

19 December 2000

From: LCDR Harry M. Riddle, USN, /1120
To: Chief of Naval Personnel (PERS-02)
Via: (1) Commander, U.S. Military Group Argentina *CA 200200*
(2) Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command

Subj: PEP TOUR REPORT

Ref: OPNAVINST 5700.7G

1. Name of 2000 billet holder:
LCDR Harry M. Riddle, USN, 1120
2. Unit assigned to:
Argentine Naval War College
3. Location:
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Official mailing address:
USMILGRP Argentina
Unit 4328
APO AA 34034-4328
4. Rank/rate:
O-4/5. The course is predominantly Argentine Navy and Marine Corps LCDR's equivalents though there was one CDR from the Argentine Navy and three CDR's from other foreign Navy's (Brazil (1) and Peru (2)). The Argentine CDR needed this course to promote to CAPT, which he did at the conclusion of the course.
5. Billet Title: Student Argentine Naval War College Exchange Student
6. a. Billet description: Foreign War College Exchange Student
b. Billet sequence code: 99990
c. Naval Officer Billet Classification: Not assigned
d. Security Clearance Required: Minimum for course is CONFIDENTIAL but SECRET is recommended for fuller embassy access.
e. Duties and Responsibilities: Attend and participate in a graduate level course in Naval Warfare that is modeled in a broad sense on the similar course taught at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport. The course includes subjects on International Law, the Law of Armed Conflict, International Relations, Global and Operational Strategy, Administration, Human Resources, Philosophy, Military and Applied Logistics with a series of gaming exercises towards the end of the course. These games are structured to apply many of the concepts and problem-solving skills learned during the course into fictionalized scenario based conflicts. During the course you will be required to complete a 40-70 page investigation on a topic of your choosing. You are given wide latitude in the selection of your topic but it should have some relevance to the course material. There is also a 20-minute defense of your work before a board headed by the school director. There are also three briefs you will give to the class of 20-30 minute duration with a follow on question and answer period. One is a country presentation, which covers some salient aspect of your choosing about the U.S., another is a general

discussion of your country's Navy and/or Marine Corps including organization, professional development, and resources. A third is on some operational aspect of your Navy and/or Marine Corps. All is at an UNCLAS level and therefore very general in nature.

7. Type of Aircraft/ships

This is not an operational billet. The Argentines do provide opportunities to visit various in port operational naval units through a series of organized tours at the end of the course. No at sea or flying time was offered or solicited.

8. Type of Training

The entire curriculum with the exception of a two-day course on International Law of the Sea (given by guest professors from the Newport Naval War College in English) is taught in Spanish. Therefore, unless the incoming billet holder already possesses minimum language proficiency, successful completion of the Basic Spanish Language Course taught at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA, is mandatory prior to arrival in Buenos Aires.

9. Qualifications

The billet holder must possess a minimum of 2/2 on the listening and reading comprehension portions of the Spanish version of the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT). It is important to note that this is an absolute minimum required for any degree of participation in what is a graduate level course with the accompanying course workload. Exams, student presentations, and homework assignments are in Spanish.

10. Security Clearance

Some of the course material in use has a CONFIDENTIAL classification though the reason for such a classification escaped me. As such, the billet holder will need to have a CONFIDENTIAL clearance to attend the course. Having said that, a SECRET clearance is recommended as this will provide the billet holder to a wider array of embassy support services, including fuller access to some administrative office spaces.

11. The Staff and Command Course

a. The Course: This is a 10-month and starts the first week in February and ends the second week of December. There is a 2-week winter break in July with a various Argentine holidays producing some 5 three-day weekends throughout the course. This provides ample opportunity to travel and see much of Argentina. The course is actually three distinct courses consisting of a Naval Command Course, a Marine Command Course, and an Executive (Administration/Logistics) Staff Course. Most of the course is taught to all of the students with specialized instruction for the various groups in the latter part of the course. In the 2000 class was a total of 54 officers, 41 from the Argentine Navy of which 9 were marines, 13 foreigners which included students from Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, the U.S. and for the first time one student each from Chile, Canada, and Great Britain. Within the class was a mix of members from various communities including surface, submarine, aviation, and marines. In the two years previous there have also been students from South Korea, Uruguay, Spain, and Italy. Canada seems to have made the recent commitment to keep one of their officers in the course for the foreseeable future. Expect a diverse student body.

b. General Layout: The War College is located at 8100 Avenida Libertador, near the shores of the Rio de La Plata in the northern suburbs of the Federal Capital. It shares

a spacious facility with the Navy Mechanics School of Dirty War fame. In fact, a portion of Mechanics School is off limits as the property and buildings have been ceded to the city of Buenos Aires ostensibly to make a memorial to those who were killed, tortured, or disappeared during the 1976-1983 military junta. Nothing has happened in that regard and this complex of adjoining buildings sits empty while competing interests decide what to do. The remaining buildings are kept in generally good condition with money recently spent to upgrade both LAN and Internet capabilities with modern Pentium computers and cable Internet connections. There is an exercise field accessible via a pedestrian overpass with a track, outdoor basketball and volleyball courts, and a soccer field. There is also an indoor pool though the hours of operation are very limited and clay tennis courts. Shower facilities are also available at the school and each student has his own locking clothes locker and a separate locker for books and school supplies.

