

"Así la Proa"

(Steady as She Goes)

*The First Chilean Antarctic Expedition of 1947 and the
Founding of the Captain Arturo Prat Naval Station*

*A joint endeavour of the Armed Forces, a contribution of intellectuals and scientists,
and the geopolitical vision of General Ramón Cañas Montalva*

FRANCISCO SÁNCHEZ URRUTIA
FELIPE MOLINA

Foreword by Jorge Vidal Stuardo, Rear Admiral (Ret.)

Eighty years of the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station · 1947–2027

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Commemorative edition

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The photographs reproduced in this edition belong to *Terra Australis* by Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (Editorial Zig-Zag, 1948).

Commemorative edition marking the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Soberanía station, today the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station (6 February 1947).

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Foreword

A country's geographical dimension determines, to a certain extent, its future development. In Chile's case, its extensive coastline makes it a nation that looks to the sea as an inexhaustible source of wealth, and that bears a responsibility for guaranteeing the security of interoceanic shipping routes.

Moreover, its continental proximity to Antarctic territory constitutes a geopolitical strength for the development of scientific research, tourism and logistical support.

This prompted the Government of Chile to plan a first scientific expedition, which had to be suspended in 1906 owing to the need to concentrate resources on rebuilding Valparaíso after the violent earthquake that struck the city in August of that same year.

On 6 November 1940, President Pedro Aguirre Cerda issued Supreme Decree No. 1747, which established the exact boundaries of the Chilean Antarctic Territory, defining with precision the frontiers the nation considered its own. This was the first step towards the conquest of Antarctica. What remained, however, was the decisive step: turning that line drawn on a map into physical and continuous presence.

It fell to President Gabriel González Videla to bring that pending task to fruition, organising within a few weeks the flotilla that would sail in January 1947 under the command of Commodore Federico Guesalaga Toro and that, the following month, would inaugurate the Soberanía station — today the Captain Arturo Prat

Naval Station — as the first permanently inhabited Chilean military and scientific settlement in Antarctica.

As the eightieth anniversary of that important historical milestone approaches, the work carried out by Francisco Sánchez Urrea, Full Member of the Chilean Academy of Naval and Maritime History, and by construction engineer Felipe Molina Molina, brings into relief the details and particulars of a geopolitical and strategic process that gave substance to Chile's claim of sovereignty over the Chilean Antarctic Territory and laid the groundwork for the subsequent signing of the Antarctic Treaty.

This research effort succeeds in showing the sheer rigour of the life led by the first naval and military garrisons on the frozen continent, where communication northwards was limited to radio and telegraph contact, and where their stay was interwoven with the singularity of nature in a cold and inhospitable environment.

It highlights not only the importance of the first Antarctic expedition, but also sets out in great detail the voyage of President Gabriel González Videla during the second expedition, which made him the first head of state anywhere in the world to set foot on Antarctic soil, accompanied by the Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and by various political authorities.

Within that party stands the figure of General Ramón Cañas Montalva, one of the foremost authorities on Chile's southern and Antarctic sovereignty, to whom the author devotes several pages of his work, regarding him as a pioneer of national geopolitics and a leading figure of Chilean strategic thought.

The authors also position the Chilean Navy as the branch that exercised operational leadership of the great Antarctic initiative, defying the unknown and the scarcity of available resources, and placing the institutional objective above budgetary comfort.

The participation of prominent intellectuals, writers and scientists in the first expedition is likewise underscored: from within their own disciplines they helped to convey the importance of the voyage as an expression both of national sovereignty and of knowledge.

Finally, the author ventures to employ the concept of "Antarcticization" as the fruit of an awakening awareness of a physical space never before discussed in our country, and which, from 1947 onwards, began to be known in its full dimension.

In sum, the present work, entitled "*Así la Proa*": *The First Chilean Antarctic Expedition of 1947 and the Founding of the Captain Arturo Prat Naval Station*, succeeds in faithfully reconstructing the feat of 1947 in all its breadth, drawing on testimonies, the press of the day and recent Chilean polar historiography, and it further manages to restore to that feat the greatness it objectively possessed — a greatness that illuminates Chile's Antarctic present and future.

This work therefore represents a remarkable effort to bring back into the national memory an epic deed eighty years on, for its undeniable appreciation within Antarctic historiography.

