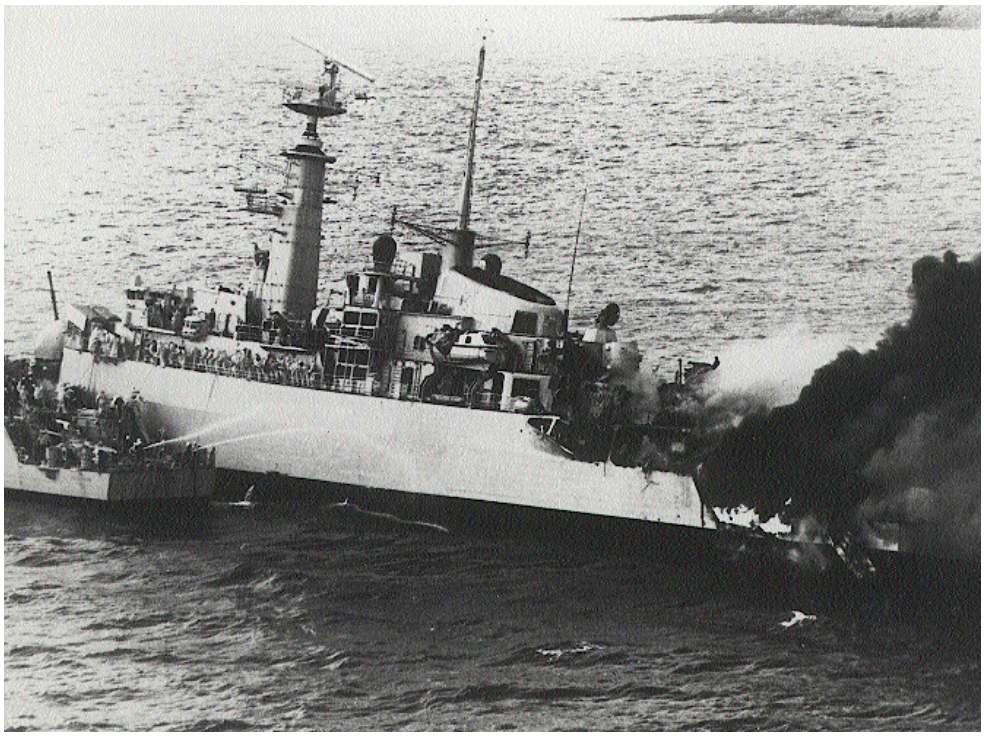
Argentine Jointness and the Malvinas

By ROBERT L. SCHEINA



Royal Navy

***HMS Yarmouth* training hoses on *HMS Ardent* which burns out of control after being hit by Argentine air force and navy planes.**

Identity is as basic to an institution as it is to those who comprise it, and once established identity can assume greater importance than survival itself. This is particularly true of the military. The Argentine experience in the Malvinas (Falklands) reveals that military institutions must evolve in order to succeed and that adherence to institutional identity can be fatal if maintained at all costs. Jointness existed at the operational and tactical levels within the Argentine armed forces during the Malvinas conflict, but it did not exist either strategically or doctrinally. In virtually every case it was the product of initiatives by mid-level officers who put aside service parochialism to confront a common enemy. There are a number of specific illustrations which stand out.

The Argentine air force operated the only tankers in the inventory. The two KC–130s were essential to air strikes against the British fleet whether carried out by air force or naval planes. For example, Skyhawks (flown by both services) had at most a few minutes over their targets if not refueled in the air. The Malvinas were barely within range of the attack aircraft of either service. In addition, every mission flown by the navy's Exocet-armed Super Etendards required at least one air-to-air refueling. These planes carried out five attacks, the second of which sank *HMS Sheffield* and the fourth *Atlantic Conveyor*. The last Super Etendard attack on May 30, 1982, needed a triple refueling to strike over

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Super Etendard with Exocet missile prior to attack on the morning of May 4.

Argentine Navy

500 miles from base and to circle and approach from the east. Without the air force, Argentine naval aviation could not have sunk *HMS Sheffield*, *Atlantic Conveyor*, and *HMS Ardent* nor have damaged other ships.[1]

The defense of the airfield at Puerto Argentina (Port Stanley) was also joint. The air force contributed search radar; the navy communication, plotters, and direction personnel; and the army twin barrel, radar-controlled Oerlikon Contraves 35mm guns. Following an initial attack on May 1 by British

Close-up view of damage to HMS Sheffield (note Chaff rocket launchers which were part of a system designed to offer protection from missiles like Exocets).