- c. Faculty: The faculty is headed by a group of active duty Naval Captains including the school director, assistant director, director of instruction, and an operations chief. Each of three courses also has a director, an active duty Commander equivalent, and they represent a cross section of the various specialties (air, surface, and submarine) with an advisor assigned for the marines in the course. There are about 20 instructors in total, mostly retired naval officers including several Admirals. Many instructors are shared between the other service's War Colleges, all of which also located in Buenos Aires. There are also weekly guest lectures which have run the range from the Argentine Defense Minister, the Argentine Chief of Naval Operations, to an economist more renowned for his off color humor than any solid information he might have offered. On the whole I found the faculty professional, with an impressive breadth of knowledge in their field of expertise. Most present a balanced perspective on global issues but have difficulty in critically analyzing the failures of their Falkland Campaign (Las Islas Malvinas). Criticism of past Argentine leadership and the decisions made is very rare.
- d. Thesis:
 - 1) There is an investigative work required of each student. This approximates a thesis in terms of presenting a hypothesis and developing a defense but falls somewhat short of a true thesis. It is a minimum of 40 pages in length, not including the bibliography, but I saw several final projects much larger than that. Most of my research data came from the Internet and from books I purchased on-line from Amazon. Also, there are a few on-line libraries and think tanks that will lend or send you information for a nominal fee. Recently published books in any language are almost nonexistent in the War College library. The only recent additions being mostly English language magazines or possibly a photocopy of a book. One person in the class used the American School library (Lincoln) for the majority of his research data. You will also need to find a sponsor who may or may not be Argentine with the only stipulation being that it is a senior officer who can assist with the work's progress and proofread the final product. The final work must be written in Spanish as your work is sent out to independent evaluators within the Argentine Navy for reading and commentary. Depending on the level of your language proficiency, it will likely be easier to do your work in English and pay to have it translated later. I did not find a computer translator worthy of the task and translation services are readily available locally or via the Internet.

- 2) Despite rumblings over the past couple of years to the contrary, there is no program in place to use this work as a basis for obtaining a Master Degree. Perhaps this will happen next year starting for the Argentines only. The problem for foreigner students is transcript verification and acceptance by the Argentine accreditors of any undergraduate work. You will however earn JPME phase I credit for completing course.
- e. Daily Routine: Class starts daily at 0900 and runs to 1700 Monday through Thursday. There is mandatory PT on Monday and Wednesday afternoons for one hour starting at the conclusion of the day's instruction and ending by 1700. Friday is a early dismissal day at 1130 to allow the many commuters who did not bring their families to Buenos Aires to fly back to their major naval base via the Friday afternoon naval transport. There is a one-hour lunch period Monday through Thursdays from 1315-1415 served free of charge to all students in the school's cafeteria. The food and service in the cafeteria is of excellent quality and of classic Argentine fare with a heavy dose of beef, the occasional chicken, and potatoes or pasta. A salad bar with a limited selection of vegetables is also included. Canned soft drinks are available for a nominal charge but most drink cold water from pitchers placed at each table. A free breakfast is also available before classes each morning, which generally consists of a croissant like pastry (called a media luna), crackers, or toast and either water or a Tang like orange drink. Several times a week yogurt is also available.
- f. Uniforms: The daily uniform is summer khakis with occasional modifications. The Argentines do not have a khaki uniform and instead wear black trousers with a white shirt (long sleeves and tie in the winter, short sleeves without tie in the summer) and shoulder boards. The winter version is easy to approximate by wearing dress blues without the jacket, which I was asked to do during several visits by high level dignitaries. Summer whites were required for the three local class trips and the professional trip for the foreign students at the end of the course. Throughout the year there are a variety of formal ceremonies requiring dress uniforms including medals and swords. Many of these ceremonies come with little advance notice so it is best to keep your dress uniform and sword at the ready in your personal clothes locker. Opening ceremonies are in full dress white, including sword, with the graduation ceremony in service dress white. Another function outside the War College requiring a uniform is the annual Marine Corps Birthday Ball, a major embassy happening, which is a dinner dress white jacket affair.
- g. School Sponsored Travel:
The school sponsors a series of class trips that is split between participation of the entire class and foreigners only. The Argentine Navy does not have the resources to travel extensively. What resources it does have it spends heavily on the foreigners in the class to help broaden their scope and understanding in what is a large and very diverse country. The exact dates of travel vary from class to class depending on various factors but the trip breakdown is basically as follows. We had three class trips. One being a visit to the widely published newspaper La Nacion, another to a local state of the art business school and the third, a trip to the Congreso (the capital building) with the visiting Chilean War College. During the Congreso trip, we met and chatted with several powerful and influential members of the Armed Services Committee in an impromptu conference. All very nice and worthy trips.

