



MALVINAS ARGENTINA

History of a Usurpation

CHAPTER 1 - THE COVETED ISLANDS

Illustrated Historical Comic

Introduction

Long before the British occupation of 1833, the Malvinas Islands were already regarded as a strategic point in the South Atlantic. Their location attracted the interest of navigators, merchants, hunters, and foreign powers. This chapter traces the events that weakened the Argentine settlement and paved the way for the usurpation.





At the beginning of the 19th century, the Panama Canal did not yet exist. To sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific, ships had to round the southern tip of the Americas. The canal would not open until 1914.



The voyage through the Strait of Magellan and around Cape Horn was long and dangerous. Storms could seriously damage ships during the journey.



Along that route, the Malvinas offered natural harbors, fresh water, and resources. They became a valuable port of call for ships crossing the South Atlantic.



The islands' strategic location attracted the interest of France, Spain, and Great Britain. Controlling them meant overseeing a maritime route of enormous importance.



During the 18th century, the French founded a settlement called Îles Malouines. The Spanish name Malvinas came from that French name.



France recognized Spain's rights and transferred its settlement. For decades, the Spanish Crown maintained authorities and an effective presence on the islands.



After independence, the United Provinces assumed the territories that had belonged to the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, including the Malvinas.



In 1820, Colonel David Jewett formally took possession of the islands on behalf of the United Provinces. The decision was announced to foreign vessels operating in the area.



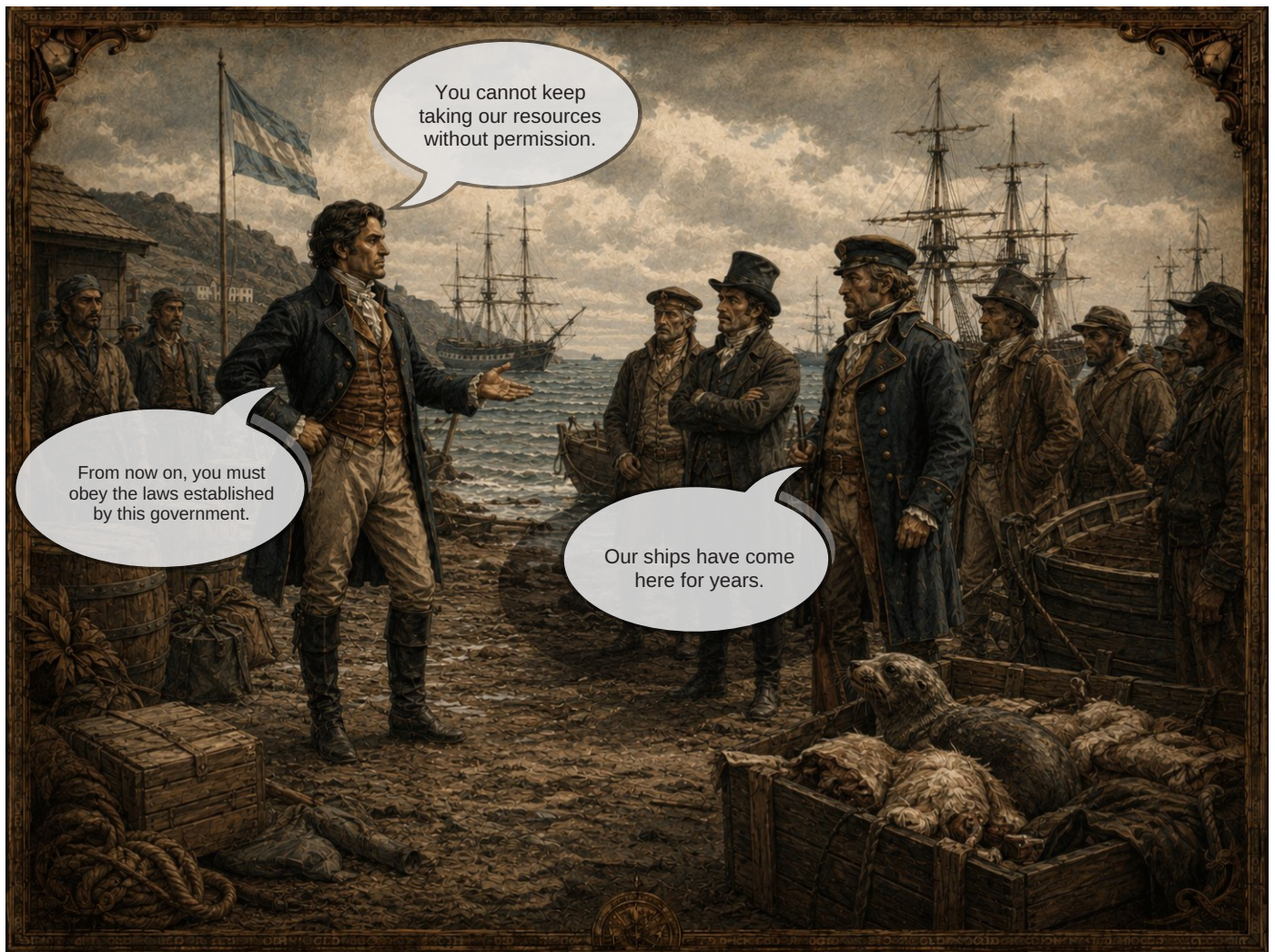
Despite that declaration, foreign ships continued exploiting whales, seals, and other resources without authorization or control.



To populate and administer the islands, the government of Buenos Aires granted Luis Vernet a concession. In 1829, he was appointed political and military commander of the Malvinas.



Under Argentine administration, a permanent community took shape, made up of families, workers, livestock, and organized authorities.



Vernet tried to stop indiscriminate hunting and enforce Argentine laws. This decision met resistance from foreign captains.



Several American vessels ignored the rules and continued exploiting the resources. Argentine authorities detained ships and confiscated their cargoes.



The United States used the conflict to justify a naval response against the Argentine settlement in the Malvinas.



In late 1831, the American corvette USS Lexington arrived at the islands. Its presence signaled military action against the colony.



The Lexington's men attacked the settlement, destroyed facilities, and detained residents. The Argentine community was left severely weakened.



After the American attack, Argentine authorities tried to rebuild the settlement and restore control, but the islands had been left almost defenseless.



Great Britain observed the settlement's weakness and revived its former strategic interest. The situation offered an opportunity to intervene.



At the beginning of 1833, a British naval force appeared off Puerto Soledad. The Argentine population realized that a new threat was approaching.



The American attack had prepared the ground. On January 2, 1833, Great Britain was about to demand that the Argentine flag be lowered and occupy the islands by force.



TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT CHAPTER: THE BRITISH OCCUPATION