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THE FALKLAND ISLANDS - AN EXAMPLE OF OPERATIONAL ART?

BY

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<p>This paper focuses on the definition of operational art. While it does not propose to offer a definition which will forever remove doubt as to the meaning of operational art, it does offer good suggestions as to how operational art might be defined. In his effort to better define the operational art, the author examines a recent military operation--the Falklands War. This is done to identify whether the Falklands War was, in fact, an example of operational art, and if so, what aspects of the war can be used to better define the--(cont.)</p>		

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operational art.

CONT. → The sequence adopted for the paper is to first address operational art historically, offering some ideas as to how it might be defined. Next the paper addresses the historical background of the events leading up to the Falklands War and the operations in the Falklands by both the British and the Argentines. Finally, the author develops the thought that the operational art is an inherent part of the achievement of strategic goals and is not necessarily related to force size. That is to say, whether or not the operational art is being used is not determined by the size of the force being used.

He draws the conclusions that the Falklands had strategic goals for both parties in the war. The British strategic goal was to preserve and improve her image in the world, or her place in the world order. The Argentine strategic goal was to establish herself as a regional power and a key player in world affairs, or in other words, to improve her position in the world order.

Britain tied together a series of military actions directed at the appropriate center of gravity and achieved its strategic objective. The Falklands War was therefore an example of the operational art from Britain's point of view.

Argentina did not tie together a series of military actions to achieve strategic goals. Her actions were directed at the wrong center of gravity. In order to have been said to be using the operational art, Argentina would have had to direct her military actions to control the South Atlantic. Control of the Falkland Islands may have been one of the military actions to achieve that control but was not enough to achieve her strategic objectives. As the war was conducted by the Argentines, we do not have an example of operational art.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE FALKLAND ISLANDS - AN EXAMPLE OF OPERATIONAL ART?

An Individual Essay

by

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1 April 1986**

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INTRODUCTION

Operational art is a concept that has recently become the subject of increasing focus and study in the U.S. Army. It has been expanded in the curriculum of the U.S. Army War College, and one can usually find an article discussing operational art in any issue of our professional journals. Operational art has also become the focus of those outside of the uniformed military who have made it their object to seek reform in the way the Army fights. This group has increasingly advocated that maneuver warfare and its capstone--operational art--need more attention from military doctrine writers. But, what is operational art? A number of our senior leaders in the Army have spoken on the subject, yet many of these speakers have professed not to truly understand the term and are unable to define it.

This paper focuses on the definition of operational art. While it does not propose to offer a definition which will forever remove doubt as to the meaning of operational art, it will offer some ideas as to how operational art might be defined. In an effort to better define the concept, this paper examines a recent military operation--the Falklands War. This will be done to identify whether the Falklands War was, in fact, an example of operational art, and if so, what aspects of the war can we use to better define the operational art.



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First, the paper will address operational art historically, offering some ideas as to how it might be defined. Next the paper will address the historical background of the events leading up to the Falklands War and the operations in the Falklands by both the British and the Argentines. Finally, conclusions will be drawn as to whether or not this conflict fits into a discussion of operational art and what aspects of the conflict clarify the definition of the operational art.

THE HISTORY OF OPERATIONAL ART

The addition of the operational level of war to FM 100-5 has been a recent occurrence. It was given mention in the 20 August 1982 version,¹ and has received more thorough treatment in the latest draft version of FM 100-5.² But before beginning a discussion of operational art and its definition, let us first take a look at the historical background.

The roots of operational art "as a field of study, go back no farther than the days of Napoleon Bonaparte."³ Drawing upon the studies of Napoleon made by general Karl von Clausewitz and Baron Henri Jomini, the idea that there existed a level of war beyond tactics was accepted. European military writers and thinkers built upon the works of Clausewitz and Jomini, however only "the Germans and, later,

the Russians made a success of operational studies."⁴

Although there was a lesser development of the operational art in the U.S. Army, American officers were schooled, to a certain degree, in some of the basic concepts in the years leading into World War II. However, after the war this limited study of operational art lost its emphasis, possibly as a result of nuclear weapons and the perception that these weapons meant the end of conventional war.⁵ In any case, although there had been some study, albeit rudimentary, of the operational art, a long period ensued in which the concept was given little serious consideration.