For the foreigners alone, there were two sightseeing trips though Buenos Aires with spouses invited to attend. The Navy hired a representative from the Ministry of Tourism who gave a wonderful daylong windshield tour with frequent stops of the city. The second tour was north to Tigre to the Navy club and one of the many naval museums throughout the country. There is a spectacular 12-day trip through the Patagonia to the southern most city in Argentina, and arguably the world, Ushuaia. This included whale watching in Peninsula Valdez, a day trip to the Gaelic village of Gaiman, a tour of Tierra del Fuego National Park, Glaciers National Park including the Perito Moreno Glaciar (one of the few advancing glaciers in the world), and much more. This was mixed with some professional visits of Naval and Marine Corps installations in the south of Argentina. During the "official" aspect of the tour the CO's wife of the visited unit hosted the wives in several shopping and other sightseeing adventures. While the Argentine navy pays for the cost of your travel, you will need to pay for your wife. For the entire 12 days the cost for wives was US\$800 which was a great value and included all food, air and land transport, tours, and lodging. My wife very much enjoyed the 5 days that she came along. She chose a shorter stay, as for her, 12 days was just too long to be away from our little one. There were only 2 wives that stayed the entire 12 days, with the others flying home after 5 days. There was some talk about breaking this trip into two shorter legs, as frankly, 12 days of living out of the suitcase with the tight social and professional calendar was a bit tiring. This trip was followed up after a few days of rest with a 4-day professional trip. Two days in Mar del Plata at the submarine base and then 2 days in Bahia Blanca at the main Argentine Naval Base of Puerto Belgrano and the nearby Espora Naval Air Station. The final trip of the class was a day trip to their Naval Academy in La Plata. These trips are definitely the highlight of the yearlong tour in Argentina.

h. Useful web resources:

- US Embassy in Buenos Aires (<http://usembassy.state.gov/posts/ar1/www0100.html>).
- Argentine Armada web page (www.ara.mil.ar). Has a War College link too.
- A site with links to the Lincoln School, rentals, and English language community events in Buenos Aires (<http://www.famconnect.com/baxpat>).
- The Canadian in this year's course also put together a web page as a clearinghouse for student information for the year 2000 class members (<http://www.geocities.com/esgn2000/>).

12. Living Conditions and Cultural Highlights

- a. One resource that I found indispensable both before as well as during my stay was the Lonely Planet Travel Survival Guide for Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. The background information for the Argentina is excellent and the city specific travel information is very accurate with rare exception. We bought ours at a bookstore in Monterey.
- b. The City of Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires is the federal capital for Argentina. It is a large and very cosmopolitan city with excellent parks, museums, theaters, gothic cathedrals, and cultural attractions. Equestrian sports like polo and racing, as well as the national passion soccer, are very big within the city with several large stadiums and tracks. The architecture is distinctly European with heavy French and Italian influences, tree lined boulevards, street cafes, and some cobble stone streets. Within the Greater Buenos Aires (the Federal Capital and surrounding suburbs) live some 40% of Argentina's population

of 34 million. In addition to being the seat of federal government, Buenos Aires is the business, banking, cultural, and religious center of the country. The city is crisscrossed with a good public transportation system, which includes trains, busses, and a decent subway and innumerable taxis.

