

A Case Study in COHESION

SOUTH ATLANTIC CONFLICT 1982

Nora Kinzer Stewart

Military analysts watched with keen interest and have since studied the short but intense conflict in the South Atlantic in 1982. Of the many lessons offered in tactical and logistic operations, the author finds that one underlying factor appeared to have a decisive impact. This case study highlights the importance of unit cohesion and soldier morale to the relative success or failure of the British and Argentine forces in that conflict.

MORE THAN a thousand young men died in May and June of 1982, on tiny lonely islands near the tip of South America. In the space of those three and a half weeks, 746 Argentines were killed; 1,336 wounded and 11,400 taken as prisoners of war; 256 British troops were killed and 777 wounded. The British navy lost 16 ships, sunk or damaged, and the Argentine air force lost approximately 90 airplanes. Estimates of the cost to Britain, excluding the reinforcement and continued garrison troops on the island, are approximately \$1.6 billion. Argentina expended at least \$850 million in the campaign and perhaps \$1 billion in arms purchases.

Called the "Malvinas" by the Argentines and the "Falklands" by the British, this nasty little war in a cold, isolated spot in the South Atlantic contains many lessons for military analysts. Once again the British proved that they can perform logistic miracles in rounding up troops, ships and equipment, and transporting men and airplanes over 8,000 miles. Argentine navy and air force pilots, who thundered down San Carlos' "bomb alley" so low under the radar that they had salt spray on their canopies, were examples of courage and daring. The legality of the British sinking of the *General Belgrano* fascinates jurist and politician. While geopolitical analyses are in-

teresting, the real lesson of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982 for military manpower specialists is how morale or cohesion affected the outcome of battles.

This article discusses the findings of a US Army Research Institute for Behavioral and

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Social Sciences (ARI) research project dealing with the South Atlantic conflict of 1982 as a case study in military cohesion.¹ This ARI research is a post hoc comparative analysis of a combined arms conflict of short duration between two technologically well-equipped forces. The focus here is to indicate the "lessons learned" for the study of cohesion in a cross-cultural comparative analysis in general and for US forces in particular. Based on interviews conducted with officers and enlisted personnel in Argentina and Great Britain in 1987, findings dealing with the human dimension of warfare are presented here.²

This "human dimension" is often defined as "esprit" or "will to fight" or "morale" or "cohesion." Military analysts often focus on quantifiable factors such as level of technology, advanced weaponry, supply capability and sheer number of troops rather than on the qualitative components of "soldier will" that lead to combat effectiveness.

Nonetheless, there is a large body of sociological and psychological research which indicates that human factors such as cohesion, trust in peers, trust in leaders, unit climate, teamwork and competence are extremely important factors in determining why men fight

in combat or run away.³ Military cohesion is 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. Military cohesion consists of horizontal or peer bonding, vertical bonding, organizational bonding and societal factors. Horizontal bonding—the relationship of officer to officer, noncommissioned officer (NCO) to NCO and enlisted to enlisted—includes such intangibles as sense of mission, technical and tactical proficiency, lack of personnel turnover, teamwork, trust, respect and friendship. Vertical bonding—relationships up and down the chain of command—involves open versus authoritarian climate, leaders' concern for the men, leader example, trust and respect of leaders, sharing of discomfort and danger and shared training. Organizational bonding—the values of the society as inculcated in the soldier or officer—entails loyalty and patriotism, military tradition and history, strong religious belief and a well-defined concept of valor or heroism.

Forty years of military research show that higher military cohesion results in:

- less nonbattlefield casualties.
- more soldiers firing their weapons in combat.
- less desertion in time of war.
- more soldiers fighting valiantly.
- less absence without leave, drug addiction, alcoholism and sick call in peacetime.

Cohesion is a necessary, but not sufficient, causal factor leading to combat effectiveness. Societal factors such as tactics, supply, logistics, weather, medical facilities, physical fitness of the troops and training all contribute to combat effectiveness and affect cohesion. Societal factors that impinge on military cohesion are those of society's attitudes toward the military in general, or toward a particular war. This attitude will determine if an adequate defense budget exists for training officers and men, purchasing supplies and ar-



Members of the Brazilian Expeditionary force returning to Rio de Janeiro in 1945. After a rocky start, Brazilian troops soon overcame their initial deficiencies in training and organizational structure.