Now however there is renewed interest in the idea of the operational art, and indeed, operational art has been thoroughly integrated into the Army's senior service college curriculum (U.S. Army War College). So, what is operational art? What part of the study of war are we talking about when we use this term?

It is often stated that operational art is the link between strategy and tactics, that operational art begins where strategy ends and ends where tactics begin. The doctrine defined in FM 100-5 states that the operational level of war is the activity concerned with using available military resources to attain strategic objectives. This doctrine further states that whenever a strategic objective is being achieved by the application of military force, the operational art is being exercised as a bridge between tactical operations and the strategic goal.

The fact that we use the operational art whenever we attempt to achieve strategic objectives, applies very nicely to the British and Argentine action in the Falklands War. But, before examining the Falklands War, it would be useful to discuss a lesser included concept of the operational art--that of center of gravity and its relation to operational art. The concept of a center of gravity implies that there is a crucial aspect to an organization or a battle, or an action, or a force--a heart if you will--upon which everything is centered. That is to say influences upon the center of gravity will have significant effect upon the whole apparatus. Clausewitz defined the enemy's center of gravity as "the hub of all power and movement on which everything depends. . . . The point against which all energies should be directed."⁶ When looking at military forces, the identification of the center of gravity of the force is of utmost concern to the commander. In the operational art, we are concerned with focusing on the enemy's center of gravity, that point at which our operations will have the greatest effect if successful. Selection by the commander of the center of gravity, that point against which we will direct our activities, may well be the most significant element of operational art. Selection of the wrong center of gravity may in fact adversely affect the entire outcome of the war.

One of the better examples in recent history of this idea of selecting the correct center of gravity is America's involvement in the Vietnam War. Colonel Harry G. Summers in his book, On Strategy, points out that "we had adopted a strategy that focused on none of the possible North Vietnamese centers of gravity--their army, their capital, the army of their protector, the community of interest with their allies, or public opinion. . . . Instead, by seeing the Viet Cong as a separate entity rather than as an instrument of North Vietnam, we chose a center of gravity which in fact did not exist."⁷ Although Colonel Summers uses the term strategy here, the concept is clear and the results of choosing the wrong center of gravity are clear. The war was lost.

Of paramount importance, is the need to keep the relationship between the operational level of war and center of gravity in mind as we study military operations. Operational art is the activity leading to the achievement of strategic objectives, but we must assure that the right center of gravity is chosen as a focus of operations.

Now that we have reviewed a number of the lessor included concepts involved in the operational art, let us look at the Falklands War in relation to operational art. For our purposes here, we will not concern ourselves with individual combat actions between the British and Argentines in the Falkland Islands; rather, we will focus on the

specific events associated with the conflict which define it as an example of the operational art.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To establish the strategic perspectives of the British and Argentines in the Falklands War, a short review of history is necessary. The islands were first sighted by sailors of the English ship Desire in 1592, but the first recorded landing was not made until 27 January 1690 by men of the English ship Welfare under command of Captain John Strong, who named them after the Treasurer of the Royal Navy, Viscount Falkland. A British settlement at Port Egmont was established some time later. Spain resented the claims of England, iterating that the islands lay west of the demarcation line of 1494 established by Pope Alexander VI Borgia and consequently were Spanish territory.⁸

On 4 June 1770 the British settlers at Egmont were forced to leave by a Spanish Frigate acting as the advance guard of a fleet of Spanish ships. After a diplomatic protest by the British, Spain disowned the action and returned Port Egmont to Britain. Three years later Britain closed Port Egmont because of costs, but continued to claim the islands as the property of King George III. In 1811, after the collapse of the Spanish empire, the Spanish garrison was withdrawn and the islands left uninhabited.⁹

In 1820, Buenos Aires, now independent from Spain, established a penal colony on the islands, an act which was disputed by Britain. However, in 1833 England reestablished a presence on the islands, peacefully dislodging a small Argentinian garrison. From that time until 1 April 1982 the islands were administered as a British colony.¹⁰

Although Argentina had shown little interest in the Falklands in the early twentieth century, Juan Peron drew attention to the Falklands, or the Malvinas as they were called by the Argentines, as part of an effort to have Argentina recognized as a Latin American and world power. He also used the islands as part of his anti-colonial crusade. Peron's successor eventually decreed the Falklands, along with South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands as part of Tierra Del Fuego, calling the inhabitants of the Falklands citizens of Argentina. Although negotiations continued between the Peron years and 1982 when General Leopoldo Galtieri came to power, the ownership of the Falklands was never settled.

