

# 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

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and  
that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and  
that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by  
this or any other University.

(signature) .....

## 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.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (MAPS)</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1. The Chilean Naval Mutiny of 1931 in brief.	12
1.2. A discussion of the literature covering the period of the Mutiny.	14
1.3. The theory of mutinies	20
1.4. The crime of sedition or mutiny in the Chilean Military Code.	28
1.5. An introduction to the following parts of this thesis.	30
<b>PART I: THE ORIGINS</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2. THE REMOTE ORIGINS OF THE MUTINY.</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1. The war against Perú and Bolivia (1879-1883) shaped an attitude in the Navy.	32
2.2. The 1891-1924 period in Chilean politics.	33
<b>3. 1924-1931: A PERIOD WHEN DISCIPLINE WAS BROKEN IN THE ARMED FORCES.</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1. Alessandri and the meddling of military and naval officers in political affairs	40
3.2. January 1925, the peril of another civil war.	48
<b>4. THE FINAL SETTLEMENT OF THE 1925 CRISIS AND ITS FAILURE TO LAST.</b>	<b>77</b>
4.1 The meddling of Ibáñez in the Navy.	77
4.2 Summary: the development of active participation by the Navy in Chilean politics and its significance for the 1931 Mutiny.	97
<b>5. THE FAILED SOLUTIONS OF 1925-1931.</b>	<b>99</b>
5.1. The brief presidential period of Emiliano Figueroa-Larraín.	99
5.2. Carlos Ibáñez finally becomes President of Chile.	112

	4
<b>6. THE IMMEDIATE ORIGINS OF THE MUTINY</b>	<b>124</b>
6.1. Alessandri's plots against Ibáñez.	124
6.2. Communist plots against political stability.	130
6.3. The battleship Latorre in Devonport, UK.	141
6.4. Before the mutiny in Chile: salary reductions.	145
<b>PART II: THE MUTINY</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>7. COQUIMBO.</b>	<b>150</b>
7.1. Organizing a mutiny in Coquimbo, Chile.	150
7.2. The outbreak of mutiny in the flagships.	163
7.3. The mutiny unleashing on board the destroyers.	166
7.4. First days of the mutiny in Coquimbo.	171
<b>8. TALCAHUANO</b>	<b>180</b>
8.1. Organizing a mutiny in Talcahuano.	180
8.2. The mutiny erupts in Talcahuano.	187
<b>9. VALPARAÍSO AND THE END OF THE REBELLION.</b>	<b>193</b>
9.1. The mutiny in Valparaíso.	193
9.2. The final events in Valparaíso, Talcahuano and Coquimbo.	199
9.3. Final comments.	222
<b>PART III: THE AFTERMATH</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>10. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE NAVY.</b>	<b>227</b>
10.1. Introduction to this part.	227
10.2. Consequences of the mutiny.	227
10.3. The presidency of Juan Esteban Montero-Rodríguez: the civilist reaction.	228
<b>11. POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES.</b>	<b>242</b>
11.1. The Chilean Communist Party after the mutiny.	242
11.2. Another period of political instability in Chile.	250

	5
11.3. Towards political stability. The end of an era.	260
<b>AN INTERPRETATION</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>12. THE CHILEAN NAVAL MUTINY OF 1931: A REASSESSMENT.</b>	<b>264</b>
12.1. Background.	264
12.2. The author's opinion.	265
12.3. Similarities and differences between the Chilean naval mutiny and the Invergordon mutiny.	266
12.4 Author's interpretation of this thesis	272
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>281</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS.</b>	<b>281</b>
A1. Evaluation of the situation made by the consulting board [Navy Board] on the night of 1/ 2 September 1931.	281
A2. First mutineers' manifesto.	281
A2. Second mutineers' manifesto.	283
<b>APPENDIX B: SHIPS AT COQUIMBO ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1931</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: SHIP AND SHORE ESTABLISHMENTS IN TALCAHUANO ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1931</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: SHIPS AND SHORE ESTABLISHMENTS IN VALPARAÍSO ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1931.</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: MEMBERSHIP OF OFFICERS' COMMITTEES OR JUNTAS</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>294</b>
<b>SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>297</b>

**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (MAPS)**

Map 1. Chile. Important cities and ports during the mutiny.	7
Map 2. From Copiapó to Temuco. Places mentioned in this thesis.	8
Map 3. Coquimbo Bay. Places mentioned in this thesis.	8
Map 4. Quintero and Valparaíso Bays. Places mentioned in this thesis.	9
Map 5. Concepción Bay (Talcahuano). Places mentioned in this thesis.	9
Map 6. Talcahuano Naval Base. Places mentioned in this thesis.	10