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WAR IN THE EIGHTIES: MEN AGAINST HIGH TECH

EDITED BY BRIAN MACDONALD

THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure on behalf of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, to welcome you to this our twelfth seminar devoted to the examination of the strategic issues which are of significance and importance to Canada. We are encouraged greatly by the increased attendance and by the fact that some 25 per cent of those attending this seminar were not members of the Institute at the time of last spring's seminar. Such a growth in interest in the work of the Institute is extremely heartening.

The Institute, as you know, is the only organization in Canada devoted solely to the study and discussion of all matters relating to the national security and strategic interests of Canada, and with the aim of helping to create a better informed and attentive public in Canada with respect to these matters. To this end our seminars are public, the media are present and welcome, and the proceedings are recorded and subsequently published. I would ask you, therefore, if during the question periods and the open forums you choose to contribute a question or a comment to clearly identify yourself so that you may be properly recorded in the proceedings.

It is useful in our role as an Institute of Strategic Studies to from time to time review the meaning of the term strategy. In our last seminar, for example, Bernard Thillaye spent some time in a cogent analysis of the term from a perspective drawn from the military strategic paradigm. It is, perhaps, useful to observe that

there is another strategic paradigm which has been created in the various schools of business administration and that strategists of both may gain useful insights from the other.

Two theoreticians of the business paradigm, Charles Hofer and Dan Schendel, argue that 'the basic characteristic of the match which an organization achieves with its environment is called its strategy.' 'Strategy is the match between an organization's resources and skills and the environmental opportunities and risks it faces and the purposes it wishes to achieve.' Strategists are, therefore, compelled to interpret the events of the future and to fashion policies which will allow their organizations to cope with that future.

At our last seminar we had the opportunity to examine not only the process by which defence policy has been developed in Canada, but to examine analyses of that policy and its strengths and weaknesses by Parliamentary and Senate committees. Insofar as policies may be considered as the manifestation of a national strategy we were also assessing the defence strategy of the Government of Canada. Meanwhile, in the war between Argentina and Great Britain, a more violent and costly analysis of the defence strategies which had been adopted by those two nations was taking place. The results of that war clearly indicated the success of the match which each nation had achieved with respect to the threats and opportunities that lay in their future environments. As we will discover this morning, each had successes and each had failures in coping with that future environment.

Brigadier Millen, the British Defence Advisor to Canada, suggested in Ottawa at the beginning of the National Speaker's Tour that the paramount lesson to be learned from the Falklands war is that the future will be unexpected. The Greek philosopher Herakleitos of Ephesos, writing in 500 BC, said 'You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are forever flowing in upon you. The sun is new every day.' Theirs, however, is not the counsel of despair but an exhortation to prepare for that uncertain future so that the unexpected may be coped with. As that noted Canadian, Sir William Osler, pointed out: 'When schemes are laid in advance, it is surprising how often the circumstances fit in with them.' Such, then, is the role of the strategist.

This seminar continues that process of strategic reasoning which we began in the last. In that seminar we examined Canada's existing defence strategies. In this seminar we move to a consideration of the future environment with which we must achieve a match. Our focus is placed upon the technological aspects of that environment, and our nation's technological resources. We will also consider man as an additional resource, as well as the interface which must exist between man and machine, if we are to achieve that match between our nation and its future environment which is required of a successful strategy.

We must realize that our analysis of our environment will be limited, even in the technological sense. We will not, for example, deal with the developing technology of defence on the space frontier which has profound implications for the strategic balance which has hitherto existed. Nor will our seminar deal with the political and ideological components of our future environment. Nor, for that matter, will it deal with the economic aspects of that environment. That examination we will leave for future seminars of the Institute.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is time to begin the action of the seminar.

S. ROBERT ELLIOT

A STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE FALKLANDS WAR

LCol Brian MacDonald

Our first speaker has arrived in Toronto as the last step in his national speaker's tour – a tour that has performed at least as well as we had hoped, and much better than we had expected. He has been heard by over fourteen hundred Canadians in eight cities across our nation. With this morning's attendance of over a hundred, he will have been heard by some fifteen hundred people.

Major Elliot is doubly welcome. He represents the prestigious International Institute for Strategic Studies as its Information Research Officer and as a senior policy researcher in that institute, and is also welcome as a former Canadian officer who ended his career as an intelligence officer on an exchange posting in Britain. He has had a very large number of articles published in a variety of journals. He is responsible for the publication, *The Military Balance*, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Major S.R. Elliot

Thank you very much, Brian.