- c. **Travel:** My wife and I (funded separate from the travel organized by the school) two trips to the northern provinces during the winter break. We visited Iguazu Falls (Niagara's much larger cousin) and the province of Salta. The Train of the Clouds (Tren de las Nubes) leaves from Salta and climbs to just over 15,000 feet into the Andes Mountains on a full day excursion. We also had a wonderful experience at Carnival in Guleguauchu (located near the boarder with Uruguay) organized through the embassy. We also traveled to Uruguay visiting Punta del Este, a very upscale "Gold Coast" beach resort favored by many in South America, and Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. All of this travel was planned down to the small details with the aid of the American Express travel office located in the Embassy. Many other travel opportunities are available including ski packages, wine country tours, backpacking in Bariloche, and travel to Chile. For the adventurous and less price conscious travelers, trips to Antarctica are easy to get in the summer months. As a student in the War College, you are given full access to a wide variety of military benefits including stays at the Argentine Navy's heavily discounted hotels. The Navy hotel at Mar del Plata sits right on the beach and is a fraction of the cost of comparably equipped hotels. Prices for travel packages in general have dropped considerably with competition in the airline industry but peak season lodging can be expensive and rental car rates of more than \$110 per day, not including insurance and with very limited miles, is common regardless of season. Taxis and hired chauffeured cars called remises (ra-meets) are very reasonable and for me, the preferred mode of short distance travel whether on vacation or not.
- d. **Airports:** Two principle airports serve Buenos Aires. Ezeiza principally services the international traffic and is located on the southern perimeter of the city some 35 miles south of the embassy. It is connected to the city via an interstate like highway though the traffic can be quiet heavy during peak commute times. A new world-class terminal opened just this year to rave reviews. The other airport is Jorge Newberry and located very near downtown on the shores of the Rio de La Plata. It's terminal is in the middle of a major upgrade improving capacity and passenger services. This airport, with its shorter single runway, principally services domestic traffic with some international flights to neighboring countries like Uruguay and Paraguay.
- e. **Climate:** Buenos Aires has a climate similar to many coastal cities along the Gulf of Mexico in the US. It is located on a low-lying plane on the shores of the Rio de La Plata. Summers are very warm and humid with temperatures rising into the lower 90's. The hottest months being January and February. Outside of these months, temperatures are very pleasant for all but a few weeks in the winter. Late fall and spring day time temperatures are generally in 70's with winter nighttime temperatures rarely below freezing. Many of the parks have tropical and subtropical foliage such as banana trees lending evidence to the rarity of freezing temperatures. This past winter was a La Nina year with many heavy rains and warmer than normal temperatures. Localized street flooding is common in some in the lower lying areas during the heavier rains and should be considered when making a housing decision.
- f. **Language:** Buenos Aires, with its vast cultural diversity, speaks a form of Spanish so unique in accent and vocabulary that the locals have given it another name, Castellano.

A street slang (lunfardo) is widely incorporated into the everyday language. The large immigrant Italian population and the proximity to Brazil and its Portuguese language heavily influence the accent. My visiting father in law, being a decent speaker of Italian, had no difficulty communicating during his stay. On the other hand, the Argentines in the class had significant problems understanding the Mexican student in my class. Add to this that the Argentines speak quickly, expect to have difficulty communicating. Most PEP's spend their first six months trying to adapt to the language and I was no different. Not to worry though. The Argentines are very generous and patient and most have a working knowledge of English. About 10 of the Argentine officers in my course were very fluent having lived for some time in the US. You will be assigned an English-speaking sponsor to help steer you through the maze of general admin and make sure you get your classes and appointments on time.

g. Food and Wines:

- 1) Argentina rightfully boasts some of the finest wines and beef in the world. Open pit BBQ's (called parillas) are very common throughout Buenos Aires. The grass fed beef is of the highest quality and very inexpensive and a staple in most Argentine meals. Chicken is also common though not widely consumed while quality seafood is scarce and very expensive. There are many all you can eat restaurants (tenedor libres, "free forks") for the hearty appetite though I found the standard menu items to be very generous and filling. There are some international restaurants with a mix of Chinese, Indian, and Thai though Argentines have an aversion to spicy foods taking some of the best food from those countries off the menu. Several US chains have restaurants here like McDonalds, Burger King, the Hard Rock Café, and Hooters. As for the wines, most varietals come from the principle wine-growing region in Mendoza, which is on the eastern slopes of the Andes Mountains. This cool, dry climate produces incredible wines which are sold very cheaply.
- 2) The embassy has a small self-supporting commissary that fills some needs for US brand name foods and spices. Breakfast cereals, chips, and candies are some of the biggest movers with a mini-mart like selection. Separate from the embassy commissary, a C-141 brings in food items monthly from the Charleston commissary. One chooses food items from a computer database and the order is filled and sent to Argentina with drops at other embassies along the way. This service may end shortly as a budgetary matter though this program has existed for many years. It turned out to be a lifeline for us with our toddler's food allergies. Soy free, milk free formula is impossible to find in Argentina and nearly all jarred baby food has sugar and wheat added. Several on-line grocers stopped sending to APO's during our stay all but drying up our alternate source for some specialty foods.

h. Crime:

This is a problem in Argentina and I have not seen much improvement during my tour. The Argentine economy has been in recession for over 2 years now. The official unemployment rate is 16.5% with underemployment double that figure. So with 1 in 3 not able to find enough work, personal property crime and bank robbery rates are very high. The only real growth industry seems to be private security firms. Petty crime statistics are also artificially lowered in the Federal Capital by having to pay a \$10 fee to file a police report. Many avoid being robbed twice by not bothering to report crime. The embassy will provide you with a security assessment when you arrive and the embassy professionals will also evaluate the home you choose to live in for security adequacy. The embassy installs a home intrusion alarm system and beefs up door and window locks. Needless to say, gated communities are very popular. Vigilance is

important when walking the streets. Caution is the key, more than fear, and my general rule was to not carry anything that I could afford to lose. Fortunately, thieves seem more bent on stealing rather than shooting but there have been some spectacular exceptions to that rule.

