soldiers. In this regard, some analysts assert that the British concept was vindicated when a force of British professional soldiers defeated an opposing Argentine force of draftees twice as numerous.² Now more than a decade and a half after the conflict has ended, with an extensive new literature beginning to emerge, this common assumption needs to be subjected to closer scrutiny. For example, analysts in general have rated the capabilities of the Argentine land forces as poor, although there were exceptions and some units performed very well. These cases deserve further study. While the British sent most of their elite troops, such as Commandos, Paratroopers, and Special Forces, the Argentine High Command sent troops to the islands that were neither the elite units nor those best suited for the Malvinas theater of operations. Instead, the elite units of the Argentine Army waited idly on the mainland in order to respond to any possible Chilean movement there.

Under such circumstances, without the proper training and equipment, the conscripted Argentine soldiers had to fight not only against the enemy but also against the lack of foresight of their own High Command. Nevertheless, even though some Argentine units surrendered without firing a shot, other engagements were hotly and quite effectively contested. The reasons for such differences in behavior beg for analysis, especially in the light of recently available Argentine sources.³

Notably, the most effective Argentine effort came from some small Army units and one Navy unit, the 5th Marine Battalion. For these units, two primary causes account for the differences in fighting performance. First, small Army groups fought well because there was cohesion among their components (conscripts, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers). Secondly, in the case of the Marine battalion, its performance was the product not only of good training and better cohesion, but also of the different institutional approach to the means of waging war that the Argentine Navy employed. By focusing upon these units and their effectiveness, a rather striking picture of the Malvinas War comes to light that differs quite substantially from those drawn in the immediate aftermath of the war itself. It should also make us rethink the “lessons” of the war, including those that surround the professionals versus conscripts controversy.

Military Service and Fighting Performance

In order to provide the manpower for its armed forces, each country must adopt particular policies in regard to military service. In this respect, the Malvinas War of 1982 initially caught the attention of military analysts because its combatants represented the two most common systems of manpower allocation. On one side, Argentina went to war with a cadre/conscript system; on the other, Great Britain waged the war with a professional army.⁴ According to Cohen, in the professional services, officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are long-service soldiers, and the rank and file sees military service as a career. With the exception of short periods for World Wars II and II,⁵ the British have adopted this system from the Eighteen Century to the present. In contrast, the cadre/conscript system often inducts draftees for periods of twelve to thirty-six months to serve in the military, in units staffed primarily by professional NCOs and officers. The system foresees that some of the junior leadership must come from the ranks of conscripts; nonetheless, in most cadre/conscripts systems, leadership rests in the hands of a professional elite.⁶ Men are drafted at a fixed age (anywhere from eighteen to twenty-one), although some may have their service deferred.⁷

This pattern held true for Argentine during most of the twentieth century. From 1901 to 1996, Argentina required universal military service for all males.⁸ After 1976, eighteen-year-olds were inducted into service. Of the total available pool, some received exemptions on the basis of being unable to meet physical requirements or having dependency considerations. The total number of conscripts was then determined by the current training budget. All males of the total pool were assigned by lottery to the Army, Navy, or Air Force, and the conscripts served for only one year.⁹

The principal advantages of such a conscript system are, first, that it provides a large standing force of young men. Second, as soon as conscripts finish their period of active duty, they became part of a reserve. Third, the system provides the state with substantial, immediately usable forces, at a fairly cheap cost.¹⁰ Finally, it provides a state with the means for quick mobilization in wartime.¹¹

On strictly military terms, the contrast between a professional and a conscript army also affects the capacity of the armed forces of a country to wage war, and the effectiveness of the two systems depends partly on the kind of war that the armed forces are required to fight. According to Cohen, different kinds of wars, small or large, challenge states with different political and military requirements. For small wars, he argues that a smaller, lightly equipped, professional force seems best. On the contrary, for large wars, a mechanized, conscript force is often assumed to offer better hope for success.¹²

Because these requirements differ, it may be that the army suited for one kind of war will find itself at a disadvantage in the other.¹³ Small wars are often long and seemingly inconclusive, waged far from home, in inhospitable regions, against seemingly invisible enemies, and without great public support.¹⁴ Although waged very close to the Argentine mainland, the Malvinas War should still be classified, in the view of most analysts, as a small war.¹⁵ In this case, they contend, the outcome of the confrontation was predetermined against Argentina.

In the face of such pessimistic conclusions, however, it must be noted that the historical performance of conscript armies shows that distinctions between short-service conscripts and volunteer professionals may be reduced or even disappear in wartime.¹⁶

Moreover, it is recognized that improving the training and the quality of the officer corps also may reduce or even erase the differences between conscripts and volunteer professional soldiers.¹⁷ This means that it is possible to improve the fighting capabilities of the conscripts so that they approach to the standards of a professional force.

The Lessons of the Malvinas War

Despite this literature on the potential of conscript armies, a general consensus formed after 1982 that the Malvinas War demonstrated the advantage of highly professional, volunteer forces for fighting sudden, small wars in remote parts of the world.¹⁸ In this case, “the British concept seemed to be vindicated in the course of the 1982 war, when a force of some 5,000 British professional soldiers routed a force of Argentine draftees nearly twice as numerous”.¹⁹ In this particular case, the United States Marine Corps also interpreted the war as the triumph of long-service British regulars against short-service Argentine conscripts.²⁰

For example, Cohen assumes that the British success was predetermined, because the Argentine conscripts were poorly led and trained and because “many of the best Argentine troops . . . [were] retained to guard the Chilean border”.²¹ Moreover, as others have noted, unlike the British forces, only few Argentine units had received training in night fighting and in cold weather operations.²²

Others have attributed the Argentine defeat to the lack of military cohesion. In this case, the key to British success was their advantage in training, stamina, and leadership, which produced a highly cohesive force.²³ Combat cohesion, defined as “a special bonding which implies that men are willing to die for the preservation of the group, or the code of honor of the group, or the valor and honor of the country,” can act as a “force multiplier”.²⁴ At moments, survival and victory depend on the intense cooperation of all ranks during combat. More broadly, cohesion comprises horizontal bonding, vertical bonding and organizational bonding.²⁵

In this same line of criticism, some observers point to the poor motivation of the Argentine conscripts.²⁶ A direct British participant in the war reportedly said that the Argentines' weakness “even before we had attacked [was] that they did not really want to fight. They were not 100 percent behind their government's action in the Falklands. All this crap about being educated from birth about the ‘Malvinas’. If they were that committed, why didn't they fight for it?”²⁷

According to this critical view, then, the experience of the Malvinas War demonstrated that, first, professional armies are better suited than conscript armies to fight small wars. Second, the common assumption has been that Argentine land forces were no match for the British, because they lacked cohesion, were poorly trained, had inadequate leadership and were poorly motivated. If so, any lay observer could come to believe that the fighting in the islands was easy and light. In contrast to these assumptions, however, some Argentine units fought well, and at times the battle on the ground was effectively contested. Therefore, we need to explore the reasons for such good performance by some Argentine units in some detail.

Reassessing the Argentine Effort

Despite the general assertions about the poor performance of the Argentine land forces during the war in the South Atlantic, several accounts present a more balanced viewpoint. For example, Nora Stewart, an American scholar who studied the combat cohesiveness of the two armies, maintains that “the Argentines fought well and bravely in many parts of the islands. Not all. But many.” Importantly she adds ‘those Argentine groups . . . are more interesting than those who did run away’. ²⁸

If we follow this line of analysis, two engagements particularly stand out as examples of hard fought battles: Goose Green and Mount Tumbledown. For Goose Green, a British source states that ‘the enemy positions had turned out to be very well sited and stoutly defended’ ²⁹ and that the Argentines ‘had been shown to be able to fight a great deal better than had been suggested’. ³⁰ Mount Tumbledown was part of the defensive ring around Puerto Argentino, the capital of the Malvinas Islands, and it has been described as part of ‘those areas of the battlefield where British troops fought professional and well-trained Argentine groups . . . English units like [the] Welsh and Scots Guards paid a high price [for capturing this position]’. ³¹ The fact that Mount Tumbledown ‘fell only after fierce fighting’ underscored ‘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’. ³² Similarly, Julian Thompson, the commanding officer of the 3rd Commando Brigade, challenged any assertion to the contrary when he contended that “on Mount Harriet, as elsewhere, the Argentine officers and senior NCOs fought hard”. ³³ Therefore, it is necessary to look at these engagements in some detail, especially as reflected in the perceptions of those who fought in them.

