

**Airborne Antarctic Ozone Experiment**  
**Santiago Conversation 1987**  
**Richard Denning, JPL**

It was quite a shock when we deployed to Chile after the wide-open Northern Territory in Australia. In Darwin we had been encouraged to invite the townspeople we met to come to the airbase to watch the launches- visitors could get quite close to the runway, and many were very interested in the ER-2 and STEP in general.

In Chile, things were different- The airfield was closely guarded, and people seldom asked questions about our work - we couldn't have told them much anyway because of the international politics surrounding ozone. Our association with the government didn't help either. We weren't allowed to take pictures in or around the terminal building, only inside the hangar.

We had our labs set up in the back end of the hangar, thanks to Tommy Thompson and others who had set the site up ahead of time. At both sides of the main hangar door, carabinieri watched quite attentively- one day I was near the containers in front of the labs, and one of the ground crew said "hey, want to see something?", so naturally, I followed him around behind one of the fac bins, and we just stood for a moment. Within that minute one of the guards came walking back to see what we were up to.

On my return leg, I had a few hours between planes in Santiago, so I thought I would get a cab into town to look around. I saw a line of taxis, and went up to one of the drivers to see if I could hire him-

¿Puedes llevarme a la ciudad?  
Can you take me into town?

Usted tendrá que hablar con el carabinero-  
You will need to talk to the carabinero- He pointed at a soldier standing watching us.

So I walked toward the carabinero, and gestured questioningly toward taxi driver. He nodded his head, and we were good to go.

As soon as we got away from the airport, the driver started some small talk, and asked if I was on vacation or travelling for work. I mentioned the "proyecto ozono" and that I was an engineer for NASA. He said he could see "en la cara y en los ojos" (in my face and my eyes) that I wasn't the normal businessman he usually came into contact with.

Everybody had heard about the mysterious flights we were making from Punta Arenas, and he actually was aware of the "Ozone Hole" problem. When I told him I was from California, and had recently been in Australia, he asked if I was in a hurry- I told him no, I was just being a tourist. We were on an expressway, and he pulled into a turnout about the right size for a bus, and

stopped. His Spanish was very intelligible, and he had a bit of English, so we communicated pretty well.

He wanted to talk- about his daughter, my kids, how he had worked overseas for a few years, in Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and France. Life was good, but the kids thought only of material things. He wanted to make sure his daughter got a good education and developed herself (he said she was very intelligent), so he came back to Chile.

He asked about the Challenger accident, and wondered if it was caused by greed or what? I told him I thought it was bad management and paperwork being signed because of outside pressure.

We got back on the road, and as he dropped me off in town, he shook my hand. He hoped if someday I should return, perhaps there will be no more of Pinochet in Chile. Then he looked around, both ways, and said in English "No more than 5 years there will be no more of this" - as he gestured toward a carabinero nearby.

This was the first time in 4 weeks that I had talked to anyone with an interest in what we were doing. He was smart, world-minded and asked questions.

*From my notes taken on Wednesday, September 9, 1987*

*Richard Denning*

*P.S. - The Airborne Antarctic Ozone Expedition was over 30 years ago now - More memoirs from other participants may be found at:*

*<https://www.esrl.noaa.gov/csd/projects/aaoe/narratives/>*