

No Man is an Island: Reflections on the Battlefield Landscapes of the Falklands-Malvinas War

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Abstract

There were two sets of Falkland Islands fought over in 1982. To the British, including the islanders, they were of course the Falklands, but to the Argentines they were the Malvinas. Some in the British military thought the islands were off the coast of Scotland when they first heard of them, in most cases just before deployment. By way of contrast, Argentine troops had grown up believing they were part of their birth right stolen from them by British ‘pirates’. But how did troops on the ground view the islands when they were up close and personal with them, when the islands formed the battlefields over which they fought? During the Falklands-Malvinas War the surface of the land was bombed, it was shelled, it was picked apart and dug into to create fortifications, minefields and graves, and in places it still carries those scars. Drawing on the experience of four visits since 2012, eyewitness accounts and memoirs, military records and archaeological remains, this article explores the islands as both imaginary spaces and as an environment in which men strove to fight the elements and one another, and in doing so presents a fresh perspective on the relationship between people and places in time of war.

Keywords

archaeological remains – conflict landscapes – military terrain – mapping battlefields
– islands at war – combat phenomenology

*Our military presence grew until about ten thousand men surrounded the village, so Porto Argentina became almost like a tiny island surrounded by a sea of troops.*¹

GENERAL MARIO B. MENENDEZ, Military Governor of the Malvinas (April-June 1982).²

Introduction

It has been suggested that it is impossible to study the Falklands conflict through the lens of a single discipline, and that the islands cannot be written about convincingly without visiting them.³ The present writer is broadly in agreement with these two principles, particularly when it comes to considering the impact of the islands' landscape and environment on the 1982 conflict and the role physical remains of that event have in enhancing our understanding.

The approach adopted here could certainly be described as multi-disciplinary, as it combines primary sources, published memoirs, landscape studies and archaeology. The last contributes to the conceptualising of the physical remains of the conflict as cultural heritage. Indeed, final work on this article follows the pilot season of the first archaeological survey of the battlefields and related sites from the 1982 conflict, which took place in March and April 2022.⁴ Although this article acknowledges previous attempts to interrogate landscapes, and more specific concepts such as sense of place and space, with

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- 1 The Argentines renamed Port Stanley *Porto Argentina*, and of course referred to the Falkland Islands as Las Malvinas. In his monograph on the conflict, Argentine army officer Major L. A. Zara noted that since the conflict, "maps of the world bear the inscription: '*Falklands Islands (Malvinas) administered by UK and claimed by Argentina.*' Many maps in United States and Great Britain though only refer to Falkland Islands (*United Kingdom*)."¹ Leonardo Arcadio Zara (Maj.), *Malvinas: The Argentine Perspective of the Falkland's Conflict*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2010), 42. The various names under which the conflict is known is worthy of discussion, not least because war was never actually declared, some therefore preferring to call it a conflict, but alas there is not the space here, and Falklands-Malvinas War has been adopted.
 - 2 Translated interview in Yorkshire Television documentary *Falklands War: The Untold Story*, directed by Peter Kosminsky (1987). Castle Communications Release.
 - 3 Jasmijn Visser, *Conflict Atlas: Geopolitics and Contingencies on the Malvinas-Falklands Archipelago* (Berlin, 2017), 18; Edward Fursdon, *Falklands Aftermath: Picking up the Pieces* (London, 1988), 9.
 - 4 The Falklands War Mapping Project is a collaboration between the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford, the Falkland Islands Museum and National Trust, and Waterloo Uncovered. The project involves the survey of battlefield remains and the team includes veterans of the conflict working alongside archaeologists and historians, while also engaging with members of the local community.

some of these studies referring to the Falklands, it does not set out to provide analysis and criticism of these works. This contribution has a more modest aim, in part reflecting a work in progress, which is to set down some of the author's impressions built up over four visits to the islands.⁵ The discussion draws upon the previously mentioned sources, most importantly veteran testimony and archaeological remains, and uses them to explore the impact of travelling to the islands and adapting to challenging conditions on combatants from both sides of the conflict. The focus here is on the land campaign as there is not the space to consider the perspectives of those who fought at sea and in the air.⁶

If there is a single text that has provided inspiration it is *Return to Tumbledown: The Falklands-Malvinas War Revisited* by Mike Seear, who is a veteran of the conflict. Seear's volume combines veteran testimony from both sides, analysis of events informed by combat experience, and re-visitation (or pilgrimage) to the battlefield decades later, in order to confront a traumatising past in the present.⁷

The veteran testimony cited in the present article has come from a number of published sources, with *Los Chicos De La Guerra* by Daniel Kon featuring prominently in a consideration of the Argentine perspective.⁸ Kon interviewed a number of young army conscripts in the weeks and months after their repatriation to Argentina as prisoners of war in June 1982. These recollections were among the first to be collected on either side, with the Spanish language edition appearing in 1982 and the English translation in 1983.⁹ The memories in Kon's work were fresh, and might therefore be more reliable than those collected fifteen years after the war and published in 1997 as *Partes de Guerra*, edited by Graciela Speranza and Fernando Cittadini, which is also drawn on here. The interviewees in this later collection were veterans of the Battle of Goose Green, which makes for a useful contrast to the Kon anthology, which is given over to the voices of conscripts mostly stationed on the mountains to the west of Stanley (FIG 1 and 2).

5 Visits were made in 2012 (alone), 2015 (in the company of a first time returning veteran), 2019 (leading a group from the British army on a battlefield tour), and in 2022 (pilot season of the Falklands War Mapping Project).

6 An earlier draft of this article included a perspective from the sea, but this had to be removed due to excessive word count.

7 Mike Seear, *Return to Tumbledown: The Falklands-Malvinas War Revisited* (Chicago, IL, 2012).

8 Daniel Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, English Translation (Sevenoaks, 1984).

9 Snippets from the Daniel Kon interviews are quoted in *The Battle for the Falklands* by Max Hastings and Simon Jennings (London, 1984), but with no reference to their source, e.g. they quote Santiago on page 307 without citing page 84 of the English translation.



FIGURE 1 Key locations across East Falkland mentioned in text. Mountains are on Fig. 2
IMAGE: GOOGLE EARTH



FIGURE 2 Mountain features to west of Stanley
IMAGE: GOOGLE EARTH

Another difference is that there is relatively little content relating to battle in the earlier volume, which might reflect an unwillingness to talk about this experience so close to the event. Could it be that over time traumatic memories of combat became less painful, and if so is it possible that they also became less reliable?¹⁰ The reality, however, is far more complex, and the work of Lucy Robinson and others has highlighted the ways in which trauma and the increasing recognition of PTSD as time passed, along with other factors such as market forces, have influenced the ways in which (British) Falklands memoirs have been composed.¹¹ The immediacy of the Kon accounts does not liberate them from such considerations – there is for instance a focus on the failure of command and leadership which reflects the national mood in Argentina in the immediate post-war era (as will become apparent though, this does not invalidate the memories recorded).¹²

Although this article has been influenced by the author's own experience of walking the battlefields of the Falklands-Malvinas War, it will begin by stepping away from the islands to consider them as places in the imaginations of soon-to-be combatants before they came anywhere near setting foot on them. Arrival on the islands turned them from imagined places into not just physical landscapes but also military terrain, and it is the experience of Argentine troops, as they came to terms with what was perhaps a misplaced sense of familiarity, that will be the first to be considered here. It is argued that for many, the ability to see beyond the horizon, and thus to fix one's place in the world, was limited not just by the nature of the landscape but also by the decision to fight, for the most part, from static positions. Agency, it will be argued, was won back to some degree by meeting the challenges of survival in an extreme environment at the onset of winter; challenges which were accentuated by poor supply networks and failures of command, including duty of care.

10 In 2008, the author had the privilege of accompanying Harry Patch on a visit to the Passchendaele in Belgium, where he was wounded in 1917 (he died in 2009 aged 111). Harry was the last survivor of combat on the Western Front during the First World War, and is fondly remembered as the *Last Fighting Tommy*, thanks to the title of the autobiography co-written with Richard Van Emden (London, 2007). Harry was 110 years old on that trip, and Richard informed me that Harry had not felt able to talk about his experiences until he was 100 years old.

