During armed conflict, military personnel can be faced with situations where they have to make an ethical decision which at times may be contrary to the Laws of Armed Conflict. This is more poignant now with the current investigations into incidents involving Australian, United States and British armed forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and the British Army’s involvement in Northern Ireland. This paper will look at two incidents that took place during the Falklands War in 1982 and whether or not the actions taken by the individuals concerned were ethical.

Ethics

Ethics is a system of moral principles, by which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad or right or wrong. An ethical decision is one where a person makes a difficult choice when faced with an ethical dilemma, a situation in which there is no clear right or wrong answer.

The Falklands War

The Falklands War was a 10-week war between Argentina and Britain over two British-Dependent Territories in the South Atlantic: the Falkland Islands, and its territorial dependency, the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. It began on Friday, 2 April 1982, when Argentina invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands in an attempt to establish the sovereignty it had claimed over them.

On 5 April, the British government dispatched a naval task force to engage the Argentine Navy and Air Force before making an amphibious assault on the islands. The conflict lasted 74 days and ended with the Argentine surrender on 14 June 1982, returning the islands to British control.

Although the British casualties were significantly lower than the planners had anticipated for such a short conflict, they were still high: 255 personnel were killed, 775 were wounded and 115 taken prisoner. Additional Argentine losses included 9 ships, 25 helicopters and 100 aircraft.

Incident A: Battle for Goose Green

The first incident, in which an unarmed Argentine prisoner-of-war (POW) was shot dead, took place in the hours following the Battle of Goose Green. Goose Green is located on a neck of land about 20km south of where the initial British amphibious landings took place at San Carlos Water.

The Battle for Goose Green took place on the night of 27/28 May 1982 between 450 members of the 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (2 Para), which formed part of 3 Commando Brigade (3 Cdo Bde) and an Argentine force of over 1200 combat troops. The attack on Goose Green was mainly a political decision rather than a tactical one for, although Goose Green and the neighbouring settlement of Darwin were well defended by Argentine forces, they had been deemed of no strategic value for the British in the campaign to recapture the Falklands and initial plans for the land campaign had been for them to be bypassed.

The landings at San Carlos had slowed down due to the need to get sufficient troops and equipment ashore from the fleet of ships anchored in Falkland Sound. Since the initial landings, no offensive ground operations had been conducted, but the British endured significant losses and damage to ships in the area of the landing from Argentine air attacks.

Back in Britain, the British Joint Headquarters was coming under increasing pressure from the British Government for an early ground offensive. As a result of this pressure, the ground force commander, Brigadier Julian Thompson, was ordered to mount an attack on the Argentine forces at Goose Green and the nearby settlement of Darwin.

On 26 May, 2 Para moved south to attack Goose Green, arriving at Camilla Creek House in the early hours of 27 May. The following evening, C Company (C Coy) advanced to clear the way to the start line with B Coy taking the western side of the isthmus and A Coy covering

---

1Email: andrew.brayshaw1@defence.gov.au

**To shoot or not to shoot: an ethical decision**

Major Andrew Brayshaw

Staff Officer Grade 2 Capstone Doctrine

Army Knowledge Centre, Australian Army

This paper looks at two incidents that took place during the 1982 Falklands War and whether or not the actions they took were ethical. Both incidents involved a combat medical technician shooting an unarmed soldier who was ablaze. In Incident A, at Goose Green, a British soldier shot an Argentine prisoner. In Incident B, in the Logistic Ship Landing Sir Galahad at Bluff Cove, a different British soldier shot another British soldier. The author does not judge the ethics of either action.

**Key words:** ethics; combat medical technician; 1982 Falklands War.
the eastern side. D Coy followed behind to mop up any enemy stragglers.

At 0335h, the naval bombardment of the Argentine positions commenced as 2 Para, with bayonets fixed, crossed the start line. The terrain was open, rolling and treeless with grassy outcrops covered in gorse making camouflage and concealment extremely difficult. A Coy cleared Burnside House killing two Argentine soldiers and freeing some civilians who had been held captive. D Coy advanced through the centre coming across an enemy position comprising of six well dug-in trenches. The position was successfully assaulted, but the Paras lost three killed.

A Coy then assaulted Coronation Point, which was undefended, and then headed towards Darwin Hill as B Coy moved towards Bocca House. At Darwin Hill, A Coy met fierce resistance and was caught in the open as the advance slowed. As the assault began to falter, Lieutenant Colonel ‘H’ Jones, the commanding officer of 2 Para, sent a number of his men forward to the lip of the hill to try to gain the advantage. As they advanced over the hill, they came under heavy enemy fire resulting in the adjutant, Captain Dave Wood, A Coy second-in-command, Captain Chris Dent, and Corporal Hardman being killed.

