



The Argentine Flag in Monterey

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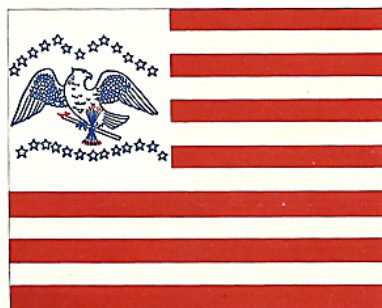
In many publications illustrating the different flags flown over California (up to sixteen of them), the flag of Argentina is often included.



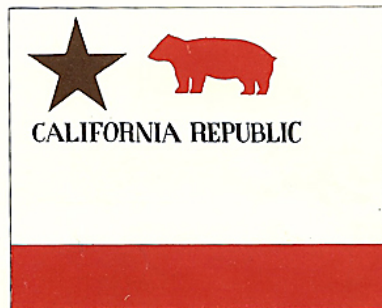
7. Flag of Argentina, flown by Bouchard over Monterey in 1818



8. Mexican Empire flag raised at Monterey, 1822



11. Special U.S. flag planted at Gavilan Peak by Frémont, 1846



12. California Republic "Bear Flag" raised over Sonoma in 1846

Figure 1: A portion of the flag chart "Flags Flown over California since 1542", published in 1976 by Lane Magazine & Book Co. Among other inaccuracies, notice that the Mexican flag shows an American "bald eagle" instead of the traditional Mexican eagle.

It might look strange to see this flag placed among others which are more closely connected to California's history. The affair becomes even more unusual when reading one such explanation for the Argentine flag:

1818 ARGENTINA — California was spared almost all military involvement in the colonial war for independence from Spain. However in 1818 two ships flying the revolutionary flag of Argentina came to anchor in Monterey Bay. Their commander, Hippolyte de Bouchard, demanded the surrender of the "City with all the furniture and other belongings of the King", indicating that he had come "to make war with all seriousness of purpose and with all right of nations". The Californians were defiant, but unable to defend the town. Bouchard's men sacked, looted, and burned it. They sailed south...

Although the facts are true, the explanation misses the full scope of the event, and by doing so, substantially misleads the reader.

However, in order to understand the entire affair, one must begin with preceding events in México and Argentina, and then focus on the actions of Bouchard and others elsewhere in Latin America. Only then will the events described in those publications start to make sense.

MEXICO AND ARGENTINA

By 1818 in several regions of Latin America, revolutionary movements had recently appeared, seeking independence from Spain against the Royalist sympathizers. Most of these movements met misfortune and quickly were suffocated, with their leaders executed or forced to leave the country.

In many respects, this was the case of México and the movement begun by Father Hidalgo and Miguel Allende in 1810. Although both leaders were executed in 1811, the ideals were taken up by yet another priest, Father Morelos, who after four years of struggle was also taken prisoner by the Royalists and executed in 1815. Vicente Guerrero kept fighting for independence with the help of Agustín de Iturbide, achieving independence only after 1821. In sum, for almost a dozen years, war and insurrection persisted throughout Mexican territory with much misfortune and sacrifice.

On the other hand, the Argentine Revolution was very successful. Self-rule began in May 1810, and independence was declared in 1816. Two very important battles fought and won by General Belgrano in 1812 and 1813 were essential in the war for independence and eliminated Royalist domination within the current Argentine borders.

However, since many other similar movements on the continent had been suppressed, the government of Buenos Aires (Argentina) started a continent-wide campaign to revive and help the insurgency against the Royalist forces elsewhere in Latin America. In part, it feared it might face the same fate of México and other similar movements.¹

The Buenos Aires government's purpose was "...to promote and help the ideals of freedom and independence..."² It financed General San Martín's expedition across the Andes to help the Chilean and Peruvian revolutions—its success was key to preserving Argentine independence.

In 1817, San Martín's army was victorious in the battle of Maipú, regaining Chile's independence, and by 1821 San Martín declared the independence of Perú. Finally, San Martín reached Guayaquil, Ecuador, and met Simón Bolívar; their armies joined forces to continue the struggle and secured independence for Latin America after the battle of Ayacucho in 1824.

Much of the credit is due to the leaders of the Argentine revolution that, against many odds, continued supporting and assisting movements against the Spanish Royalists across the entire continent.