11 Lucy Robinson, "Soldier's Stories of the Falklands War: Recomposing Trauma in Memoir", *Contemporary British History* 25 (4) (2011): 569–589.

12 Not everyone in Argentina agreed with this view. For instance, one veteran, Sub-Lieutenant Esteban La Madrid of the 6th Infantry Regiment, when talking of the bravery of the conscripts under his command during the Battle of Tumbledown, complained that "a bastard in my country called them the 'kids of war'". Seear, *Return to Tumbledown*, 318.

The British too, faced their own difficulties, which included making themselves familiar with enemy occupied terrain that would stretch endurance to extremes, not least in the advance to contact with that well dug in enemy. Like the Argentines, the British would modify the landscape by building fortifications, especially in the early stages, but later also by deploying large quantities of ordnance. While the classification of Argentines as static defenders and the British as mobile attackers is over-simplistic – and some attempt has been made to point out exceptions – it is believed that what follows provides a route into a meaningful discussion of combatant experience, but one that will become more nuanced as initiatives such as the Falklands War Mapping Project progress.

Framing Landscapes

In some respects, the preconceptions of the islands held by combatants align with Tim Ingold's concept of an imagined landscape as, "not of being but of becoming; a composition not of objects and surfaces but of movements and stillness, not there to be surveyed but cast in the current of time".¹³ Troops from both sides spent time at sea, sailing on currents of varying timescales (Argentine reinforcements were also flown in).¹⁴ Only on stepping ashore did the place they had imagined cease becoming and at last present itself as a reality (the same applies to the war they fought there). Additionally, for some, the experience was then one of stillness if they were Argentine, or of movement, if they were British.

What follows is concerned not so much with the fighting, but the ways in which combatants found a way to live on the islands before and between engagements, and how they viewed and experienced the landscape over the period of the campaign. Veteran memoirs and testimonials, such as those collected by Kon, are useful here, but we do well to keep in mind that when they write about their experiences after the conflict the veterans are removed from their own past reality and are creating landscapes of memory, in many ways similar to those defined by Simon Schama; "...landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of

13 Tim Ingold, "Introduction", in *Imagining Landscapes: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Tim Ingold and Monicka Janowski (Farnham, 2012), 10.

14 Nicholas van der Bijl, in *Nine Battles to Stanley* (Barnsley, 1999) has 6,712 army, 414 navy and 863 air force personnel flying into Stanley. 47.

rock.”¹⁵ For Argentine soldiers stationed on the rocky mountains to the west of Stanley, their memories grew out of those exposed and fortified places (FIG 2).

Schama is an unavoidable touchstone when it comes to landscapes and memory, but the phenomenological approach of Christopher Tilley has, if anything, been more influential on archaeological engagements with past landscapes.¹⁶ However, Kenny Brophy and others have rightly pointed out that we cannot walk through a landscape in the present and experience it like somebody did in the Bronze Age, around 4,000 years ago, and the same can be said of a past just 40 years old.¹⁷

This latter point was driven home to the author during a 2015 walk between the rock outcrops on Wireless Ridge, the scene of the last battle, with a Royal Marine veteran of 1982 (though not of this battle). As we walked, my friend explained that when in combat and on the move, his attention was focussed on his close quarter surroundings, within which he was always alert to imminent danger. This was entirely different to my own way of casually viewing the landscape at that moment, my focus lazily switching from my immediate surroundings to the wider landscape as it was revealed between gaps in the rocks. It was a simple point, but also revelatory, and the unique military relationship with terrain described by my friend is in part the subject-matter of this article. In combat, landscape features such as rocks and ridges can provide protection, but can also serve to conceal the enemy and therefore threaten death. An individual occupying a landscape under these circumstances cannot help but perceive it in a different way to a civilian working in it or walking through it in peace time. Additionally, soldiers are trained how to operate within a dangerous environment, and this conditioning further removes their experience from the norm. However, soldiers, even on the battlefield, carry with them a lifetime’s experience of being in the world. For many, especially Argentine conscripts so recently removed from civilian life, that other world impacted on the world of war.

Imagined Islands

Prior to the Argentine invasion in April 1982, the average person in the UK had probably never heard of a place called the Falkland Islands, let alone

15 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1996), 6–7.

16 Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape, Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford, 1994).

17 Kenny Brophy, *Selfish Walks* (n.p., 2017).

knew they were located 8,000 miles away in the South Atlantic. Various memoirs by British veterans note that when first registering the words “Falkland Islands” people assumed they were off the coast of Scotland. Ken Lukowiak, who fought with 2 Para in the Battle of Goose Green, and wrote the memoir *A Soldier's Song*, states: “After a few minutes of listening to the news on the TV I gathered that these Falkland Islands had something to do with us. I had never heard of them and so, for some reason, thought that they must lie off the coast of Scotland. Why not? Shetland, Falkland – sounds the same.”¹⁸ Tony McNally, a Rapier crewman with 12 Regiment, Royal Artillery, recalled jumping to the same conclusion: “Some Argentineans had apparently invaded an island somewhere off the coast of Scotland, and we all got excited about going up there and giving the cheeky bastards a good kicking.”¹⁹

One way to make an unknown place comprehensible is to compare it to somewhere more familiar, for instance by comparing the Falklands in size to Wales.²⁰ Thus, Professor J. C. J. Metford, in his introduction to Goebel's *The Struggle for the Falkland Islands*, estimated the Falklands to be “about the size of Wales”.²¹ Even a British military operational directive from early April 1982 states that the area of East and West Falkland combined is “similar in size to that of Wales”.²² Patrick Bishop and John Witherow, embedded reporters from *The Observer* and *The Times*, respectively, also drew on Wales, likening the precipitous, pumice stone mass of Ascension Island to a “Welsh slag heap transposed to the tropics”.²³

England was also heavily drawn upon as a geographical parallel. Army medic Thomas Navin, in an unpublished memoir, recalled being shown a film of the islands during training sessions on board ship, in which the terrain

18 Ken Lukowiak, *A Soldier's Story: True Stories from the Falklands* (London, 1999), 6. Other examples include Nigel Ely, who in *Fighting for Queen and Country*, writes, “Greg Cox, an LMG gunner in the Patrols Platoon, remembers thinking the Falklands were off the coast of Scotland.” (London, 2007), 103.

19 Tony McNally, *Watching Men Burn: A Soldier's Story* (Cheltenham, 2007), 41.

20 Ben Frampton, “Why is Wales Used as a Unit of Measurement”, BBC News 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46737277>.

21 J. C. J. Metford, “Preface and Introduction” (written in 1968), in Julius Goebel, *The Struggle for the Falkland Islands* (New Haven, CT, 1982), vi.

22 Page 6 of “An Appreciation of the Options for Landing Operations in the Falkland Islands: Review of the Situation.” Annex to *Op Sutton Directive* (COS TS8 (1)), resulting from meeting of Chiefs of Staff on 15 April 1982. Commander's War Diary HQ 3 BDE CDO Op Corporate (F1) April-May 1982, The National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA), ADM 202/815/2.