Colonel Jones identified an enemy position and attempted to outflank it. As he charged up the hill, he was shot in the neck and died of his wounds sometime later. As a result of this action, Colonel Jones was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. A Coy broke through the Argentine defences as B Coy cleared Bocca House with one Para killed and 50 Argentine prisoners taken.

The next objective was the final assault on the School House and airfield at Goose Green. During the attack on the School House, a white flag was raised over the Argentine position. Assuming the Argentines wanted to surrender, Lieutenant Jim Barry moved forward with two non-commissioned officers to take the surrender. As they did, the Argentineans opened fire killing all three. Fourteen Paras attacked the School House shortly afterwards using M79s, white phosphorus grenades and light-machine-guns, the intense fire power breaking the enemy’s defence. The explosions from the attack on the School House set it on fire turning it into a cauldron of death and an unknown number of Argentine soldiers perished in the blaze.

The battle continued for a few more hours until the Argentines finally surrendered. At the end of the battle, some 50 Argentine soldiers were dead and 1200 taken prisoner. 2 Para lost 18 killed; the majority were officers and senior non-commissioned officers, including half of the command team, and 64 were wounded.

**Corporal H Incident**

Following the battle, prisoners were used to clear the battlefield, during which the incident involving Corporal H took place. Corporal H was a combat medical technician (CMT) from the Para Clearing Troop of 16 Field Ambulance (16 Fd Amb) attached to 2 Para.

Next to the POW camp was a pile of Argentine ammunition. The proximity of the ammunition to the prisoners posed a threat to both the prisoners and those guarding them as it was suspected that the pile had been booby-trapped. While relocating the ammunition, one of the shells ignited. Four Argentine prisoners were caught in the explosion. One was killed outright, two were seriously injured, the fourth was engulfed in flames. It was obvious that he was still alive as his screams for help could be clearly heard by the soldiers in the vicinity. It was impossible to reach the burning soldier and the only humane thing that could be done for him in the eyes of the Paras was for him to be shot. Corporal H, without hesitation, raised his sub-machine-gun and fired a burst into the Argentine soldier who immediately fell to the ground silent.

The Incident was reported to higher command, although it was unclear who reported it. It was intended to charge Corporal H for what was seen as a war crime. However, no charges were ever laid as a statement was made by a senior Argentine officer who witnessed the incident. In the statement, the officer stated that all that was humanely possible had been done to try to save the unfortunate soldier and, when it became clear that nothing could be done to save him the only action left other than letting the soldier succumb to an agonising death was to shoot him.

**Incident B: Disaster at Bluff Cove**

The second incident took place in the Logistic Ship Landing (LSL) Sir Galahad at Bluff Cove. In this incident, a British soldier was shot dead by a fellow soldier.

On 8 June 1982, the LSL Sir Galahad lay abrade and sinking in Fitzroy Inlet, close to Bluff Cove, 56 of her crew and embarked force were dead and 175 were terribly injured and burned. Sir Galahad and her sister ship, Sir Tristram, had been hit by air attack. Sir Tristram had been strafed by Argentine aircraft, resulting in the death of two of her crew-members. A 500-lb bomb penetrated the deck but failed to explode immediately, allowing the remaining crew to be evacuated. Following the later explosion, she was abandoned and grounded in shallow waters. The Sir Galahad did not sink as a result of the attack. She was towed out to sea by HMS Onyx and sunk as a war grave on 21 June 1982.

The incident was named the “Bluff Cove Disaster” by the media and was the heaviest single loss of life suffered

---

by Britain during the Falklands War. In the post-Falklands euphoria, there was little enthusiasm for raking over an incident that had the potential to ignite bitter inter-service acrimony. The lessons from the incident were not widely promulgated and soon forgotten. It was generally written off as a calculated risk that did not pay-off; a misfortune of war.

This tragedy, though, was not simply an accident of war. This loss of life was the predictable consequence of a series of decisions, each based on single-service mindsets and contrary to the principles of amphibious warfare. The incident could have been a lot worse.

Following the securing of the beachhead at San Carlos by 3 Cdo Bde, by 5 June their war maintenance stores were ashore and their leading units were over half way to their objective – the Argentine Force Headquarters at Port Stanley. London, not confident that the three Royal Marine and two Parachute Regiment Battalions were sufficient to defeat the larger Argentine force, had ordered 5 Infantry Brigade (5 Inf Bde) to the Falklands. This was a non-amphibious formation based on a Guards Brigade of Welsh and Scots Guards bolstered by the 1/7 Gurkha Rifles.

