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**74 DAYS UNDER THE ARGENTINE FLAG:
THE EXPERIENCES OF OCCUPATION
DURING THE FALKLANDS/MALVINAS WAR**

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74 days under the Argentine Flag: The Experiences of Occupation during the Falklands/Malvinas War

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ABSTRACT: The experience of military occupation confronts two groups of people in an asymmetrical relation of power established by the occupiers and suffered by the occupied. Once the occupation ends, this traumatic situation leaves a deep imprint in the memory of the occupied. The occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands by Argentine troops that triggered the South Atlantic War in 1982 lasted 74 days and the cooperation from the islanders was negligible; they resorted to passive resistance, and showed their rejection of the invaders at every possible opportunity and the islanders even helped the British troops by providing intelligence and guidance on the terrain. This paper assesses the experience of the Argentine occupation. How did this small, tightly-knit islander community cope with the traumatic event of an occupation? How did the Argentine military personnel act and react during this period? In short, how did they conduct the occupation? How separated were the cultures of both occupiers and occupied? Until now this story has been told in a fragmentary form, scattered across different sources. This paper intent to put these fragments together and narrates the experience from three sides (the occupiers, the occupied and the liberators). Further analysis centers on the lasting effects of the occupation in the memories of three sides (the Argentineans, the islanders, and the British). The sources are interviews about the experience of the direct participants that were published shortly after the war and written material over the experience already published by both sides. This work shows that the views clashed at two different levels: one, about the interpretation of the rights and claims. How each country tells the story of possession and dispossession of the islands. The second level, considers the cultural characteristics of each group: the two cultures clashed because of differences in language, heritage, political and judicial traditions. Analysis of this case can yield important insights into occupations, particularly the “friendly” type, in which occupiers attempt to win the hearts and minds of the occupied, or, failing that, at least not antagonize them greatly.

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74 days under the Argentine Flag: The Experiences of Occupation during the Falklands/Malvinas War

Alejandro L. Corbacho (Ucema)

“In the islands we are going to meet a population that we must treat deferentially... They are inhabitants of Argentine territory and, therefore, they have to be treated the same as those who live in Argentina. You will have to strictly respect personal property and integrity; you are not going to intrude into any private residence unless it is necessary for combat reasons. You are going to respect women, children, elders and men. Be tough to the enemy but courteous, respectful and kind to the population of our territory which we have to protect. If anyone engages in rape, robbery, or looting, I will immediately apply the maximum penalty.”
(Commanding officer of the Argentine landing force, Vice Admiral Carlos Büsser’s, address to the troops before the landing on Malvinas)¹

Assumptions

The experience of military occupation, in general, confronts two groups of people in an asymmetrical relation of power. Relationships between occupiers and occupied are seen as interactions under a new set of rules established by the former and suffered by the latter. Once the occupation ends, this traumatic situation leaves a deep imprint in the memory of the occupied.

Recently, British possessions have suffered two similar experiences. The first one was the occupation of the Channel Islands by the Germans during World War Two.² The second was the occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands by Argentine troops that triggered the South Atlantic War in 1982. Britain regarded both incidents as a bit of British soil conquered by enemies. Different accounts describe this campaign as if the British were liberating a small village in Scotland.

Cooperation from the islanders was negligible; they resorted to passive resistance and showed their rejection to the invaders in every possible opportunity. In some cases, the islanders even helped the British troops by providing intelligence and guidance on the terrain.

¹ Speranza y Cittadini, p.70.

² Bunting 1995.

This paper assesses the experience of the Argentine occupation. How did this small, tightly-knit community cope with the traumatic event of an occupation? How did the Argentine military personnel act and react during this period? In short, how did they conduct the occupation? How separated were the cultures of both occupiers and occupied?

This paper describes the contact between the groups, the Argentine soldiers and the islanders. When the Argentines occupied the islands it was evident from the beginning that they were considered by the inhabitants not only as strangers with no invitation but also intruders. Most of the islanders were fourth or fifth generation descendants of the first settlers back in 1833. To the Argentines, their action was just and justified by the memory of a territory lost to the British Empire.

Most of the military occupations had been conducted by a more advanced or developed society over a less developed group or society. The Falklands/Malvinas is an opposite case; a less developed society embarks in the occupation of a more developed society. The situation is also compounded by the presence in one of the parts of a political regime that applied high levels of political violence against opposition.

Military occupations are hazardous most of the times because small stories generated from the interaction difficult to be controlled between both parts can have big effects on the overall success of the occupation.

The paper looks at different aspects in the process of a military occupation: previous knowledge about the other by the parts; the Argentine plan for the occupation; the failed intents by the Argentines to win the heart and minds of the islanders; situations of cultural clash; the activities and attitude of resistance and rejection developed by the islanders; the ever presence of uncertainty and fear generated by the situation; the existence of negative views, in this particular case, towards the islanders from Argentines and British; and the islanders attitude toward the British after the liberation.

The basic assumption of this work is that Argentine and islanders cultures clashed at the level of identity. This one expresses itself in the customs, names of geographic places, religion, and national symbols. How did this small, tightly-knit community cope with the traumatic event of an occupation? How did the Argentine military personnel act and react during this period? In short, how did they conduct the occupation? How separated were the cultures of both occupiers and occupied?