23 Patrick Bishop and John Witherow, *The Winter War: The Falklands* (London, 1983), 63.

was compared to the Yorkshire Moors.²⁴ The British landing on the islands was in a relatively isolated location with just a few houses and scattered farms at San Carlos, and Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux, commanding officer of 42 Commando, Royal Marines, was 'struck by the Englishness of it all' not least because of the hairy ponies, paddocks and mud.²⁵ In *No Picnic*, Julian Thompson, Royal Marine commander of 3 Commando Brigade, acknowledged that unlike many in Britain in 1982, the Royal Marines did know where the islands were, as for the past thirty years, the Corps had provided a garrison.²⁶ Ian Gardiner, commander of X Ray Company, 45 Commando, Royal Marines, goes further in *The Yompers*; he knew not only where the islands were, but also that the Argentine claims were nothing new.²⁷

Klaus Dodds reminds us that in 1982, Anthony Barnett and Peter Calvert wrote about people in the UK imagining a sparsely populated 'countryside' in the south Atlantic as something akin the rural England familiar from the radio soap-opera *The Archers*.²⁸ This conceit, supported by not much in the way of images of the islands, served to remove distance and break down the barrier between 'us and them', thus helping the British government sell the war as a legitimate and worthwhile undertaking.²⁹ This idea that the islands represented a mirror image, albeit one reflected in the cold waters of the South Atlantic, was shared by at least one Argentine combatant. Daniel Terzano, a conscript who served at Goose Green, thought "It actually seemed like we were invading an English seaside town."³⁰ Jan José Gómez Centurión, who was a junior officer (Subteniente) in IR 25 and also part of the Goose Green garrison, saw a striking contrast between his new surroundings and Patagonia; "They are hills and meadows of an intense green, as a piece of British countryside...with British houses, with British posters, British looking men. A piece of the British Isles."³¹ The previously noted observations of Nick Vaux notwithstanding, Klaus Dodds

24 Thomas Navin, *The Baggage Party* (Unpublished manuscript, 2020). The film *An American Werewolf in London* was also shown to troops aboard *QE2*, on which Navin transited south, and he wonders in his memoir whether its choice was a sick joke, given the scene on the Yorkshire Moors in which one of the characters is torn apart by a werewolf.

25 Nick Vaux, *Take That Hill! Royal Marines in the Falklands War* (Washington, DC, and New York, 1986), 88.

26 Julian Thompson, *No Picnic* (London, 2nd Edn. 1986, 1st Edn. 1985), 2.

27 Ian Gardiner, *The Yompers: With 45 Commando in the Falklands War* (Barnsley, 2012), 8.

28 Anthony Barnett, *Iron Britannia* (London, 1982); Peter Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis* (London, 1982).

29 Klaus Dodds, "Enframing the Falklands: Identity, Landscape, and the 1982 South Atlantic War", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 741.

30 Graciela Speranza and Fernando Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra* (Valencia, 2001), 42.

31 *Ibid.*, 34.

has pointed out that these Argentine perspectives were not generally shared by British troops arriving in the islands, an impression reinforced by Alex Law who uses the quote “empty, bleak, desolate and inhospitable” to characterise their response to them.³² If this was the dominant British perspective then perhaps those who first assumed the islands to be somewhere off the coast of Scotland were not so wide of the mark after all.

Tony Banks, a Scot from Dundee, served in 2 Para and wrote of his experiences in the Battle of Goose Green in *Storming the Falklands*, and knew full well that the islands were not in Scotland, but on seeing them thought they looked the part. On landing at San Carlos his first task was to climb the steep slopes of Sussex Mountain with his battalion and there to dig in. He found the hill “much like those in Scotland – bald, treeless and freezing cold – and we soon discovered that we couldn’t dig trenches because the water table was too high”.³³ Royal Marine, Hugh McManners, felt the same way, writing home on his arrival, “Well here we are actually in the Falklands, which are not unlike NW Scotland, except that it is sunny at present.”³⁴

Vincent Bramley, who fought with 3 Para on Mount Longdon, made a wry comment on supposedly poor geographical knowledge when he recorded the reminiscences of a fellow Para called Denzil, six years after the conflict: “‘They sound a bit Scottish to me’, he would say in his distinctive Welsh accent with the ever-present twinkle in his eye. You couldn’t be sure if he was serious or not.”³⁵ The comedic value of this misunderstanding was not lost on Sue Townsend, who in her 1982 novel *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, had the thirteen and three quarter year old protagonist record the invasion of the Falklands. On the morning of Saturday 3 April 1982, Adrian woke his father to give him the news, but he promptly returned to bed when reassured by his son that the Falklands were not off the coast of Scotland.³⁶

More serious in tone was a suggestion made by Henry Rowen of the US National Intelligence Council in a January 1982 memo titled “Solution to the Falkland Islands crisis” addressed to Paul Wolfowitz, Director of Policy Planning at the US Department of State. This involved the voluntary departure of those of the population who wished to take advantage of a \$100,000

32 Alex Law, “Of Navies and Navels: Britain as a Mental Island”, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography, Special Issue: Islands: Objects of Representation* 87 (4) (2005): 272.

33 Tony Banks, *Storming the Falklands: My War and After* (London, 2012), 105.

34 Hugh McManners, *Falklands Commando* (2014 e-book edition. First published in 2014 by William Kimber & Son), Loc 2131.

35 Vincent Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell* (Rochester, NY, 1995), 39.

36 Sue Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾* (London, 1982 Kindle edition), 294.

relocation grant to move somewhere like Scotland, “where conditions may be similar to the Falkland Islands”.³⁷

Into the Unknown?

Greater certainty about their destination might be expected among Argentine troops, given that the islands were only around 350 miles (c.560km) away from their own coast. Much has been made of the role of schools in inculcating Argentine children with the idea that the Malvinas are an inherent part of the mother country stolen from them by the British. The topic had been a prescribed part of the national curriculum since 1941, with text books and even television cartoons driving the message home.³⁸ This sense of connection did not always come with any real knowledge though. As Felix Barreto, who was a conscript from the ‘class of 62’ (referring to date of birth) and a soldier in 7 IR, recalled:

Before we took the Malvinas I knew absolutely nothing about the place. The way the military told us about the islands filled us with pride and strength, as if the English had stolen them from us and we were there to defend something that was rightfully ours. Because of this I felt a love for that land, a love...I don’t know...a love of it even more than of my own home.³⁹

Even if combatants did know the islands’ location, the majority embarked on 28 March, at Porto Belgrano in Argentina, and landing on the beaches of Yorke Bay on 2 April, did not know their destination, with Marines told they would be exercising in Patagonia. In order to further ensure secrecy, newspapers reported a large scale anti-submarine exercise with the Uruguayan navy.⁴⁰ Officers and some NCOs did know their destination, and others might have

37 Henry Rowen, *Solution to the Falkland Islands Crisis* (CIA Report, 1 January 1982, Document No. (FOIA)/(ESDN (CREST): CIA-RDP83T00966R000100030008-0). Accessed at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83T00966R000100030008-0.pdf>.

38 Pablo Pineau and Alejandra Birgin, “The Malvinas War: Experiencing and Remembering the Conflict in Argentine Schools”, *Paedagogica Historica* 55 (2) (2019): 314–333.

39 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 72.

40 Martin Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas: The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War* (London, 1990), 20.

guessed, but the departure was a clandestine operation with the destination only revealed to all when the ships were at sea.⁴¹

The majority of Argentine forces did not, however, arrive in that first wave, and most of the garrison was brought in by plane in the days and weeks following the initial landings (according to Martin Middlebrook, there were 13,000 troops on the island by the end of April).⁴² These reinforcing units were largely made up from conscripts, with, for example, seventy-five percent of the 12th Regiment contingent of 733 men, which was among the last to arrive, coming from the class of 1963 and so having only 30 days training under their belts.⁴³ Those recently demobbed after finishing their year's national service, and those eighteen year olds⁴⁴ who had recently commenced it, knew that they were likely to be deployed – as did members of the then civilian, older class, who recollected waiting for call-up letters.⁴⁵

Deployment might have seemed inevitable, as the news of the invasion dominated the media, but the destination was less certain.⁴⁶ The initial landings left gaps in Argentina's domestic military capability, and given ongoing tension with Chile on the western and southern border, these needed filling. Mobilised troops thus thought they were just as likely to be moving within their borders as they were to be travelling east to the Malvinas. Augusto La Madrid, a cadet

41 Sergeant Manuel Batista was a Marine who landed as part of the Special Forces unit which spearheaded the attack on Government House on 2 April, and was only told of his destination when at sea. Michael Bilton and Peter Kosminsky, *Speaking Out: Untold Stories from the Falklands War* (London, 1989), 127.

42 Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas*, 63. He states that there were 630 Argentine troops on the islands by the end of the first day of the occupation. 41. Sir Lawrence Freedman, in *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, puts the number of Argentine personnel on the islands at 11,848, based on POW numbers after the surrender (Abington, 2005), 658.