This is straight from the Consular Information Sheet: Petty crime in the greater Buenos Aires area continues to be a problem for residents and visitors alike. Visitors to the city of Buenos Aires and popular tourist destinations should be especially alert to problems with pickpockets or purse snatching on the streets and public transportation (buses and trains). Pickpockets often work in pairs and employ a variety of ruses to victimize the unsuspecting visitor. In recent years, most crime affecting U.S. visitors has been non-violent. Nevertheless, aggravated robberies, shootings, etc., have become more frequent, especially in the suburbs of Buenos Aires and in Buenos Aires Province. Additionally, there have been frequent instances of false taxicabs in which passengers have been robbed. Incidents of armed invasions of restaurants, shops, and residences in the more fashionable suburbs are also occurring with greater frequency. As a result, it is recommended that due caution be exercised when traveling about the city.

13. Considerations for Future PEP students

- a. **Arrival Dates:** When you arrive in Argentina, a member of the MILGRP will meet you at the airport and transport you to the hotel. You and your family members will be issued magnetic swipe cards to permit you direct 24-hour gate access to the embassy. The course actually begins the first week in February. The long pole in the tent is finding housing. We arrived in the beginning of January and we waited for three weeks for our furniture to arrive prior to moving into our own apartment. We left Monterey in mid-December, as that was when my class graduated. Our furniture actually flew from Charleston, S.C., on the end of January C-141 flight that also brought the commissary foodstuff. We were still living in the hotel when school started, which as it turned out, was not a significant problem. I would recommend though that you have all of the moving logistics done before starting class. The best plan is to arrive as soon as possible for a contact relief with the outgoing student. Arriving before mid-December allows you to tour the school (the school closes from mid-December until classes start in February), meets some of the staff and possibly your Argentine sponsor, and gets a head start on assimilating the culture and language. The two other native English speakers in my course arrived some two months early, which really benefited them when class started.
- b. **Administrative Matters:** The Navy PEP students are administered through the Commander, Naval Forces Southern Command which is headquartered in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. You will make a stop there during your transit to Argentina, without your family, for admin processing and introductions with some of the key members of the chain of command. Your pay is actually administered through PSD in Key West though no stop there is required for administrative processing. In Puerto Rico you will meet Gloria Santana (santanag@navstarr.navy.mil) COMM: (787) 865-5584 DSN: 831-5584, who is your single point of contact for all administrative matters. The embassy has a DSN line to call if you wish but I personally found e-mail to be the most effective way to communicate with her.
- c. **Banking:** You will need to have a minimum of \$10,000, \$15,000 being better, readily available through your checking account or credit cards. Temporary lodging is \$160 per day at the recommended hotel (Cristoforo Colombo) which will need to be liquidated weekly. While the reimbursements are generally handled very quickly, a matter of days from submission to deposit in your checking account, we were delayed in one TLA

payment putting us down 2 weeks at a time when we were about to move in to our apartment. A reimbursable realtor finders fee (generally one months rent) and your first months rent are required to be paid at lease signing. Together, this will be another check for \$7,000+ that you need to write on move in day. We also had problems getting the proper amount reimbursed for the realtor's fee. We received a \$350 reimbursement instead of the \$3,500 we spent which kept us in arrears for another month while PSD worked to get it all straightened out. The bottom-line, have some serious cash fluidity when you arrive.

You will not need to open an Argentine checking account and I would even suggest against doing so. Service charges at banks for everything from writing checks to making a simple deposit are hefty. US currencies above \$5 bills are widely accepted through much of Argentina, especially in tourist zones. The embassy has a bank that charges a flat 1% to cash checks written on US banks into either dollars or pesos. Automatic tellers are also located throughout the city making access to funds in US banks a simple affair. On line banking through the Internet is simple and direct deposit of your military pay continues uninterrupted during your tour. VISA and MasterCard are also widely accepted though I did have the occasional problem of direct billing some services like internet access to my credit card. That required a phone call to customer service for a work around or cash payment at the local office. You can pay your utility and phone bills at the embassy bank or at major supermarkets where you pass your bill through a bar code reader and pay at any of the checkout lines. Make sure you save all receipts as you can expect at least one challenge for an already paid bill during your stay. You will want to save your receipts for other reasons as the 21% Value Added Tax (IVA) is refundable to you based on your "official" status with the embassy.