Goose Green: The Preparation for Battle

The Darwin and Goose Green isthmus is a low area of the islands, about ten kilometers long, in the south about five kilometers wide. It provides the only land link between the north of Soledad Island (East Falkland) and the southern part of it (Lafonia). The northern limits are between Low Pass and the Burntside Pond. A deep fiord, Bodie Creek, which penetrates the land from east to west, establishes the southern limit. A spine running NNE-SSW along its center dominates the isthmus, and a thick gorse-line divides it in half from the ruined Boca House to the hilltop (Darwin Hill) overlooking Darwin settlement. Precarious tracks link the three main areas of habitation—Burntside House in the northeast, Darwin settlement on the East Coast halfway down the isthmus, and Goose Green settlement towards the south, also on the East Coast. From the airstrip to the north, one can see the settlement.³⁴ Map 1 shows the location of the different reference points of Darwin-Goose Green isthmus. The Argentines named the small landing strip ‘Cóndor’ Air Base, and Air Force personnel manned it for air defense and airplane servicing, defending it with six 20mm antiaircraft guns. The Darwin settlement consisted of six houses, and in Goose Green there were fifteen houses.

On April 4th, the first Argentine garrison arrived at Goose Green. It was First Lieutenant Carlos Esteban’s C Company of the 25th IR (Infantry Regiment).³⁵ Later, the Argentine High Command decided to augment the defenses in the area and sent in an

infantry regiment reinforced with other support troops. They arrived in different echelons between April 30th and May 21st. Then the troops responsible for the defenses of the area were placed under a unified command named Task Force Mercedes. The main unit was the 12th Regiment, whose home base in Argentina was at Mercedes in Corrientes Province, hence the name of the task force.³⁶ This regiment was incomplete; its B Company (named the Team Solari) stayed in the area of Mount Kent, from which it was sent by helicopter to Goose Green too late to have any significant impact in the battle. Group Güemes, which consisted of two platoons of C Company of the 25th IR and the support platoon of A Company of the 12th IR, was detached north of Goose Green to San Carlos.

The 12th Regiment was part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, the last major combat unit to be sent to the Malvinas, and much of its heavy, support, and communication equipment never arrived.³⁷ Three quarters of the force consisted of conscripts with an average time under the colors of no more than six months, and their level of instruction and training was deficient.³⁸ The Regiment's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Italo Piaggi, declared that most of the conscripts were from the class of 1963 with only thirty days of military instruction.³⁹ At the beginning of the battle, the support weapons available to the defenders were three 105mm howitzers, three 105mm recoilless guns, one 120mm mortar, two 81mm mortars, ten heavy machine guns (MAGs), and one heavy 0.5 machine gun.⁴⁰ There were also six 20mm antiaircraft guns and two 35mm antiaircraft guns. Originally sited to protect the airfield from air raids, these weapons were employed later in the ground defense role.

During the period between the Argentine occupation and the beginning of the combat, the Argentine soldiers were occupied in numerous activities. Principally, they dug foxholes, prepared positions, and cleaned their armament.⁴¹ To prepare their combat positions the units had very few shovels, as there was the provision of only one large shovel per platoon.⁴² After the fighting, Conscript Walter Donado (C Company of the 25th IR) explained the situation quite candidly:

Stone, rock, pure stone, deadly. Up higher it was easy because of the peat, but right away the stone came up. And right there, with a shitty little shovel, I started to dig. If it took me two and a half days to dig my little foxhole, how could the English build an aluminum airstrip with hangers and everything in two and half-hours? Something went wrong . . . They had machines, they had everything. I don't know where they got them. So I wondered, how was I going to win the war with my little shovel?"⁴³

During those days the soldiers had to cope with the intense cold, as well as with isolation and an anxiety generated by the lack of news from outside.⁴⁴ Other "enemies" that the participants constantly mention when they look back were the intense darkness, the tendency to sleep, and the boredom.⁴⁵

In this context, a priority for the officers was to get to know their men and to prepare them to fight. Second Lieutenant Juan José Gómez Centurión remembers that "during those days, we talked a lot with the soldiers, trying to get the cohesion that the units would need in a combat situation."⁴⁶

During this time, conscripts and junior officers appear to have established a close relationship. For example, Conscript Adrián Bravo (C Company 25th IR) underscored the importance of the officers as examples for the men under their command:

During the bombardments, Second Lieutenant [Roberto] Estévez and other officers stood outside the foxholes while all the soldiers and the NCOs were in them. Nobody could get out. There was also another lieutenant or second lieutenant, I don't remember, Reyes. The guy seemed to be crazy, he shouted, and told dirty jokes. By doing that, he gave us a lot of courage.⁴⁷

Shortages of weapons and men were not Piaggi's only difficulty. His original task—to protect the two settlements and the airfield—entailed a defensive perimeter of 17 kilometers, with the main emphasis on countering a landing from the sea. But, after the British landings at San Carlos, Piaggi was ordered to extend his defenses farther northwards and to prepare to face a land attack from San Carlos. Piaggi's men, who had earlier constructed a strong defense line approximately halfway up the isthmus protected by minefields, now had to move beyond the minefields and construct new defenses. His second perimeter was now 31 kilometers long.⁴⁸ Thus, the Argentine forces had to fight on an overextended perimeter.

The Battle of Goose Green

The British troops began the seaborne assault on the Malvinas during the night of May 20-21, in San Carlos, at the northeast corner of Soledad Island (East Falkland). The landing was nearly unopposed. They met resistance from a token force (the Güemes Team), which immediately pulled back, abandoning its heavy equipment.

The British High Command, wanting to engage the Argentines as soon as possible, ordered the Second Parachute Battalion to move south and recapture the Darwin and Goose Green settlements. For the operation, they had naval artillery support from the frigate *HMS Arrow*.⁴⁹ British Harriers also constantly bombed the Argentine positions, and, during the fight, Argentine airplanes from the Air Force and the Navy also bombed the British. Despite these efforts, however, the battle became a classic infantry engagement.

To the north, the Argentines had advanced a scout platoon one kilometer north of Camilla Creek. During part of May 27th the British paratroopers examined the terrain for night fighting, and at that time there were skirmishes and patrol engagements between both forces. The Scout Platoon of the 12th IR had been deployed three kilometers north of the main line of defense, and its A Company was assigned to defend the zone of Low Pass-Burntside House.⁵⁰ A general British advance down the mile-wide neck of the isthmus commenced at 2:30 a.m. local time on Friday, May 28th.⁵¹ Conscript Esteban Bustamante (Scout Platoon, 12th IR) described this first encounter:

They attacked us on May 27th. We began to see the English, who were coming from the north in columns . . . Night was falling, but we sent up flares and you could see like day . . . The next day, as it began to get light, they started to get close, and we saw them at about two hundred meters . . . Now there was artillery firing on both sides . . . and the corporal said: fire, fire, they're coming on top of us.⁵²

Bustamante was later captured.