43 Francisco Cervo, "El cerco estratégico operacional y el combate de Darwin-Prado del Ganso", in *Operaciones terrestre en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1985), 156.

44 All 18 year old males in Argentina were made eligible for National Service in 1976. Alejandro L. Corbacho, *Reassessing the Fighting Performance of Conscript Soldiers during the Malvinas/Falklands War (1982)*, Serie Documentos de Trabajo, No. 271 (Buenos Aires, 2004), 3.

45 Not all received letters, for Ariel, another Kon interviewee, the call up came by phone on 9 April, and he arrived in the Falklands on 15 April. He had completed his year-long service in the 10th Mechanised Communication Unit on 12 November, 1981. Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 41.

46 On 3 April 1982, Right leaning Argentine newspaper *La Nación* summed up its reading of the atmosphere in Argentina in a column with the headline, "National merriment for the recovery of the Malvinas"; Marina Walker, "Framing the Falklands Malvinas War: National Interest in the Coverage of the *London Times*, *La Nación* (Argentina), and *El Mercurio* (Chile)", *Revisita Universum* 19 (1) (1998): 198–219.

given an accelerated commission, said, "I did not know where we were actually going until we'd left Rio Gallegos by air; then we guessed where we were going. No one told a junior officer like me."⁴⁷

This uncertainty would perhaps explain the presence on the islands, as archaeological remains, of Argentinian footwear suited only to PT (physical training) or off duty socialising.⁴⁸ It was, however, the widely reported poor quality of kit that put lives at risk. Guillermo recounted:

Many people have said that the clothes we had were inadequate; I think they were adequate for the first few days when it was still Autumn, but later in the winter, wearing those clothes on sentry duty, you just froze solid. It was summer clothing; it wasn't right for mountains or snow...The clothes we were given could never have lasted three months, much less so with winter already upon us.⁴⁹

Inadequacies of kit were not limited to the Argentines. British army boots at the time were notoriously very far from waterproof, and on the wet ground of the Falklands created a serious problem with Trench Foot, a condition more usually associated with the First World War.⁵⁰

Arrivals – From Imagination to Materiality

Whatever preconceptions Argentine troops might have had about the islands, upon arrival they faced serious challenges in situating themselves in a landscape which in reality was *terra incognita*. For those inserted by air, their first move was a march west through Stanley to the former Royal Marine barracks at Moody Brook (c.6 miles), which had become the HQ of 10 Brigade and a forward staging depot, before a move further west, up into the mountains where

47 Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas*, 65.

48 The remains of white canvas plimsolls worn during physical training are to be seen in some numbers in Argentine positions on the mountains to the west of Stanley and the author has also encountered civilian shoes manufactured in Argentina in these contexts.

49 Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 16.

50 The ankle-length, DMS (Directly Moulded Sole) boot had rubber soles and generally poor quality leather uppers which included elements of compressed cardboard. When water got into them, either around the tongue or over the top, feet remained wet.

they dug in.⁵¹ It was during this time that the Argentine perception of the islands shifted from imagined to real experience. As Argentine film maker and academic Julieta Vitullo, explains, prior to the war the islands held a mythical status for Argentine troops, but afterwards they had gained materiality for men who were now veterans.⁵²

When he arrived at Stanley airport, Antonio Belmonte, who had been unable to tell his parents he was leaving for the Malvinas – the destination his NCO bellowed at him while in barracks – had to make his way into Stanley to a company rendezvous point between the Post Office and Government House. He struggled with the radio he had to carry in addition to his kit, and was grateful for a lift from an islander. He joined his company and an officer showed him a map with their destination marked; it was Mount Longdon.⁵³

Belmonte had an inkling of where he was, but others had no orientation and therefore no idea other than that they were on the islands. Guillermo of the 7th Infantry Regiment recalled:

My company was assigned to a hill about 1,000 feet high, right in the front of Moody Brook.⁵⁴ Other companies, such as B company, were moved about six miles west to Mount Longdon.⁵⁵ I'm telling you these details now, but at the time I hadn't the slightest idea what that area was called, I didn't know where I was. When I was a prisoner aboard the *Canberra*, I talked to some of the English and they showed me a very small pocket map with coloured dots marking even our positions. And those guys I talked to weren't officers, they were ordinary troops; but as soon as they landed they had known where they were, they knew which hill was which. I, on the other hand, had no idea.⁵⁶

51 Thanks to the supply ship ARA *Ciudad de Córdoba* not making it to the islands, due to imposition of the Maritime Exclusion Zone, some men were ordered to buy shovels from local stores before boarding their flights. Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas*, 57.

52 Julieta Vitullo, "The Malvinas Journey: Harsh Landscapes Rough Writing, Raw Footage", in *Revisiting the Falklands-Malvinas Question: Transitional and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Guillermo Mira and Fernando Pedrosa (London, 2021), 186.

53 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 82–83.

54 From the location and unit (7IR), possibly Wireless Ridge, though this is nowhere near 1,000 feet high (305 metres), and nor are any of the other features in the area: Tumbledown 229m, Mount William 138m, and Sapper Hill 138m.

55 Actually only around two miles from Moody Brook. He might mean the airport, which is 7.5 miles from Mount Longdon.

56 Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 16–17.

It was a similar situation for Felix Barreto, who abandoned his idealised image of the islands almost immediately upon arrival. After a night at Moody Brook, during which time he was not fed, he was ordered to Mount Longdon, around two miles north west of Moody Brook, although “At this time I didn’t know it was Longdon because I’d not seen a map. None of us had. Not the whole time I was in the Malvinas. Not one miserable map.”⁵⁷ Of course, the Argentine military did come equipped with maps. These were identical to the 1:50,000 maps used by the British with one notable difference. Nicholas van der Bijl, who was an intelligence officer during the Falklands campaign, reported, on the basis of captured examples, that at least some of these Argentine maps lacked grid lines, which precluded the use of co-ordinates and grid squares. Their solution was to take notable terrain features, such as hills and settlements, and give them numbers. This is obviously far from precise, with an example being Bluff Cove, which was ninety-three, and must have placed limitations on activities such as artillery fire missions.⁵⁸

Even using maps with grid lines, the present writer has himself experienced some of this disorientation on the islands, as during the 2012 visit, Sapper Hill was mistaken for Mount William. Beyond evidencing poor map reading skills this might give some idea of the confusing nature of this broken and interrupted landscape. A multitude of ridges, hills and outcrops limit visibility and can induce uncertainty over location. One rock looks pretty much like another. This, incidentally, makes it essential that the locations where photographs are taken is recorded, as, for instance, a shot taken on Mount Longdon can easily be mistaken for one taken on Tumbledown. It was these personal errors that provided further inspiration for the multidisciplinary approach adopted here.

While Barretto and Gulliarmino were limited in their geographical knowledge, they were in a better position than others to understand their place in the islands and the wider world. Santiago, another conscript interviewed by Kon, from rural north-western Argentina, could not tie down his position any closer than Soledad Island (East Falkland). Indeed, he mistakenly believed that Soledad was the name of the position, somewhere to the west of Stanley, his cohort had arrived at since an officer gave only “Soledad” as their location on disembarking at the airport (Kon suggests he was in the vicinity of Mount Kent and Two Sisters). Some understood even less of their location. Stanley resident, John Smith, recorded meeting a group of conscripts, sometime before 30 April, who thought they were on exercise in southern Argentina, somewhere near

57 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 72.