- d. Spouse Employment: Due to your "official" embassy status, your wife will not be able to obtain a work permit in Argentina. This pretty much limits spousal employment to the embassy, where no such credential is required to work, or some free lance work such as web page design that my wife did usually in some barter agreement. During school breaks, the embassy offers employment to children age 16 and older in a variety of mostly make work positions.
- e. Medical Care:
 - 1) Medical care is administered by TRICARE South America in conjunction with International SOS and overseen by TRICARE Fort Gordon. The embassy also has a doctor on staff though he does travel frequently leaving the embassy nurse to run the show. She is an Argentine national, knows the health care system, and is very good at directing you to the right person. Most doctors speak at least decent English as many actually have trained in the US. The medical care in general meets minimum US standards with some of the better hospitals equivalent to the US in equipment and nursing care. The Embassy uses the German Hospital due to its proximity, deferred billing, and they do provide a bilingual escort during your visit. Having said that, we had two exceptionally poor experiences at the German Hospital. My US trained RN wife will not go back after their orthopedics chief botched her hand surgery and the substandard nursing and hygiene practices she noted during a two day stay for my toddler daughter due to severe asthma (winter time air in Buenos Aires is anything but good). TRICARE is trying to arrange a contract with another hospital that is world class in every sense. My wife arranged, with the help of International SOS, to have her second hand surgery done at this facility affiliated with Duke University. An excellent hospital. My wife also found a superb English speaking pediatrician that makes house calls, provided us with his home and cellular phone numbers, and

enrolled in the TRICARE system at our request. We wish we could take him back to the US with us!

- 2) Another option for medical care is the Argentine Navy. They actually have one of the better hospitals in Buenos Aires though it is not very centrally located. You and your family will have full access and privileges to the Argentine military health care system as if you were an Argentine service member. As a foreigner, you receive priority treatment from the better doctors on staff. I used the facility once and found the health care good with incredible service. At every line in this very busy hospital I was immediately moved to the front and whisked through. From start to finish, including x-rays, in and out in less than 45 minutes. Try to get service like that in the US!
- f. Accommodations:
- 1) Temporary accommodations: When you first arrive, the embassy preferentially uses the Cristoforo Colombo Hotel (<http://www.torrecc.com.ar/ingles/index.htm>). It is a 16-story tower located just around the corner from the US Embassy in Palermo. It is near the major train and bus lines and a few blocks from one of the four Buenos Aires subway lines making getting around very easy. It is within walking distance of spacious and beautiful Palermo Park and the Buenos Aires zoo. The recently expanded Expo center is adjacent and has frequent events worthy of a visit. The hotel is clean, has a bilingual staff, and good security. You are permitted up to 30 days of Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA) which can be extended should circumstances warrant.
 - 2) For your longer-term needs, Buenos Aires has a wide variety of housing options to choose from. Everything from elegant high-rise condos to spacious suburban homes with ample yard space for kids and pets. The Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) of \$3,800 maximum will more than cover the cost for a generous home in a safe and secure neighborhood. You also will receive a COLA and a one time Move-In Housing Allowance (MIHA) intended to offset the cost of additionally needed items such as transformers, plug adapters, etc.
- g. Household effects: The support staff is very helpful and will take care of all of the required customs documents and import forms for your household goods and car. The shipping office will arrange for delivery of your household goods and the housing office will steer you through the house search process including writing of the lease. Embassy service and support is excellent and essential. Bring only what you intend to use, as storage is very expensive and hard to find.
- h. Internet Access: One of the major public works projects in progress in Buenos Aires is to get Argentina wired for the world wide web. The improved bandwidth and infrastructure has brought along fierce competition amongst Internet providers and very reasonable prices. AOL South America is here though your account from the US is not transportable. You can access a local number to access AOL for 10 cents a minute plus the local phone charge. I used a local provider at \$9.95 per month with unlimited time. Local calls are toll (billed by the pulso which are 2 or 4-minute intervals depending on the time of day) and can add up quickly. For moderate Internet usage, even using the discounted 0610 line, phone bills of \$150-\$200 per month are common. Cable Internet access is becoming very popular and the \$125 per month charge is well worth the cost. These high-speed connections also give you access to Internet phone calling to the US for pennies per minute.