Until now this story has been told in a fragmentary form, scattered through different sources. This paper is intent to put these fragments together and to count this experience from both sides. This analysis does not center on the lasting effects of the occupation in the memories of both sides and how they affect the diplomatic relations.

Sources material are accounts of direct participants or witnesses that are as close as possible in time to the operation and written material over the experience already published from both sides.

Previous knowledge

The Argentine troops sailing to storm the beaches near Port Stanley in the Falklands Islands on April 2, 1982 had little idea who the islanders really were, how they would respond to their action or about their way of life. One reason could be attributed to the hurry that assisted Argentines to launch the operation for the military occupation of the Malvinas triggered by the crisis in the South Georgias Island. Another reason, according to Argentine law the islanders were born in Argentine soil, thus automatically they were Argentines citizens. Another predominant opinion was that the islanders were simply British settlers. Finally, Argentine diplomacy had been always focused in the diplomatic battle without accepting the islander wishes, as was Great Britain's position. Whatever the reasons, the Argentine forces approaching to the islands had had no time or the experience to confront the new situation they were going to generate. Consequently there was no much information about the particular characteristic of the population. This ignorance opened the door for problems and misunderstandings. In 1966, an Argentine visitor wrote:

“Nearly the whole islands’ population is British descendant. Despite that, the natives felt themselves weakly linked to Great Britain. They do not know that territory and, under the best circumstances, they only have distant relatives.³

John Smith first came to the Islands on board of the survey ship *Shackleton* in 1959. He portraits everyday life prior April 1982 in a bucolic mood as quiet, peaceful and regulated.⁴ And continue his description:

“At that time, probably the immediate impression on visitors to the Islands , besides the solitude and remoteness, was their cleanliness and

³ Solari Yrigoyen 1966, p. 4.

⁴ Smith, p. 255.

orderliness. Port Stanley [Puerto Argentino] and the settlements were like something picture from a postcard. The air was dust free, the streets clean, the number of vehicles so few that the exhaust fumes were soon whisked away by South Atlantic winds”.⁵

In 1980 the British government introduced a new citizenship law; consequently nearly two thirds of the islanders lost their British citizenship. This was later considered as one of the reason for Argentine miscalculations towards Her Majesty’s Government commitment towards the territory. But it justified the idea in the mind of many Argentines that the islander were now in sort of nationality limbo from which they could take advantage.

“The new British Nationality Bill came before the Parliament (mid 1980) sponsored by the Home Office. It had been intended to clarify the status of British colonial citizens whom for reasons of race relations the government did not wish to see migrating to Britain. It was aimed primarily at the Hong Kong Chinese. The rules had to be drawn up with care...so as not to deny rights of entry to white colonials of British descent. The method...was to admit to full citizenship those with ‘partial’ status, conferred where at least one grandparent had been born in Britain”. Consequently, “this did not covered third or fourth-generation settlers in colonies such as Gibraltar or the Falklands. The bill would now deprive them of their most valued security: full British citizenship with rights of abode in the United Kingdom”.⁶

“The kelpers can barely say who they ‘are’, they can feel themselves British, but in Britain they are not accepted. Conversely, they reject the idea of being Argentineans because they were made believe that they are not Argentine.”⁷

In spite of the islanders’ legal status, Martin Middlebrook describes them as “fanatically pro-British... They have preserved a most English way of life. To walk through Stanley is to walk through an English village of thirty or more years ago.”⁸

“Stanley has been described being described many times as being like a Scottish fishing village, on its fine harbours, and that description cannot be improved...”⁹

However, some recognize that prior to the occupation it was impossible to define one islander heritage or even if there was one at all. ¹⁰ One result of the that event was a turning point that created “the birth of what it is becoming the Falklands heritage”.¹¹

⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

⁶ Hasting and Jenkins, p. 44-43.

⁷ Calvi 1982, p. 6.

⁸ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, p. 21.

⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

Regarding the character of the islanders some year before the Argentine occupation, Ned Miller, a storekeeper of Port Stanley, described themselves to an Argentine journalist: “you know that the islander of any island has a very special character, very difficult to communicate with him.”¹² Middlebrook adds that “the people are quiet and slow of speech. Most of them are very deep and sincere people who have grown up in their own community where a slow pace of life is norm, who have no desire to join the rat race, who are satisfied with a simple life and few possessions”.¹³

Shortly after the occupation, the former Argentina military governor of the islands, Mario Benjamín Menéndez, remembered that “one characteristic of the islander has a much closed minded character, typical of island populations: very closed minded, self-sufficient and suspicious.”¹⁴

“In January 1976, during the time of my stay in Port Stanley, there prevailed an absolutely negative image of the then Argentine government. Overall, the islanders feared being administered by the Argentines than any other political change. They claimed to know about their [Argentines] incompetence and they feared the prospect of losing the comfortable living standard they enjoyed”.¹⁵

To the islanders, one source of knowledge about the Argentines had been the possibility granted by the Argentine government that young islanders could go to the continent to study at different Argentine schools. The results of the experience were not as positive as the authorities expected. Sydney Miller remembered that “the islanders’ kids that went to study to Argentine schools returned complaining that they had been insistently bombarded with the jingoist slogan that the Malvinas are Argentines. That situation bothered the kids a lot... What happened then? They did not want to go back to Argentina, and they are right”.¹⁶

The first lieutenant Carlos Esteban was part of the occupying force of Darwin. There he experienced contradictory feelings:

“In Darwin... Janet Hardcastle, the FIC manager’s daughter, had been my wife’s high school classmate. Many islanders went to Argentina for schooling at the English schools in La Cumbre, province of Córdoba. It was

¹⁰ Smith, p. 255.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 254-55.

