

GEN. MARTIN GÜEMES

Martin Miguel Juan De Mata Güemes was born in Salta, Argentina on February 8, 1785 to a noble and wealthy family. He attended primary school in his hometown, alternating formal schooling with working with the peasants on the family farms. At the age of 14, Martin joined the Infantry Regiment in Salta as a cadet and began a brilliant military career.



In 1805, he was transferred to Buenos Aires, where he defended territorial integrity, acting heroically during the English Invasions; and was rewarded by the King of Spain for this.

In 1810, serving the revolutionary cause, Güemes performed efficiently in command of a Gaucho Squadron in the Quebrada de Humahuaca, preventing communication between the opponents of the new regime and the royalists of Alto Peru. In Suipacha -the sole triumph of the patriots attempting to recover the valuable altoperuano- Captain Güemes' involvement was decisive.

After the disaster of Huaqui, Güemes escorted Juan Martín de Pueyrredón through the Oran jungle, saving the Potosi Mint and its funds, which were held by the royalists.

In 1814, Gen. José de San Martín put Güemes in charge of the advance party of the Río Pasaje (today called "Juramento" (Oath) because on its banks Belgrano made the troops swear allegiance to the new blue-white-blue flag which was the symbol (of the Argentines) initiating the Gaucho war. The following year, in Puesto Marqués, Güemes completely defeated the powerful invading army under the command of Joaquin de la Pezuela, and was hailed as "Governor of the Intendencia" (then formed by the cities of Salta, Jujuy, Tarija, and Oran).

In June 1816, Supreme Director Juan Martín de Pueyrredón put Güemes in charge of "defense of the United Provinces and Security of the Auxiliary Army of Alto Peru," which was in Tucumán reorganizing after defeat in Sipe Sipe. Then the gaucho militia commanded by the heroic Güemes went on to act as an army in the service of the nation.

In 1817, Güemes stopped two powerful invasions commanded by prominent leaders. The first invasion was by Marshal José de la Serna, who, commanding 5,500 veterans, set off from Lima, assuring that he would recover Buenos Aires. The second was an invasion by General Pedro de Olañeta, a staunch enemy of Güemes. Later, in June 1820, General Juan Ramírez Orozco advanced with 6,500 men. None of the invaders managed to implement plans to reach Buenos Aires and restore the former Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata.

For his meritorious action, San Martín appointed Güemes General in Chief of the Observation Army, and gave him the task of assisting in liberating Peru. The provinces recognized the designation, but gave him very little support. Güemes was forced to impose taxes that caused opposition and great discontent among the wealthy, impoverishing the Intendencia's economy under his government.

Because of this, internal opposition, allied with that from outside, became the seed of treason that resulted in his death.

By 1821, Güemes was surrounded by enemies. One of the most powerful was the governor of Tucumán, who refused to hand over to Güemes the weapons that had belonged to the Auxiliary

Army, and prevented Güemes' peer in Santiago from assisting him. In May, accusing Güemes of being a dictator, the Cabildo of Salta deposed him, in alliance with Gen. Olañeta. Güemes regained power days later, but the royalists, guided by Güemes' internal enemies, wounded him on the night of June 7. Güemes, age 36, died ten days later, outdoors on a cot in Cañada de la Horqueta. He is the only Argentine general to fall in a foreign war.

Güemes' remains rest in the Panteón de las Glorias in northern Argentina, in the Salta Basilica Cathedral. His ideals of freedom, his scorn of materialism, his love of the Motherland and his unwavering spirit remain with those who carry him in their hearts, and pay emotional tribute every time they pronounce his name, because General Güemes continues to ride and guide his compatriots.



Autora: María Cristina Fernández
Traductor: Tom Wallis