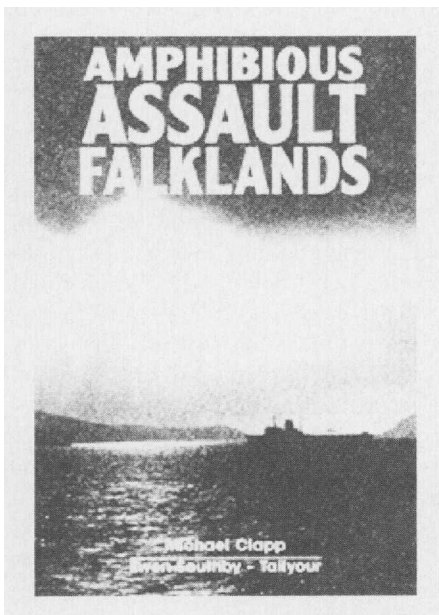


Amphibious Operations in the Falklands War

reviewed by LtCol Leonard A. Blasiol

AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT FALKLANDS: The Battle of San Carlos Water. By Michael Clapp and Ewen Southby-Tailyour. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 1996, 300 pp., \$27.95. (Member \$ 25.15)



While the lessons of the Falklands War have been chronicled in many excellent firsthand accounts covering the air, land, and sea perspectives, *Amphibious Assault Falklands* is a detailed examination of the planning and execution of the amphibious operations that formed the centerpiece of the successful U.K. campaign. The authors are highly qualified to comment on the war. Commodore Michael Clapp, RN, served as Commander, Amphibious Task Group, in the South Atlantic Task Force; his coauthor, Ewen Southby-Tailyour, served as a Royal Marine major during the war and later wrote his own account of events, entitled *Reasons in Writing*. While Southby-Tailyour is credited with most of the actual writing of *Amphibious Assault Falklands*, the story is told in the first person from Clapp's perspective.

Amphibious Assault Falklands is of special interest to Marines because it focuses on modern amphibious operations. Operation SUTTON (code name for the actual Falklands landings) was one of the few large-scale combat amphibious assaults since World War II. The commanders and staffs who planned the operation faced many challenges that should resonate with Marines who are thinking about operational maneuver from the sea (OMFTS) and its implications for the future of the Corps. First, the South Atlantic Task Force faced an adversary equipped with a potent array of access denial systems, similar to those U.S. naval forces can expect to confront in fu-

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ture littoral operations: high-performance fighter and attack aircraft, long-range surveillance platforms, antiship cruise missiles, mines, submarines, and naval surface forces. Additionally, U.K. military leaders wrestled with the same complex command relationships issues that the Marine Corps and the Navy face today as we seek to transition OMFTS from concept to ca-

pability. There are many other examples, including use of the sea as maneuver space at the operational and tactical levels of war. The authors describe how all of these factors affected the planning and execution of the operation. Perhaps most important for us, the narrative underscores the gaps in U.K. capabilities for amphibious operations, allowing the reader to infer how long-term programming and resourcing decisions in an austere fiscal environment can go astray when not guided by a clear institutional vision.

Strategic miscalculation in defense planning forms a major underlying theme of the book. Through many years of austerity in U.K. defense spending, the limited funds available were focused on NATO-related missions, frequently at the expense of maintaining other capabilities needed by a nation with global interests. The narrow mission focus that had driven defense preparations for so long had far-reaching effects that surfaced throughout the campaign and the authors relate many examples. For instance, civilian and military decisionmakers initially found their strategic options severely limited by a dearth of power projection assets, especially amphibious shipping. In another instance, the authors describe the difficulties in conducting long-range bombing missions against Stanley Airfield early in the war:

To reach the target with one Vulcan [bomber] needed about eighteen Victor tanker sorties but the in-flight refuelling equipment on the Vulcan had not been used for ten years and the aircrew were barely practiced—the aircraft having sufficient range on its own for NATO purposes.

Similar difficulties plagued the task force throughout the operation, frequently requiring work-arounds, compromise solutions, or acceptance of increased risk.

