

"The Gauchos, under pretense of a revolution, had murdered & plundered all the Englishmen whom they could catch," Darwin wrote to his sister Catherine. "Here we, dog-in-the-manger fashion, seize an island & leave to protect it a Union Jack; the possessor has been of course murdered. . . . A man of war,

however, ventured to leave a party of Marines, & by their assistance & the treachery of some of the party, the murderers have all been taken:—there being now as many prisoners as inhabitants."

Despite the cost of the struggle, the importance of the Falklands was clear to

Darwin. "This island," he continued to his sister, "must someday become a very important halting place in the most turbulent sea in the world." And so it was, until the opening of the Panama Canal made the torturous trip around the southern tip of South America unnecessary.—WILLIAM J. BROAD

Chess-Playing Computer Seized by Customs

On 4 May, Kenneth Thompson of Bell Laboratories traveled to New York's Kennedy Airport and boarded a British Airways flight to Moscow. He was on his way to a Central Chess Club meeting sponsored by the Soviet Sports Committee. With him, he thought, in the airplane's hold, was a small crate containing Belle, the world's champion chess-playing computer. The Russians had invited Thompson, who designed Belle, to bring the computer to their meeting so that Belle could compete against a grand master and against 20 lesser experts in chess tournaments.

When Thompson arrived in Moscow he discovered, to his dismay, that Belle was missing. British Airways put a tracer on the computer. Two days later the airline reported to Thompson that Belle was still at Kennedy Airport and would be shipped. The Russians obligingly rescheduled Belle's tournaments, expecting the computer to arrive momentarily, but Belle did not show up. As Thompson and the Soviets soon learned, the computer had been confiscated by the Customs Service as part of its Operation Exodus, a program to prevent the illegal export of high technology items to the Soviets.

For his first 4 days in Moscow, Thompson was baffled by the disappearance of his computer. Then he got a call from Belle's co-designer, Joseph Condon of Bell Labs. Condon told Thompson that the security department at the labs had received a call from the Customs Service saying that someone had stolen a Bell Labs computer and was trying to ship it to Moscow. But not to worry, Customs said, its Exodus team had seized the computer. The computer in question turned out to be Belle.

"I told the Russians what had happened and they couldn't believe it," Thompson says. "They had big demonstrations planned and they had been rearranging their schedules to put off the demonstrations as long as possible." Thompson too was astounded. Belle, he explains, is not a high technology item—all its components can be bought off the shelf. And the computer has no military use. It does just one thing—play chess. Moreover, Thompson planned to be with Belle the entire time the computer was in Moscow. Before going to Moscow, Thompson had asked one of Bell Labs' attorneys whether he needed an export license for Belle and he had been advised—erroneously, it turned out—that he did not.

The Soviets, at first, would not accept the fact that Belle was not coming to their chess meeting. "They kept saying that if we could just find the right person and slip him a bottle of vodka we could get the computer," Thompson remarks. "Then they said that if I could get the computer out of the country they would send a plane to pick it up and fly it to Moscow. They couldn't understand that this

couldn't be done." Finally, the Russians went with Thompson to the American Embassy in Moscow and suggested that Belle might be shipped in a diplomatic pouch. This idea, too, met with a less than enthusiastic reception.

"When it became clear that Belle was not going to come, the Russians canceled everything to do with it, including my lectures. They left me my interpreter so I turned tourist for a week—I had nothing else to do," Thompson says. "When I came back, I tried to find who had the computer. It took me 3 weeks to find out who was holding it. You can't imagine the frustration. No one tells you anything and we were kept waiting for phone calls that never came."

Finally, Thompson and Condon learned that Belle was in the hands of Stanley Hoffman at the Office of Fines, Penalties, and Forfeitures. Hoffman sent Thompson a letter asking for \$600, which is 10 percent of Belle's stated value, in return for the computer. Bell Laboratories sent in the \$600, but it took more than a week for the computer to arrive at the labs. Finally, on 7 June, Belle was returned.

When asked about the seizure of Belle, Bohdan Denysyk, deputy assistant secretary for export administration at the Commerce Department, said that Customs recently assigned about 200 inspectors and investigators in 11 cities to look for possible illegal exports of high technology items. Six months ago, before Operation Exodus began, no Customs investigators were explicitly assigned to look for such exports. Consequently, says Denysyk, "More baggage and cargo are being opened and there are a lot more detentions."

Once Customs officials find suspicious-looking cargo, they call Commerce to ask if the cargo can in fact be exported without a license. In Belle's case, they were told that an export license was required. The reason, Denysyk says, is that it is a general-purpose computer and such computers are on the Commerce Department's list of controlled items.

Whether it belongs on the list is another question. "I can't believe that if the Russians want those general-purpose computers they don't have them," says Condon. "I can buy one for \$1000 cash in New York City with no questions asked. So stamping down on one that is supposed to come back to the United States doesn't stop the hemorrhage of technology or whatever those guys call it," he remarks.

Thompson is left with a bad taste in his mouth. "The invoice on Belle said it was a computer going to Moscow, so I can't blame Customs for confiscating it. But I sure can blame them for not telling me anything about it," he says.—GINA KOLATA