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mament, and staffing military hospitals. Of course, even high levels of morale and a staunch will to win among officers and men who trust each other will come to naught if the men have no weapons or food. If political will is absent or political strategy is incorrect, military strategy will suffer. Or if the level of technology of the war has an imbalance, troops are doomed. World War II Polish officers using cavalry charges against German tanks may illustrate high levels of cohesion, but their valor was to no avail.

In the specific case of the land forces in the 1982 South Atlantic conflict, the strength of the British forces was neither weapons nor technology, but men. As Brigadier David Chandler of the United Kingdom 5th Airborne Brigade said in an interview:

"No matter how sophisticated the weaponry, the ultimate test is the man himself on the battlefield. It is always a soldier with a fixed bayonet and rifle who wins the war."

Many Argentine units fought bravely and well. Other Argentine units broke and ran. Why? British Paras and Royal Marines added another page to their already distinguished battlefield history. In those areas of the battlefield where British troops fought professional and well-trained Argentine groups such as the Argentine Marines, the 25th Infantry, the Argentine 3d Artillery and Commando 601 and 602, English units like the Welsh and Scots Guards paid a high price.⁴

The price might have been much worse. If the Argentine navy had not gone to port; if the seven unexploded Exocet missiles that hit

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their targets had gone off; if Argentina had waited a few months until the English had dismantled their surface fleet; if the Argentine air force and naval air arm had not squabbled over tactics and command; if Argentina had only prepared adequate logistic plans; if Argentina's medical services had been better prepared, then perhaps, and only perhaps, the outcome would have been different. "What if" is an interesting exercise for armchair historians, but in order to learn from this violent incident, one must deal with the facts at hand. The Argentine loss is a repetition of errors made by other peacetime armies in other wars on other battlefields. What is most interesting is that most, if not all, the mistakes made by Argentine officers and men in the Malvinas were very similar to those made by the Brazilian army in the initial months of the Italian Campaign of 1944.³ As important as supply, logistics, communications and strategy are, the relationships between and among men often determine the outcomes of battles.

Were there discernible differences in selection, training, leadership or experience? Which land forces or which units manifested high levels of morale and cohesion? It is appropriate to begin with a discussion of societal factors.

Societal Factors

Born of a 400-year tradition of overseas engagements involving long supply lines, joint operations and amphibious landings, British

troops exhibited high morale, esprit and cohesion. Several British NCOs spoke of "taking the Queen's Shilling and going where she sends us." And it mattered not where they were sent. One Para NCO said, "I thought the Falklands were someplace near Scotland."

Britain was convinced that a war was necessary to defend the Falklands against a foreign aggressor. She sent her very best troops to the Falklands. Contrary to Argentine evaluations of the war, not all British troops were battle-experienced veterans. Fully one-half of British enlisted were young boys with an average age of 20. Few officers had participated in pitched modern battles, with enemy naval and air bombardment. But Britain's lengthy military tradition and experience and the armed forces' continuing training and preparation for NATO exercises have tempered their forces' attitude toward combat. This, combined with living memory of recent wars (World War II, Korea) and firsthand experiences in Cyprus, Belize and constant duty in Northern Ireland, make British forces aware of the essentials of battlefield tactics and quick response in combat.

Argentine forces, too, were fully convinced of the historical and political justification for their invasion of the Malvinas. From his first day in school, every Argentine child is taught that the Malvinas are Argentine territory. Nearly all the Argentines interviewed stated that they were proud of having tried to liberate the Malvinas. Their loyalty and patriotism were bolstered by strong religious faith. While Argentine forces have a long tradition of geopolitical strategy and political involvement, their lack of combat experience produced deficiencies in supply, logistics, communications and intelligence. Argentine armed forces have recent experience in the war against subversion, but no living memory of modern battlefield conditions.

Yet few nations have such long historical tradition in the area of rapid and innovative mobilization as the British. England is a na-



British troops in the Falklands, 1982.

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tion that mobilized coal barges and sailing yachts to evacuate 300,000 men from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1941. Thus, it is not surprising that the United Kingdom, once again, performed logistics, supply and mobilization miracles in May and June of 1982. Civilian workers performed heroic tasks. The *Canberra* was refitted in 60 hours. The *Queen Elizabeth 2* was outfitted as a troop ship in three and a half weeks, although war plans called for a three-month period to do the job. In the tradition of Dunkirk, the *Queen Elizabeth 2* elegantly sailed alongside four roll-on-roll-off Channel ferries that lumbered 8,000 miles to the Falklands.