- i. **Transportation:** PEP students are entitled to ship one car into the country. I elected to store my car in Miami at government expense and relied solely on public transportation. That required an ORDMOD giving me less than a 12-month tour preventing me from shipping a car. In turn the government then picked up the car storage bill. This retrospect was an excellent decision. Not really a viable option if you choose to live in the suburbs or have school age children that have after school transportation needs. Gas (nafta) is very expensive here with a price of over \$4 per gallon. Diesel fuel (gas-oil) is considerably cheaper at a little over \$2 per gallon. Unleaded fuels for catalytic converter equipped cars are widely available though out all of Argentina at octane ratings comparable to the US.

My general observations are that traffic is very heavy and driving customs are far different from what you may have experienced in the US. The Consular Information sheet characterizes Argentine drivers as reckless. The painted lanes on the roads are used for general guidance only. It is very common to see a 5-lane street become 8 lanes with drivers filling every conceivable gap, including one of the oncoming traffic lanes. When the light turns green it's a race to get out of the way of the oncoming traffic. Could replace NASCAR racing as a spectator sport in the US. There is no right turn on red, stop signs are mostly ignored with many intersections not even marked, busses are the 800-pound guerrillas of the road and drive accordingly, changing lanes with little warning as they service their routes. A pedestrian by law has the right of way but a woman over 60 or any other slow moving pedestrian is an endangered species. Cars will frequently try to thread and weave amongst pedestrians in cross walks. The problem is not so much the laws, there are plenty that mandate the use of child car seats, motorcycle helmets, compulsory insurance, and more. There are laws against drunken driving, speeding, jaywalking, running stoplights/signs, etc. Many drivers do not use headlights after dark or use a subdued lighting claiming better night vision on both well-lit city streets and darkened rural highways. The annual number (not rate) of highway fatalities from drunken driving is equal to that of the US. The problem in Argentina lies in the lack of enforcement, which creates a general disregard for many well-intentioned laws.

Connecting highways for major cities are of good to excellent quality. This is not the case as you get deeper into the provinces where it is not uncommon to find that the national highway is a dirt or gravel road. Side streets in the city are decent depending on the level of construction and road repair. A sports car with ground hugging aerodynamics and stiff suspension can expect periodic clearance problems and rough rides on the occasional cobble stone street.

- j. **Insurance and Drivers License:** Insurance is expensive, some 30% more than major metropolitan areas like San Diego, but less than New York City. Liability must be purchased through an Argentine carrier and the embassy will help direct you in this matter. You will be required to get an Argentine driver's license, which is very simple. Take a current valid driver's license and a carnet you will be issued to the DMV and complete some very simple paperwork. One of the Argentine nationals that work in the MILGRP can accompany you through the process. This can be done only on Fridays during working hours so set a goal of doing this during early to avoid missing any class. You will also receive a set of special plates for your car and will need to have the your car inspected by the Argentines within two weeks of receiving the plates.
- k. **Schools:** Most embassy staffers send their kids to the American school (Lincoln) located in the northern suburbs of Buenos Aires. It has all grades under one roof and is reputed to be a good school. There is a school bus that makes a loop into the downtown area but with a number of stops and heavy traffic, the one-way commute time is up to 45 minutes

depending on where you live. For this reason, many of those with school age children choose to live in the suburbs closer to the school greatly simplifying the commute. There are many preschools located in Capitol Federal and the suburbs. Home schooling always remains an option.