¹² Foulkes, *74 días...* p. 160.

¹³ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, p. 21.

¹⁴ Turolo, p. 78.

¹⁵ Foulkes, *74 días...* , p. 33.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 39.

very weird for me to encounter familiar pictures of my wife when she was a teenager in a house in Darwin and to talk about my family in such an unusual situation.”¹⁷

Another important source of knowledge about the Argentines was the increasing number of tourist that visited the islands immediately after the Communications Agreement was signed in July 1971 between Argentina and Great Britain. The first contingent of 300 tourists, mostly Argentines, arrived in January 1972.

The former military governor, general Menéndez, explained that the knowledge that many islanders had about Argentines were acquire through this massive presence of tourists in the islands:

“What the islanders got to know about the Argentines “started with the arrival of the avalanche of tourist brought by the big cruiser ships to Port Stanley. And they had very bad image because they painted on the walls ‘The Malvinas are Argentine’. Because the population liked to take care of their homes they had to paint back the walls. They did not like to do that...All these situations created a very negative image of the Argentines. What was worst was the shoplifting of merchandise from the shops. Consequently, some closed their businesses when the tourists arrived or asked friends for help to keep an eye on the customers”¹⁸

Nat Bound, a Port Stanley store owner also added that, the problem was that the population of the town was small and the contingents of tourists were large, consequently they were hard to watch. According to Bound, after a while, the tourists became bore and they don’t know what to do. Then,

“they started to knock at the doors of the pubs after closing time, or they, practically ‘assaulted’ the stores. The worst thing for Bound was that fact many tourists knocked at the doors or ring at the houses of the islanders with the excuse of fraternize.”¹⁹

One Argentine commentator regretted that Argentine positive actions toward the island population were barely taking into account:

“However, all the Argentines’ positives actions towards the islanders -like providing teachers, weekly connecting flights, petrol, gasoline, and gas- did not make a great impression on the ‘kelpers’, whose families had settled their three, four, or even five generations ago. They did not distinguish

¹⁷ Speranza and Cittadini, p. 41.

¹⁸ Turolo, p. 79.

¹⁹ Foulkes, *74 days...*, pp. 159-160.

between the historical validity of the Argentine claim and the concrete reality of their forefathers...In case of Argentine administration of the Islands, the locals wanted to know for sure how the extent to which their orderly life, their social tranquility and their calm coexistence would be threatened. For them we have had a bad name as [not very] efficient administrators. I have to admit that they are not much off the mark...".²⁰

Finally, Foulkes also explains that among many Argentines there was ignorance about the possible behavior of the "nativos malvineros" (islanders). As an example he cites the case of a radio commentator who was himself convinced that the islanders would salute the recuperation of the islands by the Argentines because "they were liberated from the colonial yoke".²¹

Plans for the occupation

What it is accepted today is that Argentines wanted to conduct a model occupation by producing a cordial relation between them and the occupied. Some time after the war, the Argentine military governor explained more detailed the nature and purpose of what he and the government thought about the occupation:

"After seventeen years of negotiations with the United Kingdom, Argentina had made many proposals regarding the local population that should not be set aside because we were now the occupants of the islands. On the contrary, we have to teach a lesson and demonstrate that we were honest in keeping our promises. Moreover, we have to show that we were capable of conducting a good government beneficial to the local population".²²

"The main concept was to introduce first the indispensable changes and then gradually implement the rules convenient and necessary in order to integrate the islands and their population with the rest of the country...".²³

"Both the National Strategy and Military Strategy Directives prepared for the Malvinas mentioned a series of items that whoever was in charge of the military government had to consider. For instance, to respect as much as possible the population's lives and possessions during the military occupation... They also talked about trying to maintain and respect the customs, essential rights of the inhabitants, and even more, to improve their living standards."²⁴

Hearts and minds

²⁰ Ibid. p. 150.

²¹ Foulkes, *Kelpers*, p. 26-27.

²² Menéndez in Turolo, p. 20.

²³ Ibid. p. 22.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

In 1966, there was a lunch between high ranking British Foreign Office officials and Argentine diplomats in a “deniable scenario” to talk informally about the British ideas concerning the island’s future. During the conversations, the British suggested that “if you like to conquer the hearts and minds of the islander Argentines would try to befriend with the islanders and demonstrate that with Argentina their situation would be better”. In order to obtain that, communication and understanding were necessary.²⁵ That proposal was fulfilled later when both governments signed the Communication Agreements in the early seventies.²⁶ They opened the door to Argentines to assist in the development of the islands and to generate a more fluid contact with the islands population. However, after twelve years, the relationship had not matured enough. Thus, during the short occupation Argentines tried a new strategy of using “mirrors and beads” towards the islanders:

“The very first thing they [the military] wanted off was that container of televisions sets for the kelpers. I thought that was disgusting; the army needed ammunition and food far more urgently than the kelpers needed those televisions sets, but it was a political decision”.²⁷

“Those days we received a very precious present sent by the government of the province of Misiones: it was a colour transmission TV station...we wanted to introduce through the TV cultural elements, our language and our way of life. It was important to counter the negative campaign that they had been receiving so far. The inconvenience was that from the continent they sent us programming and shows that were only comprehensive to the Argentines because the islanders had no knowledge of Spanish language or the slang or archetypical human types. In order for them to know that Argentina has good music, they would be much better off listening to our folk music or watching a program with the Buenos Aires Symphonic Orchestra. We had to give them a good idea of our cultural level and not allow them to continue believing that we were feathered Indians”.²⁸

“Those television sets were part of the ‘hearts and minds’ policy by which the Argentine administration hoped to win over the Falklands civilians. Two hours of transmission were relayed each evening from the mainland”

When the Argentines departed, the television sets were “only able to play video recordings.”²⁹

²⁵ Cisneros and Escudé, p. 52.