58 van der Bijl, *Nine Battles to Stanley*, 160.

the Chilean border. They were hungry and cold, and learning of their actual location did little to lift flagging spirits.⁵⁹

British troops, by way of contrast, were afforded greater opportunity to fix their position in the landscape. This is not to say that they never got lost – they did – but this was usually due to navigational errors rather than existing in a state of extreme disorientation, either deliberately imposed or due to the indifference of command.⁶⁰ As Robert Lofthouse, a sergeant in 3 Para who fought on Longdon, points out, maps and compasses were only issued to lance corporals and above, with most soldiers relying on the information provided by their seniors. One way in which this was imparted, usually prior to battle, was through the terrain model, and Lofthouse notes that these bespoke briefing tools are known as the as the “Private soldiers map”.⁶¹ Graham Colbeck, another 3 Para sergeant and Longdon veteran, built the model of Mount Longdon, which was used by Major Dennison to brief the men of Support Company on Friday 11 June. “Every nook and cranny” had been modelled based on the intelligence brought back by reconnaissance patrols. This might be something of an exaggeration as the few photographs of models being used during the campaign appear to show quite basic constructions, using rocks, earth and ponchos. Nonetheless, he was disappointed that there were no aerial photographs of the objective and complained the maps were lacking detail.⁶² Although the general topography and geography of the islands was known to the British, the level of detail required was not always good enough for combat, and so they felt their way into the landscape, with risky forward patrols, often under cover of night, and then using that information to literally build the terrain through the medium of the model.⁶³

It is here that we encounter a notable contrast between the Argentine and British experience. Many Argentine troops were assigned positions and left there, with no attempt to fill them in on their surroundings, a policy that

59 John Smith, *74 Days: An Islander's Diary of the Falkland's Occupation* (London, 2001; 1st Edn. 1984), 84.

60 Examples include B company of 3 Para losing its way on the long march or *Tab* to Estancia with the breakout from San Carlos. Bramley records the thoughts of Dominic Gray who witnessed the “U turn” which resulted and notes the widely held belief that officers were not good at navigation. Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 114.

61 Robert Lofthouse, *A Cold Night in June* (n.p., 2017), 119.

62 Graham Colbeck, *With 3 Para in the Falklands* (London, 2002), 120.

63 Anthony King has written about the importance of model making in military training and their role in strengthening social cohesion during O Group briefings. *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactic and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford, 2013), 282.

instilled a sense of isolation, which along with an anxiety inducing lack of news from outside deprived them of much in the way of agency.⁶⁴ Of course, not all officers treated their men this way, and those who cared about their charges talked to them and tried to develop a sense of unit cohesion.⁶⁵ One un-named officer told Nora Kinzer Stewart “My men were never forced to stay in their wet foxholes except when there was an air raid or when the battle came closer. But before the English landed, I made sure that my troops were warm, safe and well fed.”⁶⁶ However, there are enough negative testimonies and even post-conflict trials for crimes against humanity to indicate at best poor leadership, and at worst cruelty and torture, on the part of not inconsiderable numbers of NCOs and officers.⁶⁷

While some Argentine units were dynamic, carrying out reconnaissance and occupying forward positions, much of the occupying force ultimately fought from fixed defences. The British, however, were more mobile, actively probing their surroundings as they advanced, with the results of almost constant reconnaissance communicated through terrain models and briefings. Despite this, British combatants would still face their own challenges in situating themselves in the Falklands landscape, especially in memory. This is because the battles were fought at night, in the dark. Despite the Argentines being better equipped with US manufactured night vision goggles and ground surveillance radar, the British were better trained in night fighting and throughout the campaign used the darkness to their advantage.⁶⁸ The first British veteran the writer spoke to about his experiences, said he would like to visit his battlefields during daylight so he could see what they looked like.⁶⁹

64 The impact of a lack of outside news is noted by Corbacho, *Reassessing the Fighting Performance*, 6.

65 Corbacho, *Reassessing the Fighting Performance*, 6.

66 Nora Kinzer Stewart, *South Atlantic Conflict of 1982: A Case Study in Military Cohesion* (Fort Belvoir, VA, 1988), 100.

67 In 2009, around 70 NCOs and officers were considered for trial in Argentina. Anon., “Confirman el juzgamiento por torturas en Malvinas”, *Clarín* (Buenos Aires, 27 June 2009). Accessed at https://www.clarin.com/ultimo-momento/confirman-juzgamiento-torturas-malvinas_0_BiuG6wt0pFl.html (last consulted 15 February 22).

68 The need for more night fighting equipment in future campaigns was raised in the British post conflict assessment of lessons learned. Anon., *The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons* (London, 1982), 23.

69 Jan José Gómez Centurión described the dark nights as “Transylvanian”. Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 67.

Fortifying the Islands

Combatants on both sides transformed the landscape of the islands, whether through the use of high explosives or the construction of fortifications. During the writer's visits to the islands a number of battle locations were explored, sometimes with a battlefield guide, and notes were taken on the nature of the numerous field fortifications and extant material remains. The result of field observations made in 2012 was a report on the nature and condition of the cultural heritage of the conflict presented to the Falklands government, with the aim of initiating a full archaeological survey of the battlefield remains.⁷⁰ In 2022, a team co-led by the author carried out a three week pilot project in part on the basis of that proposal. The remains allow us to reflect on the human experience of the landscape, with which troops engaged with in a tactile way. Remains range from artefacts scattered across the battlefields, to trenches dug into the earth and structures of stone and other materials built up from the ground surface. What follows is a brief summary of some elements relevant to the present discussion.

A striking aspect of the Argentine defences is that there was no attempt, prior to British landings, to construct more permanent fortifications such as concrete pillboxes.⁷¹ The structures built during the conflict were far more organic and ad-hoc in character, and they and the men building and occupying them had a close association with the natural environment (FIG 3). Although some of the Argentine troops were based in the settlements, most of them in Stanley, but also in places like Goose Green on East Falkland, and Fox Bay on West Falkland, the majority of the occupying forces were distributed across the hill tops and moors in what islanders refer to as "the Camp". As the British advance closed in, so more troops were moved out of Stanley and set to work digging in to await the final confrontation. This has left an enduring legacy in the form of trenches, sangars and other features on the mountains and open moors like the Darwin/Goose Green isthmus.⁷²

70 Tony Pollard. *Mapping the Cultural Heritage of the Falklands War: Report on Scoping Visit* (Glasgow, 2014).

71 The failure of the supply ship, ARA *Cuidad de Córdoba* to reach the islands has already been noted. It was not just the British who limited the supply of heavy materials, including railway sleepers that would have aided fortification construction; the blockade runner ARA *Formosa* was hit by a bomb dropped by an Argentine Skyhawk on 25 April. David Brown, *The Royal Navy in the Falklands* (London, 1987), 198.

72 A sangar is a small barricade or breastwork, which in the Falklands usually takes the form of a low curving wall built from locally sourced rocks.



FIGURE 3 Drystone bunker built from angular rocks on Tumbledown – the closest that the author has seen to a pillbox on the islands
PHOTO: TONY POLLARD

Argentine accounts of this experience vary, but suggest there was little strategic planning beyond using the high ground to the west of Stanley to block an advance from the west.⁷³ There had been little or no attempt to train troops in areas similar to the Falklands and so there was no pre-planned response to the need for field fortifications, and this is reflected in the range of structure types

⁷³ The 2012 and 2019 visits identified linear arrangements of positions along the south foot of Sapper Hill and on the ridge between Mount William and Sapper Hill, and there can be no doubt that these were positioned to face landings to the south. These did occur with the delivery of 5 Infantry Brigade by sea, but these were further to the west at Bluff Cove. In 2022, as part of the Falklands War Mapping Project pilot, another linear arrangement was surveyed – this time oriented north to south between Tumbledown and the ridge coming off the western foot of Mount William.

visible today.⁷⁴ Indecision on the part of local commanders and the challenges presented by the local geology and hydrology caused wasted effort. A nineteen-year-old conscript in 1982, Luis Leccese, told Vincent Bramley about his experience of digging in on Mount Longdon:

You were slaving away with your buddy, building a bunker, when he (the corporal) would appear, point out a spot and order you to dig a bunker for him. No “please”, no help. He would just stand there like the lazy bastard he was, telling you the specifications he wanted and giving orders. Five or six days later he would come back and tell you it was no good because water was seeping-in and send you to another spot to build him another one. We must have built about ten bunkers.⁷⁵

Lecesse might have exaggerating the number of bunkers he built, but the implication is that not all remains visible today were put to use. Veteran testimony can thus provide valuable insight when interpreting the archaeological legacy of the conflict. The transhumance it reveals, whereby multiple structures were occupied by the same individuals, is also evidenced elsewhere. A conscript referred to as Fabian by Kon was also posted to Longdon. He recalled arriving on the hill as part of a group that did not dig foxholes but built “stone fortifications” inside of which they pitched tents (FIG 4). They were then moved to a different location to take charge of field guns, where they built a stronger shelter with stone walls and a corrugated iron roof, which they covered with turfs.⁷⁶ Today, remains of both types of structure can be seen on Longdon and other mountains. Again, testimony is useful because it is not always obvious what sort of structure the remains represent.