U.K. Ministry of Defence

Chronology

April 2 Task Force 40 puts Argentine forces ashore near Port Stanley; Moody Brooks Barracks and Government House seized

April 5 British carrier group sails from Portsmouth

April 12 maritime exclusion zone comes into effect around Falklands

April 14 Argentine fleet leaves Puerto Belgrano

April 21 South Georgia operation begins

April 25 South Georgia recaptured by British forces

April 29 British task force arrives at exclusion zone

April 30 total exclusion zone comes into force

May 1 initial SAS and SBSD landings; first raid on Port Stanley by Sea Harriers and naval bombardment

May 2 *General Belgrano* sunk on orders of War Cabinet with loss of 321 Argentine sailors

May 4 *HMS Sheffield* sunk; first Sea Harrier shot down

May 7 total exclusion zone extended to 12 miles off Argentine coast

May 9 trawler *Narwhal* attacked

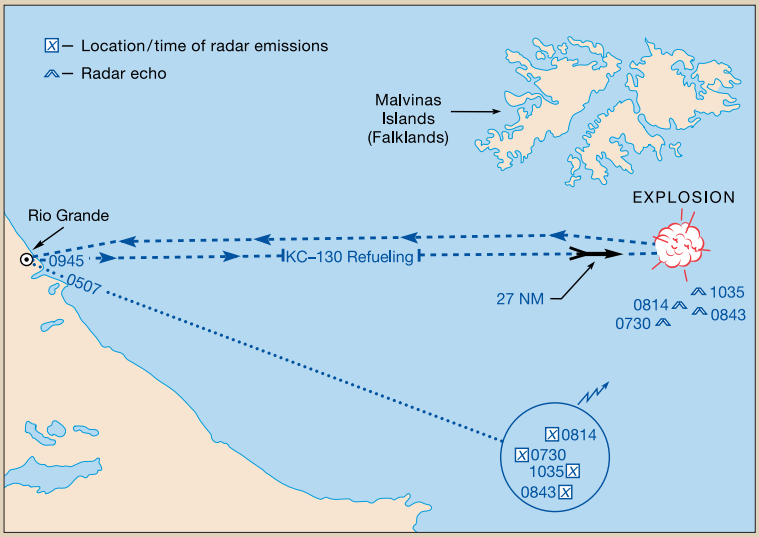
Vulcans and Harriers, the latter had to change tactics from close-in bombing to less accurate lob bombing. This was due largely to the effective Argentine anti-aircraft defenses which were credited with shooting down five Harriers, plus a few Argentine aircraft which strayed too close. Importantly, the defenders kept the airfield partially operational throughout the entire conflict. The fact that in spite of British activity an Electra carrying supplies was able to land on June 14 (the day Port Stanley fell) testifies to the success of this joint effort.[2]

Another success that can be attributed to jointness was the Exocet missile which hit the destroyer *HMS Glamorgan*. In April, while tensions were building over the Argentine occupation of the Malvinas, the Argentine navy removed two Exocet missiles and launchers from the destroyer *Santisima Trinidad*. It married these to a jury-rigged fire control system and then mounted them on old trailers and christened them *Instalación de Tiro Berreta* (a do-it-yourself firing system). It took an air force C–130 three attempts to get the system to the Malvinas. Once on the island, the system was mated to an army Rasit radar operated by a marine officer. The first attempt to fire a missile failed, perhaps due to damage sustained in transit. A second missile veered sharply to the right because of a bad connection. On June 12, two days before the fall of Port Stanley, a third missile slammed into *HMS Glamorgan*.[3]

Other cases of Argentine jointness arose when air force attack aircraft trained against navy type 42 destroyers (the same class of ship found in the British fleet); the air force and navy shared meager reconnaissance assets; and the air force carried navy Exocets between Rio Grande and Espora for maintenance. Unfortunately for the Argentine cause such ad hoc efforts on the operational and tactical levels were too few and too late, and could not make up for a lack of joint strategic planning and doctrine that was necessary to overcome the inertia fostered by each service's institutional identity.