²⁶ Ibid. pp. 59-64.

²⁷ Captain Dell'Elicine, *Río Carcarañá*, ELMA in Middelbrook, *The Fight for Malvinas...*, p. 70.

²⁸ Menéndez in Turolo, p. 77-78.

²⁹ Middlebrook, *The Fight for Malvinas...* p. 70.

After the Argentine occupation, the military governor was informed that the teachers refused to restart teaching at the schools. Doing that would have meant “collaboration with the enemy.” Therefore, “we suspended the classes and decided to contact the Ministry of Education in order to obtain new teachers and, logically, adequate teaching programs. They would maintain certain topics like geography, language, etc. but changing other subjects like history. A ‘mixed’ system and, fundamentally bilingual.”³⁰

“I know that there are photos showing Argentine troops drinking mate [an Argentine national drink, like a tea] with the kelpers, apparently living together in peace and integrated. However, we never participated in that game... we never treated them as allies because they never were that. We separated them, and restricted their mobility.”³¹

“We have to be extremely careful with all that, because the islanders are pretty closed minded, typical of island peoples: closed minded, self-sufficient, and distrustful... We promoted talks with the population, they voiced inquiries and complaints that could have been on small subjects, but all their concerns were attended to. This way, there was a starting point to establish a bonding with the population... It was a starting point but it ended as soon as the Task Force arrived to the islands.”³²

“To show how well the Argentines treated the islanders, it can only be said that at the government building there was a claims office. There, Argentine paid for every chicken or lamb that the troops captured for feeding themselves, every Land Rover or house requisited for the using of the troops was religiously paid and to very high prices as the kelper claimed. They appraised by themselves how much money would cost the damaged produced.”³³

Cultural clash

It is clear that Argentine culture differs from that of the British. Consequently, cultural clashes might be expected. In his recollections of an earlier visit to the Islands in 1976, the Argentine journalist Haroldo Foulkes, expresses the shock suffered by any Argentine visitors when visiting the South Atlantic territory:

“Truly, to me it was very alienating to step on Argentine land, and feel myself trapped in a typical British environment. It was strange and shocking at the same time. For it was not only the language, the style of the houses,

³⁰ Menéndez in Turolo, p. 65.

³¹ Second Lieutenant Oscar Reyes, Speranza and Cittadini, p. 79.

³² Menéndez in Turolo, p. 78.

³³ Kasanzew, p. 81.

the human behavior so different to ours...told me that I was in a different world”.³⁴

Cultural clashes are problematic because, although no matter how minor they could appear, they seem to threaten the identity of the occupied. In this case, these conflicts evolved about four issues: customs, driving; the names of geographic locations and places; symbolic, the Crown; and religion: catholic versus Anglican.

“The Falklands civilians protested when an order was issued that all local vehicles should change from driving on the left to the right-hand side of the road. Captain Hussey pointed out that one reason for the change was concern for the safety of the civilians. ‘Which would you prefer, that our eighteen-year-old conscripts, with their big lorries, should try to drive on the left, or that you, with your little vehicles, change to the right?’”³⁵

“There is a worthy anecdote because the islanders complained a lot about it. This was the change of driving circulation. They complained about how could we say wouldn’t change their customs when we were doing precisely that. We had to convince them that it was safer for them to drive on the opposite side than for our drivers, who were not used to driving on the left-side, and having heavy trucks on the wrong side was much more dangerous ...”³⁶

The young lieutenant Carlos Esteban, during the occupation of Darwin expressed his thoughts about the British names:

“We didn’t like the English names because they make no sense to us. We changed the name of the village. We unified the locations of Darwin and Goose Green and we named them Puerto Santiago. We celebrated a [Catholic] mass, we raised the Argentine flag and changed the name of everything: from the FCI [Falkland Island Company], to the school, to the postal code.”³⁷

In 1976, Harry Milne, then general manager of the FIC, while interviewed by an Argentine journalist defined the islanders’ identity:

“The islanders want to maintain their links to the Crown because the Queen is the symbol of the British way of life, whether in London or Port Stanley. And for this reason they don’t want to know anything about a sovereignty change”.³⁸

³⁴ Foulkes, *74 días...* p. 14.

³⁵ Middlebrook, *The Fight for the Malvinas*, p. 44.

³⁶ Menéndez in Turolo, p. 62.

³⁷ Speranza and Cittadini, p. 38.

³⁸ Foulkes, *74 days...* p. 41.