Juan Carlos was ordered to dig foxholes in the last week of April in a valley behind hills to the west of Porto Argentina (Stanley). These filled with water and had to be abandoned. In some places rock lay not far beneath the peaty soil, and Walter Donado, from the 25 IR, recalled “Stone, rock, pure stone, deadly”, and cursed the ineffectiveness of his shovel.⁷⁷ Some units, however,

74 The Argentine *South Atlantic Conflict Analysis and Assessment Commission*, composed of two senior officers from each of the three services, produced the so-called *Rattenbach Report* in September 1983, in which the failings of the operation were examined. One of its findings was that the conditions on the islands were not considered by army planners, nor were the quality of the troops sent, or of those they would face (translation in Anthony Babb, *Operation Argentina: Falklands Museum & Memorials* (n.p., 2020), 104).

75 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 117.

76 Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 146.

77 Corbacho, *Reassessing the Fighting Performance*, 6.



FIGURE 4 Sangar on south flank of Tumbledown. Contains tent remains. Similar to Fabian's description above.

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

including the Marines, were better prepared than others for these harsh conditions. They had trained in Tierra de Fuego so were adapted to the cold, benefited from better clothing and communications, and even came equipped with iron bars for digging through rock.⁷⁸ Juan Carlos eventually found a more suitable location, and expressed pride in his final dug-out, which was 'a very pretty, very comfortable hole.' He even managed to provide electric lighting after stealing 200 yards of cable, a lamp holder and a bulb, presumably from somewhere in Stanley.⁷⁹ There was also a brazier, planks on the floor to keep out the damp and a shelf for mugs. These luxuries aside, Argentine testimonies leave us in no doubt about basic survival being a challenge even before combat. Lacesse spoke for many when he said of his experience on Longdon: "It was like living in hell on that hill."⁸⁰ As conscript Carlos told Daniel Kon: "The worst days were when it was misty, or there was fine rain, like sleet. You had to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 116.

⁸⁰ Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 117.

stay inside the trench the whole time, without even poking your head out, and it was maddening.⁸¹

It is worth pointing out here that the first season of work in surveying the remains of Argentine dug defences on Tumbledown as part of the Falklands War Mapping Project included the recording of dugouts stretching from north to south along the saddle between Tumbledown and Mount William, in an area occupied by the 2nd Platoon of the 5th Marine Infantry Regiment (FIG 5). Some of these had recently been looted, with earth and artefacts pulled out of the backfilled features. This gave the archaeologists the opportunity to see inside structures that today are normally seen only as shallow depressions in the earth. It was clear that a variety of roofing materials, including corrugated iron, timber and stone slabs had been used, and that in some cases several chambers were apparent.

A full excavation would be required to provide more detailed information, but it is clear that these features were as complex as suggested by the testimonies. Whether they approach anything like the labyrinthine bunkers portrayed in Rodolfo Fogwill's 1982 novel of the war, *The Armadillos (Los Pichiciegos)* is unlikely, but these preliminary observations do add to its sense of authenticity. It tells the story of a group of conscript deserters who spend most of the war underground and takes on a magical realist quality, but in doing so alludes to a reality absent in Argentine media portrayals at the time.⁸²

These structures certainly impressed the British who had to confront them. An artillery officer recalled that those on Tumbledown were "exceptionally well-prepared. Many of the fire trenches had bunkers attached to them and these often burrowed under the natural overhang of rock".⁸³ Every nook and cranny was seemingly put to use when it came to seeking shelter. There is a very low cave, almost a crack in the rock, at the base of a cliff in the southern side of Sapper Hill that still has a camper's sleeping mat in it. The occupant would have to crawl inside to lie down, and it seems likely this natural bomb-proof would provide protection and induce claustrophobia in equal measure.

81 Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 148.

82 Rodolfo Fogwill, *Malvinas Requiem* [previously published in 1982 as *Los Pichiciegos*] (London, 2007), 20.

83 Captain J. B. A. Bailey R. A., quoted in H. G. Summers (Jnr.), "Yomping to Port Stanley", *Military Review* 64 (3) (1983): 14.

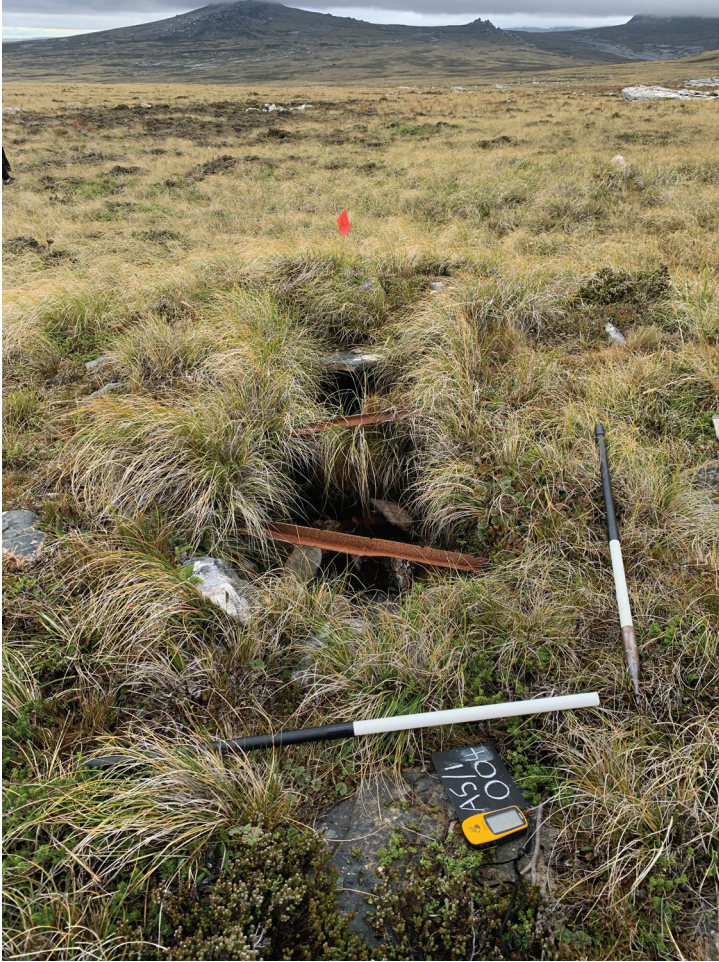


FIGURE 5 Argentine foxhole (two-man trench) with roofing remains to south of Tumbledown
PHOTO: TONY POLLARD, FALKLANDS WAR MAPPING PROJECT

Hunting and Gathering – Survival on the Mountains

Few would disagree that the defining experience of war is combat, and there can be little doubt that the landscape of the Falkland Islands had a profound impact on its character. Argentine forces did advance into combat, in actions which included commandos moving on Mount Kent from the east to meet the

threat of approaching elements of 3 Commando Brigade.⁸⁴ However, most of the major battles were characterised by a British advance to contact against Argentine fixed positions.⁸⁵ This article has not addressed the experience of combat and its relationship to the landscape, but it could be said that the Falklands-Malvinas War embodied more than one type. Yes, there were dramatic close quarter battles, but for men who spent weeks in exposed positions, there was also the fight against an extreme climate, which when combined with the unforgiving nature of the landscape, made survival a battle against the elements. One challenge was to find shelter, and this led to the modification of the landscape through the digging of trenches and the building of sangars as previously described, the other was to find food.

Even when on the move, Argentine troops could feel restrained and disorientated, especially when on night patrols, as Guillermo Aliaga of 12 IR at Goose Green, recalled:

It was very difficult to move on night patrols with that permanent drizzle and zero visibility, orienting ourselves only with a compass. We had no charts, we did not know the terrain well and there was a risk of walking into a minefield.⁸⁶

In recounting his experience, Carlos Mayano, also in the vicinity of Goose Green, said “We spent almost all day in the dugout because you couldn’t walk outside of the positions.” Beyond patrolling, a strong motivation for crawling out of the trenches and exploring the wider world was the quest for food, even if this meant nothing more than a walk to a field kitchen or, for those on the mountains, a hike back into Stanley where meagre rations could be supplemented, at times through theft.