Today, the Argentines are fully aware of the price that they paid for this lack of jointness. In 1982 the last military junta tasked a retired army general, Benjamin Rattenbach, to conduct an investigation of the war effort. Rattenbach, renowned for his professionalism, headed a joint team which produced a secret report. Eventually, many of the report's findings were leaked to the press and, in 1988, a group of veterans published the full report under the title of *Informe Rattenbach: el drama de Malvinas*. The report concluded that there was a lack of joint training and planning, and what did exist was purely theoretical and unable to be (translated) into action.[4]

Super Etendard Attack on *HMS Sheffield* (May 4, 1982)



Source: Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America: A Naval History, 1810–1987* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), p. 267.

May 12 *QE2* leaves Southampton with 5th Brigade on board

May 14 SAS attack on Pebble Island

May 21 San Carlos landing begins. *HMS Ardent* sunk; 16 Argentine aircraft lost

May 23 *Antelope* sunk; 7 Argentine aircraft lost

May 25 *HMS Coventry* and *Atlantic Conveyor* sunk

May 28 Battle of Goose Green; 5th Brigade trans-ships from *QE2* at South Georgia

May 29 42d Commando lands on Mount Kent

June 1 5th Brigade disembarks at San Carlos

June 2 2d Para leapfrogs to Bluff Cove

June 6 Scots Guards land at Fitzroy; Welsh Guards embark for same

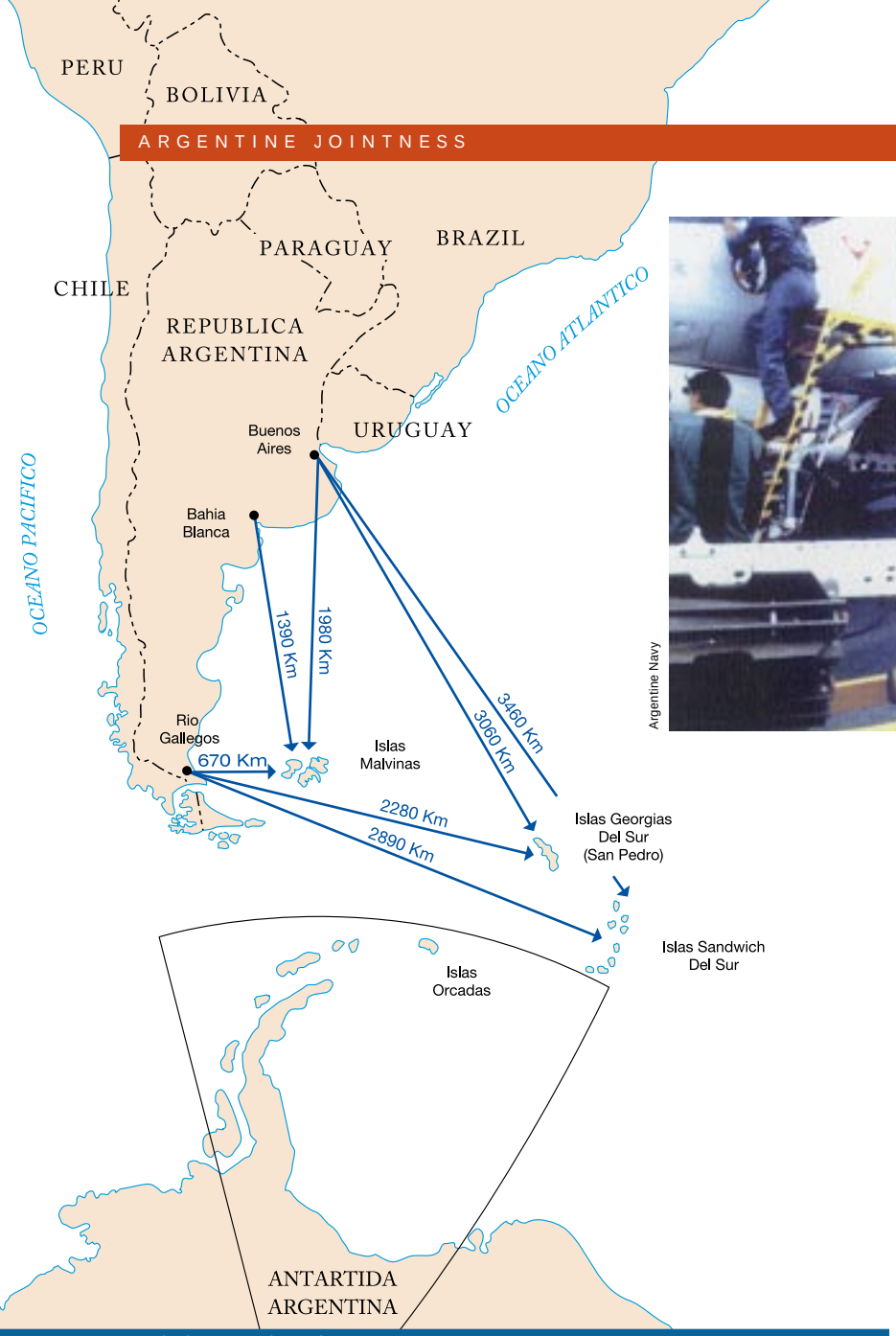
June 8 Disaster at Fitzroy; *HMS Galahad* and *HMS Tristam* bombed with loss of 51 crewmen

