

Britain at War: on the fringes

I have a few memories on the fringes of WW2, having lived with my parents in Buenos Aires from 1931 onwards.

The first memory dates from 1935/6 when new neighbours appeared at the next door house; they spoke English but my mother explained that they came from Germany, they had had to escape because they were in danger, presumably Jewish or liberal thinkers.

Next, early 1937, on the way to England by ship, we pulled into Santa Cruz in Tenerife, anchored in the harbour for 3 days to coal, under the protective eyes of a British and a US destroyers. The Spanish Civil War was not to interfere with the trade routes.

Next, in March 1938. At this point staying with my maternal grandparents in Crewe, it was the period when my father was on his 4 months leave back to UK from his employment on railways in Argentina. One evening the family was gathered, the "Anschluss" was talked about, father said there would be war within a year, everyone laughed, he was slightly wrong, it took 18 months to start!

Then December 1939 back in Buenos Aires, just after the battle of the River Plate, one of our ships came in for the permitted 72 hour R&R – I can't remember whether it was Achilles or Ajax. My mother and I went to the "new" harbour to see the ship; to get there we walked past the immigrants hostel where the German crew, who had come over from Montevideo, were being detained.

At this point a number of "charabancs" laden with our sailors went past and the 2 crews waved to each other in a most cordial fashion!

The Graff Spee crew were then allowed to wander round the city in uniform for several weeks before eventually being moved inland to the provinces of Cordoba and La Pampa.

In the former there is now a village that is straight out of Bavaria!

Things got difficult on the railways – the procurement of spares and coal for the locomotives. The latter meant local development of oil firing the locomotives.

On a trivial level, tea, traditionally from India via UK, became almost unobtainable. The airmail service, that had been operated by Lufthansa ceased, and letters took months to and from UK.

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*Looking up Corboda + Bavarian on Google you arrive at Villa General Belgrano.
(gives you a sinking feeling doesn't it.)
(Sorry but I couldn't resist it)*

From Wikiperdia;- Villa General Belgrano that was founded in 1930, by two German speculators attracted by its agricultural potential. The Alpine quality of the village attracted many immigrants from Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Austria and from about 1932 on many German and Swiss immigrants began arriving in Argentina, no doubt they could sense trouble brewing in Europe.

Some of them headed for the hills and settled in this Alpine style village.

And why wouldn't they it looks a lovely place.

In 1940, after the Battle of the River Plate, German seaman scuttled and sunk their battleship, the Admiral Graf Spee off the coast of the Montevideo harbour, and 130 of its surviving sailors settled in the village along with the original settlers and landscaped the mountain ranges of Córdoba with red-roofed, wood-frame homes, micro-brewerys and pastry and chocolate shops which gave it that unique style that distinguishes it today.



Villa General Belgrano