

BOOK REVIEW:

The Falklands War: there and back again: the story of Naval Party 8901

by Mike Norman and Michael Jones

*Pen & Sword Military: Barnsley, South Yorkshire; 2019; 230 pp; ISBN 9781526710772;
RRP \$52.99; Ursula Davidson Library call number 750 NORM 2019*



Naval Party (NP) 8901, some 50 Royal Marines, was garrisoning Stanley, the Falkland Islands capital, when Argentina invaded on 2 April 1982. This book tells the story of the defence of Stanley by NP 8901 and the role its members subsequently played in Britain's recapture of the Falklands in May-June 1982.

The book is written in the first person, being the memoir of the primary author, Major Mike Norman, who commanded NP 8901 during the invasion and later commanded J (Juliet) Company, 42 Commando, during the recapture of the Falklands. He had been serving in the Royal Marines for 20 years prior to the invasion and would continue serving for another 10 years before retiring in 1992. His co-author, Michael Jones, is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, a member of the British Commission for Military History, and the author of 12 books on military history. The combination of participant and historian ensures a well-written, factual account.

Many authoritative books have been published on the Falklands War, including a two-volume official history and several memoirs. Why another now 37 years after the event? Well, the focus here is primarily on the lead up to the invasion and the invasion itself – only a third of the book is devoted to the Islands' recapture, whereas that has been the focus of most previous books. Secondly, no unit history of NP 8901 has been published before and this book goes some way towards filling this gap. Thirdly, official archives relevant to the matters described have recently been released and this book draws on them, enhancing the accuracy of the account.

The history of British, French, Spanish and Argentine interest in the Falkland Islands (*Las Malvinas* in Spanish) from 1690 on, including occupation by the British from 1765, is recounted concisely. In the decade leading up to the 1982 invasion, British foreign policy failed to deter Argentine aggression. Despite Argentina's desire to take over *Las Malvinas*, and despite Argentine provocations to test Britain's will, Britain displayed neither the capability nor intent to defend the Islands.

When the Argentine invasion came, Britain was caught unprepared. Before first light on 2 April 1982, Argentine special forces landed by small boat south of Stanley and outflanked the defences. They destroyed an unoccupied barracks and then advanced from the west on Government House which was stoutly defended largely by headquarters and logistics personnel. Meantime, Norman had deployed his Marine troop to deny an expected amphibious landing in the east, but had to rapidly redeploy these troops to the town and Government House in response to the Argentine special forces action. Once

the Argentine amphibious landing had occurred and a battalion plus in armoured tracked amphibians had advanced into Stanley, the Governor, as commander-in-chief, ordered a cease fire to protect the town. The battle for Stanley had lasted 3.5 hours. The Argentines had lost five killed and 15 wounded, plus several prisoners. Due to excellent battlecraft, there were no Marine casualties. Following the Argentine takeover, Argentina sent the Governor and Naval Party 8901 back to England.

Britain decided to mount its own invasion and recapture the Falklands. Most of NP 8901 volunteered to take part in this campaign and Mike Norman was appointed commander of J Company, 42 Commando (an infantry battalion), with his NP 8901 troop (rifle platoon) forming 10 Troop of J Company. During the campaign, they landed at Port San Carlos on 21 May, supported 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, at Goose Green, re-joined 42 Commando at Mt Kent and participated in the attack on Mt Harriet on 11-12 June, before leading the British advance into Stanley on 14 June after the Argentine collapse.

The book includes a foreword by Major General Julian Thompson who as a brigadier had commanded 3 Commando Brigade during the recapture of the Falklands; a nominal role of the naval party; a timeline; a glossary; a bibliography of both primary and secondary sources; and an index. There are five reasonable maps, but three additional tactical maps detailing respectively the situations at Port San Carlos, Darwin-Goose Green, and Mt Kent, Mt Harriet, Mt Longdon-Tumbledown would have aided comprehension. Scholars also will be disappointed that there are no endnotes.

At the time of the Argentine invasion, press propaganda in Argentina, repeated by British tabloids, misrepresented the brave resistance offered by NP 8901, especially its defence of Government House. In doing so, it traduced the reputation of the Royal Marines involved. This book seeks to correct the record and does so splendidly. Major Norman also is disappointed that none of his men received a bravery award, despite their gallantry defending Stanley. He presents a fair case for that to be reconsidered.

I commend the book to those interested in gaining a more complete understanding of the Falklands campaign and to those who wish to gain a better understanding of leadership and courage in war at the tactical level. For others seeking a 'boys' own adventure', this book will not disappoint.

David Leece