“But the younger Argentine priests were less popular. They flooded Stanley with Spanish-language religious-political pamphlets, attempting to justify the occupation...”³⁹

The different language was an important issue for the locals. John Smith, a settler with nearly 25 year of living in the Islands remembered that after the Communication Agreements of 1974 the aircraft employed by the Argentines were capable of the relatively short flight between the Falklands and the mainland of Southern Argentina:

“This state of affairs was of course highly pleasing to the Argentinians, who added insult to injury during the flights by giving the instructions for the life-saving equipment only in Spanish! The lesson was quite clear: if you wished to be saved, you should learn Spanish”.⁴⁰

Finally, it is possible to find a contradictory sense about the occupation of the islands among some Argentines troops related to identity:

“There was a pretty strange sensation: one knows that the land was ours, but one saw people that did not speak our language. The first day, a lady came to us and with the help of signals offered us a cup of coffee, but the order of our superior officer was that it was forbidden to accept anything from the kelpers, we explained the best we could that we wanted it but could not accept it.”⁴¹

An older conscript soldier remembered that for him: “it was an intellectual contradiction to think that we were in our land. Truly, it looked more as if we were invading an English coastal village”.⁴²

Resistance and rejection

The newly appointed military governor, General Menéndez, later told a journalist that they did not expect serious problems, but they found a certain attitude of rejection:

“There was an attitude of prevention, probably some fear. Certainly we could not expect much in Puerto Argentino [Port Stanley], because there, the most recalcitrant members of the Falklands Islands Company had influence.

³⁹ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, p. 172.

⁴⁰ Smith p. 13. Smith refers to the Fokker F-27 Fellowship and Fokker F-28 employed by the Argentinian state owned airline LADE.

⁴¹ Guillermo Huiricapán, conscript class 63 in *ibid.* p. 30.

⁴² Daniel Terzano, conscript class 55 in *ibid.* p. 44.

There the majority of the people maintained a reactionary and colonialist position.”⁴³

The Royal Marines garrison had trained the Falkland Islands Defence Force, formed by the young members of the community. After the Argentines occupied the Islands, they confiscated their weapons and the occupying military governor had a meeting with them.

“I met some of them [members of the FIDF] and explained that if they did some wrong to the occupying troops, I would apply the laws of war against them. I also told them that there was a group of two or three youngsters that continuously were gesticulating or showed an aggressive attitude against the Argentine officers and NCOs. For instance, they used to approach at an excessive speed and pass our troops very closely. I told them that if they ran into one of them or threw them to the floor and somebody fired at them, although I did not like martyrs, I was going to justify what my men did.”⁴⁴

The Argentine First Lieutenant Esteban in Darwin:

“We believed that the [British] landing was imminent, and I did not want the children around; also, some of the civilians had seemed hostile and uncooperative. They had left lights on at night, let animals out on to our minefields and sometimes cut off the water and petrol...”⁴⁵

The islanders made clear from the very beginning that they rejected the Argentines and comments on how could be possible that the occupiers expected to be welcomed by the population as liberators. Middlebrook tells of Bob Rutherford’s attitude towards the occupiers: “You can walk past a person without being aggressive but letting them know they were not wanted. I believe many of the lower ranks of Argentinians were disillusioned to find no crowds in the streets waving Argentine Flags”.⁴⁶

“During one house search we came inside the house of an islander couple. The husband seemed to be calm...but, the wife on the other hand, was very nervous...Suddenly, the woman turned on the record player...She opened the windows and turned up the volume. I believe it was the British national anthem...”⁴⁷

When a large group of Argentine reporters visited the islands for a day, the owner of the Upland Goose Hotel explained how they were disappointed, as “they all came

⁴³ Menéndez in Turolo, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 80-81.

⁴⁵ Middlebrook, *The Fight for Malvinas*, p. 92.

⁴⁶ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ Conscript soldier Ricardo Peralta in Darwin (Speranza y Cittadini, p. 44).

down the road in a big swarm, hoping to see happy Malvinas residents liberated, but no one wanted to be interviewed. Some of the more naïve really believed they would find a Spanish-speaking, repressed Malvinas population who would welcome the Argentinians.”⁴⁸

Some Argentines viewed themselves as agents of civilization. The problem arises when the other does not share the same view. Sometimes the nonsensical question found an obvious answer; Middlebrook presents First Lieutenant Ignacio Gorriti of the 12th IR,

“At the first of the several meetings I had with Mr. Richard Stevens at Estancia House, I asked him what he thought about us being there. He said he wanted everyone –the English and the Argentines- to leave and for the islanders to be left alone. I told him that we would be staying and making improvements, building roads and suchlike. He replied: ‘look, if I wanted to live in a place with roads, I would go there. But I like it here and I want to be left alone’.”⁴⁹

Sub lieutenant Oscar Reyes (23 years old) remembers with frustration that:

“we treated them as if they were our allies but truly, they never were that. The directives were: ‘they are Argentineans’, but they were not and never will be. They always wanted to make perfectly clear the relation of rejection and reticence. In any case, our exchanges were economic only (or limited to trade) .”⁵⁰

The only Argentine TV reporter in the islands during the duration of the conflict, Nicolás Kasanzew remembers that “the islanders attitude towards Argentina was absolutely negative. They showed all the time, an attitude of boycott in order to underline their contempt and hate towards us. However, they never avoided to do profitable business with the Argentines.”⁵¹

Uncertainty and fear

The arrival of a large contingent of heavily armed foreign troops to any community creates uncertainty about the future and fear about what can happen to the occupied. Gerald Cheek tells a lasting experience,

⁴⁸ Middlebrook, *Task Force*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid. *The Fight for Malvinas*, p. 289.