Amphibious Assault Falklands is by far one of the most objective firsthand accounts of the Falklands War. Clapp and Southby-Tailyour deal candidly with the failures and mistakes of the campaign, providing a fresh perspective that highlights the

effects of leaders' personalities and the bewildering command relationships that generated a great deal of self-inflicted friction for the South Atlantic Task Force. For readers of Adm Sandy Woodward's *One Hundred Days* (an excellent—if one-sided—book, which is on the Commandant's Reading List), *Amphibious Assault Falklands* provides an essential counterbalance. Indeed, the tension between these two particular stories highlights the trained historian's dictum that one can rarely, if ever, discern the truth about an event from a single firsthand account.

On the negative side, the book's map coverage is a bit disappointing. Indeed, the only map provided is a sparsely annotated, small-scale representation of the Falkland Islands that appears in the end papers. The reader will

benefit by having some additional maps at hand, such as an operational scale depiction of the area between the Argentine mainland and South Georgia and a strategic scale map of the Atlantic on which one can examine the "big picture," including the spatial relationships between the British Isles, the intermediate staging base at Ascension Island, and the South Atlantic theater of operations.

Amphibious Assault Falklands has much to offer Marines as a description of warfare under circumstances very similar to those which U.S. forces might face in early 21st century conflicts: a "downsized" military confronting an unanticipated mission in a region where there is no host nation support. The authors explore the challenges these circumstances posed for U.K. military

forces, focusing primarily on amphibious power projection, and distilling many lessons that are relevant for us as we develop the capabilities that will enable OMFTS. U.K. forces encountered many difficulties, to be sure, but they nonetheless prevailed in a theater of operations that was 8,000 miles from home, but right in their adversary's back yard. This book describes how this somewhat unlikely victory was crafted through the courage, endurance, and talent of a thoroughly professional military force led by commanders who weighed and accepted grave risks. This is the critical learning objective of the book and a lesson that should not be lost on our own Naval Service.

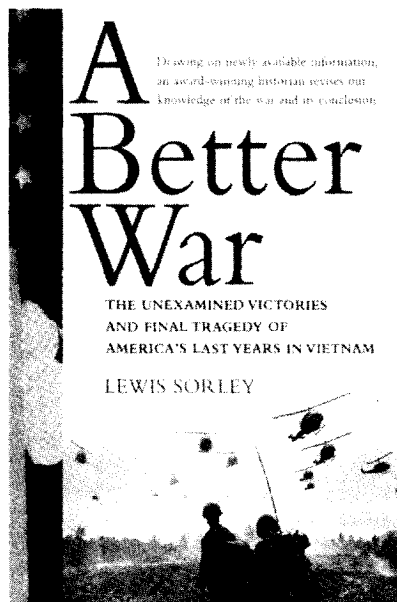
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Misinformed About the Vietnam War

reviewed by Robert Previdi

A BETTER WAR: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam. By Lewis Sorley. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1999, 507 pp., \$28.00. (Member \$25.20)



It doesn't matter whether you served in Vietnam or how many books you've read on the subject, this book is essential reading. And for members of the Marine Corps, it is an excellent military case study. There is much new information and perspective in this well-thought-out, clearly written book.

Lewis Sorley, a West Point graduate who spent 20 years in the U.S. Army, has written a superb book that focuses primarily on the second half of the war, starting in 1968 when GEN Creighton W. Abrams replaced GEN William C. Westmoreland. After reading this book, it is hard to understand how GEN Westmoreland was allowed to remain in command for so long (20

June 1964 to mid-1968). The fact that Johnson and McNamara allowed this to happen may be one of the greater mistakes of the war.

We can only wonder what might have happened if GEN Abrams or a Marine general, such as Victor H. Krulak, was in command from 1964. The Westmoreland "search and destroy" strategy was the wrong one to follow. The reality is that the enemy had more troops available than the United States, and their troops could fight indefinitely with no political consequences. Here is what Gen Krulak wrote in a memorandum to McNamara:

We must not engage in an attritional contest with the hardcore just for the sake of attrition; nor should we react to Viet Cong initiatives or seek them out just to do battle. The attritional ratio under these circumstances is not going to favor us, and this form of competition has little to do with who ultimately wins anyhow.

In his book on Vietnam, McNamara claims that his decisionmaking was hampered by a lack of accurate information and analysis. The Krulak memorandum, a sensible and informed strategic document, proves him wrong.