

Combat Orders and the Battle of Goose Green

A bad operations order, poorly communicated and poorly understood, almost cost the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment the battle of Goose Green during the Falklands War of 1982. Spencer Fitz-Gibbon's *Not Mentioned in Despatches* (Cambridge, England: Lutterworth Press, 1995) contends that the battalion order for the Goose Green battle was a complex ballet of six phases with fragile linkages and schedules requiring excessive oversight and coordination. A critical flaw of the order was its assumption of perfect intelligence on the enemy. It was never understood by the officers or the men. Yet this order, and the style of planning and control that it represented, was the norm in the British army. The battalion commander who wrote it had been the lead instructor at the army's school of infantry. When the battle quickly exceeded the scope of the order, the battalion commander froze all initiative, berating his company commanders to remain in position, in some cases for hours: "Let me fight my own battle!"



2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment (2 Para) in the Falklands Islands, 1982

Mark Adkin, in *Goose Green: A Battle Is Fought to be Won* (London: Casswell Military Paperbacks, 1992), is not as critical of the battalion commander but agrees that the badly conceived and communicated operations order almost cost the British the battle. Not until after the battalion commander was killed and the choreographed scheme of maneuver discarded did the initiative and combat skills of the battalion's small units outfight and defeat the enemy.