- l. **Electronics:** Argentina uses a 50Hz, 220-volt electrical system. The voltage problem is easy to solve with transformers that are widely sold in electrical shops and major hardware stores. I had no problem using transformers with any of our household electronics. Timer and clocks do run slower so you will need to acquire some 50Hz models. These are actually available in the US. Many newer electronics such as computers, shavers, and even televisions marketed in the US accept either voltage though you will need some plug adapters. Read carefully the instructions for your electronic devices to determine how best to proceed. The television broadcast medium is PAL-N while the US uses NTSC. The good news is that your NTSC VCR, DVD player, video camera, and TV will all work well with one another. The bad news is you will need to buy a TV here that is compatible with the PAL-N system if you want to watch the local broadcast, including CNN in either English or Spanish. The good news there is that Argentine televisions are also NTSC compatible and will work just fine with your other electronics and will also work just fine back in the US. Electronics are generally very expensive in Argentina. For some reason color TV's 21" and less in size are competitively priced when you factor in the 21% IVA refund that you as an "official" embassy member are entitled.
- m. **Appliances:** Most apartments or the associated service elevators will not accept the larger sized US style appliances. Clothes dryers are rare and few apartments and houses are configured accept them. Though electricity is cheap by US standards, about a half to two-thirds of US rates, a clothes dryer is viewed as an unnecessary luxury. Most people dry their clothes on drying racks or on a clotheslines outdoors. The building I lived in had a laundry with washers and dryers in the basement though the cost was nearly the same as having one of the many laundry services wash, dry, and fold. These services will even pick up and deliver for no additional charge. Those that bring their appliances use a large transformer, except for the dryer of which most are 220 volt, and that seems to work just fine. If you bring your own appliances, know the dimensions prior to signing a lease so you will know that they will fit. We simply made the installation of appliances a condition of our lease and left our appliances in storage and paid for by the government.
- n. **Gifts:** It is customary when visiting to bring a gift of some sort. Most are simple trinkets and not very expensive. Wines and chocolates are very well received. I would suggest bringing with you two categories of gift items. One being more for home visits and the other for when you give your US presentations to the class. The embassy has a small library of available brochures and booklets that I found useful for the country presentation (ask for Noris Zerda at the resource center). The embassy commissary has a supply of joint US/Argentine flag pins that were very well received. A recruiting office in the US might also have some other trinket type items like pens or posters. After their presentation, the Peruvians served pisco, a margarita like alcoholic drink, which is widely consumed in their country. The idea being to share a little flavor of your country, literally or figuratively, during your presentations.
- o. **Pets:** Buenos Aires is a very dog-friendly city. Cats have a more difficult time due to the dog density but seem to do just fine. Many apartment dwellers hire out professional dog walkers to take their animal out for an afternoon stroll through the park. There are fenced

in areas in many parks set aside for the responsible dog owners to use and let their pet run free. Unfortunately, many owners are not so responsible and it is quiet common to see dogs running loose in the parks with the owner some distance away. Dog excrement is also very common both in the parks and, oddly enough, on sidewalks though out the city. For this reason, my wife liked to let our toddler run loose on the grassy embassy grounds, which is a pet free zone. Professional walkers are excellent and do clean up after their pets. Barking dogs, while considered a nuisance in the US, are viewed here as an additional layer of security as a potential burglar then knows a dog is present. This is something to be aware of as you are house hunting especially if you have small children that require naps during the day. Also keep in mind that Argentines eat and socialize until very late and leaving the dog outside to roam the property is common.

- p. Smoking: This deserves special mention because many Argentines are heavy smokers. Non-smoking sections in restaurants are rare and though airports and hospitals are typically non-smoking, this is widely disregarded. Public transport is also non-smoking and the only routine violations of this I saw were the bus drivers. With their powerful labor union they are pretty much immune from dismissal. The worst is actually at the War College as no area is off limits to smoking. There are many small group exercises in small, poorly ventilated rooms, which I excused myself from when the smoke was thick. I was not the only one to do so. None of the foreign students in the class smoked while some 75% of the Argentines did. Smoking during lunch in the smallish cafeteria is normal especially at the conclusion of the meal. Instruction periods are smoke free. As such, the passageways become veritable tunnels of smoke during the breaks. If this is something that really bothers you, you should consider another assignment.

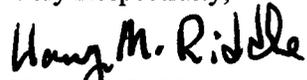
14. Summary

- a. The course is primarily intended to prepare mid-grade officers for a position on a major staff. And to that end, the course does just that. The course is not optional and therefore not selective for the Argentine officers who must complete the course prior to advancing to Captain. For that reason, the experiences and abilities of the Argentine officer's run the full range with a core of very intelligent and hard working officers. Following graduation, most Argentines move directly on to a one-year command tour.
- b. On the whole, this has been a very enjoyable tour. You will find the Argentines welcoming and eager to help and assist you both in and out of school. We exchanged a number of dinners and social calls and enjoyed all of them immensely. As for professional development, you do drop off the radar screen for your community for a year and a half. FITREP's are non-observed and might be a factor you need to consider depending on the competitiveness of your community. I leave with an enormous number of Argentine friends, contacts and experiences, now speak a second major world language, and found the subject matter fascinating though occasionally frustrating. My principle frustration being in that the language proficiency one possesses straight out of DLI is inadequate. I left DLI with above average test scores and still found myself struggling. This has been a common theme for past billet holders who were not native speakers. To help put this in perspective, the Canadian government sends their student to a yearlong course with one-on-one instruction from an Argentine national. It took me six months just to get to where he started the course and I know his experience was much fuller than mine because of it. Now that I have finished the course, I finally feel that I am ready to fully participate in classroom debates and instruction. This handicap could be partially offset by having the incoming student arrive as soon as practicable and

enrolling, if only for a short time, in the language-training course offered through the embassy here in Buenos Aires.

- c. Bottom line for this tour, lots of quality family time, unique challenges, and great and new experiences with memories for a lifetime.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harry M. Riddle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "H" and "R".

Harry M. Riddle
LCDR USN