In December 1981, General Leopoldo Galtieri, the new President of Argentina, pledged privately to take control of the Falklands by 3 January 1983, the 150th anniversary of British occupation. His government began immediately to make plans to accomplish this.¹² On 1 April 1982, Argentina placed troops ashore in the Falklands and gained complete control of the islands; by 6 April 1982, the same day on

which units of a British task force sailed from Portsmouth for the South Atlantic, South Georgia Island was also under control.¹³ The war had begun!

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Recall that our purpose in examining the Falklands campaign is to first identify strategic objectives for both England and Argentina; and then draw parallels as to whether or not the Falklands campaign serves as an example of the operational art. If we accept that the operational art is that which bridges the gap between tactical actions and strategic objectives, then a step in analyzing the military effort in the Falklands and its relevance to operational art is to determine the strategic objectives of the participants.

An important consideration here is Britain's place on the world stage. A former great world and colonial power, England had seen its role in world affairs on a steady decline since World War II. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's she had seen the vast majority of her colonies gain independence, and although Britain was an important player in many places, it was clear by the 1970's that she would never again exert the influence which had seemed her right in years gone by. Indeed, many felt that England had become so dependent on the United States that she was incapable of independent action in world affairs.¹⁴ The decline of empire

had placed economic burdens on Britain and by the early 1980's she was compelled to reduce her defense spending, although the government expressed its intent and ability to honor all its existing defense commitments.¹⁵ However, in the end the British were compelled to drastically reduce the size of their forces, particularly the navy, and as a result her ability to project power was significantly reduced.

The point then is that, in England, we have a former colonial power, with a history replete with its ability to impose its will anywhere in the world. However, by the early 1980's that power, and the empire, are by and large gone. Although England is still a major industrialized nation with strong ties to many nations, she simply is not one of the world powers. Now, although she had clearly shown her willingness to negotiate the status of the Falklands, and in fact by reducing her defense capability had probably signaled an unwillingness to defend the islands, she was not prepared to have the islands taken by force. She had a world order interest in the Falkland Islands. That is, allowing the Argentines to forcibly take the islands would diminish England's status in the world, a status which had already been substantially reduced. Clearly, a paramount strategic objective of Britain in the Falklands was to preserve and improve her image in the world. She may have been willing to negotiate away her interests, but was not willing to lose them by the force of arms of what she considered a third rate power.

On the other hand, Argentina was in a position of trying to enhance its status among nations. The capture of the Falklands was part of a campaign to establish Argentina as a regional power and a key player in world affairs. She had a world order interest in the islands as well and was prepared to use force to advance that interest, particularly in the face of what was perceived as British unwillingness to defend the islands.

This belief by Buenos Aires that Britain would not defend the islands was erroneously confirmed by England's response to the "South Georgia incident."¹⁶ The "South Georgia incident" refers to the landing on South Georgia, some 700 miles southeast of the Falklands, by a work party ostensibly engaged in salvage work at an abandoned whaling station. Although a contract had been let to allow the removal and salvage of equipment on the island, Britain protested the unauthorized landing of the work party and the presence of what were thought to be military personnel in the work party.¹⁷ In any case, London's response to the incident persuaded the Argentines that England would not respond militarily to invasion of the Falklands.