84 When it came to viewing the landscape, and the enemy within it, both sides recognised the importance of Mount Kent (altitude: 1,093 ft: 333 m), which provided near uninterrupted views in all directions. The British won the race to dominate this piece of key terrain and from there could monitor Argentine movements as far away as Stanley and direct artillery fire.

85 The 4th Infantry Regiment (4IR) of around 450 men was one of the few, if not the only, regimental sized units to move *en masse* from its original position (minus A company which moved to the Murrell Ridge north of Stanley). This was from Mount Challenger, facing south, where British landings might have taken place, to Mount Harriet and Two Sisters further to the north, to the west of Stanley, where they would dig in and on 11/12 June fight defensive battles. It was a regiment that faced considerable challenges in persevering on the islands, having been recruited and trained in the sub-tropical province of Corrientes. Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas*, 337.

86 Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 67.

When recalling their experiences, almost every Argentine refers to hunger caused by the lack of a regular food supply.⁸⁷ Malnutrition, along with exposure, is recorded in the British report on the Argentine dead during the reburial operation in early 1983.⁸⁸ Alonso, a veteran recalling his experiences for an Argentine volume marking the 20th anniversary, described the terrible conditions:

...we were always wet, it was always raining and if it was not raining the cold was unbearable with a wind that *flew*. It was chaos! There was no food and there was no water and [what there was] to drink we gathered from puddles.⁸⁹

Among the iconic pieces of hardware left on the islands are the two Argentine field kitchen trailers, or Ranchos, at the east end of Tumbledown (FIG 6), and there is a photograph not reproduced here of hungry troops lining up to receive their meagre rations at this location. Felix Barreto complained that, “when it (Rancho) came, only dished up dirty water. Absolute shit.”⁹⁰ Alberto Carbone concurred, but observed that some got better rations than others:

Officially all the food came in the same pot – and it did. But the conscripts got a ladleful of crap from the top – greasy water – and the corporal’s

87 The British also complained. As an example, Tony Gregory from 3 Para, recalled the cold and long marches, which meant that despite “scoffing” everything in his ration packs he was always hungry. Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 109. In some respects, the British experience was similar to that when it came to discomfort, with the arrival of 5 Infantry Brigade in early June putting further pressure on an already stretched logistics train. A telling incident is recorded by Captain Mark Willis from the Recce Platoon of 1/7th Gurkha Rifles, who on moving forward to Two Sisters from Goose Green, was pleased to find abandoned rations in Argentine positions which included tins of pasta with meat sauce, biscuits, confectionary and even miniature bottles of spirits (presumably from officer’s packs). These came as a welcome break from the rice and curried sheep which had been the staple up until then. It was clearly not just the Argentines who were eating their way through islands’ herds (in Seear, *Return to Tumbledown*, 412). In a classic “coals to Newcastle” twist of irony, tins of corned beef in Argentine ration packs were found to be manufactured in Leeds, UK (van der Bijl, *Nine Battles to Stanley*, 59). In addition, the south Atlantic climate served to push everything to the limit – it was Admiral Woodward, Commander of the Task Force at sea who said, “Frankly, if the Argies could only breathe on us, we would fall over!”

88 Captain Geoffrey Cardozo, Project Officer, Argentine Dead. *Report on the Argentine Reburial Operation*. February 1983, TNA, DEFE 70/1100.

89 J. V. Alonso, Testimony in: *Malvinas 20 años 20 héroes* (Buenos Aires, 2003), 262–267.

90 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 74.



FIGURE 6 Argentine field kitchens (Ranchos) at East end of Tumbledown
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

food was scooped from the bottom of the pot so they got a mess tin full of meat and potatoes and the like.⁹¹

The food situation worsened after the Total Exclusion Zone was implemented on 12 April, and Argentine conscript German Chamorro made no bones about his dissatisfaction when arriving by plane on 29 April – “Straight away we were looking for food. We nicked some from an Air Force officer and watched all the chaos going on around us.”⁹² He was initially posted to Mount Kent, and the closest the Rancho got on its irregular visits was a valley over a mile away. The men started to shoot sheep and cattle to supplement their meagre diets, and one veteran, Jan José Gómez Centurión, at Goose Green, described hunting expeditions which not surprisingly in that location, included the shooting of geese, as “safaris”.⁹³ A number of accounts mention these desperate measures,

91 Bramley, *Two Sides of Hell*, 107.

92 Ibid., 91.

93 Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 61. He also described hunting geese with a modified grenade known as a Spanish Pomegranate, which with only the plastic casing remaining and fastened to a stake killed geese, tempted by crumbs or seeds, with its shock wave.

at times carried out with the sanction of immediate superiors, but always with the risk of severe field punishment if caught.⁹⁴

It is around the basic requirements of food and shelter, that men bonded, surviving by co-operating with one another, despite (or because of) the cruelty of those in command.⁹⁵ Guilleramo described being part of a group of seven that shared chores such as cooking, gathering firewood (peat was more available) and walking the three miles back into town to raid the well-stocked depots for food (though he also claims to have shot more than fifty sheep).⁹⁶ The nearest NCO was a 'fantastic guy' who shared guard duty and assisted with heavy work when required.⁹⁷ He described his group as a gang without a leader and a clan, and over time these small groups made friends and a sense of community began to develop among soldiers he referred to as "cavemen".⁹⁸

In Argentina and Paraguay, the drinking of *mate* is a communal activity with the gourd passed around a group of friends. Now for Guilleramo, a hand grenade casing stood in for the gourd, and a biro tube with gauze replaced the straw-like bombilla.⁹⁹ A similar experience, using the same combination of objects, was recounted by Oscar Poltronieri at Goose Green, where he noted that conscripts who grew up in the countryside coped better under the extreme conditions than those who came from the towns.¹⁰⁰ A direct parallel can be drawn between these Argentine troops sharing *mate* and their British opponents sharing tea, or a "brew". It is in reference to British troops in the Falklands that Johnson has highlighted the importance of these rituals, which include smoking, in reincorporation into the collective military body,

94 In his interview with Kon, Santiago described some of the various punishments meted out, many of them for stealing food. They included standing in puddles of freezing cold water with bare feet, or holding their hands under. Other men were stripped from the waist, made to lean their testicles on a plank and then beaten from the rear. The most common punishment seems to have been staking out, spread-eagled on the ground, with hands and feet tied to tent pegs. Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 73.

95 In *South Atlantic Conflict of 1982*, Stewart, refers to the development of this sort of camaraderie among men of equal rank as *horizontal bonding*, while that between the rank and file and those of higher rank is termed *vertical bonding*, x.

96 Casual movement was observed by British night-time reces. An intelligence summary signal for Wireless Ridge and Mount Longdon area from 4 June records: "Discipline poor, lights and noise at night, soldiers wandering around without webbing and weapons." The same report also notes "Longdon strongly held and difficult objective." Anon INTSUM 042300Z Commander's Diary, HQ 3 CDO BDE Op Corporate (FI), 23 June page G-3, TNA, ADM/202/815/2.

97 Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 21.

98 *Ibid.*, 23.

99 *Ibid.*, 12.

100 Speranza and Cittadini, *Partes de Guerra*, 50.

especially after traumatic events such as combat.¹⁰¹ It is important to note however that in the case of these small, isolated groups in places such as the mountains, and perhaps more widely, the collective is the group and not the regiment or the wider military.