While Argentine forces have a long tradition of geopolitical strategy and political involvement, they have little experience in mundane activities such as supply and logistics. Argentine troops were sent to the Malvinas with summer uniforms and no rational supply or logistics system was set up. While British forces suffered from confusion and supply problems, they were able to quick-

ly set up headquarters. Their long history and experience in overseas wars, amphibious landings, joint operations, combined arms tactics, and command and control served them well. British supply and logistics capabilities were well managed by their NCOs.

Britain's creative logistics were repeated in brilliant tactical strategies applied by the land forces in their march across the Falklands and particularly the Royal Marines 42 Commando's assault on Mount Harriet.

As World War II social science research indicated, most soldiers find it difficult to state their views of patriotism and loyalty. In a fire fight, ideology is not the issue—survival is. However, experiences in previous wars have shown that patriotism is an important factor in determining the will to endure and the will to fight. Both Argentine and British forces are profoundly loyal and patriotic. They both have a proud military heritage, deep religious conviction and an ingrained sense of valor or heroism. The Argentines were not lacking in valor or patriotism, but were woefully lacking

in experience and unable to translate heroism into formation of cohesive units.

The British were a combined arms and combined unit team. Their bonds of trust, respect and friendship with each other were stronger by reason of history, training, time spent together in garrison, on exercises and on the long sea voyage from England. In the close confines of the ships, troops ran and jumped around decks until bolts in the plating came loose. Medical officers taught self-administered first-aid, how to inject morphine and an innovative method of administering saline drips. British troops used 37 1/2 years' worth of training munitions in practice on their sea voyage.

Like the British, teamwork and peer bonding are particularly strong among the Argentine office corps. Argentine officers evinced a high degree of trust with their fellow officers due to close personal relationships developed

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in the service academies. But their schooling, based on rote memory and no living memory of modern battlefield conditions, produced a rigid intransigent attitude toward battlefield tactics and doctrine. Lack of combat experience produced deficiencies in logistics, supply, communications and intelligence.

Even though Argentine troops were enthusiastic about their liberation of the Malvinas,

many individual soldiers evinced self-doubt about their ability to fight pitched battles. The Argentine conscript himself knew his own liabilities and strengths. A young 19-year-old conscript with only one month's training was well aware of his inadequate preparation. The majority of troops in the Malvinas were conscripts with scarcely one month's training. Argentine conscripts hardly knew each other, their officers or even how to load their weapons. For these conscripts, horizontal bonding was nonexistent.

Yet those Argentine units with conscripts who had completed a full year's training, such as the Argentine 25th Infantry Brigade, the Argentine 3d Artillery Infantry Brigade, the 5th Argentine Marine Brigade or the special case of 601 and 602 Commandos, trusted their leaders, knew their weapons and endured against frightening odds of continual bombardment, cold, wet, humid weather, lack of food, lack of sleep and the sight of their fellow soldiers wounded and dying. These units exhibited high levels of horizontal and vertical bonding.

In the case of British troops in the Falklands, an open organizational climate, combined with the officer's credo of caring for his men, serving as an example and sharing training and discomfort, led to incredibly strong positive relationships up and down the vertical dimensions of the command structure from private to regimental commander. An open organizational climate is a characteristic of a society with little regard for hierarchy. This open climate, in turn, produces and fosters cooperation and flexibility. Teamwork, trust, respect and friendship are associated within an open organizational climate and also are strengthened by leaders and subordinates sharing discomfort and sharing training.

British soldiers and NCOs were confident that their officers were well-versed in battle tactics. British NCOs are trained to accept responsibility at all levels of command. An open organizational climate with little regard



Argentine soldiers in Port Stanley, the Islands' capital.

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for privileges of rank and accompanied by swift good humor led to continual adaptation in the fluid and ever-changing battle and spelled swift success on the battlefield. A rigid, highly stratified officer corps ethos, such as the Argentine case, produces little or no bonding from conscript to commander.

This rigid stratification was not present in all units. Many Argentine officers, particularly in those units mentioned, were deeply concerned about their men. One Argentine officer commented, "I took care of my men. I made sure they were warm and fed because I knew that terrible things were yet to come."