HIPOLITO BUCHARDO

In 1816, Captain Hippolyte de Bouchard (known in Argentina as Buchardo) was put in command of a three-masted frigate named the *Argentina*. It was very important to the war effort to have control of the seas to give logistic and military support to the different revolutionary movements spreading in the continent.

Bouchard was born in France, near Marseilles, but was brought to Buenos Aires at an early age. He fought for his adoptive country during the war of

independence, and in 1810 was put in command of ships serving under navy colonel Guillermo Brown, head of the Argentine revolutionary navy.

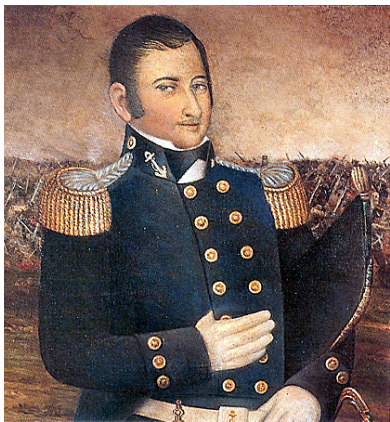


Figure 2. Portrait of Captain Hipólito Bouchard, wearing the uniform of an officer of the Argentine Navy, by Julio Marc. Source: Museo de Historia de Rosario, Santa Fé, Argentina.

Brown and Bouchard participated in various actions against the Royalists in Chile and Argentina. In 1813 he fought alongside General San Martín on the shores of the Paraná River, where he achieved glory capturing the enemy's flag. Such courage and dedication prompted the government to grant Bouchard Argentine citizenship. His marriage to a distinguished lady, and the birth of two daughters, cemented his bonds to the country even further.

When he took command of the *Argentina*, he also became, by official decree, a privateer. The object of his campaign was to undermine the Royalist naval system and to encourage insurrections along American shores.

EVENTS LEADING TO MONTEREY

During his voyages to the Pacific, Bouchard supplemented his crew with natives from the islands after heavy losses from epidemics and battles. He arrived at Honolulu on 17 August 1818 and retrieved the Argentine corvette *Chacabuco* from King Kamehameha I of the Sandwich Islands. Her crew had mutinied, abandoned the officers on the coast of Chile, and later sold the ship to Kamehameha.

After delicate negotiations, Bouchard won the king's friendship and then rounded up the mutineers and executed their leaders. Later, he established a treaty of union for peace, war, and commerce and Kamehameha pledged to help any ship with the Argentine flag. Bouchard reciprocated by giving the king the honorary title of colonel together with his own uniform, hat, and saber. According to the records, the Kingdom of Hawaii was among the first

countries to officially recognize the Argentine Republic as an independent and sovereign country.

In October of 1818, Bouchard set sail to North America with 30 Hawaiians that Kamehameha had given to Bouchard as part of the crew. The *Chacabuco*, also known as the *Santa Rosa*, was commanded by Peter Corney, an English sailor and explorer. A veteran of many Pacific crossings, he is probably best known for his work *Voyages in the Northern Pacific; Narrative of Several Trading Voyages from 1813 to 1818*.

Bouchard had received news of a new insurrection in México under the leadership of Francisco Xavier Minas, and set course to give support to the movement. Minas was a Spanish officer banished from Spain for his ideals.

In London, Minas organized an expedition to help fight the “absolutism of the Spanish Monarch”. He arrived in México with the help of yet another privateer from Buenos Aires, Commodore Luis Aury, on 15 April 1817. His fight was misunderstood and did not get the popular support he had expected. He was executed 11 November 1817.

IN MONTEREY

Bouchard and Corney visited California’s Fort Ross, a Russian settlement north of Monterey, to obtain needed supplies.

On November 20th, a sentinel at Point Pinos sighted the ships and reported their approach to the Spanish authorities at Monterey. The *Chacabuco* anchored in the Monterey harbor, while the *Argentina* stood off at some distance.

Bouchard and Corney were rowed ashore to meet Governor Pablo Vicente de Solá. The governor rejected Bouchard’s demand for the surrender of the garrison, and Bouchard and Corney returned to their respective ships. The *Chacabuco* opened fire and the guns of the presidio answered, damaging the *Chacabuco*. The *Argentina* entered the harbor and anchored in a position from which she could defend the *Chacabuco* from further

attack. The following morning Bouchard landed with some two hundred men, forcing Solá to retreat.