When I was given this task, the general parameters of the speech were to be a quick review of the strategy of the Falklands Islands war, then the war itself, the lessons learned by Britain and the application of those lessons to Canada. That is the format I intend to follow.

The Argentine junta's strategy required it to take over a territory it long regarded as its own. The islands were within easy sailing distance and just within the range of limited air cover from the bases in south Argentina. The junta was sure it could count on Third World support, and benevolent or neutral Soviet and United States attitudes. In the opinion of the military chiefs, Britain had been seen as being unwilling to support the colony. The distance, and British defence cuts, made a military reaction unlikely. A swift coup de main would force Britain into meaningful negotiations towards a transfer of the islands to Argentine political as well as de facto control.

The British attitude towards the Falklands was indeed ambivalent. There was by no means universal belief in the validity of the British claim to sovereignty. The islands themselves represented a minor, and relatively unproductive vestige of empire, which could neither be defended nor made self-sufficient. British defence doctrine called for priority to be given to operations within NATO, and minimal support for operations outside the NATO area. The government misread the pressures on the Argentine leadership – social, economic and political – which led to a foreign adventure being the only practical avenue by which to gain and keep popular support. Having mismanaged the initial crisis, the British government was faced with a dilemma. Acceding to a political and military defeat would have been totally unacceptable to a nation resentful of aggression against its own people, and so would lead to the fall of the Thatcher government. The alternative, to fight a war to recover a piece of unwanted territory, would be expensive and difficult, and victory was by no means certain. Operational considerations did not favour the British defence forces. There were no air or naval bases within easy reach. The nearest – Ascension, 4000 miles from the Falklands – had only a limited air facility. It offered an anchorage only, not a port. A heavy casualty toll would also put the government at risk. The basic dispute at issue, that is, sovereignty, would remain unsolved.

The Falklands crisis began on or about 27 February 1982 with yet another inconclusive discussion between British and Argentine representatives over the islands' future. The junta reviewed its long-standing contingency plans for occupying the territory. The navy took a leading part in this review. The landing, on March 19, of a party of metal salvage workers on South Georgia, and their raising of the Argentine flag, was a navy-inspired gesture intended as a provocation to Britain and a challenge to moderates within the junta.

As a precaution, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, on March 29, ordered a nuclear fleet submarine to the South Atlantic. The handover of the Royal Marine garrison in the islands was delayed. The British First Sea Lord, Sir Henry Leech, on his own initiative, set planning in train to send a task force as a counter-stroke. The only field force available was 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines,

comprising 40, 42 and 45 Commandos. RAF aircraft were sent to Ascension with airfield equipment and stores on April 1.

Argentine marines landed near Port Stanley by helicopter about 0430 on April 2. The garrison surrendered at 1000 and the governor was on a plane for Britain via Argentina by 1800. Argentine marines arrived at Gritviken, South Georgia, the next day. The 21 British marines shot down two helicopters and badly damaged a corvette with their anti-tank rockets before surrendering.

On April 3, the British House of Commons agreed that the islands would be recovered. The United Nations unanimously approved resolution 502 which called upon Argentina to withdraw and for both sides to enter into negotiations on the future of the Falklands. Two days later the carriers *Hermes*, *Invincible*, and the royal fleet auxiliary tanker *Pearleaf* sailed. The Ministry of Defence had begun to requisition and to charter an additional fleet of civilian vessels. The commander, 3 Commando Brigade, Brigadier Julian Thompson, was given in addition two parachute battalions each 5 Brigade. The force left on April 6, 4820 strong. There followed unproductive diplomatic initiatives by United States Secretary of State Haig, the Peruvian president and the UN Secretary General. British diplomacy rallied United States popular support and convinced the EEC to ban arms exports to, and commercial imports from, Argentina. Britain imposed a military exclusion zone around the Falklands on April 7, the implication being that a nuclear submarine had arrived. It raised it to a total exclusion zone on April 28 and on May 7, imposed a blockade on Argentine coastal waters.

The Falklands operation, code named 'Corporate,' was controlled by Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, C-in-C Fleet, from his headquarters at Northwood, near London. The task force commander was Rear Admiral R.J. 'Sandy' Woodward. The ground operation was under the command first, of Brigadier Thompson, later, of Major General Jeremy Moore, Royal Marines.

The recapture of South Georgia was the first priority. It would provide a base well out of range of Argentine air, 800 miles east of the Falklands, with a good sheltered anchorage and some shore installations. Its political status was clear: it is not part of the Falklands. Its recapture would be good for British morale and correspondingly bad for Argentina.

