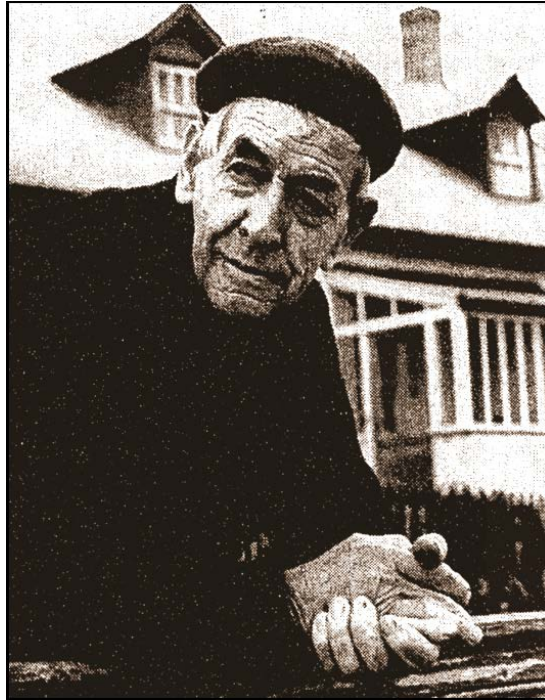


The Falkland Islands War

By Jim Alexander



From the *New York Times*, Feb 5, 1981:

The barman is throwing darts in the corner. An old man rubs his hands before the burning peat in the fireplace. A strapping Celt, red-haired and ruddy faced, finishes a can of Tennant's lager, revealing the cheesecake picture of a buxom Scottish lass smiling from its aluminum sides.

It is lunch hour at the Globe, a dreary but friendly pub of cluttered orange and green walls and faded linoleum floor. Reigning over the scene is an official portrait of the royal family, properly posed.

The setting could be England or Scotland but is neither. It is almost 8,000 miles down the Atlantic in these treeless and wind-swept islands, the last stop before Antarctica. The islands, with a total land mass of 4,700 square miles, are home to five million penguins, 700,000 sheep and 1,700 very British people.

The Falklands, one of Britain's last colonies, are only about 300 miles from the coast of Argentina, which is determined to make them and their inhabitants Argentine and is increasing the pressure. The islanders are fiercely opposed.

"We're all British and that's it," said William Halliday, who has lived his 81 years here. "We don't intend to be anything but British. We don't want the 'Argies' here."

The Falklands (the Malvinas to the Spanish speaking world) are an archipelago 300 miles east of Argentina's Patagonian coast, and 750 miles north of Antarctica.

The Falklands War was a series of battles over a 10-week period just over a year after Halliday's proclamation, in which Great Britain successfully defeated an Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands and their dependencies, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. The basis was a long-standing claim by Argentina that Britain had seized its sovereign territory around 1830; the immediate motivation was the prospect of oil discoveries in the region which Argentina badly needed to prop up its failing dictatorial economy.

Britain, with a mere shadow of its former military strength, had a difficult time removing the Argentinians who had staged a sneak occupying attack. Involving aircraft carriers, destroyers, planes, Exocet missiles and submarines as well as land forces, it was one of the largest air-naval combat operations between modern forces since the end of the Second World War. Ships and lives were lost: 650 Argentinians and 258 British. The United States, while supporting its ally Great Britain, played a quiet hand in light of the Monroe Doctrine, providing mostly logistical and arms support.

Today, the Falklands remain a British Overseas Territory, with sheep, fish and a modest tourism industry predominating. Exploitable oil reserves have remained elusive. With a population of around 3,500, they remain more traditionally British than Britain.