A Company of the 12th IR defended the attacked sector with two platoons (about 104 men) under First Lieutenant Antonio Manresa. This was the area in which the Argentines had been ordered to extend their defense positions a few days earlier.⁵³ The attacking B Company of the Second Parachute Battalion encountered no mines as it moved to the top of the neck of the isthmus. In the ensuing action, about nine Argentines were killed. It was not possible to tell the exact number, owing to the effect of the burning white phosphorous in the dugouts.⁵⁴ In this situation, Middlebrook described the first proper action between formed units of the two adversaries as a fight between one of the most aggressive and skillful battalions of the British army and a typical Argentine unit based on the conscript system.⁵⁵

One by one, the Argentine posts were eliminated, or the defenders fell back. The action lasted until first light, and Manresa's men did at least stop the British advance from reaching Goose Green by daylight.⁵⁶ Conscript Ernesto Vallejo (A Company 12th IR) later said, '[Corporal] Pedemonte's section [A Company] suffered many casualties, because they took the first attack and fought practically hand to hand.'⁵⁷

Behind A Company, a scratch platoon formed from the 12th IR's administrative personnel under the command of Second Lieutenant Ernesto Peluffo manned the center of the main Argentine line.⁵⁸ But before the British troops reached the defense line, two fresh platoons reinforced the line. One, the 3rd Platoon of C Company of the 8th IR under Second Lieutenant Guillermo Aliaga, moved to the left end of the main line, occupying trenches around the ruins of an abandoned building called Boca House. The other reinforcement came up on the right. This was the 1st Platoon of C Company of the 25th IR, which had stayed at the settlement as a central reserve. Lt. Col. Piaggi ordered platoon commander Roberto Estévez to move up and counter-attack to relieve the pressure on A Company. His troops occupied positions at the eastern end of the line, on and around the small rise known as Darwin Hill.⁵⁹ Estévez had no time to counter-attack, however, because, as his platoon advanced, he met the remnants of A Company and immediately afterward encountered the first British troops.

Now three platoons and possibly thirty or forty more men who had fallen back from the earlier fighting defended the line. They had no support from the artillery and no mortar bombs, so that the coming fight would be purely a clash of light-infantry weapons.⁶⁰ Conscript Guillermo Huircapán (C of Company, 25th IR) described the action:

Lieutenant Estévez went from one side to the other organizing the defense until all at once they got him in the shoulder. But with that and everything, badly wounded, he kept crawling along the trenches, giving orders, encouraging the soldiers, asking for everyone. A little later they got him in the side, but just the same, from the trench he continued directing the artillery fire by radio. There was a little pause and then the English began the attack again, trying to advance, and again we beat them off...The English threw colored smoke bombs and in the middle of the smoke and confusion we saw that some of our comrades had begun to surrender, because they had no more ammunition.⁶¹

The fighting here resulted in a partial reversal for the British. As British paratroopers advanced to Darwin Hill, the men of the Estévez platoon caught them in the open. The

British suffered several casualties and went to ground. They attempted an attack on the hill, but the Argentines had the ground well covered, and killed three paratroopers.⁶²

British field commanders also recognized that the previous reports about a demoralized and unmotivated garrison were inaccurate.⁶³ Surprisingly, the same Major Keeble who had said that the Argentines were not motivated to fight now testified “all this [is] rubbish about them not wanting to fight, they were fighting hard”.⁶⁴ During this action on Darwin Hill, the commanding officer of the Second Parachute Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Jones, was killed when he attempted a solo attack on the Argentine trenches.⁶⁵

The advance ran out of steam at Darwin Hill. At 8:30 that morning, the paratroopers’ position was unenviable, as none of their rifle companies could break through the open ground and end the deadlock that the Argentines had imposed.⁶⁶ When the paratroopers resumed the assault, they worked round to the right (from the British side) of the Argentine position. With the help of 66-mm anti-tank rocket launchers, the British took one trench after another in an action depicted as ‘a slow work and hard fighting’.⁶⁷ According to a British author, Lt. Estévez’s platoon ‘fought well’. He was hit three times and died, while only three or four men from his platoon escaped back to Goose Green.⁶⁸ The stalemate lasted until 1 p.m. Although the area was still shelled and mortared, the British finally took Darwin Hill.

At the Boca House position, Aliaga’s platoon also stopped the British advance. The British suffered casualties here as well, and the paratroopers were forced to pull back.⁶⁹ Later, D Company of the Second Parachute Battalion outflanked the position, and the defenders were caught between its fire and that of B Company.⁷⁰ During the fighting, Aliaga was wounded in the neck, many soldiers were wounded, and one Argentine NCO and four conscripts were killed. With no chance for a breakout, and out of ammunition, they surrendered.⁷¹

At the same time, to the south of Goose Green, C Company of the 12th IR returned to the southern positions near the settlement. One of its platoons was detached as reinforcement to the positions in the north. At 12:30 p.m. Argentine reinforcements, coming from Puerto Argentino, landed northeast of Bodie Creek Bridge to the south of Goose Green.⁷²

Meanwhile, the scratch platoon holding the middle of the Argentine main line fell back with its commanding officer, Second Lieutenant Peluffo, injured in the head and leg.⁷³ Boca House finally fell at 12:30 p.m. After capturing the three objectives, Major Keeble, now in command of the paratroopers, called a temporary halt to the companies’ operations until the ammunition could be distributed and the support weapons placed in position. Particularly helpful were the Milans which ‘could have a telling shock effect’.⁷⁴ A Company was to stay where it was on Darwin Hill, while C Company, reinforced by a Platoon from D, would clear Darwin. D Company would continue moving forward up to the high ground dominating the airfield and it would deal with the Argentine units placed at the Schoolhouse. B Company was to make a wide flanking movement to the south to block Goose Green off from that direction.⁷⁵

At 1:30 p.m. the British resumed the advance to the south toward the airfield and the Goose Green settlement. The platoon of the Second Lt. Gómez Centurión (the Second Platoon of C Company of the 25 IR) and the men recently helicoptered from Puerto Argentino commanded now by Second Lt. Vásquez advanced to reinforce the Argentine positions and to protect the airfield. The British were advancing in the opposite direction

from the north, and the forces clashed.⁷⁶ They fought between 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Gómez Centurión described the action in the following terms:

I set out with thirty-six men toward the north. Passing the school, we entered a depression from which we saw the hill . . . I sent a scouting party ahead, and they told me that the British were advancing from the other side of the low ridge, some one hundred and fifty men . . . [My] men were very tense, there was a ferocious cold, we shivered with cold, with fear . . . When they were about fifty meters away, we opened fire . . . We kept firing for at least forty minutes . . . They started to attack our flank, my soldiers had to take cover, the firing went down, and the situation started to become critical. Then we were surrounded, we had wounded, people started to lose control . . . I began to ask about casualties, each time more casualties. There was no way out behind, because we had been flanked, nearly surrounded . . . So when there was a pause in the firing I decided that it was the time to stop, and I gave the order to disengage.⁷⁷

The British gradually gained the upper hand in the fighting. But, as Frost recognizes, C and D Companies were suffering casualties now. Once again the white phosphorus grenades proved most effective in helping men to get close to the enemy, and gradually the paratroopers cleared the positions.⁷⁸ Clive Livingstone described that the combination of artillery, mortar, machine-gun and antiaircraft guns into which C Company advanced towards the Goose Green schoolhouse as ‘terrifying.’⁷⁹ As the paratroopers captured the Schoolhouse position, most of the Argentines began to retreat to Goose Green, while, at the same time, small groups were surrendering from outlying positions around the edge of the airfield.⁸⁰ Gómez Centurión’s platoon suffered twenty casualties, of which seven were dead. The Argentines were pushed back to the last line of defense. At 12:25 p.m., Piaggi received orders from Puerto Argentino to counterattack, but he had no means available to comply with the order.⁸¹