This new way of living on the edge of the military establishment enabled Argentine troops to win back agency from their senior commanders, who seemed to have abandoned them to the elements.¹⁰² As part of this process, the tools essential for survival were manufactured from what could be scrounged, scavenged or stolen. Among the debris of war scattered across the hilltops are some of the most fascinating and moving objects the writer has encountered on the islands. These seem to have escaped the attention of souvenir hunters as they are mundane and by their nature almost invisible, and include cooking utensils and the stands on which to place cooking vessels (perhaps a mess tin or tin cans) over a fire. These were constructed from fencing wire, which also provided for the handle of a skillet the author encountered in a rock shelter on the flanks of Sapper Hill (FIG 7).¹⁰³ These modest artefacts are a contrast



FIGURE 7 Trivet (pan stand) made from wire on Tumbledown and Skillet from tin lid and wire from cave on Sapper Hill
AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

101 Lucy Robinson, "Explanations of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Falklands memoirs: The Fragmented self and the collective body", *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 5 (1) (2012): 96.

102 Again, there is no general picture when it comes to treatment by officers, morale and basic supplies. van der Bijl and Aldea, for instance, give a different impression when they note that men of the 5th Marine Infantry Battalion on Tumbledown were proud of their unit, well-equipped and regularly rotated into Stanley when on leave. *5th Infantry Brigade in the Falklands* (Barnsley, 2008), 158.

103 This object was seen to decay over visits made in 2012, 2015 and 2019. On the first visit it was intact, on the second rust had eaten a wedge from the lid and on the third only the wire handle remained.

to the industrial bulk of the ranchos, reflecting the break-down of Argentine military organisation on the islands, but also the ability of those men left on the mountain tops to adapt to the most extreme of conditions with minimal resources.

Beachhead

The British also had to “dig in” to provide protection from the elements and enemy fire. If one walks from the landing beaches of San Carlos, which has all the characteristics of a Scottish sea loch, the first traces of the British presence on 21 May 1982 are rifle pits or foxholes (FIG 8). These were dug into the flat ground beyond the settlement of San Carlos, not much more than 200 metres from the water’s edge. The remains of these small trenches can still be seen as depressions in the peaty soil. They might be unassuming as relics of the conflict, but represent early physical engagement with the islands by British troops and so deserve attention.



FIGURE 8 British foxholes at San Carlos, view to south. Settlement in background to right, and slope up to Verde Mountains to left
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Modest as these features are, their meaning as a statement of intent would not have been lost on the Argentines. Conscript Guillermo was in no doubt:

When they landed at San Carlos we knew we were in direct contact, by land, and we didn't like it at all. It was different, because while we were alone on the island, despite the planes and the naval bombardments, as long as they didn't set foot on the islands, they were ours. But once they landed, even if they had just one square yard of terrain, that square yard was theirs.¹⁰⁴

The first enemy facing ground troops in those first hours and days was the wet earth. Like the Argentines, British troops found digging-in a thankless task that resulted in wet feet, or removed the possibility of drying feet submerged during the landings, and the problem of Trench Foot has already been mentioned. Once the summits of the Verde Mountains (a long ridge rising up from the coastal plain) were reached, soils in some places gave way to rocks. Here sangars were constructed, and were it not for their location they would be indistinguishable from those stone structures built by the Argentines (FIG 9).¹⁰⁵ Certainly, there are clues as to nationality to be found among these small, low-walled enclosures today, such as a cartridge case encountered by the author in 2012. The 7.62 calibre ammunition used by the British and Argentines was identical, apart from the head stamp, the series of letters and numbers on the opposite end of the cartridge case to the projectile. This was a British round, and given its location, on the hilltop, it must have been the result of small arms fire delivered at Argentine aircraft attacking ships on San Carlos Water.¹⁰⁶

Like the Argentine troops, the British made good use of scavenged raw materials. Graham Colbeck recalled a good deal of scavenging at Estancia House. He used fence posts to provide a dry floor for his poncho shelter erected against a fence, and turned a perforated oil drum into a brazier, while the soldier's old friend, "wriggly tin" (corrugated iron), was recovered from an abandoned

¹⁰⁴ Kon, *Los Chicos De La Guerra*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ The British would avoid occupying Argentine positions wherever possible as the campaign progressed, for no other reason than hygiene conditions, but at times there was no option. Nick Vaux refers to this in relation to positions on Mount Harriet, where men from 42 Cdo had to take cover in sangars containing faeces. Vaux, *Take That Hill!*, 186.

¹⁰⁶ Journalist Patrick Bishop recalled having a lecture on how to build protective sangars from rocks and peat and how to dig slit trenches while on board *Norland* after departure from Ascension. Bishop and Whitherow, *The Winter War*, 67.



FIGURE 9 British sangar on summit of Verde Mountains, Fanning Head and entrance to San Carlos Water to north, top left. Cartridge case found in rocks in foreground.
AUTHOR'S PHOTO

mortar position for use in a new trench.¹⁰⁷ Even the shovel used to dig the trench was borrowed from the farm, being better at the job than their army entrenching tools, though the handle broke through heavy use. Of course, the trench filled with water while being dug.

Conclusion

Through the use of veteran testimony, landscape study and archaeological remains this article has explored how some combatants engaged with their surroundings when transplanted to an unfamiliar landscape. The Argentines on the mountains bucked authority and scrounged the essentials for survival, by trekking back into Stanley to raid depots. They traversed ground already trod, first on their arrival via the airport and the town. Their worldview was therefore limited, not just by obscuring features like mountains, but their inability to push its bounds beyond what became well-worn paths. For some, their

¹⁰⁷ Graham Colbeck, *With 3 Para to the Falklands* (Barnsley, 2002), 111.

knowledge of place was even more restricted, limited to their trench and those nearby.

The British, on the other hand, after landing at San Carlos, entered into a far less sedentary existence, with their first week in dugouts on the heights, and then perhaps their post-advance pause before the final battles, probably closest to mirroring the Argentine experience on the mountains. For 3 Commando Brigade, that advance east, over more than 45 miles of rough terrain, made on foot due to the loss of transport helicopters on *Atlantic Conveyor*, brought its own hardships. This movement over the *no man's land* between the British beachhead and the Argentine defences around Stanley, aided by maps and local knowledge (shared by islanders at San Carlos and then at the settlements at Teal and Estancia), expanded horizons and gave the men a greater understanding of the landscape and their place within it.¹⁰⁸ The closer the British got to Stanley, the more they learned about the terrain ahead, with forward patrols providing the fine grained detail which helped to secure success in battle.

The archaeological project, following a successful pilot season, will enable the expansion of ideas proposed here. Areas of interest growing out of this work include the scarification of the landscape as a result of the conflict. On the mountains, outcrops of rock have been bomb and shell shattered, and impact craters range from the massive depressions created by bombs dropped on the airport by Vulcan bombers during Operation Blackbuck to barely discernible peat exposures created by mortar rounds on the Goose Green battlefield. On a wider scale, it is possible to make out shell holes on *Google Earth*, such as the area to the west of Wireless Ridge – it is reckoned that around 3,000 British shells landed around here in the closing stages of the conflict.¹⁰⁹ The foregoing discussion has concentrated on the land campaign, but given the Falklands-Malvinas War is notable for its air and sea elements there is much potential

¹⁰⁸ The best known example of an islander assisting the British was Terry Peck, a police officer who carried out espionage against the Argentine garrison in Stanley, then escaped into the Camp and arrived at the San Carlos beachhead with information on Argentine dispositions gained during his journey. Acting as a guide he went on to take part in the Battle of Longdon. Graham Bound. *Falkland Islanders at War* (Barnsley, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Hastings and Jennings, in *The Battle for the Falklands* cite 6,000 rounds (page 305), but the lower and much more accurate count comes from Mark Waring, *Falklands War 1982 – A Gun Position Officers Account* (Larkhill, 2017), 163. Nearly 17,500 rounds were fired by the five batteries on land based 105mm field guns, with a further 8,000 rounds fired by ships providing naval gunfire support. Anon., *The Falklands Campaign: The Lessons* (London, 1982), 23.

for an expansion of this type of study. A further worthwhile area of interest would be the weaponisation of the landscape through the sewing of minefields, which were finally cleared in 2020. Another, of course, is the experience of the islanders, who, for instance, constructed bunkers and shelters beneath the floors of buildings. In these areas too, the multidisciplinary approach can provide a fresh perspective on the relationships between place and people, and it will be interesting also to see how this approach could illuminate other fields of conflict.

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