June 11 Battle of Port Stanley begins; Mount Longdon, Harriet, and Two Sisters

June 12 Battle of Tumbledown and Wireless Ridge

June 14 Argentine forces surrender at Port Stanley

Source: Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), pp.341–43.



Malvinas Islands

Source: Public Information Secretariat of the Presidency of the Nation, *Islas Malvinas Argentinas* (Buenos Aires, 1982).

Argentine Navy

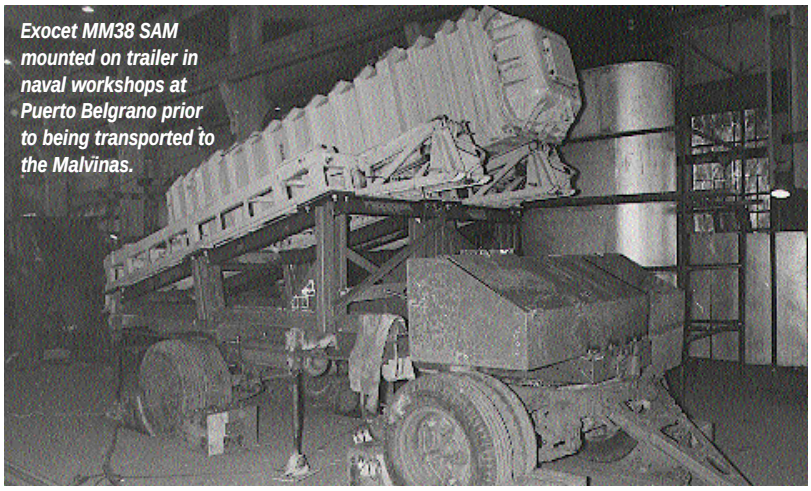
Skyhawk 305 being armed for attack on May 1 (the intended target of one bomb, HMS Invincible, has been enscribed by deck crew).

Argentine Navy

The architects of the Malvinas campaign conferring at Puerto Argentina: (from left) Rear Admiral Carlos Busser of the marines, landing force commander; General Osvaldo Garcia of the army, commander of V Corps in Patagonia and theater of operations; and Rear Admiral Gualter Allara of the navy, amphibious force commander.

Marine officer briefing 5th Battalion personnel with Puerto Argentino in distance.

(Carlos F. Ries Centeno)



Exocet MM38 SAM mounted on trailer in naval workshops at Puerto Belgrano prior to being transported to the Malvinas.

Argentine Navy

(Carlos F. Ries Centeno)

Argentine marine operating Rasit radar loaned to the navy by the army (at night the radar set recorded distance and bearing of British ships bombarding Puerto Argentino; later it was used for fire control of "do-it-yourself" Exocet systems).

Malvinas (Falklands) War: April 2–June 14, 1982

Argentine Armed Forces

Army

10th Infantry Brigade (8,500), 2d Infantry Brigade (1,300), 3d Infantry Brigade (1,675)

Navy

1 aircraft carrier, 1 cruiser (*sunk*), 6 destroyers, 3 frigates, 2 submarines (*1 captured*), 9 merchant vessels (*all lost*); naval attack air: 5 Super Etendards, 8 Skyhawks

Air Force

8 air brigades with A–4P Skyhawks, IAI Daggers, Mirage III–E fighters

Losses:

655 killed, 12,700 taken prisoner

British Armed Forces

Army

3d Commando Brigade, 5th Infantry Brigade (28,000 combat or combat support troops)

Royal Navy

2 aircraft carriers, 8 destroyers (*2 sunk*), 15 frigates (*2 sunk*), 1 ice patrol ship, 8 amphibious ships (*1 sunk*), 12 troop transports (*1 sunk*); naval air: 15 squadrons with 171 aircraft and helicopters

Royal Air Force

15 squadrons with Harriers, Vulcans, Hercules C–130 transports, Chinooks

Losses:

255 killed

Sources: Brenda Ralph Lewis, "Unexpected War in the Falklands: Colonial War in the Missile Age," *Strategy and Tactics*, no. 103 (September/October 1985), pp. 37–43; Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), pp. 316–18; and Martin Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas': The Argentine Force in the Falklands War* (London: Penguin Group, 1989), pp. 282–83.