The British had reached the very last defenses around Goose Green settlement by 5:00 p.m. B Company of the Second Parachute Battalion had completed its long encircling move, and the paratroopers had taken up positions immediately southwest of the settlement.⁸²

At 5:20 p.m., Argentine helicopters arrived unexpectedly and landed troops at a position about three miles south of Goose Green. Captain Eduardo Corsiglia commanded this group known as Task Group Solari, about 140 strong.⁸³ As the men landed, they were shelled by enemy artillery. They had no radios, so that they could not contact the commanding officer in Goose Green to assess the situation and receive further orders. Later in the night, Task Group Solari found a gap in the British ring and came into the settlement. At about midnight, Captain Corsiglia appeared at Piaggi’s headquarters.⁸⁴ According to Argentine sources, the scene was one of absolute disorganization. Soldiers were hanging around without direction, looking like “zombies”.⁸⁵ At that moment, Piaggi recognized that the men under his command were dispirited because of the high casualties and their weariness.⁸⁶

Now Chris Keeble could take stock of the situation. He had the Argentines bottled up in the settlement, with his own companies on the higher ground above the settlement. J Company of 42nd Commando Battalion was helicoptered to a position three miles north of

Goose Green as reinforcements. Keeble also received three more field guns, mortars and lots of ammunition. Fighting was imminent, but the British were worried because in the settlement there still were about 100 civilians. In order to avoid unnecessary casualties, Major Keeble proposed that the Argentines surrender. A meeting was arranged for 9:30 a.m., May 29th and finally Lt. Col. Piaggi agreed to surrender. At 11:50 a.m. that day, the British entered the settlement.⁸⁷

Assessment of the Battle

One important lesson of this battle and of the campaign more generally was that it was possible to fight outnumbered and to win.⁸⁸ In this case, the most extreme estimate claims that in Goose Green, 450 paratroopers defeated 1,600 Argentines.⁸⁹ If true, the paratroopers defeated a force three and a half time larger. At the end of the battle, the British claimed that they captured more than 1,000 prisoners, although, depending on the source, that number has fluctuated between 1,200 and 1,600. The British reported Argentine casualties as high as 250 dead.⁹⁰ The numbers of British casualties reported, sources agree, were 15 paratroopers dead and between 30 to 40 wounded.

On the other hand, the Official Argentine Army Report states that the total number of soldiers present at Darwin Goose Green area on May 27th was 981.⁹¹ The commanding officer of the Task Force, Lt. Col. Piaggi, reported that on the same date, the number of his soldiers present in the area was 684, and, when considering the reinforcement sent in by helicopters, the final number of his forces reached the 790.⁹² Cervo points out that the total Argentine army troops present in the area at the beginning of the fighting was 643 and that the final total count never exceeded 881. In addition, Air force personnel numbered 202.⁹³ The official number of Argentine fatalities was 47, with 98 wounded.⁹⁴ In his book of 1989, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, Martin Middlebrook notes that the Argentines comprised 630 soldiers, not counting reinforcements.⁹⁵

These numbers tell an important story. When the numbers of Argentine defenders are compared to the 450 British paratroopers, the British success can not be seen as crushing. For political reasons, both parties have incentives to increase their adversary's numbers, while at the same time decreasing their own, as a way to highlight the efforts and the effectiveness of their own forces.

In fact, the battle for Goose Green was highly contested. Both sides recognized the capacity of the enemy to inflict damage. The British paratroops were a highly prepared military force and it was expected they would perform well. They carried out orders efficiently, fought tenaciously, and were able to adapt rapidly to the conditions of the theater of operations. Conversely, Argentine forces lacked many of the basic elements needed to prepare soldiers to confront combat situations. Their logistics were appalling; their training was in many cases incomplete or deficient; and their armament was at times defective. At the tactical level, because of the lack of tools, the Argentine units had to improvise in order to dig in and fight, and, for this reason, their efforts looked uncoordinated. But under these severe restrictions, the men of Task Force Mercedes fought gallantly as well. The degree of success that Estevéz in Darwin Hill, Gómez Centurión in the Schoolhouse and Aliaga in Boca House had reflects the work of the junior officers, NCOs and numerous conscripts.

These men created enough cohesion to confront adversity. Finally, the faults were on the shoulders of the Argentine High Command, both at the operational and the strategic levels.

Mount Tumbledown: Preparation for Battle

On April 8th, the commanding officer of the 5th Marine Battalion, Commander Carlos Robacio, received orders to go to the Malvinas. Until April 12th, personnel and equipment arrived at Puerto Argentino. Once the unit was totally in place, the High Command ordered its members to prepare defensive positions around the capital. More precisely, the 5th Marine Battalion was responsible for Mount Tumbledown, Mount William, and Sapper Hill. The battalion had to cover a perimeter of 16 kilometers. To accomplish this, the battalion had a total force of 703 men. All conscripts, the Marines were from the class 1962 or older, and no new conscripts (class of 1963) were sent to the islands. The battalion was far from complete, since only the rifle companies, the headquarters unit, and a few logistical units entered the islands. Later, other Marine units would reinforce the battalion, including a group of heavy machine-guns (some 29 men, with 0.5 caliber machine-gun), the First Platoon of Marine Amphibious Engineers (20 men), and B Battery of the Marine Field Artillery Battalion with six 105mm guns.⁹⁶ Originally, the machine-gun group belonged to a Marine Machine-gun Company hastily assembled in Puerto Belgrano, the principal Argentine naval base. This company, some 136 strong, had a total of 27 guns and was divided into three platoons. When the company arrived in the islands, its platoons were dispersed, and the Marine Battalion used only one.⁹⁷ The rifle companies were M Company (203 men), N Company (200 men), and the O Company (100 strong).⁹⁸

As to what to defend most strongly, the Argentine General High Command in the Malvinas decided to defend three ‘key’ zones: Puerto Argentino (Port Stanley), the capital of the islands; Darwin-Goose Green on Soledad Island (East Falkland); and, for political reasons, Fox Bay and Port Howard on Gran Malvina Island (West Falkland). Map 2 shows the location of the Argentine key defense zones in the Malvinas Islands.⁹⁹ All the Army units rushed to the islands without their heavy and support equipment. For instance, they lacked sufficient field kitchens, winter clothing, communication equipment, or even spare batteries to properly support the troops.

Unlike their Army brothers, the Argentine Marines were well fed, and they had good clothing and improved communications equipment. Also unlike the Army conscript soldiers, the Marines had undergone night combat training, and, principally because the battalion had been based in Tierra del Fuego in the far south of Patagonia, its members were adapted to the rigorous climatic conditions.¹⁰⁰ During the period between their arrival and the fighting, the Marines were kept busy preparing their positions, digging bunkers, cleaning their equipment, and reconnoitering the terrain and coordinating and organizing fire support.¹⁰¹ The battalion was also well provided with entrenching tools. Because of their experience in Tierra del Fuego, they were well aware of the hardness of the soil of the islands surrounding Argentina. Therefore, the battalion flew to the islands provided with iron bars, which were very useful for digging in the rocks.¹⁰²

The actual combat between Argentine and British forces began on May 1st with the bombardment of the airport by a Vulcan bomber of the RAF. The British then harassed the Argentine garrison, using continuous naval and aerial bombardment, as well as small-scale

commando raids. Every night after May 1st, two or three British vessels bombarded the south coast of Puerto Argentino from 12 to 15 kilometers out at sea.¹⁰³

After the British landings in San Carlos, the General High Command in the islands rearranged the defensive perimeter. Initially the commanders had expected the most probable direction of attack to be from the sea, with the British landing troops in Puerto Argentino or its surroundings. But later, those in charge decided to defend Puerto Argentino also from an attack from the west, while maintaining strong coastal defenses to the east and south of the capital.