Two perspectives on the strategic objectives of the Argentines are normally agreed upon. First, was the need for Argentina to establish itself as a regional power in the South Atlantic and South America and to move into a more central role in world affairs. Second, was the need for

General Galtieri to use the Falklands as a rallying point for the Argentine people--a ruse to divert their attention from political and economic crises at home. This paper does not subscribe to the latter point of view. As pointed out earlier, Juan Peron had determined that regaining control of the islands was key to establishing Argentina's rightful place in the world. So, while we may agree that invading the Falklands served Galtieri's short term political goals, the time was at hand, from Argentina's point of view, to resolve the issue of ownership of the Falklands.

OPERATIONAL ART OR NOT?

Was the Falklands War an example of the operational art?

From England's point of view, the answer is fairly simple. The strategic objective for Britain was to maintain her status among nations. She could not allow an inferior (in her eyes) nation to violate her sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. She might be willing to negotiate away her sovereignty, but she was not willing to give up her world image by losing it militarily. Her military response to Argentina's invasion, the recapture of the islands, achieved her strategic objective. Her center of gravity was the Argentine force on the Falklands. British operations were directed at that force and the force in the immediate vicinity of the islands. By destroying the force on and

around the Falklands, England applied tactical pressure on the points around which all of Argentina's tactical action hinged. These activities by Britain represent a clear example of the tying together of a series of tactical operations and combat engagements to achieve a strategic objective. Clearly from the British perspective, we have an example of operational art.

In the case of Argentina, we do not have an example of operational art. The invasion did not achieve its strategic objective, that is establishing Argentina as a regional and world power. Although a successful operation may have enhanced Argentina's image among some nations of the world, it probably would not have established Argentina in the position she desired.

Now if we were to assume for the purposes of this discussion that Argentina's strategic objective was to control the South Atlantic which would lead to a role as a regional and military power, the Falkland invasion still could not be considered an example of operational art. Even a successful invasion would not have insured control of the South Atlantic. The wrong center of gravity would have been selected. The center of gravity for Buenos Aires was the British Fleet. To prevent England from retaking the islands, it was necessary that the waters in the South Atlantic be under Argentine control. That is, the British Fleet would have to have been denied access to and operations in the

South Atlantic. As we saw during the battle, with the Argentine use of the Exocet missile, it was a near thing that the British Fleet was able to successfully put ashore the ground force to retake the islands. Had the Argentines chosen to control the South Atlantic, using the Falklands and South Georgia as bases to effect that control, then we would have a good example of the operational level of war. As the events took place on the Argentine side of the conflict, we do not.

CONCLUSIONS

Operational art is the tying together of military actions to achieve strategic goals. FM 100-5 identifies a doctrinal theme which says that when one achieves strategic goals through the application of military power, the operational art is in use. The operational art is an inherent part of the achievement of strategic goals and is not necessarily related to force size. That is to say, whether or not the operational art is being used is not determined by the size of the force being used.

The Falklands had strategic goals for both parties in the war. The British strategic goal was to preserve and improve her image in the world, or her place in the world order. The Argentine strategic goal was to establish herself as a regional power and a key player in world affairs, or in other words, to improve her position in the world order.

Britain tied together a series of military actions directed at the appropriate center of gravity and achieved its strategic objective. The Falklands War was therefore an example of the operational art from Britain's point of view.

Argentina did not tie together a series of military actions to achieve strategic goals. Her actions were directed at the wrong center of gravity. In order to have been said to be using the operational art, Argentina would have had to direct her military actions to control the South Atlantic. Control of the Falkland Islands may have been one of the military actions to achieve that control but was not enough to achieve her strategic objectives. As the war was conducted by the Argentines, we do not have an example of operational art.

NOTES

¹US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, 20 August 1982, pp. 2-3.

²US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, DRAFT.

³LTC L. D. Holder, "A New Day for Operational Art", Army Magazine, March 1985, p. 1.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p.2.

⁶Clausewitz, On War, VIII: 4, pp. 595-596.

⁷COL Harry G. Summers, On Strategy, US Army War College, April 1981, p. 80.

⁸Peter Calvert, The Falklands Crisis, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 1982. Pp. 4-6.

⁹Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 6-7.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 36-37.

¹²Ibid., p. 56

¹³Ibid., pp. 56-60.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷Falkland Islands Review, Report of a committee of Privy Counsellors/Chairman: Lord Franks, January 1983, pp. 48-55.