Juan Carlos Murguizur, a lecturer at the Argentine army staff college, laid bare the failure of jointness on the strategic level:

> *The armed forces were divided into watertight compartments, each service jealously guarding its rights and privileges, and their compulsory participation in the to and fro of national politics merely aggravated the situation.*
>
> *The so-called* Estado Mayor de Coordinacion, *or coordination staff, was responsible in theory for drawing up plans for joint-service operations, but in practice did very little. In military circles, this organization was referred to as "the pantheon" since it served as an elegant burial-place for senior officers too old for command posting but not yet old enough to be retired. Plans for joint service operations needed the approval of all three services; and the troops and equipment necessary had to be requested from the respective commanders, making it desperately hard to get around the time-consuming bureaucracy and interservice jealousy.*[5]

These findings should not surprise those who have studied Central and South America, for the history of that region shaped the identity of its military institutions, one that can be surrendered only with great difficulty. As elsewhere, the principal role of the soldier in Latin America is to defend the nation. But that role was pursued in ways which differed significantly from those of the military in the United States. The armed forces of Latin America found an identity in defining nationality as well as in defending it.

As Latin American nations gained their independence (most by 1824), many lacked a sense of identity. The monarchs of Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, and Holland had owned the region, and two of them, the kings of Spain and Portugal, ruled over the largest parts. Latin America was a huge area with isolated pockets of inhabitants. Almost impassable natural barriers—mountains, deserts, jungles, and rivers—reinforced this isolation and contributed to a lack of national identity. For example, Argentina was not united as a nation until 1853 even though it was among the first Spanish colonies to win independence in the 1800s. Also, colonial powers frequently fought each other and had little incentive in defining the boundaries of their empires. The King of Spain, who owned perhaps three-fifths of Latin America, was unconcerned over

(Carlos F. Ries Centeno)

Argentine soldiers, airmen, and marines taking cover during British air raid.

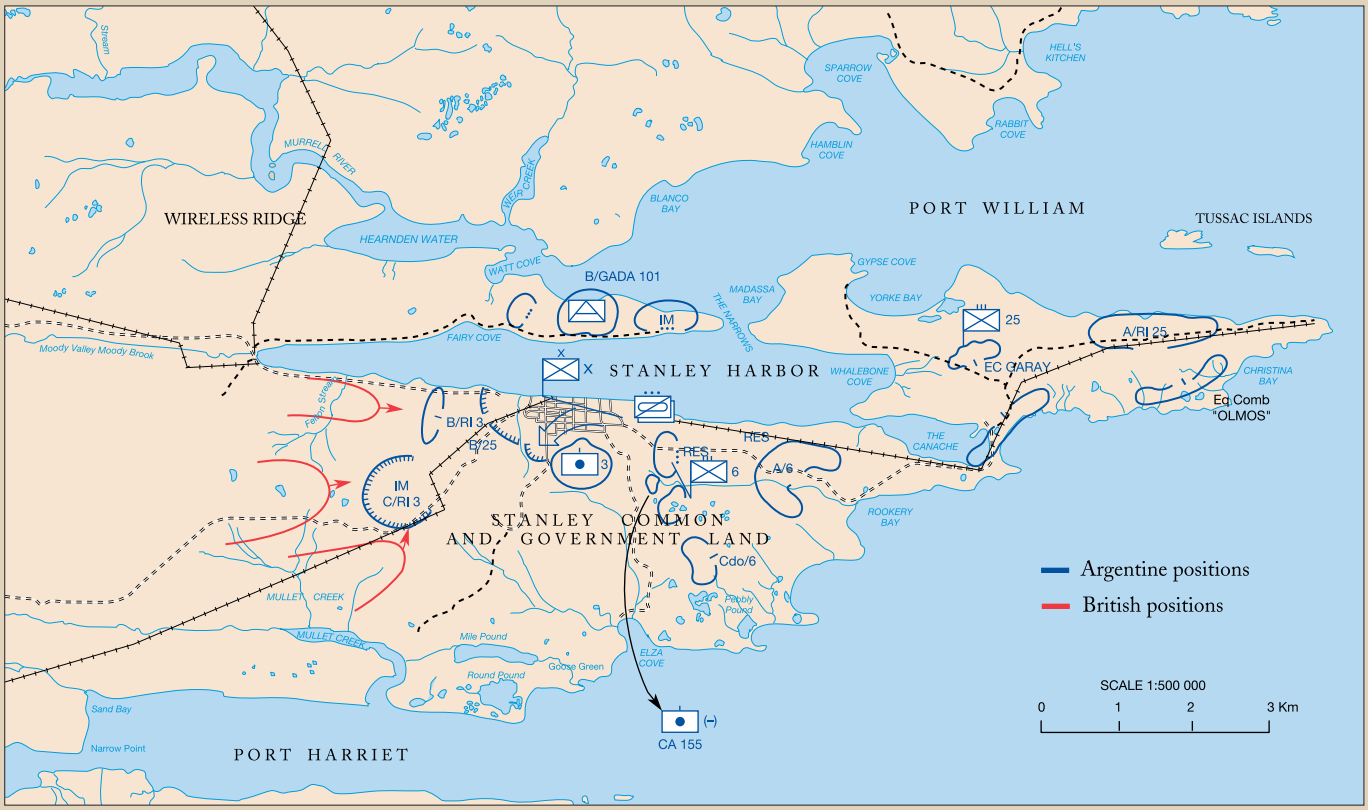
(Carlos F. Ries Centeno)