Between May 29th and June 3rd, the High Command established the western side of the defensive perimeter along the mounts that surrounded Puerto Argentino. These ran from north to south, and they comprised Wireless Ridge, Longdon, Dos Hermanas (Two Sisters), Harriet, Tumbledown, William, and Sapper Hill. This new perimeter was 48 kilometers long, and the Argentine forces could guard only 37 per cent of it. This meant that there was enough space left uncovered that the enemy could take advantage of the gaps and infiltrate the Argentine positions.¹⁰⁴ Map 3 shows Puerto Argentino, its surrounding heights and the Marine positions around Mount Tumbledown.

After the fall of Goose Green, the British troops moved—some chroniclers say ‘yomped’—west toward Puerto Argentino,¹⁰⁵ and after May 31st British land and naval artillery began pounding the Argentine positions in the mountains. Until June 8th, the only land actions were intense skirmishes between patrols. For three days the British probed the Argentine defenses and prepared for the final assault. Then the battle for Puerto Argentino began on the night of June 11th. The British plan encompassed two phases, the first phase being the conquest of the first line of mounts. The entire 3rd Commando Brigade under Brigadier Thompson would take part in this attack. The Third Parachute Battalion would attack Mount Longdon, the 45th Commando Battalion would confront Mount Dos Hermanas, and the 42 Commando Battalion would move against Goat Ridge and Mount Harriet. During the operation, the frigates *HMS Avenger*, *HMS Glamorgan* and *HMS Yarmouth* would provide the supporting naval bombardment.

At about 11:00 p.m., local time, the British attacked simultaneously all along the western front. The attackers outnumbered the Argentine defenders by two to one.¹⁰⁶ The British were using all of their available forces in the attack on Puerto Argentino; there were no more fresh troops in reserve and no more under way from Great Britain. Also, as Middlebrook notes, the British troops were tiring and were suffering, as were the Argentines, from the increasingly cold weather.¹⁰⁷ The Argentine positions facing the British commandos comprised part of the 7th IR in Mount Longdon and part of the 4th IR in the area of Dos Hermanas, Goat Ridge, and Harriet. By the early morning of June 12th, after very hard fighting in some areas, British troops occupied the outer ring of hills surrounding the Puerto Argentino defenses.¹⁰⁸

After losing these positions, the Argentines adjusted their defensive perimeter during the 12th of June. A Company of the 3rd IR advanced and occupied positions northeast of Mount Tumbledown, working with B Company of the 6th IR. At the same time, O Company of the 5th Marine Battalion occupied the heights near Pony Pass, southeast of Mount Harriet.¹⁰⁹

The Battle for Mount Tumbledown

The next phase in the British plan of attack was that the Second Parachute Battalion, with the Third Commando Battalion as reserve, would attack Wireless Ridge, northwest of Puerto Argentino. At the same time, the 5th Brigade, formed by the Scottish Guard Battalion, the Welsh Guard Battalion and the Gurkha Battalion would attack Tumbledown (229 meters high), William (213 meters high) and Sapper Hill (138 meters high), respectively. The attack, which had been originally planned for the evening of the 12th, was postponed until the evening of the 13th. For the attack the British brought up ammunition and supplies during the whole day,¹¹⁰ and there they confronted the Argentines responsible for the defense of Mount Tumbledown, Mount William and Sapper Hill in the west and southeast of Puerto Argentino: the 5th Marine Battalion. Leaders of the Argentine High Command in the Malvinas decided to attach to the Marine unit C Company of the 3rd IR in the south, as well as B Company of the 6th IR and A Company of the 3rd IR in the north. At 10:15 p.m., after a heavy preparation bombardment, the British began the attack against two companies from the 5th Marine Battalion: N Company on Tumbledown and O Company southwest of Mount William. The attackers were the 2nd Battalion of the Scots Guards. If they captured the position quickly, the Gurkhas were to follow through and assault the smaller position on Mount William.¹¹¹ See map 3.

Assuming that the British would take one position at a time and then consolidate it, the Marines tried, as their basic strategy, to hold their positions until dawn. They expected the British to withdraw if they failed to capture these positions.¹¹²

The first action was a diversionary attack carried out by about thirty guardsmen of the Headquarters Company, supported by four light tanks. This was the first tank operation in the Malvinas Islands. The attack was aimed to attract the Argentine forces towards Mount William, and the British column engaged the southernmost elements of the O Company of the 5th Marines, which had been sent forward near Pony Pass.¹¹³ The British advanced while there was still some light, so that the Argentines could clearly identify the attacking force and its composition.¹¹⁴ According to the officer commanding O Company, the British were unaware of the presence of the Argentine force. The Argentine officer in charge fixed the position of the attackers and directed the artillery fire, which rained down on the Scots.¹¹⁵

This initial exchange ended favorably for the Argentines, as the guards pulled back, believing that they had accomplished the diversion. But no Argentine reserves moved to that sector,¹¹⁶ and the British had not yet detected the presence of O Company¹¹⁷. Later, this company engaged the Welsh Guards, who were advancing in order to pass Mount William and attack Sapper Hill. After the men of the O Company had inflicted some casualties and delayed the advance of the attackers, Battalion Headquarters ordered them to pull back to Sapper Hill.¹¹⁸ The unit retreated, fighting all the way. Finally, at about 1:30 a.m. on June 14th, the company reinforced the defensive perimeter of C Company of the 3rd IR.¹¹⁹

Next, the British directed their main effort on Tumbledown. The plan of the Scots Guards for the main attack was to tackle Tumbledown's long, thin ridge in three phases, working from west to east, with each of the battalion's three rifle companies capturing one-third of the objective in turn.¹²⁰ G Company of the Scots Guards would attack the first third, the Left Flank Company would capture the central third, and the Right Flank Company would capture the last third.

Confronting the Scots Guards, the defenders of Tumbledown were N Company of the 5th Marine Battalion. This company positioned its platoons as follows: the 1st Platoon, on the south side of Mount William, protecting the road from Fitz Roy to Puerto Argentino; the 2nd Platoon, on the west side of Mount William in the direction to Dos Hermanas; the 3rd Platoon, on the north side of Mount Tumbledown in the direction of Moody Valley; the 4th Platoon positioned on the southeast of Mount Tumbledown toward Mount Harriet; and finally, the 5th Platoon, which consisted of the Amphibious Engineers, lay positioned on the highest point of the western part of Mount Tumbledown toward the west-northeast. The company was supported by six 81mm mortars, six 106mm mortars, the Marine howitzers battery and Army Artillery Groups 3 and 4.¹²¹

G Company (Scots Guards Battalion) approached silently on to the western end of Tumbledown and occupied the position without difficulty, because no Argentine troops were stationed there.¹²² Next, the Left Flank Company passed through G Company to approach the main heights of Tumbledown and, on this occasion, its men met fierce Argentine fire.¹²³ In order to stop the British, nearly all of N Company was concentrated on the eastern end of the ridge, deployed to dominate the open ground to the north and the south.¹²⁴ This left only the 4th Platoon, led by Second Lieutenant Carlos Vázquez, to receive the full attack of the Scots Guards. Moreover, this was not even a regular platoon, as it has been made up from Marines spared from other duties. The platoon comprised twenty-seven Marines, plus a few Marine engineers, and sixteen Army soldiers.¹²⁵

The British used profusely rocket fire, but the Marines' positions had been well prepared, and the men resisted. As the night wore on and the fierce firefight continued, the Argentines showed no sign of crumbling, and their main positions held firm. They brought down mortar fire on their attackers.¹²⁶ According to Vázquez, during the first attacks it appeared that the Scots were overconfident, but later they changed their tactics.¹²⁷ At about 1:00 a.m. on June 14th, with the Scots Guards occupying positions among the Argentine foxholes, the Argentine officer in charge requested supporting fire over his own positions. After a hail of fire and after being caught in the open, the Scots withdrew to their rear and to higher ground.¹²⁸

