



**MUSEO**  
SITIO DE MEMORIA  
**ESMA**



# HISTORIAS SIN OLVIDO

In the Officers' quarters where the Clandestine Detention Center of Torture and Extermination set up in the Naval Mechanics School operated. There were more than 700 places of illegal detention during the last dictatorship from 1976 to 1983.

**Here, in the ESMA** approximately 5000 men and women were detained or missing. They were members of political parties or social activists, revolutionary organizations either armed or unarmed, workers, trade union members, students, professionals, artists and members of religious orders. Most of them were dropped alive into the ocean.

**Here, in the ESMA** the Navy planned abductions and systematically carried out murders. Here, prisoners were kept in hoods and shackled. Here, they were tortured. Here, the Navy made them disappear.

**Here, in the ESMA** children were born in captivity and were separated from their mothers. Most of them were illegally adopted or robbed. We are still looking for many of them.

**Here, in the ESM a crime against humanity was perpetrated.**

**memory,  
truth &  
justice**

## **ESMA MUSEUM AND SITE OF MEMORY** **Former Clandestine Centre for Detention, Torture and Extermination**

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory will remain closed until further notice as a preemptive measure against the spread of Coronavirus in our country.

Contents not suitable for children under 12.

Del Libertador Ave. 8151 / 8571 (former ESMA) CABA, Argentina.

+54 (11) 5300-4000 int. 79178/80 - sitiomemoriaesma@jus.gov.ar

Schedule group visit: institucionalsitioesma@jus.gov.ar



**Argentina unida**  
HISTORIAS SIN OLVIDO

**Secretaría de**  
**Derechos Humanos**



**Ministerio de Justicia**  
**y Derechos Humanos**  
**Argentina**

The story is based on court documents

---

# THE CASE OF REPRESSOR CAVALLO

## COLLECTIVE FIGHTS AND UNIVERSAL JUSTICE

---



Ricardo Miguel Cavallo was born in Buenos Aires on September 29, 1951. He enlisted as a midshipman in the Navy Command in 1970. Since the beginning of the last dictatorship in 1976, he worked at the ESMA and was a member of Task Force 3.3.2 until 1980. Assigned to the Intelligence sector, he was responsible for the kidnapping, torture, rape, forced labor and murder of thousands of victims. In this context, he infiltrated the University of Buenos Aires, where he pretended to be a student of Exact Sciences. One of his aliases was “Sérpico” and he was also known as “Miguel Ángel”, “Ricardo” or “Marcelo”. In 1981 the Navy sent Cavallo to Paris, where he led the propaganda campaign for the de facto government as a Deputy Naval Attaché at the Argentine Embassy in Paris. On June 27, 1985 he received the National Order of Merit with the rank of Officer, an award established by Charles de Gaulle in 1963. Back in Argentina, in 1987, he was indicted by prosecutor Julio Strassera, with charges of 227 disappearances, 110 kidnappings and torture, but with the passing of the Due Obedience Law, he was never actually prosecuted.

Between 1987 and 1988 he enrolled in the University of Belgrano’s Systems Analyst program. In 1990 he filed for retirement from the Navy and began his career as a businessman. In 1991 he was a deputy director of London Clubs, the real estate agency ran by former

ESMA repressor Jorge Rádice. At that time, Cavallo, Rádice and Jorge Eduardo “el Tigre” Acosta, all members of the ESMA task force, coincided in the company Martiel SA. During the 1990s, they were connected to officials of president Carlos Menem’s administration, along with Rádice and Miguel Ángel Egea, also a former ESMA repressor. In 1998 Cavallo became general manager of the company Talsud SA, in charge of driving licenses in the City of Buenos Aires (through the associated company Seal Lock SA), the provinces of La Rioja and Mendoza, and also in El Salvador, where they won tenders thanks to their political contacts. It is a complex web of corporate connections established to launder properties that were stolen from people who disappeared at ESMA, a crime that is still being investigated.

In August 1998 he traveled to Mexico, where he served as director of a consortium formed by the Argentine company Talsud SA and the French firm Gemplus SA, winners of a tender launched in 1999 by the then Secretary of Commerce and Industrial Development (Secofi) for the privatization of the National Vehicle Registry (RENAVE). This business was the result of his connections with the Menem administration and the Mexican PRI. The tender was heavily resisted by society in general and the governors, especially from the Chief of Government of the Federal District, Rosario Robles, and Attorney

General Samuel del Villas. They were against giving a private company a database of citizens and objected to every article in the tender. Car drivers also complained because it was expensive, poorly organized and they had to pay an additional tax.

Newspaper Reforma takes notice of the criticism and begins an investigation. In Buenos Aires, Reforma correspondent José Vales collects information on Cavallo. The journalist finds a list of repressors in a book by Alipio Paoletti, where Miguel Ángel Cavallo was included with his aliases “Marcelo”, “Sérpico” or “Ricardo”. Carrying a recent photo of Cavallo, Vales met with the Association of Former Disappeared Detainees, who recognized the repressor. They believed his name was Miguel Ángel instead of Ricardo Miguel. CELS provides a photocopy of his State Intelligence credential, which Víctor Basterra recovered from ESMA. The credential confirms that the number on Ricardo’s ID was the same as in Miguel Ángel Cavallo. This is how they were able to prove that the Argentine man who led RENAVE in Mexico was the former lieutenant commander and repressor of the ESMA.