The attacking force was M Company, 42 Commando - 110 men - led by the Commando second-in-command, Major Sheridan, just back from an Arctic warfare exercise, and some 70 special boat service (SBS) and special air service (SAS). The force was flown to Ascension and loaded into the county class destroyer *Antrim*, the antarctic patrol vessel *Endurance*, and the RFA tanker *Tidespring*. The SAS and SBS were to reconnoitre the island at Gritviken and Leith, moving via Husvik and Stromness.

On April 21, two Wessex helicopters were sent out with three four-man SAS patrols. The first sortie failed but the second landed on Fortuna glacier. The weather closed in. Two attempts were made the next day to lift them off. Both Wessex helicopters crashed. On the third attempt, *Antrim's* Wessex picked up the 13 SAS, plus the two crews, and brought all 17 back to *Antrim* in a spectacular piece of flying that won the pilot, Lieut Cdr Ian Stanley, the DSC. (The capacity of a Wessex is normally five.) Two SBS squads from *Antrim*, which had landed in Hound Bay to move to Gritviken via Moraine Fjord, had also to be rescued. A third SAS attempt on 23 April with five Gemini assault boats came near to disaster when two of their notoriously unreliable Johnson outboard motors failed. One patrol was picked up by *Antrim's* helicopter. The other landed on the last point of land before Antarctica and walked back to Leith. An obvious lesson: if the equipment is unreliable in peacetime it will surely fail in war.

These setbacks, plus reports that an Argentine submarine was in the area, worried Admirals Fieldhouse and Woodward, but *Antrim's* skipper by then had gone over to the offensive. At 0630 on April 25, the submarine *Santa Fé* was spotted, incoming to Gritviken, on the surface. It was depth-charged and driven ashore. Sheridan managed to refocus naval attention on his mission, and although his main force was still some hours away, he cobbled together a 75-man scratch force of his marines and the SAS and SBS, and went ashore supported by gunfire from *Antrim* and the frigate *Plymouth*. The Argentine garrison at Gritviken ran up white flags as he came ashore. Leith surrendered the next day and the 137 prisoners were taken aboard *Tidespring*. There had been two Argentine casualties, one sailor wounded in the attack on the *Santa Fé*, and another who was shot owing to a misunderstanding. There were no British casualties. This was an Argentine mistake. It gave the British a cheap victory.

The British landings on the Falklands proper began on May 1 with the deployment of SAS and SBS patrols to reconnoitre landing areas and monitor Argentine activity. That morning also, a single Vulcan bombed Port Stanley airfield. Harriers followed during the afternoon and also hit Goose Green. On May 2, the nuclear-attack submarine *Conqueror* sank the cruiser *General Belgrano* with two Mk 8 torpedoes. *Belgrano* sank in about an hour. The torpedo strike, and losses from an overturned liferaft later, killed 368. That afternoon, also, Harriers sank one Argentine patrol boat and damaged another.

On May 4 *Sheffield*, which had been deployed as a radar picket west of the islands, was hit by an air-launched Exocet and abandoned after attempts to quell the resultant blaze had failed. Twenty were killed; 24 hurt. On May 9 the fleet captured an intelligence collector, the *Narwal*. On May 11, the frigate *Alacrity* sank a transport in Falkland Sound.

An SAS raid on May 14, supported by gunfire from *Glamorgan*, destroyed 11 aircraft on Pebble Island. Two more Argentine marine transports were caught on May 16; one was sunk, the other driven ashore.

The landings began in San Carlos water on May 21: 40 Commando and 2 Para went to San Carlos and Sussex Mountain; 45 Commando and 3 Para went to Ajax Bay and Port San Carlos; 42 Commando and the artillery came ashore at Ajax as followup. The day was clear, with no cloud to give cover to the landing. About noon the Argentine air force began to counterattack. Some 80 sorties arrived over the Sound that afternoon. The Type-21 frigate *Ardent* was badly hit, losing 22 killed and 30 injured. Five ships were damaged. Fourteen Argentine aircraft and two helicopters were shot down.

On May 23, Argentine air hit the frigate *Antelope*. The bomb, which landed in her engine room, did not then explode but did so while the expert tried to defuse it. Fortunately casualties were light. Eight aircraft were shot down.

