

MALVINAS. SEARCHING FOR A NEW FIELD OF STUDY.



FRONT PAGE
First Vigil for Malvinas, 1995
(Malvinas War Veterans Center of
Río Grande).

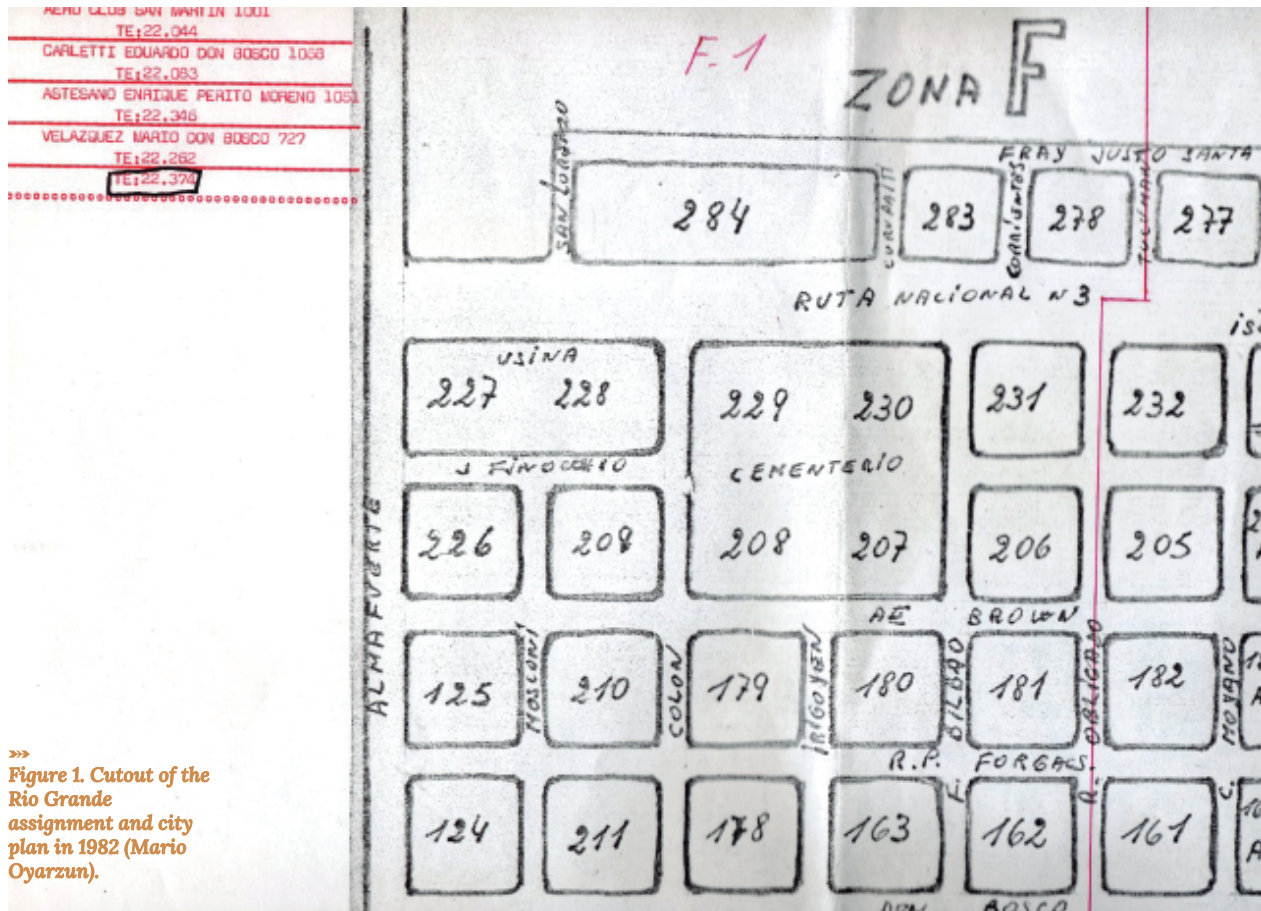
-THE WAR FROM BUENOS AIRES TO TIERRA DEL FUEGO

The 2nd of April is Veterans Day and Day of the Fallen for those who fought in the War of Malvinas. 40 years have passed to the day since armed forces of the de facto government initiated Operation Rosario, consisting of a landing and recovery of the Islands. Just days before, for the first time in a long time, thousands of Argentinians joined together in a demonstration against the Galteri government. The protesters were violently repressed.