Up to this point, the Argentine casualties had been light. The 1st and 2nd Platoons of N Company had received only artillery fire, and they stayed in their positions in order to block any attack from the Welsh Guards. The 3rd Platoon was also on the north side of Tumbledown covering Moody Valley.¹²⁹ At about 1:30 a.m., a platoon from the B Company of the 6th IR arrived at N Company's command post and prepared for a counterattack in support of the 5th Platoon of N Company. But components of the Scots Guards and the Gurkha Battalion blocked these men. The British units had advanced from the west-northwest, suffering heavy casualties from the Marine artillery.¹³⁰

Then, at 2:00 a.m., the Scots Guards reassumed the attack against the 4th Platoon, this time more violently. They charged on up the hill, began to assault the Marines' positions from several directions at once, and took them one by one.¹³¹ At about 4:30 a.m., after the machine guns of the 4th Platoon began to run out of ammunition, Vázquez saw that the Argentines were losing control of the situation, as the British were occupying the foxholes, killing their original occupants.¹³²

Once again, Vázquez asked for artillery fire over his position and this time the Marines' 105mm howitzers pounded the area. At about 5:00 a.m., the British initiated the third assault on the platoon's foxholes. At 7:00 a.m., only three foxholes remained in the

hands of the Marines. Finally, with the ammunition nearly gone, Lieutenant Vázquez decided to surrender. Of the 36 men originally in the platoon, 12 were killed, four missing, and five wounded.¹³³ By the time that the Scots Guards finally captured the crest of the mount, their Left Flank Company lost also seven killed and twenty-one wounded.¹³⁴

The third phase of the battalion's attack began at 6 a.m. This time, the Right Flank Company followed up the advance of the Left Flank Company, with its First Platoon taking positions as high up in the rocks to the left as possible in order to provide fire support. This put the Argentine defenders—a platoon of B Company of the 6th IR—under crossfire.¹³⁵ After what one participant described as a further “six hours of struggle inch by inch up the rocks, using phosphorous grenades and automatic weapons” in order to force the Argentines out from their positions, the Scots Guards sized Tumbledown.¹³⁶ They occupied their objective eleven hours after crossing the Start Line,¹³⁷ and their casualties numbered 9 dead and 41 wounded. Some of the survivors of Vázquez's platoon retreated in the direction of Puerto Argentino.

This stiff resistance from the Marines upset the British timetable and caused the postponement of the Gurkhas' attack on Mount William.¹³⁸ At 5:30 a.m., Commander Robacio informed Headquarters in Puerto Argentino that the western section of Mount Tumbledown was in enemy hands, and he told his superiors that M Company and two platoons of B Company of 6th IR under his command were going to counterattack.

The enemy blocked this Argentine counterattack. At 8 a.m. the fighting was concentrated on the eastern part of Tumbledown and Mount William, but the High Command in Puerto Argentino denied Robacio authorization to employ M Company, which was stationed in Sapper Hill, to reinforce N Company. Finally, at 8:45 a.m., obeying orders from Puerto Argentino and after abandoning their heavy equipment, the 5th Marine Battalion and the remnants of the Army troops with them began to retreat towards Sapper Hill.¹³⁹ M Company, which up to now had only received the attention of the British naval artillery, was positioned to receive the retreating Marines.¹⁴⁰ The pullback of the Battalion, which was accomplished under constant bombardment, was orderly and according to regulations.¹⁴¹ At 9:30 a.m. June 14th, the fighting stopped and a cease-fire came into force.

Assessment of the Battle

At the end of the battle, the 5th Marines had suffered a total of 61 casualties: 16 dead and 45 wounded.¹⁴² The Scots Guards recognize nine of their number killed and 41 wounded.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, while Argentine casualties thus marginally outweighed the British, British sources still acknowledge that the fighting was fierce at Tumbledown. On that mount, as the *Sunday Times* explained to its readers, ‘the Scots Guards were to face the toughest action of all. There a well trained Argentinian marine battalion was heavily dug into a series of intricate bunkers, cut in the rock . . . The firepower of the marines was intense and impressive.’¹⁴⁴

The Argentine 5th Marines stayed together as a team and behaved cohesively, both before and after their surrender.¹⁴⁵ According to Lieutenant-Colonel N. Vaux, the commanding officer of the 42nd Marine Commandos, the Argentine Marines marched smartly, holding their regimental colors high as they marched along the streets of Port Stanley. The British wanted to capture their regimental flag, but ‘to the Royal Marines’

chagrin, the Argentine Marines poured gasoline on their flags and burned them to ashes before the eyes of their enemies.”¹⁴⁶

A publication of the Argentine Army also explicitly assessed the reasons for the superior performance of the 5th Marine Battalion:

[They] possessed a well-balanced set of weapons, and excellent communication equipment. But much more important, because of the Navy’s particular draft system, they had enough trained soldiers adapted from peacetime to the terrain and the extreme weather conditions . . . At the same time, the Navy’s excellent logistic support system . . . could sustain the outstanding fighting performance.¹⁴⁷

Certainly in the experience of this unit there were lessons, both for the Argentine military and also for all whom want to learn from the experience of the Malvinas War.

Conclusions

From this analysis of the actual fighting of the Malvinas War, the idea that the professional British Army defeated the concept of a conscript army has to be qualified in significant degree. The battle of Goose Green showed how a group of conscript soldiers could fight effectively when they have capable leadership from their junior officers. In this case, cohesion was generated through the key role of military leaders.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the Argentine Marines, which were not an elite force, also showed what conscript soldiers can do when they are well equipped, trained and led. In this case, the Argentine Marines were better prepared to cope with the emergency and to fight this small war. Their institution had provided them with the tools and the capabilities to perform well under combat conditions.¹⁴⁹

The official account of the Argentine Commission of Inquiry for the Malvinas War, Rattenbach Report, underscored the contrast in institutional approaches to war that the Argentine services personified so clearly in the Malvinas:

The 5th Marine Battalion demonstrated teamwork, spirit, and higher levels of training, professionalism and adequate equipment. These aptitudes were shown in the land fighting during the defense of Puerto Argentino. In this action, the unit established an outstanding performance.¹⁵⁰

On the contrary, when the Argentine Army confronted an unexpected war situation, its soldiers were not adequately trained and prepared to wage a war of the magnitude and characteristics of the South Atlantic conflict, especially against an enemy highly experienced and superior in military power.¹⁵¹ In this case, as Steward wrote, ‘the Argentine Army did not train its men or prepare them for the battle ahead.’¹⁵² In the final hours of the conflict, as a consequence of the lack of cohesion of some Army units retreated disorderly and the number of conscripts that run away in direction of Puerto Argentino.¹⁵³

Another institutional feature that distinguished these services, the Army and the Navy, was the system of inducting conscripts. The Navy arranged to draft new recruits bimonthly in five successive rotations, which helped to maintain enough veteran conscripts

during the full year.¹⁵⁴ The Marine conscripts served a fixed time of 14 months. Conversely, as Stewart also observed:

The fluctuating numbers for the Army depend on the number of conscripts inducted each year and on what date in any one of the three training cycles one measures the Army's size. Conscripts are inducted in March; the training cycle closes in October; a portion of the class is released in November, others in December and January, and the final group after the induction of the new class in March. Therefore, some conscripts serve as few as eight months and others their full twelve-month commitment. Thus the lowest number of men in the Army is between January and March (summer)."¹⁵⁵

In this case, the organizational culture of the Argentine Army and Navy was the critical variable. This culture defined the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that in turn shaped the ways in which the soldiers and Marines behaved collectively.¹⁵⁶

Finally, the Malvinas case was also a typical example of "combined failure," in which the Argentine High Command failed to anticipate the British reaction and to adapt to the combat conditions¹⁵⁷. Argentina was playing a dangerous game without a contingency plan in case the British accepted the gauntlet thrown down and decided to send troops to the South Atlantic. As both the broader issues of the Malvinas War and the actual strategies for fighting it demonstrate, the full responsibility for the Argentine debacle lay, mainly, on the shoulders of the High Command and the Theater Command.¹⁵⁸ The tactical commands did what they could with the elements provided for them.