Both Argentine and British soldiers reported that a caring and competent officer was one of the, if not the most, salient factors in promoting high levels of cohesion. British and Argentine officers constantly used the word "love" to describe the manner in which an officer must treat his men. They did not say "like" or "nurture" or "care for your men," but emphasized the word "love."

Interrelationship of Factors

Such close bonds do not exist in a vacuum. For example, high personnel turnover destroys cohesion. Budgetary constraints impact on training, education and purchase of medical supplies and armaments. Attitudes of the society and cultural attitudes toward the mili-

tary as an organization, or individuals as members of a particular service, relate to the self-concept of those individuals, their dedication, loyalty and patriotism.

If a particular war is political anathema to the population as a whole, cohesion may mean nothing in the battlefield situation. Men may either refuse to fight or fight in such a desultory fashion that the enemy will win. Also public disapproval may be expressed in cuts in military budgets which curtail purchase of armaments and training. Military units may have high levels of cohesion, but without adequate training and weapons, they cannot fight a conflict. Or, Third World nations may spend an inordinately large percentage of their budgets on high technology weapons, but not have soldiers sophisticated enough to use or repair the weapons. Such was not the case for the Falklands/Malvinas conflict. In combat, distinctions based on rank are blurred. Survival and victory depend on the intense cooperation of all ranks during combat. We must not make the fallacious assumption that an open climate is endemic exclusively to democratic societies. Even organizations that appear, at first glance, to be rigid and inflexible, such as the *Wehrmacht* in World War II and the North Vietnamese army, showed that in battlefield situations and at the small-unit level, criticisms and sug-

gestions were a part of an open climate.⁶ Even though British society is still somewhat stratified, British forces exhibited such an open climate. Argentine forces generally did not. Those Argentine units that stood and fought exhibited high levels of cohesion and an open organizational climate with nurturing leadership.

Recent US ARI research indicates that an open command climate leads to high levels of morale, cohesion and competence. However, morale and competence are intertwined.⁷ High-performing groups have high morale and thus perform well. Such an ambience requires patience and time.

Time is an important factor for the development of cohesion. Military tradition grows out of years and years, if not centuries, of military heritage, lore and myth. British soldiers and Argentine officers recount with pride their military traditions. Perhaps more than any army in the world, British soldiers and NCOs readily speak of their forebears and long-ago battles. David Cooper, chaplain of

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2 Para in the Falklands states, "Every Para knows about the men at Arnhem. We can't let that tradition down."

As interesting as analyses of the sea, land and air war of the South Atlantic conflict of 1982 may be for the military analyst, what are the salient lessons for the US Army manpower specialists and trainers? First of all, we see that cohesion was a force multiplier for all

British units and specific Argentine units. The issue of conscript versus volunteer soldier is moot, given that Argentine conscripts with one year's training, such as the Argentine 3d Artillery, fought valiantly and held their ground. British and Argentine battle success or failure was shown nightly on television and seen in daily papers.

In this era of high-speed communications with television and press coverage of a war, public opinion impacts on the conduct of the war and the attitudes of the soldiers themselves. Regardless of reductions in the size of their armed forces and cuts in military budgets in the years preceding the conflict, British and Argentine citizens were strongly in favor of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982. Had the war lasted for much longer and casualties rates mounted, the British population might have had second thoughts about continuing to support their task force. Conversely, we see how public opinion dramatically changed within Argentina after the surrender. The Argentine nation's anger against its loss in the Malvinas resulted in toppling the military junta and the return of democracy to Argentina.

The United States learned that a prolonged war such as Vietnam may lead to public disapproval. The 1983 invasion of Grenada met with high levels of public approval. But the short duration of this conflict should not lead military leaders or politicians to the conclusions that public opinion is now, and constantly, in favor of military action regardless of its strategic implications. Military analysts need to have a sense of history and knowledge of cultural idiosyncracies and their potential impact on soldier and unit morale and cohesion.

While the US Army teaches military history to its officer cadets, there seems to be little emphasis on military history within the training cycles of the average soldier. There are recent attempts to resurrect traditions and historical lore; for example, the 10th Mountain

Division of the US Army. The US Army might model its training of history and military tradition by examining how British forces inculcate soldiers with a sense of military history. One factor in teaching soldiers their military tradition is time in service. British troops generally serve long tours which reduce personnel turbulence.