On that same day, again, thousands of Argentinians went to Plaza de Mayo to cheer on the recovery of the "lost southern pearl." "If they want to come, let them come. We will give them a fight," affirmed the President, and the plaza erupted with joy. There were others, however, who thought that this might not be good news.

3000 km from Plaza de Mayo and 600 km from the Malvinas Islands, military preparations were underway, both in Rio Grande, home of the Fifth Marine Infantry Battalion and the Naval Air Base, and in Ushuaia, the capital city of Malvinas where naval units and a military dock operate. Soldiers from all over were transported to Port Argentino, a new British-imposed name for Port Stanley that leaves long behind Gaucho Rivero's legacy utilized by the Condors in 1966.

For our province, which in those years was called the National Territory, it was like returning to the Christmas of '78. Cities darkened, vehicles were covered, strict schedules were established, air attack drills became frequent, Block Chiefs were appointed (FIGURE 1), and a group of Forward Observers was created to guard the border and airspace against the possibility of attack. Although schools didn't suspend classes, many families moved north, fearing the possibility of war on the big island.



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Figure 1. Cutout of the
Rio Grande
assignment and city
plan in 1982 (Mario
Oyarzun).

Deep sadness fell upon Ushuaia on the 3rd of May, when the survivors of the ARA General Belgrano arrived, their ship having been sunk the previous afternoon outside of the **Exclusion Zone**. Father Zink, who was in the capital at the time, remembers how they went to look for castaways on a coast guard vessel

Major concern reached Rio Grande just days later when an alarm suddenly sounded, announcing an English attack. Previously, authorities had been informed that there would be no more drills. The next alarm would be real.

Fortunately, Operation Mikado, which intended to kill the pilots and destroy the planes at the naval air base, failed.

Military actions ended on the 14th of June, and the “draftees” were discharged (**FIGURE 2**), with varying difficulty. They returned to their homes, suffering abandonment by the state. Some officers and non-commissioned officers resumed their service in the forces, and others left in search of new horizons. Over the years, they came back to settle permanently in Tierra del Fuego. For many, the wounds are still open (**FIGURE 3**).



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Figure 2. “Draftees” visiting a family home. In the background are windows covered for the blackouts. Photo: Marcela Sosa.



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Figure 3. First Vigil for Malvinas, 1995 (Centro de Veteranos de Guerra de Malvinas in Rio Grande).

TELLING THE STORY FROM THE TERRITORY

The stories from Río Grande, Tolhuin, and Ushuaia during the war's 74 days circulate among those families that have lived in the province for more than two generations. Only some of these stories have been written down. In the case of Río Grande, "A hacha, cuña y golpe" was published in 1995, a work that brings together several testimonies about experiences in the city, even before it was founded. The work of Roberto Chunú is published digitally, including testimonies from Tolhuin residents. And serving as a beacon in the reconstruction of local history, there is Mingo Gutiérrez's colossal work. His blog recovers the lives and experiences of the people of Río Grande.

Federico Lorenz (2013) dedicated a chapter to Río Grande when he published "Unas Islas demasiado famosas," including the contribution of Chenú. There's also Jorge Muñoz (2005) recounting Operation Mikado in "Ataquen Río Grande". Then we remember again the words of the priest Zink, who affirmed that the history of Malvinas has not yet been written.