Tiger Cat SAM battery launcher near the Puerto Argentino airfield (this weapon was quite old and had limited range, and its missiles did not down any British planes).

boundaries which subdivided his many possessions. As a consequence the military of the region emerged not only as guarantors of sovereignty but also as creators and guardians of national identity.

In preserving national identity, many Latin American military establishments evolved into closely knit institutions whose cohesion served to bond a larger but weaker national identity. But that cohesion within the military was achieved in part by creating loyalty to a service and its unique territorially-defined mission, and participating in an extensive and isolationist social infrastructure. The distinctive duties of the services traditionally found in Latin America—army, navy, air force, and federal police—reinforce this separateness and territoriality. These duties, traditionally implicit or at times explicit in Latin American constitutions, give the services separate, inviolable identities. While defending the nation, a service must act to define nationality. Consequently, one finds many examples in

Argentine and British forces, Puerto Argentino (Port Stanley), 1030 hours, June 14



Source: Informe Oficial Ejército Argentino, *Conflicto Malvinas*, vol. 2., Abreviaturas, Anexos y Fuentes Bibliográficas (Buenos Aires, 1983).

Photos taken with pocket camera by a senior officer of General Belgrano showing (1) main deck below bridge as crew pushes life-raft canister into water; (2) bow folded under by second torpedo hit (note "B" turret is swung starboard to test maneuverability without power); and (3) sea climbing over main deck on port side as list increases dramatically (note rafts standing near forward turrets relatively close to sinking vessel).

(Photos by Martin Sgut)

Latin America's past of a service acting to define the nation's political course.

Given this tradition it should not be surprising that the Argentine army, navy, and air force fought three wars against the British in the Malvinas. But one must understand that the Argentine view of service identity, as established and reinforced by tradition, is the greatest obstacle to joint activity, no matter how desperately circumstances press for such an innovation. For truly effective jointness, new institutional perspectives must evolve. That *unnatural* process takes time, vision, and commitment, for it must work against the forces of history and tradition. JFQ

NOTES

[1] Interview with Capitan de Fragata Jorge Colombo, who commanded the Super Etendard squadron (September 15, 1983).

[2] Interview with the Argentine navy's Malvinas analysis group on September 30, 1983; interview with Contra Almirante Eduardo Otero, who commanded Naval Forces Malvinas (September 8, 1982).

[3] Interview with Capitan de Fragata Julio Pérez, who was in charge of the special detachment responsible for the installation of the Exocet in the Malvinas (September 9, 1982).

[4] Centro Ex-Combatientes Malvinas—La Plata, *Informe Rattenbach: El drama de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Espáraco, 1988), pp. 204, 274.

[5] Juan Carlos Murguizur, "The South Atlantic Conflict: An Argentine Point of View," *International Defence Review*, vol. 16, no. 2 (February 1983), pp. 135–36.