5 Inf Bde was to be allocated the southern flank of the Island while 3 Cdo Bde took the north. Initially 3 Cdo Bde had five battalions while 5 Inf Bde had only three. 2 Para was passed from 3 Cdo Bde to 5 Inf Bde giving both Brigades four battalions. To command the two brigades, a skeleton divisional headquarters was formed, commanded by a Royal Marine, Major General Jeremy Moore, and staffed by a mix of Army and Royal Marines.

2 Para received information that Fitzroy Settlement and Bluff Cove had been temporarily abandoned by the Argentines, so they commandeered an RAF Chinook to seize the settlements. It was a vital advanced foothold, but had potential to be a bridge too far.

The Paras were now isolated and much closer to enemy forces than to friendly forces. No amount of fighting spirit could compensate for their lack of artillery and shortage of ammunition and food. They had only what they stood up in. If the remainder of 5 Inf Bde could be brought up to join them, it would consolidate and balance the lop-sided British advance.

Major General Moore ordered 5 Inf Bde to get itself forward to support the isolated Paras. Commodore Amphibious Warfare [now known as the Commander UK Task Group (COMUKTG)] assumed this would be a coastal hook and drew up contingency plans accordingly. 5 Inf Bde, however, decided to push the Welsh Guards forward overland. The distance was approximately 20 miles; the going proved very difficult; and after 12 hours they were called back. By the following morning, the Welsh Guards had straggled back to their start point, minus much of their equipment.

The British force was about to conduct a subsidiary amphibious operation, but neither of the in-theatre 2-star headquarters issued an initiating directive. This was the first and most important step causing this disaster. The initiating directive is the foundation of an amphibious operation and appoints the two key commanders – commander amphibious task force and commander landing force. As a result of no initiating directive, there was huge confusion. The amphibious ships, full of troops and equipment, would therefore have to move mostly at night.

The plan comprised moving the Scots Guards forward half way in HMS Intrepid, a landing platform dock. She would then disembark the troops on the last leg using her four landing craft utility (LCUs). After launching her landing craft, Intrepid would withdraw to the relative safety of San Carlos then repeat the operation with the Welsh Guards the following night using HMS Fearless.

The second step to disaster came about due to the events on the night of 5/6 June. Intrepid launched her four LCUs, containing 600 Scots Guards, somewhat short of the planned drop-off. As they headed east, HMS Cardiff was prowling the approaches to Port Pleasant looking for the nightly Argentine C-130 resupply flight. This was the only way the Argentines could resupply due to the Royal Navy closing the sea routes.

At the same time, 5 Inf Bde’s signals officer and a rebroadcast team were flying forward in a Gazelle helicopter looking for a site from which they could provide a radio rebroadcast communication post between Bluff Cove and San Carlos. Cardiff, the LCUs and the Gazelle were each unaware of the others’ presence as they were all under different commands.

\[Image of Falklands Map\]

Infantry deployment in East Falklands after landing in San Carlos\(^1\)

Cardiff detected an aircraft flying low along the coastline, the route that the C-130 was believed to be using. She destroyed it with a Sea Dart missile. It was the 5 Inf Bde rebroadcast team helicopter. The consequent inability to communicate with Bluff Cove further compounded the disaster.

A little later, Cardiff detected four surface contacts, about the size of patrol boats and prepared to engage. They were, in fact, Intrepid’s LCUs each carrying 150 men! Fortunately, she fired a star shell to illuminate them, rather than firing on radar data.

The 3rd step to disaster occurred the following night. Fearless repeated the operation with the Welsh Guards embarked, but there was one difference. She took only two landing craft, pre-loaded with Welsh Guards’ heavy equipment. Intrepid’s landing craft, left behind the previous night, would come out to meet her from Bluff Cove, where they had been sheltering since delivering the Scots Guards the previous night. The remainder of the Welsh Guards were to travel in Intrepid’s craft, but they never came. Consequently, only half the troops could be taken to Bluff Cove that night. The weather had worsened considerably during the night of 6 June and a shortage of LCUs meant it was only possible to send half the battalion of Welsh Guards, the balance returned to Goose Green in Fearless. A third night move was now necessary, increasing the chances of an Argentine attack. There was only one ship available for this, the LSL, Sir Galahad.

The task force headquarters deemed any further move by the assault ships as too risky and offered up two RFA, Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad. The Sir Tristram was committed to moving stores and ammunition and arrived at Fitzroy on 7 June. Sir Galahad embarked with the remaining Welsh Guards, 16 Fd Amb and smaller contingents of other units.

On 8 June, the third wave was to land at Bluff Cove. The landing is usually the most fraught phase of an amphibious operation and so it proved on this occasion. Galahad was ordered to go to Fitzroy, several hours’ march from Bluff Cove, as the anchorage at Bluff Cove was visible to enemy forward air controllers in the Stanley Hills and the beach was only accessible for short tidal windows.