On May 25, Argentina's national day, the destroyer *Coventry* was sunk with the loss of 21 killed and 21 injured. *Atlantic Conveyor* was hit by an Exocet diverted from *Invincible*. All her load of harriers had been flown off but three of the four Chinook and all six of the Wessex transport helicopters she carried were still aboard, as were the 20 tons of tentage, engineer vehicles and material for the Harrier landing pads. Argentina lost 10 aircraft and this attrition finally proved too much. Thereafter only small raids took place. One, unfortunately, was on the brigade maintenance area, where it destroyed a considerable quantity of mortar and other ammunition.

Brigadier Thompson had planned to send his forces against Port Stanley in a two-pronged attack along both the northern and southern routes around the island. For this, he needed the helicopters to give his plan flexibility and support. He wanted 5 Brigade but before it arrived he was ordered forward.

The southern operation started with 2 Para's capture of Port Darwin and Goose Green. The Argentine regiments occupied a ridge running obliquely along the narrow isthmus connecting East Falkland with Lafonia. Approaches to it were flat, with virtually no cover. Defensive fire was well planned and co-ordinated in depth. The Paras had three 105mm field guns plus fire from the frigate *Arrow*'s single 4.5 inch gun in support. Harrier support had been planned, but the low ceiling prevented it from being used until late in the afternoon.

Despite early difficulties and the loss of the Battalion commander LCol H. Jones, by the end of the day the 450 men of 2 Para had defeated some 1600 Argentines, perhaps 1300 of them combatants. It cost them 17 killed, 34 wounded. Argentine fatal casualties were 50, mostly from the cluster bombs from the Harriers. The three field guns fired some 900 rounds; *Arrow* 235.

The initial advance on the northern flank also began on May 28. 45 Commando was ordered to Douglas; 3 Para to Teal Inlet. The 45 Commando "yomp" (that's their word for a pleasant walk in the country) started with the men carrying up to 120 pounds of gear. It took them, eventually, some 60 miles to the mountain Two Sisters. The Paras took 24 hours non-stop to get to Teal, about one-third of the time Brigade HQ had thought necessary. Major General Moore took command of the land battle on May 30.

On May 31, K Company began 42 Commando's lift by helicopter to Mount Kent. It occupied Kent and Mount Challenger by 3 June. Those two features had been abandoned by the Argentines to back up Goose Green and Darwin: again, a tactical error. Headquarters 3 Brigade moved to Kent by May 7. The brigade was given three batteries, 7, 9, and 79 of 29 Commando Regiment, RA - 18 105mm guns - with 1000 rounds per gun, all moved up by helicopter.

5 Infantry Brigade began landing at San Carlos on 1 June. By this time this brigade was something of a scratch force. Its two para battalions had gone to 3 Brigade, replaced by 2nd Battalion Scots Guards and 1st Battalion Welsh Guards. The Guards had been on public duties - stamping up and down in front of Buckingham Palace, and there is some considerable doubt as to their standard of training and fitness. Its third Battalion, of course, was 1/7 Gurkhas. One gets the impression that this brigade had originally been intended solely as a garrison and was put into combat only after the size of the Argentine garrison became known and after the losses from *Atlantic Conveyor*. The initial estimate of that Argentine garrison had been 3000. By this time, estimates had been raised to between 12 000 and 16 000.

When Brigadier Wilson, Commander 5 Brigade, heard that the Argentines had withdrawn from Bluff Cove and Fitzroy Harbour, he sent two companies of 2 Para to take over. He then tried to march the guards forward but they were halted. The helicopters were lifting supplies forward for 3 Brigade and PWs back to the concentration areas and were not available to support him. The only alternative was a sea lift. Owing to battle damage, there were insufficient escorts to protect this lift but the gamble was considered acceptable, providing most of the move was at night.

The Scots Guards were to be moved in *Intrepid* to Lively Island. From Lively they were to be lifted to Bluff Cove in four utility landing craft. It took them five hours due to rough water, winds gusting to 70 knots, and navigation difficulties. In order to cut down the time spent in open boats *Fearless* took the Welsh to Direction Island, but the weather was so foul that the LCU could not come out to meet her. She loaded as many as possible into the two LCUs she carried, slipped them, and returned to San Carlos with the rest of the battalion.

On June 7, the Welsh were trans-shipped to *Sir Galahad*, together with a number of other brigade unit personnel. It was daylight before she left San Carlos. She found the Bluff Cove channel too narrow and diverted into Fitzroy, where *Sir Tristan* was already unloading. But there were not enough landing craft for both tasks. Further, from Fitzroy the troops would have had to walk the 12 miles around the inlet to Bluff. They elected to wait until the LCUs were free. The Skyhawks and Mirages arrived first. Sixty-three were killed, 46 injured. The navy admitted fault for not giving protection. The Guards were criticized for not going ashore and for doing nothing to protect themselves. There were other reasons. The Harrier cover had been withdrawn, but nobody had been told. An air raid imminent warning had not reached the ships. The Rapier had not been set up on shore early enough, although it did come into action, claiming one killed.

