



## Bad Time in Buenos Aires

by Richard Rewell

He was not an easy man to describe, General Leopoldo Galtieri as we ate in a corner booth of the 'Edelweiss' restaurant in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was 1<sup>st</sup> April 1981 and I had been sent by my paper to find out about Galtieri's fascist junta and Argentina's role in allowing Nazi war criminals sanctuary at the end of the second world war.

However, Galtieri was easy to describe physically. He was medium height, slightly overweight, grey hair with chillingly cold blue eyes that radiated a malevolence that made me feel uneasy as did his two bulky minders who sat to my left in the palm filled atrium amongst the other diners.

But it was what Galtieri thought and how his mind worked that I wanted to know and so describe to my paper's readers.

Research had revealed that Galtieri had been the 'doer' in Argentina's previous fascist regime. And, what he did was to liquidate as many liberals, socialists, democrats, communists and anyone who questioned or challenged the fascist ruling elite. His victims numbered twenty-five thousand and that was a conservative estimate.

It was obvious he was not used to journalists asking awkward questions in fact he slid across the table to me a typed history of himself, which I scanned as he launched into a diatribe about his life as a cadet officer.

I got nowhere with Galtieri. Whether it be on Argentina's education, its economy, the role of women, post Eva Peron, on Chile with whom Argentina was having a border dispute and Argentina's continued trading with South Africa.

No answers, no explanations. Only non-committal bullshit. He did not even want to talk about his family.

I had one more go as an old waiter tottered over to our booth and whispered something to Galtieri in what sounded like German before the old boy removed the debris of our lunch and gave me an unfriendly stare.

"What do you want for your country?" I asked.

"I want for it to be powerful and great."

"Do you mean wealthier? With a good standard of living?"

Galtieri took a large gulp of wine "Yes but we must have strong leadership and be united. No debates. Opposition must be non-existent." He swallowed another mouthful and sneered "There is no room for soft European democratic ideas here. You British are weak with your pathetic liberal views and fair play. You will learn. Britain will regret."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing." Snapped Galtieri.

"Well what about the Nazis Argentina let in back in the forties? And what about all those people protesting in the Plaza de Mayo about their loved ones killed by your junta?"

"Good bye Senor Smith" said Galtieri his horrible eyes burning into me.

The two minders roughly escorted me through the restaurant, pushed me into a car, drove me to Buenos Aires International where they bundled me through the sliding doors and marched me to the check-in desk. I was back in my boss's London office eighteen hours later.

"Well true Richard you haven't described him in the way I anticipated. Not surprising. He gave you nothing, but his repugnant personality jumps out in your article. And as for his outburst 'Britain will regret.' Prat. Don't let's give him any publicity. No, we'll use your piece about Argentine cuisine instead.

I looked at the world map behind my boss's head and noticed something.

"Is that British?" I said pointing to a tiny pink archipelago off Argentina's coast.

My boss swivelled around, his chair making a loud squeak before his eyes followed my finger towards the cluster of islands and answering "Yes. It's the Falklands. Oh, shit get the MoD now."