The problem that 16 Fd Amb had with their disembarkation was that all the Fd Amb medical equipment had been loaded into the hold of the Galahad first followed by pallets of ammunition and the Welsh Guards mortar platoon. This meant that, once at Fitzroy, the equipment could not be off-loaded until the mortar platoon and ammunition had been off-loaded. The Galahad had arrived at Fitzroy at first light, but was still almost fully loaded when the air attacks came in at approximately 1300h.

Within minutes, 56 men were dead and many more injured. There was no panic among the personnel on board and the life boats and rafts were launched within seconds. Electrical power failed almost instantaneously after the ship was hit. It was impossible to fight any of the fires.

Lance Corporal B Incident

Lance Corporal B was a CMT in B Section 16 Fd Amb. After loading all the Fd Amb equipment into the hold of Sir Galahad, B Section was packed into the hold along with the Welsh Guard’s mortar platoon, who had two of the Fd Amb medics attached to them – Lance Corporal Ian ‘Scouse’ Farrell and Private Kenny Preston.

As half the hold was taken up by the Fd Amb equipment and crates of ammunition, with the Mortar Platoon taking up the remaining space, members of B Section tried to find a gap where they could throw their gear and catch some sleep before the disembarking at Fitzroy.

Lance Corporal B, Scouse and Kenny were good mates having served in 16 Fd Amb for the past three years. As it would be a few hours before reaching Fitzroy, those who wanted to grab a quick shower could have one. Lance Corporal B and the rest of B Section proceeded up the stairs to the cabins.

Several hours later, Lance Corporal B was on his way to the canteen when there was a loud whoosh followed by several more. The air suddenly turned black, filling with thick dark smoke and the sound of ammunition exploding. The force of one of these explosions threw Lance Corporal B up a flight of metal stairs landing in what felt like warm mush – this later turned out to be the remains of one of the crew.

Feeling through the dark, Lance Corporal B managed to find his way up to one of the decks and managed to get outside. The scene that greeted him was unimaginable. There were broken and burnt bodies everywhere, some were blackened from head to toe while others had limbs missing.

In a situation like this you would expect there to be panic, but the scene was amazingly calm. There were soldiers moving around the deck locating wounded and assessing if anything could be done for them. As the casualties were treated, they were off-loaded over the side of the Galahad into waiting landing craft and life boats and evacuated to the shore.

Lance Corporal B located a soldier beneath a pile of twisted burning metal that had a traumatic amputation of his left leg and part of the left side of his face was missing. Miraculously, he was still alive. With the aid of another soldier, Lance Corporal B worked to release the casualty. Due to the intense heat that had followed the initial explosions, there was very little bleeding. The casualty was loaded into a Neil Robertson stretcher and carefully lowered over the side.

Having a quick look around to see if there were any more casualties in the vicinity, Lance Corporal B began to climb over the rails. As he began to descend over the side he heard a familiar voice screaming his name and turned to see a burring figure standing in the doorway of the stairs leading down into the hold.

Lance Corporal B swung back over the rail and attempted to reach the soldier who he believed to be either Scouse or Kenny but could not be sure as the soldier was engulfed in flames. Due to the intense heat, Lance Corporal B was unable to reach the burning figure. Looking down on the deck, Lance Corporal B caught the glimpse of metal beneath some debris and reached out to find a sub-machine-gun with a magazine in place. Picking up the weapon, Lance Corporal B removed the magazine
to see if it contained any rounds. By the weight of the magazine, Lance Corporal B estimated that it to be half full. Replacing the magazine, Lance Corporal B switched the safety catch to automatic and raised the weapon in the direction of the burning figure. Lance Corporal B later reported that, as he did, it appeared that the burning figure began to nod his head. Mouthing ‘sorry mate’, Lance Corporal B depressed the trigger and emptied the magazine towards the figure. The soldier fell backwards and disappeared into the surrounding inferno. Lance Corporal B threw down the weapon and the next minute he was wading waist deep through water.

Conclusion

Although the circumstances surrounding these two incidents were different, both Corporal H and Lance Corporal B were faced with the dilemma of having to make an ethical decision. Were they right or were they wrong?

The Author: Major Andrew Brayshaw served for 24 years in the British Army where he saw service in the Falklands, Germany, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Persian Gulf, Yugoslavia, Gulf War in 1991 and Croatia. He joined the Australian Regular Army in 2001 where he has had a number of postings and is currently the Staff Officer Grade 2 Capstone Doctrine at the Army Knowledge Centre. In 2005, Andrew was awarded the C. F. Marks Award for outstanding service to the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. [Photo of Major Brayshaw: Colonel J. M. Hutcheson, M.C.]