⁵⁰ Speranza and Cittadini, p. 43.

⁵¹ Kasanzew, p. 78.

“My wife phoned and said there was a soldier at the front gate but he could not speak English. I went home quickly and found that a vehicle had arrived and there were several men, revolvers in hands, I believe under an NCO. They burst into the house and insisted that my wife and two daughters and I should all pack... They told me I could choose to leave my wife and children behind. ‘You will only be gone two or three days,’ they said. It was a very difficult decision to take. They came up to the bedroom, threatening my wife and daughters, hurrying us to get packed. My daughters were crying and my wife was on the verge. We talked very quickly and decided on the spur of the moment that it would be better to leave them. It was the most terrifying moment of my life. I didn’t expect to see my family again and they didn’t expect to see me again. I didn’t know where we were going and asked if I needed my passport, but they said it would be ‘internal’”⁵²

But fear of the presence of foreign people was mutual. Second Lieutenant Gómez Centurión, then 23 years old, remembers that during the occupation of small village of Darwin,

“we searched the houses with a sergeant and three soldiers. The soldiers distrusted the people that spoke in a foreign language; everything was foreign and aggressive to them. I tried to keep a more relaxed and a little more accommodating attitude... When we searched a house, the soldiers waited outside, they were very tense, with the weapons ready.”⁵³

An Army conscript, of the class 1963, Ricardo Peralta, tells the story of small acts of rejection by islander youngsters. How he reacted to one of these events could depict one case of how small incidents can have a potential large negative and durable impact in small communities:

“The islanders’ kids did all the possible to disturb us. They pulled my leg every time I went for my meal. My look was frightening after living in the foxholes and working with the mines. I was all black, covered with mud. One day, I was going to eat and walked near a group of kids who were on the playground. I do not understand English but I had the feeling that they were making jokes about me and that angered me. I left the meal can and I cocked the FAL and pointed it at the head of a small girl. I know it was brutal, but they never bothered me again.”⁵⁴

Although there is no record of the little girl’s parents reaction when they were informed about the incident, it is hardly not to imagine that it could have been very negative for the Argentines.

⁵² Middlebrook, *Task Force*, pp. 173-174.

⁵³ Speranza and Cittadini, p. 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 80.

According to an islander, Graham Bound, “there had been a number of incidents that proved how vulnerable islanders were”. He gave an example:

“a machine gunner with a twitchy trigger finger had riddled Monsignor Spraggon’s home, blowing the toilet away from beneath the elderly cleric and leaving him in a stunned but uninjured heap on the floor...Similarly, a machine gunner defending troops in what once been the Stanley senior school fell asleep over his gun and ventilated a nearby cottage in which two single women lived. Remarkably, neither was injured.”⁵⁵

Uncertainty and fear were not only felt by individuals, it could also be a collective experience. According to BBC war reporter Robert Fox, the community of Goose Green (Darwin) “received a bigger shock than almost any other in the two months of Argentinean occupation. The people suffered air raids and bombardment, and a day of battle, and they had endured twenty-nine days of captivity during which the threat of what might happen was worse than any physical deprivation or violence ...By the time I left many had yet to come to terms with the violence and fear stirred up by the campaign.”⁵⁶

Islanders’ attitude toward the British soldiers after liberation

Argentine occupation of the Malvinas ended June 14, 1982. After 74 days, the islands became Falklands again. Although it was a joyous moment for the islanders, it seemed quite the opposite to the liberators. Anthony Barnett, was surprised by the islanders’ attitude after Argentine surrender was announced: “what should have been a moment of jubilation was met merely with enigmatic reserve by the kelpers [sic] themselves.”⁵⁷ He cites British journalists’ reports:

“at times it was hard to believe that they (the Falklanders) had any connection with the war. They behaved, it sometimes appeared, like peasants caught in an eighteenth century European dynastic clash...”⁵⁸

“The islander never seemed particularly glad to see us...”⁵⁹

The war had changed the life of the inhabitant, and for the time being they were not happy with the presence of British troops:

⁵⁵ Bound, p. 109.

⁵⁶ Fox 1982, p. 215.

⁵⁷ Barnett, 131.

⁵⁸ Patrick Bishop, *The Observer*, 20 June 1982.

⁵⁹ Garreth Parry, *The Guardian*, 3 July 1982.

“they are still an occupied people, albeit this time occupied by their own forces! Not unnaturally, bitter words (are) being exchanged between locals and soldier.”⁶⁰

According to Barnett, hatred of Argentina after the invasion was compounded by bitterness toward the British⁶¹:

“their attitude towards the British is a mixture of continued deep mistrust, disappointment and a sullen acceptance of the military realities of the new occupying army amongst them...”⁶²

A war correspondent witnessed one time when an islander expressed his inner feelings toward their new situation: “In the Upland Goose, now a hotbed of hard drinking...some officers had been journalistic guests, and it was clear that this was not a popular move. Des King, the landlord, has been drinking for some hours. His face red with rage against the chiefs of the 2 Para: ‘First the fucking Argies, now you lot. When are you going to clear off and leave us in peace?’ The Journalist explained what happened after those comments, “the moment passed, but word got around. Some paras wanted to level the hotel. Some Marines wanted to help them...”⁶³

One day after the liberation, the war correspondent that walked all the way from the beaches of San Carlos to Port Stanley with the British soldiers badly needed a cup of tea and he asked innocently, “could I put some water in here so I could make a cup of tea?” The reply was: “Use the tap in the garden, I’ve got washing up in the kitchen sink”. According to the journalist, “he shuffled off, hoping against hope that one day a member of the household...would knock on his door in England asking a favor.”⁶⁴

Negative views on the islanders: Argentine and British perspectives

Related to the previous section, Argentines felt frustrated toward the islanders’ attitude and way of life. What is interesting was that they were not alone. A number of British visitors also share similar feelings.