Bouchard entered Monterey without further opposition and for five days flew the flag of Argentina at the presidio. At the end of the fifth day, with the *Chacabuco* repaired, Bouchard decided to leave Monterey, and he ordered the destruction of the garrison, any other military emplacements, and the king's stores. Eyewitness accounts note that the properties of foreigners (many of then Americans settlers) were respected and untouched.

This ended Bouchard's attempt to subvert the Spanish colonial government of Alta California. He believed Solá would be forced to surrender since nearly all the soldiers were Mexicans. Revolt was spreading in the rest of México. Most of the 3,000 settlers were Mexicans, and San Diego, he was assured, was ready to support him. But the little force at Monterey remained loyal to the Spanish crown.

However, the movement toward a break with the old world was spreading in México. In 1822, Governor Solá wrote that he had received from Mexico City "such documents as are printed in a country of dreamers, since independence was a dream".³

Two months later word reached him that the dream had come true. Later Solá would serve as the delegate of Alta California to the Iturbide administration, becoming loyal to the Mexican independence that he had once condemned.

OTHER ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

The incident at Monterey was not isolated. In the Caribbean, Commodore Luis Aury was on a similar mission, using as sanctuaries the island of San Andres, the Port of Baltimore, and Kingston Harbor in Jamaica, where the Argentine government had a consulate. Aury, Bouchard, Lord Cochrane⁴, and others were acting in accordance to an international practice which was well accepted and practiced by all European and American governments.⁵

The Argentine government had authorized them to hoist the flag when “... attacking an enemy vessel, garrison, or fortress”.⁶ The orders also gave specific instructions regarding uniforms, ethics, treatment of prisoners, and so on.

Aury was more successful than Bouchard—in recognition of his help the insurgents in Central America adopted as their flag the same colors and design as the flag hoisted on the ships that “*came from Buenos Aires*”. Those colors were associated with a movement for independence, not Buenos Aires (Argentina) itself.⁷

It is understandable that Spanish documents and letters of the time, when referring to those naval operations, characterized them as “acts of piracy”. Also, the same documents mentioned “the increasing insurgency which is being helped by Buenos Aires”.

A real insurgency existed in the American colonies, a reflection of the discontent that also existed in Spain. In fact, Lt. Manuel Gómez, one of the defenders of the Monterey presidio, was the uncle of one of Bouchard’s officers, Luciano Gómez.

A FINAL HISTORICAL NOTE

Bouchard was licensed as a privateer by Argentine government decree. His task was to undermine the Royalist naval system by encouraging insurrections. His intent in taking Monterey was not to pillage or destroy the city (as the explanation given for the existence of the Argentine flag in California seems to imply), but to promote freedom and independence among the locals and win them over to the cause of liberty (a cause which he believed was already deeply rooted in their spirit). History should record Bouchard, not as what pirate tales have made of him, but as a courageous warrior in the cause of liberty.

This spirit of revolt, instigated by Napoleon Bonaparte placing his brother Joseph upon the Spanish throne, had begun in 1809 and spread across South America then northwards, where it culminated in México’s independence in 1821. However, in 1818 Bouchard failed to overcome the locals’ indifference in California.



Figure 3: Letter of marque granted to Captain Hippolyte de Bouchard by the United Provinces of the River Plate. Source: <http://www.rain.org/campinternet/channelhistory/images/bouchard/gallery/pages/Letterofmark.jpg>

The Argentine government of 1818 never had any claims or intention to incorporate California as a possession, nor to exercise any type of control over its inhabitants. The purpose of the attack was to encourage an uprising and the fact the flag flew for a few days was because it came allied to the already ongoing Mexican revolt and as part of a very successful continental campaign. The Argentine flag should thus be removed from charts and publications illustrating the flag of nations which, at one time or another had either territorial claims, possessions, or commercial interests in what is today the state of California.⁸

On the other hand, if the people of California wished to keep this flag as part of their “heritage”⁹ and history, major alterations to explanatory texts should be made.