Close personal bonds and learning whom one can and cannot trust take months and probably years to come to full fruition. High levels of personnel turbulence adversely affect officer and soldier competence. High morale, dedication, loyalty, patriotism, devotion to duty and sincerity are fine words for boy scouts, but they have little import to a lonely soldier on a battlefield who is unsure of himself and his officers.

Current US Army policy of developing units with strong cohesive bonds as in the COHORT (cohesion, operational readiness and training) system is an excellent method to counter personnel turbulence and promote cohesion. But throughout the US Army, training should emphasize developing an open command climate that produces freewheeling criticism and, of course, good humor.

Time also is a compelling factor on the immediate outcome of a modern war. Warning time to prepare for immediate mobilization and deployment is shorter and shorter. Wars born of a short- or no-notice crisis themselves tend to be of brief duration. The Argentines called their war *Una Guerra Improvisada* (an improvised war) and the British called their war one of "muddling through." As the time factor becomes more compressed for mobilization and deployment, and duration of a battle shorter and shorter, the few days or months usually needed for the chaos of war to shake out the basic irrationality of the training system, logistics plans or the battle tactics may simply not be there.

If we (US and NATO) plan for a six-day war, then it will be an "improvised and muddling through" war. If we cannot rely on



Argentine and British troops after the fighting.

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the industrial might of a war machine, as we did in World War II, then we ought to look carefully at British military and civilian ingenuity in quick adaptation to ships, airplanes and equipment at hand. And such adaptability is much more feasible with well-trained, well-led, cohesive units made up of motivated soldiers.

The Falklands/Malvinas conflict shows that today's modern battlefield of increased lethality and short duration requires competent officers and NCOs who are capable of adapting quickly to a fluid situation. Such flexibility results from constant, arduous and appropriate training which, in turn, requires months and years. Soldiers and officers train in peacetime for war and hope that their training, doctrine and tactics are sufficient, appropriate and ensure development of high morale and cohesion in order to achieve success in combat.

A decided strength of the British and weakness of the Argentine land forces

Although there is a US cultural bias against elite units with their peculiar customs, regimental insignia and strange-looking berets, the British show over and over again that elite units produce, maintain and foster high levels of morale, esprit, organizational integrity and horizontal and vertical cohesion. The success of Argentine elite units underscores the combat effectiveness of cohesive elites.

proved to be their NCOs. Argentine NCOs have little training in battlefield tactics and are used mainly for administrative duties. British officers rely heavily on their NCOs for direct leadership of troops in garrison, in training and on the battlefield. British NCO training is rigorous and thorough. More important, British NCOs have a well-defined sphere of command and influence that their officers respect. US forces might well look to the British model in order to relieve officers of administrative responsibilities which could lie within the purview of the NCO.

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Finally, as Chaundler says, "wars are always and finally a question of a lonely soldier on a battlefield fighting his war."

This soldier on the battlefield of today or tomorrow wins or loses the battle based on supply, weaponry and cohesion. His training, his confidence in his weapons, his reliance on the experience of his officers and his belief in the battle at hand will win or lose the battle and perhaps the war. The single most important element in developing bonds between and among ranks are caring, nurturing officers and NCOs. The hallmark of a competent officer is, as both the Argentines and British said, "You must love your men." \square

NOTES

1 Nora Kinzer Stewart, *South Atlantic Conflict of 1982: A Study in Military Cohesion* Research Report, Leadership and Management Technical Area, US Army Research Institute, Alexandria, VA, 1988.

2 Stewart interviews conducted with enlisted men and officers of the Argentine army (April and August 1987) and enlisted personnel and officers of the British army and Royal Marines (March and July 1987). She is the first military researcher given access to both British and Argentine officers and enlisted personnel for a study of this type. For a detailed explanation of the sampling and methodology, see Stewart, Research Report, 1988, appendix B.

3 Stewart, *Military Cohesion: Literature Review and Theoretical Model* Working Paper_B7-15, Leadership and Management Technical Area, US

Army Research Institute, Alexandria, VA, 1987.

4 Interviews with Argentine army 601 and 602 commandos, consisting of officers and noncommissioned officers only. There are no enlisted personnel.

5 J. H. Williams, "The Bleeding of the FEB," *Army* (July 1986), 64-75.

6 E. A. Shils and M. Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 12, (1948), 280-315; W. D. Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat, Leadership and Societal Influence in the Armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, North Vietnam and Israel* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1979).

7 Stewart, Research Report, 1988, appendix B.

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