⁶⁰ John Withdraw, *The Times*, 29 June 1982.

⁶¹ Barnett, p. 131.

⁶² *The Sunday Times*, 1 August 1982.

⁶³ McGowan and Hands, pp. 273-274.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 189.

“The kelpers are named after seaweeds that surround the coasts of Port Argentino [Stanley]. And this population is truly as cold and inexpressive as these plants.”⁶⁵

“The islanders are phlegmatic lot and a stranger can never be sure if they could not care less, or just don’t show their feelings”.⁶⁶

“The kelpers were second class citizens. So what? They were totally happy to be so. They are basically shepherds, and they are very primitive people and they live primitively. Their appearance and character are both hybrid. They can be defined as ‘fishes’. They lived on a very monotonous diet...they exclusively consume lamb. Perhaps a professional could discover a link between the diet and their ‘hybrid’ character”.⁶⁷

War reporters Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins inform their readers that a Marine major, Ewen Southby-Tailyour (who served in the Falklands war) had no complimentary words for the islanders:

“He explained the problems of the islands development firmly in terms of the poor quality of the workforce. They [the islanders] were, for most part, ‘a drunken, decadent, immoral and indolent collection of drop-outs’. According to the Marine officer, “these characteristics are evident at all levels of society with only a frighteningly few exceptions.”⁶⁸

Second Lieutenant Juan José Gómez Centurión:

“One thing I learnt from the contact with the islanders is that they are people with no communitarian interest, they didn’t care for social interaction, they links were merely economic. ‘Kelper’ is the name of seaweed in the Malvinas, and I truly believed that the kelpers have the mind set of a seaweed... They didn’t show any interest in understanding absolutely anything. They couldn’t care less. Later, they showed the same attitude toward the British. After the two first days of celebration, they wanted to expel them the same way as us”.⁶⁹

Argentine journalist Nicolás Kasanzew also transfers his anger and frustration against female islanders:

“A curious aspect of this war was the fact that our soldiers did not watch the female kelpers as truly women in spite of have being without any female contact for many days. Perhaps, the reason for this attitude was that they saw them simply as seaweeds, as hybrid beings. This meant one less

⁶⁵ Kasanzew, p. 80.

⁶⁶ McGowan and Hand, p. 218.

⁶⁷ Kasanzew, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁸ Hastings and Jenkins, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Speranza and Cittadini, p. 60.

problem: there was not a single sexual incident. That was something remarkable and perhaps unique in the history of occupations in general.”⁷⁰

McGowan and Hands think that “Falklanders seemed to be treating the whole war that was fought for their liberation as an intrusion on their way of life. Everything was taken in such a matter-of-fact way that nothing, it seemed, could shock, shame or in any way disturb the locals.”⁷¹

Finally, an Argentine journalist tells an interesting story of what happened when the British soldiers were sent back to England immediately after the Argentine occupation. It is believed to be totally true:

“There was a Royal Marine Corps officer that before stepping into the airplane answered to an Argentine journalist’s request about how had been the relationship between the military and the islanders. His answer was: “Do you know who the Indians are? Well, these kelpers are like indians who speak Spanish.”⁷²

Vision of the occupation by British observers

“The Junta instructed its forces to ‘respect’ the inhabitants. None of them or the small British garrison were killed in the invasion... After the British reconquest, it was reported that Port Stanley was ‘in much better shape than one might have expected’ Many unattended homes had not been vandalized...”⁷³

The war correspondents Hastings and Jenkins informed that

“when the British reconquered Stanley, they found that the civilians still possessed ample stores of food and alcohol. There had been no systematic pillaging in the capital, and only isolated occurrences in outlying village. This is all the more remarkable when the plight of some of the Argentine soldiers is considered- cold, far from home, in conditions entirely unfamiliar, often hungry...”⁷⁴

“In the last hours before their surrender, humiliated and dejected Argentine soldiers looted, wrecked and fouled some civilian homes in Port Stanley. Yet some British soldiers behaved almost equally badly on the first day of victory. Sadly, it is part of the nature of war. Many of the tales of a fascist Argentine army behaving monstrously throughout their occupation of the

⁷⁰ Kasanzew, pp. 81-82.

⁷¹ McGowan and Hands, p. 190.

⁷² Berger, p. 105.

⁷³ Barnett, p. 26. Another version asserts that the officer said “we also have blonde Indians [meaning natives].”

⁷⁴ Hastings and Jenkins, p. 313.