At the National University of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica, and the South Atlantic Islands, the Malvinas Free Chair has been operating (formally) for just over two years, made up of research professors and external collaborators. Within their proposal is, among other things, the progress in the production of knowledge on this subject, the recovery of files, and the development of audiovisual material. All of this is in pursuit of addressing the issue from an academic perspective and democratizing knowledge.

Many researchers in our province choose the Malvinas Islands as their theme of study. Within the social sciences in general and history and education in particular, it is presented as an expanding topic that offers opportunities and challenges alike.

To name just a few examples, there is Gabriela Fernández, who dedicates her master's thesis to the period of the last civic-military dictatorship, the democratic transition, and the experiences of forced migration on the island. From testimonies, she shows how the war impacted the city of Ushuaia.

There's also Karin Otero, who intends to analyze the curricular reform policies in Argentina since 2006, focusing on the problems related to the inclusion of

the theme of Malvinas as compulsory teaching content. From a local history approach, it addresses the construction of the specific meaning that Malvinas holds in Tierra del Fuego, and builds oral sources.

Meanwhile in Río Grande, we worked together with Federico Rodríguez and Mingo Gutiérrez a few years ago on the edition of a book called "La Noche que sonó la alarma". This work recovers the experiences of inhabitants in our city during the war. It also has part of the phonographic and documentary archive of Mingo Gutiérrez, who throughout more than 40 years of journalism conducted interviews with prominent individuals who are no longer alive or who no longer live in the city. The recovery of this file is invaluable, allowing access to visual, written, and oral sources that don't reside anywhere else in the city (FIGURE 4).

Figure 4.
Recommendations to the
population from the
Municipal Board of Civil
Defense. Photo: Mario
Oyarzún.



These are just three examples from our province. Certainly in other spaces, in other classrooms, and in other libraries, there are researchers following what the gaucho priest said. They are writing the history of Malvinas from our territory, from the perspectives of the men and women who lived through the days of the war, recounting their experiences serving for the armed forces. Today, they want to tell their stories.

40 years after the start of the War of Malvinas (FIGURE 5) there is still much to do. There is work from the National University of Tierra del Fuego, from teacher training institutes, and from differing levels of government agencies.

We must be protagonists of our history and take on the challenge of revising and debating these narratives, ready with new questions and perspectives. Regional, recent, and oral history should become the framework for these proposals, removing big capitals from the spotlight. This revised story ought to focus on the region,

which still has a lot to say. 🔍

GLOSARIO



EXCLUSION ZONE: 200 maritime mile imaginary circumference imposed by the United Kingdom during the conflict. Ships outside this area couldn't be attacked, something the British ignored when attacking the ARA General Belgrano.



SUGGESTED
READING

• Bou L y E Repeto. (1995). *A hacha, cuña y golpe. Recuerdos de pobladores de Río Grande, Tierra del Fuego*. Talleres Gráficos Recali, Buenos Aires. 595 p.

• Lorenz F. (2013). *Unas islas demasiado famosas: Malvinas, historia y política*. Capital Intelectual, Buenos Aires. 235 p.

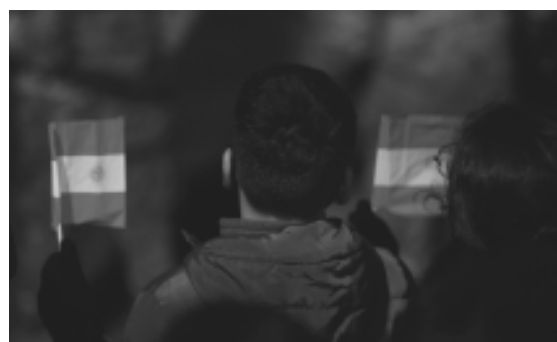
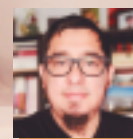


Figure 5.
Vigil for Malvinas,
2022. 40th
anniversary of the
Malvinas war.
Photos:
Deba Rementería.



ESTEBAN RODRÍGUEZ
ICSE-UNTDF
erodriguez@untdf.edu.ar