On the northern flank, 3 Brigade led the assault with five artillery batteries and some naval guns in support. 3 Para captured Mount Longdon in a night attack on June 12, losing 23 killed and 45 wounded. One of its NCOs, Sgt McKay, won a VC taking out a machine-gun nest. In taking Two Sisters, 45 Commando lost four killed and eight wounded. Mount Harriet fell to 42 Commando with fire support from two companies of 40 Commando and what was left of the Welsh Guards. They used their Milan anti-tank missiles against machine-gun posts and an outflanking movement around the hill to attack the defenders from the rear. They lost one killed, 13 wounded and took 250 prisoners, many of them wounded. In 5 Brigade's follow-up assault, the Gurkhas took Mount William which, to their intense disgust, was largely empty. On June 13, 2 Para took Wireless Ridge with support from the four Scimitars and two Scorpions of the troop of Blues and Royals. Later that night, the Scots Guards took Mount Tumbledown, held by an Argentine marine battalion which literally had to be dug out with the bayonet. The engagement lasted some 14 hours. The Scots lost nine killed, 41 wounded; the Argentines 30 killed and 40 prisoners, many of them wounded. The Welsh finished their war by taking a deserted Sapper Hill. Many casualties in these last actions were caused by the little plastic mines that had been seeded indiscriminately on the approaches, often by helicopter, and which are still there.

At 2100 June 14, General Menendez surrendered. Britain lost 255 killed, 18 of whom were civilian crews aboard the royal fleet auxiliaries and *Atlantic Conveyor*. The number of Argentine casualties is still unknown.

It has been said that this war was won not so much by superior equipment as by professionalism. As an example, the decision of the First Sea Lord to anticipate his Prime Minister's requirements and to initiate planning for the task force is in the highest professional tradition of the RN. And this is reinforced by the fact that the first units were at sea within three days of the decision to send

them. The navy mobilized 23 warships and 26 fleet auxiliaries, and some 54 merchant ships were either chartered or requisitioned. Many of these latter vessels had to be modified. Dockyard workers, some of them with dismissal notices in their pockets because their dockyards were scheduled to close, worked round the clock to get the force to sea. Some modifications were unscheduled. The master of the ro-ro ferry *Elk*, and his RN liaison officer, for example, refused to go to war unarmed, and by scrounging material and some engineers constructed gun tubs, mounting in them some Bofors 40mm guns. He had to be dissuaded from putting in a ski jump for a Harrier.

Moving a large naval force 8000 miles requires extensive logistic support. Refuelling required naval fittings to be mounted in *Canberra* and the *Queen Elizabeth II*, among others. Transfers of personnel and stores at sea became almost routine. That there were no major accidents reported despite some very severe sea conditions is a mark of the standard of seamanship that prevailed. Gaining that seamanship is difficult in a small navy without putting an unacceptable strain on the crew members and their families. In wartime, this can be accepted; in peacetime it cannot. Canada does not have enough sailors for the ships it now has.

Each ship must be able to protect itself through a wide spectrum of air attack. Because the concept of war in the NATO environment has stressed specialization, with ships acting as part of a team, they become vulnerable if, for any reason, the team is incomplete. In the Falklands the enemy used mass attacks to swamp the defences. Even though his aircraft were obsolete, they did have some successes. Combat pilots will tell you that, no matter how good the defences, something will invariably get through, and so it proved, albeit at high cost.

Fleet operations in the North Atlantic are becoming more dangerous, not only from the increasing number of Soviet aircraft assigned to long-range fleet protection, but also as a result of the long-term Soviet policy of mounting a wide range of surface-to-surface missiles in its combat vessels. Only four of Canada's DDHs have even a simple surface-to-air missile – the Sea Sparrow, a design which first emerged in 1964. Is this weapon still able to do its job? Are the electronics which support it adequate? The Falklands proved that there has to be a layered defence, with its various components so interlocked that, even if one element fails, there is always something to back it up. This is not possible in today's Canadian maritime force.

An interesting facet of the Falklands war was the re-emergence of the naval gun as a weapon of war. Not only were these used against shore targets, on their own and in support of the military, but also against minor naval targets. *Glamorgan*, for example, put some 12 000 rounds through her twin 4.5 inch guns.