Falklands were ill founded... Yet, by the standards of most occupying armies the Argentine's behaviour was very moderate."⁷⁵

They acknowledged that the "Argentine occupiers of the Falklands appear to have embarked on a policy of conciliation, however heavy-handedly it was executed."⁷⁶

In 1984, nearly two years after the war, Jimmy Burns Marañón, *Financial Times* correspondent in Buenos Aires, visited the Islands. He flew all the way from Buenos Aires to London and from there to Malvinas with scales. After flying 80 hours and travelled 22.000 kilometers he arrived to Port Stanley. He stayed for ten days interviewing ordinary people and government officials. All the interviewed agreed that the invasion produced a huge disruption in their lives. Besides, he concludes that there was no generalized destruction or looting and the only three islanders killed during the conflict were accidentally bombed by the British. Regarding human relations between occupants and occupied, he reports that "humanity clearly shone in some of the personal relationships among kelpers and conscript soldiers. At the official level, Argentines seemed to divide themselves between hawks and doves in their attitudes towards the islanders"⁷⁷.

Another visitor to the islands, who arrived few months after the conflict, found that "all things considered, Falklanders bear remarkably little animosity toward the Argentines-perhaps because the war turned out well, perhaps because 'the Argies'...proved such hapless warriors, as well as being, almost until the very end, highly unthreatening occupiers"⁷⁸.

BBC war correspondents, McGowan and Hand, tells the story that after the end of the campaign, "through the night, a handful of homes were looted. Some residents said the Argentinians had done it. Others were convinced it was the British.

The testimony of Mrs. Lillian Stacey (86-year old) inside a little house with fences broken explained his experience: "some men were in here in the night...I've been broken into three times now in three months. I didn't have anything that was worth much, not to them..." According to McGowan and Hand, if the British were involved, it has never been established. (McGowan p. 272) However, both journalists asserted that

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp. 312-313.

⁷⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, p. 313.

⁷⁷ Burns Marañón, 1984.

⁷⁸ Dean, 1984, p. 53.

“beyond a shadow of any doubt, the Argentinians were responsible for wholesale looting and vandalism while they occupied Stanley”. And they explain that “in the Junior School, troops who had been there...had defecated throughout the classrooms and cloakrooms...”⁷⁹

Twenty five years after the invasion, some islanders think that civilians were well treated by the Argentines troops. Regarding the cases of burglary, these were incursions by soldiers searching for food on abandoned houses or henhouses.⁸⁰

Reflections

During an interview, General Menéndez as former military governor of the islands expressed the following considerations:

Journalist: but you appeared to be in a certain way to be commanding an occupation force in your own territory.

Menéndez : “I never wanted to be so. I could have concentrated the population in one place and tell the British: ‘Watch out, they are there, don’t fire!’. If I had done that I would had had one problem solved and I could have forgotten about controlling them if they were using radio, or making signals or if they had concealed weapons...”⁸¹

Some time later, Haroldo Foulkes, the journalist expert on the Malvinas, wrote that after of what he called a “frustrated war” there was a case of lack of foresight from the Argentine leaders not to consider the sentiments of the islanders when confronting the Argentine military occupation. Consequently, for him it was natural that they showed a mood opposing the presence of the troops and that they did try to help the British forces by sending useful information.⁸²

Menéndez was also asked if he thought that there could have been some sort of collaboration or acceptance of the Argentines, provided he had stayed in the islands a longer time. Menéndez answered:

“I am sure. But it will not happen while we are unable to educate a whole generation of islanders in the knowledge, and consequently, in the appreciation of the Argentine history, geography, and all other Argentine aspects of life. We cannot expect that they will change their views if they

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ Eduardo Belgrano Rawson interviewed with John Fowler, *Clarín*, suplemento La Guerra y la paz. Malvinas hoy, p. 6, 1-04-2007.

⁸¹ Turolo, p. 80.

⁸² Foulkes, *Los Kelpers...* p. 26.

have had a long English education and, moreover, if they have been convinced that the islands are British.”⁸³

The outspoken journalist Nicolás Kasanzew also produced some interesting point of view from the perspective of the occupier:

“At all times, the kelpers exaggerated the discomfort we produced to them and they invented imaginary prosecutions or inexistent grievances... The kelpers like the British only show respect when they are confronted forcefully. Because the Argentines never applied force against the population and treated them with velvet gloves they showed more and more disrespect.”⁸⁴

A few years later an islander presents the opposite view:

“It has been suggested that a lot of nonsense has been talked about life under Occupation. An easy statement –seventy-four days dismissed without further thought. Admittedly things could had been worse, but it was not an easy or pleasant time for 500 or so folk left in Stanley, nor a time which any of us would ever wish to repeat”.⁸⁵

Finally, Kasanzew, concluded that “the kelpers were our arch-enemies. From the very first moment they were going to be fifth columnist. I wasn’t mistaken. I also understood from the start that they were never to be gained to the Argentine cause.”⁸⁶

Conclusions

The 74 days Argentine occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands is a clear example that this type of operation needs troops to be prepared to cope with a situation which is not related to combat. They need to have some minimal understanding of the situation and, if possible of the language.

It is also another example how difficult is for occupiers to conduct a successful occupation if they act without any invitation.

This case also shows that military occupation is a very complex endeavor.

Finally, in the long story of military occupations experiences, most of them failed, then it is not surprising that Argentine also failed. Consequently, it was not a “model occupation”. However, it is interesting to note that against of what could have been expected from an Argentine occupation in that time period, the experience resulted

⁸³ Turolo, p. 78.

⁸⁴ Kasanzew, p. 79.

⁸⁵ Smith, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 77.

in a mild occupation. The islander suffered an important disruption in their normal lives but, considering the high levels of force applied by both contestants, there were levels of violence against islander population were low and the amount of property resulted small.

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