Endnotes

(*) Paper presented at the Society for Military History 1998 Annual Meeting. Lisle Hilton, Lisle, IL. April 24-26, 1998

¹ I use the name Malvinas when refer to the islands. For geographical references and when using Argentine sources I will use the Spanish names if applicable. When citing British sources I will keep the names in English.

²Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers. The Dilemmas of Military Service* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

³ Graciela Speranza and Fernando Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra. Malvinas 1982* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Norma, 1997); and Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente. Batallón de Infantería de Marina N° 5* (Buenos Aires: Solaris, 1996).

⁴ Other alternative military systems are expandible, Universal Military Training, militia, All-Volunteer Force, and selective (See Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 23).

⁵ Ibid. 23.

⁶ Ibid. 28.0

⁷ Ibid. 66.

⁸ Rodolfo Martínez Pita, *Riccheri* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1995) 154. For the process of approval and the debates about its adoption see ibid. 79-154. In 1996 Argentina adopted the All-Volunteer Force system.

⁹ Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos. Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (McLean, VI: Brassey's, 1991), 45.

¹⁰ Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 28.

¹¹ Ibid. 67. Outside the military theater of operations, of course, the conscript system may also provide other benefits, such as giving basic education, discipline and a sense of patriotism to members of most if not all sectors of the national society.

¹² Ibid. 32.

¹³ Ibid. 36.

¹⁴ Ibid. 92.

¹⁵ See Ibid. Leonard Wainstein, ‘Reflections on a Small War,’ *Conflict* 6 (2) 1985, 97-115; and Kenneth R. McGruther, ‘When Deterrence Fails: The Nasty Little War for the Falklands Islands,’ *Naval War College Review* 36 (2) 296 March/April 1983, 47-56. Unlike the Victorian small wars, the war of 1982 confronted two regular armies of nation-states that committed large amount of resources and employed sophisticated technology. On Victorian wars see Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985). On the original concept of small wars see C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles & Practice. 3rd Edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, 1905)

¹⁶ Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 36; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers. The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany. June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood. The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998); John Sloan Brown, *Draftee Division. The 88th Infantry Division in World War II* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Michael D. Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy. How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

¹⁷ Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 36.

¹⁸ Ibid. 112.

¹⁹ Ibid. 171.

²⁰ Jeffrey Record, ‘On the Lessons of Military History,’ *Military Review* LXV (8) August 1985, 31.

²¹ Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 172.

²² Record, ‘On the Lessons...’, 32.

²³ Ibid., 33; Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 73.

²⁴ Nora Kinzer Stewart, ‘A Case Study in Cohesion. South Atlantic Conflict 1982,’ *Military Review* LXIX (4) April 1989, 32 and 38.

²⁵ Horizontal bonding refers to the relationship among peers, vertical bonding is relationships up and down the chain of command and organizational bonding are the values of the society in which soldiers are embedded (Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*. 27-29).

²⁶ William Fowler, *Battle for the Falklands 1. Land Forces* (London: Osprey Military, 1993 27-28).

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- ²⁷ Major Chris Keeble, second in command of the 2 Para Battalion. Paul Eddy et al., *The Falklands War* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983) 229.
- ²⁸ Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*, 127-28.
- ²⁹ John Frost, *2 Para Falklands. The Battalion at War* (London: Sphere Books, 1987), 74.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 91-92.
- ³¹ Stewart, “A Case Study...” 33. Military analyst Harry Summers likewise noted that: “as [the British] approached the main heights of Mount Tumbledown, the Scots Guards ran into heavy opposition. Instead of the hasty field fortifications that the British had faced earlier in the war, they came up against a strongly entrenched company of the Argentine 5th Marines . . . A British artillery officer described these positions as ‘exceptionally well-prepared’”(Harry G. Summers Jr., “Yomping to Port Stanley,” *Military Review* LXIV (3) March 1984, 14).
- ³² Harry D. Train, “An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign,” *Naval War College Review* XLI (1) 321, winter 1988, 49. Not only in Goose Green and Mount Tumbledown there was hard fighting. After the bloody encounter in Mount Longdon, Colour-Sergeant Faulkner said that, “some of the Argies wounded had been injured by phosphorous grenades...One or two had bayonet wounds –very unusual in a modern battle—some were even physically mauled, literally from hand-to-hand fighting with rifle butts or anything that had come to hand. The Argies had fought very well”(Middlebrook, *Task Force*, 352).
- ³³ Julian Thompson, *No Picnic. 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic: 1982* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1986), 168. Even the title of Thompson’s book is *No Picnic* because, “althoough the Falklands War of 1982 was both small in scale and short in duration it was indeed no picnic”(Ibid., xvii).
- ³⁴ Frost, *2 Para*, 53-54.
- ³⁵ The Company had been formed a few days before the invasion of the island and originally composed by three infantry platoons with 122 men (Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 19; Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino. Conflicto Malvinas II* (n.p: 1983), annex 21).
- ³⁶ Martin Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas'. The Argentine Forces en the Falklands War* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 177-78. 12th Regiment had originally reached the islands with 733 men. The Argentine regiments were equivalent of battalions in Western armies. Besides this unit the Task Force consisted of the 3º Platoon C Company 8th IR (37 men); A Battery of 4th Airborne Artillery Group (45 men); 3º Squad 1º Platoon Pioneer Company 9th (11 men); the C Company of the 25th RI; and the 3º Platoon B battery Air defense Group 601 (33 men) (Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial*, annex 21).
- ³⁷ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas'* 179. The heavy equipment had been stored in a cargo ship but because of the blockade it never attempted to sail for the islands.
- ³⁸ Francisco Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional y el combate de Darwin-Prado del Ganso’ in *Operaciones terrestre en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 156.
- ³⁹ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 92.
- ⁴⁰ Originally, the 12th Regiment should have had four 105mm Howitzers, thirteen 105mm recoilless guns, four 120mm mortars, ten 81mm mortars and 25 heavy machine guns (MAGs), and four .5 machine guns (Italo A. Piaggi, *Ganso Verde (Goose Green)* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1989), Apéndice Documental).
- ⁴¹ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 53-71.
- ⁴² Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 91.
- ⁴³ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 47.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid. 61-65.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid. 70-71.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. 57 see also 55)
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. 85. Other conscripts confirm Bravo’s opinion. See also 123.
- ⁴⁸ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas'* 179-180.
- ⁴⁹ The Argentine garrison had been bombed since May 1st and its members acknowledged the devastating effect of naval bombardment (Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 81-82).
- ⁵⁰ Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 93.
- ⁵¹ Ibid. 95.
- ⁵² Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 129-130.
- ⁵³ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas'* 181.
- ⁵⁴ British sources assert that “the unwillingness or inability of the enemy to defend themselves was pathetic; possibly these were administrative troops...Most of the Argentine soldiers hid under their blankets, with their rifles propped against the side of their trenches”(Frost, *2 Para*, 62-3).
- ⁵⁵ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas'* 182.