A VEXILLOLOGICAL NOTE

The flag briefly flown by Bouchard over Monterrey likely had no charge. However the flag illustrated in this type of publication or chart bears a sun, and usually locates it near the hoist rather than at the center of the flag.

Editors and publishers must have taken as accurate the flag of Argentina as it appears in many 19th-century books on flags, which depict the Argentine flag in this fashion—they likely presumed that those books were reproducing faithfully the flag as it was used in 1818.¹⁰

The reasons why those books reproduced the flag in that fashion are unclear, but in the 19th century, and even earlier, it was often common practice to put the principal charge of a flag, either the coat of arms or other kind of charge, near the hoist. The idea was that the flag would be exposed to the elements and the principal ornament of the flag would last longer—with the fly end frayed and repaired repeatedly.

Furthermore, in case of calm winds the principal charge could be seen more easily. Argentina officially adopted the flag in 1816, without the sun. The Congress on 2 February 1818 resolved to add the sun to the war flag and naval ensign.



Figure 4: The flag of Argentina as illustrated in many publications. Source: Lane Magazine & Book Co.

The secret instructions to Bouchard were given on 15 June 1815, and the license renewed again in September 1817. There was no mention of the sun when referring to the specifications of the flag.

Also, taking into consideration Bouchard's itinerary throughout the Pacific, it is very unlikely that he knew of the modification of the flag. In August of 1818, Bouchard was in Honolulu and the flags hoisted on the *Argentina* and the *Chacabuco* did not have a sun at the center or the hoist. In that era, communications were very slow, and resources and or materials to modify the flag were very scarce.

That flag played a part in an important “first”: The *Argentina*, with Bouchard as its commander, was the first Argentine ship to sail around the globe flying the national flag.



END NOTES

1. In 1810, Chile declared its independence, but in October 1814 Chilean forces were defeated in the Battle of Rancagua. The government, remains of the army, and civilians alike were exiled to the Argentine city of Mendoza. The Republic of Venezuela was officially born in July 1811, but its poorly trained revolutionary militiamen were soon defeated. Francisco Miranda surrendered, and Simon Bolívar fled to Jamaica. Later, Bolívar was again twice driven from Venezuela after 1813.
2. From the written instructions given by the Government of Buenos Aires to Bouchard and Brown on 15 June 1815. The signature was of Juan Martín de Pueyrredón, Supreme Director of the United Provinces of the River Plate and a strong believer of republicanism. The instructions were secret because it mentioned a flag which only would become official a year later.
3. *The Monterey Peninsula*, p. 39-41.
4. Lord Thomas Cochrane, head of the Chilean Navy, commanded the fleet that transported San Martín's army from Chile to Perú in 1820.
5. Webster's definition of a privateer: "An armed vessel commissioned to cruise against commerce and war vessels of the enemy". An annex to the Treaty of Paris of 1856 called on all countries to abolish the practice of privateering. Argentina signed the annex on October of the same year.
6. *Idem* 2.
7. Editor's note: Perhaps also inspired by the Argentine flag (although further research is needed to verify the connection), the flag of Guayaquil (five horizontal stripes alternating light blue and white, with three white stars on the center stripe) was adopted in 1820 after the involvement in Ecuador of Admiral Guillermo Brown in 1816 and Lord Thomas Cochrane in 1819. Also, the flag of the Independent Province of Ecuador (a white star on a light blue canton on a field of white) was adopted in 1822 after Brown's earlier support and the victory of San Martín's troops (under the overall command of Antonio de Sucre) in the Battle of Pichincha, which secured the independence of Ecuador.
8. A primary example is a chart published by Lane Magazine and Book Co. (publisher of *Sunset* magazine), which is representative of many publications on the subject of flags flown over California. Many Internet sources repeat the story.
9. Under the title *California's Heritage*, signed by then-governor Ronald Reagan, is another publication that includes the flag of Argentina among 15 other flags. Several current websites repeat the same information.
10. I contacted Lane Magazine & Book Co. as well as the Department of Parks and Recreation of California, which ordered the printing of the chart, requesting information on the sources consulted, but I was told that no files were kept. I also researched the Monterey Library for documents, letters, or recollections of eyewitnesses hoping to identify any local sources used.

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- Ferrigan, James The Flag Store, Sonoma, Calif.
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