THE CHILEAN NAVAL MUTINY OF 1931

Submitted by Carlos René Manuel Tromben Corbalán to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Maritime History, September 2010

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ABSTRACT

On 1st September 1931, the most serious mutiny affecting the Chilean Navy in nearly two centuries of existence broke out. The various books and articles which have examined this subject have used as their sources the local press and the participants’ own stories. Just in a few cases, historians have had access to official documents, because they were seldom published or access was restricted until now. This has led to gross factual mistakes in the existing historiography, leading to questionable interpretations and to the creation of legends still alive in Chile and elsewhere. This thesis discusses these topics.

The Chilean Navy has in its archives a collection of 35 volumes (about 9,200 pages) of Courts Martial official documents and proceedings never studied by historians. The author used these sources under a special authorization for academic purposes.

The following theories of the causes of the mutiny commonly expounded by contemporaries and subsequent historians have been researched:

a. Participation of Marxist groups in the origin of the mutiny and exploitation of it.

b. Participation of the two Chilean populist political groups in the movement’s generation (headed by the former presidents Arturo Alessandri and Carlos Ibáñez)

c. Army and Navy officers’ participation in politics during 1924 to 1931 and the consequence in the behaviour of the mutineers.

Examination has also been made of connections with the mutiny on board HMS Lucia in Devonport in January 1931 which occurred while the Chilean battleship Latorre was being refitted at that port. Months later and being anchored in the port of Coquimbo, Chile, serious mutiny or revolt started on board Latorre and spread to other naval units as well as other Navy’s, Army’s and Air Force’s shore establishments. One week after the Chilean mutiny, the Invergordon mutiny started in the Royal Navy Atlantic Fleet. This thesis also compares both mutinies because they had many aspects in common.
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