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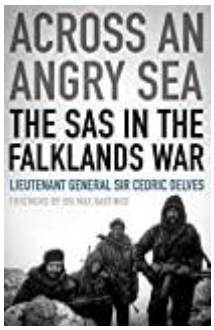
Cedric Delves. *Across an Angry Sea: The SAS in the Falklands War.* London: Hurst, 2018. xxxviii + 341 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78738-112-4.



Reviewed by John DiEugenio (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

If Admiral Sandy Woodward's *One Hundred Days* remains the definitive memoir on the operational landscape of the 1982 Falklands War, Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves's *Across an Angry Sea* must serve as its tactical companion. Where Woodward details his designs and decisions aboard the British Task Force's flagship, Delves lucidly describes how the war felt to those on the ground. Delves, then a major in command of D Squadron in the elite 22 Special Air Service (SAS) Group, is uniquely suited to write the memoir, as he participated in the conflict's major engagements. Questions of imperialism, decolonization, and Thatcherite politics are beyond the scope of Delves's book. Instead, Delves reminds readers that for the British military the war was about "the need to demonstrate resolve" (p. 13). As Delves reveals, however, the Falklands War was a "come-as you-are-party" (p. 180). For a force trained for warfare across Central Europe, projecting power over eight thousand miles in the South Atlantic "put our defence assumptions under severe pressure" (p. 13). Delves suggests that initiative, improvisation, and fighting spirit propelled the United Kingdom to victory.

Across two chronological parts, Delves delivers a gripping narrative that traces D Squadron's one hundred days at war. In part 1, he describes how the SAS sprang into action following the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. D Squadron "shaped its own destiny" to secure its position as the tip of the British spear to retake the collection of Falkland dependencies called the South Georgia Islands (p. 23). Delves's account pivots on the theme of improvisation. Pointedly, his squadron, "unrehearsed, without the benefit of any shared grounding in even the basics of what we were attempting," compelled the first Argentine surrender of the conflict (p. 88). With South Georgia secured, Delves describes in part 2 how D Squadron moved from the center of the British effort to the periphery. While the Task Force planned its main assault, the SAS sought targets with "value greater than the sum of its destroyed parts; most likely a target with psychological as well as material impact" (p. 115). Delves details

how D Squadron moved from diversionary attacks on Goose Green in the south, to raids in the west, to take-and-hold operations on the vital high ground of Mount Kent in the east, all without geospatial intelligence. The book's pace and scale crescendos into Argentine surrender. Like the conflict itself, Delves abruptly ends the narrative without fanfare or reflection: "We remembered. Then we left" (p. 320).

Methodologically, Delves "relies mostly upon [his own] fading memories" and those of his fellow squadron mates (p. xxiii). Where memory fails, Delves leans on military historians such as Lawrence Freedman, Roger Perkins, and Julian Lindsey-French. Delves, a reflective practitioner, did not write the book with scholars in mind. Rather, Delves aims to provide a firsthand account of the SAS's Falklands experience, to honor his fallen brethren, and, lastly, to reflect on the "shared, national values," that secured victory and, which he believes, raised the United Kingdom from "relative decline" (p. xiii).

On the first two accounts, Delves succeeds. His narrative brings the reader onto the decks of windswept destroyers and then across the damp, icy landscape of the Falkland Islands. Beyond the difficulties associated with power projection, Delves, in vivid prose, rips the concepts of fog and friction from their theoretical abstractions. He describes how D Squadron, fresh off counterterrorism training in Kenya, maneuvered across glaciers, how helicopters designed for Central Europe became caught in South Atlantic whiteouts, and how mortar tubes lodged themselves in the rain-soaked peat after firing single rounds. Delves's tactical history is illustrative of the operational challenges and frustrations the British faced, as conditions "put severe strain" on "men, machines and doctrine" (p. 227). Through improvisation and "***fingerspitzengefuhl***," Delves explains how D Squadron favored the initiative over "Staff College thoroughness," against a better positioned but more poorly trained enemy (p. 82).

Yet Delves's decision to limit analysis beyond D Squadron's one hundred days at war lessens the book's potential impact. He suggests connections between national spirit and military victory in the book's first pages but never returns to the theme. Where Delves offers criticism, he often self-deprecates: "it was a wonder I hadn't killed us all well before now" (p. 168). While he expresses angst over the tempo of the war, he avoids comments on controversies such as the British strike on the ARA ***Belgrano*** and the British assault on Goose Green. Moreover, Delves, who later became the director of special forces in 1993, misses an opportunity to demonstrate the significance of the Falklands War in the broader context of his thirty-seven-year career.

Whatever its shortcomings, ***Across an Angry Sea***, while not classically historical, challenges the Falklands War's historiography. Too often, scholars such as Sir Max Hastings, ironically in the book's foreword, depict the conflict as "a freak of history, an anachronism such as the world will never see again" (p. xv). Yet, in 2021, the prospects of projecting power thousands of miles from a homeland to prevent an unlawful invasion of a sovereign island seem all the more relevant. Delves's book, then is worthy of study for historians and practitioners alike.

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