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- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 182; Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 131.
- ⁵⁷ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 132.
- ⁵⁸ To provide this unit with weapons, Piaggi ordered them to exchange their .45 cal. pistols for the FAL rifles of the artillery units (Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 100).
- ⁵⁹ This platoon was probably the most effective of the three platoons now manning the line. It had full complement of weapons; its commander was older and more experienced soldier than the other two platoon commanders (Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 184).
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. 184-185.
- ⁶¹ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 134-35.
- ⁶² Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 185.
- ⁶³ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983) 242.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. 242.
- ⁶⁵ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 185.
- ⁶⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for*, 245.
- ⁶⁷ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 188.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 188. Lieutenant Estévez was later honored with the higher decoration of Argentina: ‘Medalla al heróico valor en combate’ (Medal to the Heroic Valor in Combat).
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. 186.
- ⁷⁰ Frost, *2 Para*, 80.
- ⁷¹ Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 103.
- ⁷² This fraction was Task Group Güemes (two platoons from C Company of the 25th IR) and part of the Command and Service Company (from the 12th Regiment), and the men were gathered together under First Lieutenant Carlos Esteban (Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 187). According to Middlebrook it had 84 strong; Piaggi reports that they were 106 men (Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 120); Cervo, says that they were 44 men (Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional...’, 170).
- ⁷³ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 188; Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 137-38.
- ⁷⁴ Frost, *2 Para*, 80. Milans are wire guided antitank missiles.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. 82.
- ⁷⁶ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 189.
- ⁷⁷ Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 143-46.
- ⁷⁸ Frost, *2 Para*, 88.
- ⁷⁹ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for*, 247.
- ⁸⁰ Frost, *2 Para*, 89.
- ⁸¹ Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 102-3; Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 137.
- ⁸² D Company (Second Parachute Battalion) regrouped just north of the airfield, while C Company concentrated near the gorse-line. In this area were also the Support Company and the Battalion’s headquarters (Frost, *2 Para*, 90).
- ⁸³ These troops were B Company of the 12th IR (less two platoons), which had been held back as a helicopter reserve in the Mount Kent area for the past month (Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 193). Cervo says 132 men (Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional’, 170).
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 194; Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 105-07.
- ⁸⁵ Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional...’, 171.
- ⁸⁶ Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 107.
- ⁸⁷ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 194-95. Piaggi decided to surrender after considering that they have practically run out of ammunition, the firepower of the enemy was overwhelming, his defensive positions were unsuitable, and 100 civilians were in the settlement (Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 124-25).
- ⁸⁸ Record, ‘On the Lessons...’, 31.
- ⁸⁹ Paul Eddy et al., *The Falklands War*, 229.
- ⁹⁰ Frost, *2 Para*, 100; Paul Eddy et al., *The Falklands War*; Thompson, *No Picnic*, 98; Fowler, *Battle for the...*, 23, Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for...* 251.
- ⁹¹ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial*, annex 21
- ⁹² He considers only the first group of troop that was sent by helicopter. Because the second group did not arrived until very late the night of the 28th they did not took part in the combats for Goose Green and they arrived only to be capture (Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, 120).

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- ⁹³ Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional ...’, 155.
- ⁹⁴ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial*, annex 64; Piaggi, *Ganso Verde*, Anexo documental.
- ⁹⁵ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 197.
- ⁹⁶ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 67.
- ⁹⁷ Emilio Villarino, *Batallón 5. El Batallón de Infantería de Marina N° 5 en la Guerra de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Aller Atucha, 1992), 93; Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 380.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. 58; Ibid., 250, 258. On April 11th, the first echelon of the Argentine Tenth Mechanized Infantry Brigade arrived in the islands. Later, the Military Junta also sent the Third Infantry Brigade, and on April 28th the command in the islands was finally established. There would be a General High Command under which the land forces were organized in two groups, the Army Group Litoral (under the command of the Third Brigade) and the Army Group Puerto Argentino (under the command of the Tenth Brigade). The 5th Marine Battalion served under the latter.
- ⁹⁹ As noted above, part of the Third Infantry Brigade (the 12th IR) was sent to Goose Green, and, at the same time, the 8th IR and the 9th Engineer Company deployed in Fox Bay, and the 5th IR went sent to Port Howard. This decision of the Argentine High Command was strongly criticized because the units sent there were not properly supported and had no mobility. They stayed in their positions suffering great deprivations without any possibility of influencing the outcome of the battle.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 64; Ibid., 71, 107, 117, 138, 168 and 230.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid. 64-65; Ibid., 72, 118, 189.
- ¹⁰² Ibid. 123; Ibid., 19.
- ¹⁰³ Many Argentines sources acknowledged that, despite the minor material damages done, these actions created a profound psychological effect on the troops, increasing their feelings of insecurity and isolation (Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional’, 207).
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 200, 212.
- ¹⁰⁵ Harry G. Summers Jr., ‘Yomping to...’ 9 -10 and Nick Kerr, ‘The Falklands Campaign,’ *Naval War College Review* XXXV (6) 294, November-December 1982, 19.
- ¹⁰⁶ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 232.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 232. Middlebrook also concludes, “if the Argentines soldiers could hold off the attacks, then the British would be in serious trouble”.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 244.
- ¹⁰⁹ Cervo, ‘El cerco estratégico operacional’, 232.
- ¹¹⁰ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 248.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid. 251.
- ¹¹² Ibid. 254.
- ¹¹³ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 226.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid. 227.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid. 228.
- ¹¹⁶ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 255.
- ¹¹⁷ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 243.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid. 249-250.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid. 252.
- ¹²⁰ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 256.
- ¹²¹ Ibid. 259-69.
- ¹²² Ibid. 256.
- ¹²³ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for..* 301.
- ¹²⁴ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 256.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid. 256; Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 129.
- ¹²⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for..* 303; Middlebrook, *Task Force*, 362.
- ¹²⁷ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the `Malvinas`*, 258.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid. 258; Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 152-3; Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 270.
- ¹²⁹ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 279.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid. 322.
- ¹³¹ Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 160; Ibid., 297.
- ¹³² Ibid. 164; Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 300-301.
- ¹³³ Ibid. 169-172.

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- ¹³⁴ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for...* 303.
- ¹³⁵ Martin Middlebrook, *Task Force: The Falklands War, 1982. Revised Edition* (London: Penguin, 1987) 364-65.
- ¹³⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for...*, 303.
- ¹³⁷ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, 365.
- ¹³⁸ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'*, 262.
- ¹³⁹ Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 192.
- ¹⁴⁰ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 328.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid. 329.
- ¹⁴² Ibid. 346.
- ¹⁴³ Paul Eddy et al., *The Falklands War*, 253; Middlebrook, *Task Force*, 366.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 251.
- ¹⁴⁵ Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*, 104.
- ¹⁴⁶ N. Vaux, *March to the South Atlantic: 42 Commando Royal Marines in the Falklands War* (London: Buchan and Enright, 1986) 206-07 cited in ibid. 105; see also Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 201.
- ¹⁴⁷ Eugenio Dalton and Martin Balza, ‘La batalla de Puerto Argentino’ in *Operaciones Terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar), 236, emphasis added.
- ¹⁴⁸ Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*, 119-131.
- ¹⁴⁹ Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 9-10, 16.
- ¹⁵⁰ Comisión Rattenbach, *Informe Rattenbach. El drama de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Espartaco, 1988) 203.
- ¹⁵¹ Comisión Rattenbach, *Informe*, 201.
- ¹⁵² Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*, 62.
- ¹⁵³ Dalton and Balza, ‘La batalla de Puerto Argentino’, 236; Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 203-04, 222; Comisión Rattenbach, *Informe* 218.
- ¹⁵⁴ Robacio and Hernández, *Desde el Frente*, 14; Villarino, *Batallón 5*, 21.
- ¹⁵⁵ Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos*, 45.
- ¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War. French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28-30. Dimensions of the effectiveness of any organization stem from its development of an organizational culture. Organizational life would be unmanageable if specific actions did not call for specific responses, if members of the organization had no expectations about the actions of other members, or if they had no understanding of the effects of their own actions on others. Predictability is necessary, since fighting a war is a task for groups. In this context, decisions must be made and implemented automatically in order to ensure the integration of diverse units, and the fog of war further intensifies the need for coordination and the efficient implementation of group tasks (Ibid., 29).
- ¹⁵⁷ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes. The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 27.
- ¹⁵⁸ Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 46