Vales’ article was published on August 24, 2000: “*Yesterday, five former Argentine prisoners identified the current director of Mexico’s National Vehicle Registry, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, as their torturer,*” read the headline of the article.

The same day the article came out, Cavallo hastened his trip to Argentina where the Law of Due Obedience would grant him impunity. When the plane in which Cavallo tried to escape to Buenos Aires made a stopover in Cancun, he was arrested with a warrant signed by the head of Interpol Mexico, Juan Miguel Ponce Edmonson.

Judge Baltasar Garzón was on vacation and the alternate judge was Guillermo Ruiz Polanco. If there was no request from Judge Garzón in the following hours, Cavallo, who was held in solitary in a Mexico City jail, could have requested to be released. In Madrid, Argentine lawyer Carlos Slepoy sponsored “*the people’s accusation*”, an association of plaintiffs so that Spain could judge the Argentine military following the principle of international jurisdiction of crimes against humanity. The day before the extradition period would expire, he met with Ruiz Polanco, who in turn consulted with Baltasar Garzón and signed the extradition order.

Cavallo’s name had already been mentioned in the summary for terrorism and genocide in Argentina instructed by Garzón in the National Court in Madrid in 1996, based on the statements of several survivors, including Juan Gasparini, who pointed him out as the person responsible for the murders of his wife Mónica Jáuregui and Azucena Victorina Buono, as well as the torture suffered by Thelma Jara de Cabezas. Víctor Basterra, also a survivor, provided Judge Garzón with a copy of Cavallo’s photograph, which he had obtained while doing forced labor in the ESMA Basement, and which he was able to hide together with other photographs up until the time he was able to extract them from there.

Finally, on September 1, 2000, Judge Garzón signed Cavallo’s indictment and requested his extradition to Spain under the principle of universal jurisdiction. He charged him with participating in 264 disappearances of people and 159 kidnappings and uses of torture. Cavallo was transferred to the Oriente Prison. As requested by Mexican law in order for the process to move forward, Judge Jesús Guadalupe Luna Altamirano issued his opinion on January 11, 2001, stating that the international extradition was in order to prosecute Cavallo and try him for the crimes of genocide and terrorism, but considered that the crime of torture had already prescribed. On February 2, 2001, the Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico, Jorge Castañeda Gutman, granted the extradition. Cavallo appealed the decision and, finally, on June 10, 2003, the Mexican Supreme



Court of Justice issued its ruling which refused every point in Cavallo’s amparo, except those in connection to the expiration of the torture charge, and determined his extradition to Spain. It was an unprecedented sentence in the world in terms of transnational justice. For the first time, a state extradited a citizen accused by another state for crimes committed in a third state; and it was the first time in the history of Mexico that the court endorsed an extradition for crimes against humanity. On June 28, 2003, he was extradited to Spain.

While imprisoned in Spain, on August 12, 2003 the laws of Punto Final and Due Obedience were annulled in Argentina. When the judicial accusations resumed, the National Court of Spain decided that it was appropriate for Cavallo to be tried in his country. He arrived in Buenos Aires in March 2008, due to appear in federal courts. In the second trial for crimes against humanity committed at the ESMA, on October 26, 2011, Federal Court No. 5 tried the 18 prosecuted repressors, including Cavallo, who was sentenced to life imprisonment, absolute and perpetual disqualification. He received another life sentence in a third trial in 2017 for the so-called “death flights” and is currently charged in the fourth trial for illicit enrichment through the appropriation of property owned by disappeared persons and their families. He is currently serving his sentence in the Marcos Paz federal prison.

In April 2010, journalist and ESMA survivor Juan Gasparini denounced before the UN Committee on Torture that

Cavallo had been given the Order of Merit from the French State. France declared before the Committee that a law reform was necessary in order to suppress the award, as it was not legal to strip foreign beneficiaries away from it, although a conviction of Cavallo in Argentina would make it easier to initiate a procedure for its removal. In May 2010, French president Nicolas Sarkozy signed a decree to establish a legal basis to proceed with the abolition of the award for a foreign citizen. In July 2010, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner confirmed that Cavallo had been distinguished in 1985 with the National Order of Merit with the rank of Officer. The French government notified Cavallo in writing in 2014, but he never responded. In March 2019, once Cavallo’s sentence to life imprisonment was ratified by the Argentine Supreme Court, Gasparini submitted the complaint to the French government through a letter to the French ambassador in Geneva, François Rivasseau, requesting that he be withdrawn of the honor. In January 2020, several survivors joined Gasparini’s request. When President Alberto Fernández traveled to France last February, Justice Minister Marcela Losardo and Foreign Minister Felipe Solá brought the issue to their local counterparts. Finally, in May of this year the Argentine Foreign Ministry received notification that the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and the Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, signed a decree by which they withdrew the National Order of Merit the country had awarded repressor Ricardo Miguel Cavallo with in 1985, considering that the former marine had seriously failed the honor.