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Abstract

Abstract. Between January and April 1947, Chile organised and carried out its first official expedition to the Chilean Antarctic Territory, an undertaking that culminated on 6 February with the founding of the Soberanía station — today the Arturo Prat naval station — on Greenwich Island, in the South Shetland archipelago. This work offers a comprehensive reconstruction of that feat and, above all, an interpretation of its meaning eight decades later. It examines the historical and legal roots of Chile's southern vocation; the post-war international scene that precipitated the undertaking; the transition from the territorial delimitation of 1940 to the effective occupation of 1947; the body of geopolitical ideas — exemplarily embodied in General Ramón Cañas Montalva — that gave doctrinal foundation to the Antarctic projection; the joint character of the operation, with the indispensable contribution of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force; the decisive role of a select body of intellectuals, writers and scientists; the voyage and the founding of the station; the epic of the garrison that wintered at the edge of the world; and the technical foundations — lighthouse and meteorological records — that the campaign bequeathed. The work closes with a forward-looking outlook: in light of the Chilean Antarctic Statute, of twenty-first-century Antarctic policy and of new national capabilities, it is argued that the hallmark forged in 1947 — permanent presence combined with scientific activity — still orders Chile's Antarctic destiny and projects its future.

Keywords: Chilean Antarctica; 1947 expedition; Arturo Prat station; Armed Forces; Ramón Cañas Montalva; sovereignty; southern geopolitics.

Resumen. Entre noviembre de 1946 y abril de 1947, Chile organizó y ejecutó su primera expedición oficial al Territorio Chileno Antártico, empresa que cumplió un importante hito el 6 de febrero con la fundación de la base Soberanía —hoy base naval Arturo Prat— en la isla Greenwich, en el archipiélago de las Shetland del Sur. Este trabajo ofrece una reconstrucción integral de aquella gesta y, sobre todo, una interpretación de su sentido a ocho décadas de distancia.

Palabras clave: Antártica chilena; expedición de 1947; base Arturo Prat; Fuerzas Armadas; Ramón Cañas Montalva; soberanía; geopolítica austral.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: An Undertaking of Courage and Patriotism

In the southern summer of 1947, a small flotilla of the Chilean Navy set its prow southwards on a mission that far exceeded naval routine. This was no ordinary voyage, but what the press of the day called, without circumlocution, a patriotic mission, intended to demonstrate that Chile was — and would remain — a nation with a genuine southern and Antarctic vocation (León Wöppke, 2017). That undertaking brought together, in a single effort, sailors, soldiers, airmen, engineers, geographers, biologists, naturalists, historians and writers. It was, at root, a work of courage and patriotism in which servicemen and men of science forged a hallmark that endures to this day: consolidating the national presence in the polar territory through permanence and scientific activity alike (León Wöppke, 2017).

There are feats measured not by the magnitude of their means, but by the disproportion between what was available and what was achieved, and by the duration of their consequences. The First Chilean Antarctic Expedition belongs to that lineage. A country whose economy had been battered by the post-war years, with neither icebreakers nor polar experience, dispatched to the stormiest latitudes on the planet two newly acquired vessels and a handful of men willing to remain an entire winter in a wooden house buffeted by the wind, so that the Chilean flag would not cease to fly on the white continent. From that gesture was born the Soberanía station — today the Arturo Prat naval station — the

oldest Chilean Antarctic installation still in operation (Armada de Chile, 2017).

The purpose of this work is twofold. First, to reconstruct the feat of 1947 in all its breadth, from its historical roots to its consolidation, attending to its essentially joint and inter-institutional character. Second, to interpret its meaning eighty years on, showing that it was not an isolated anniversary but the founding act of a sovereign and scientific continuity that still orders national Antarctic policy. It is argued that the success of the undertaking cannot be attributed to a single institution or a single will, but to the convergence of four factors: a southern vocation with centuries-old roots; the coordinated deployment of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force; the participation of a genuine intellectual and scientific elite that endowed the occupation with legal, geographical and symbolic foundation; and a body of geopolitical ideas — whose principal architect was General Ramón Cañas Montalva — that conceived of Chile as a tricontinental and Antarctic power. The reflection draws on first-hand testimonies — the diaries of the naturalist Carlos Oliver Schneider and of Lieutenant Boris Kopaitic O'Neill — on the press of the period and on recent Chilean polar historiography, and issues in an assessment of the milestone's continuing relevance in light of the Antarctic institutional framework now in force.

It is worth noting, at the threshold, the register this work assumes. To reconstruct 1947 without an epic tone would be to betray the very substance of the story, for this was an undertaking that its protagonists experienced as a feat and that the nation celebrated as

such. But here the epic does not quarrel with rigour: every assertion rests on verifiable sources — the diaries recovered by polar historiography, the contemporary press compiled and studied, the institutional memory of the Navy and specialised geopolitical research — and verbatim quotations are kept brief out of respect for both intellectual property and documentary honesty. The purpose is not to mythologise but to understand; not to aggrandise an episode artificially, but to restore to it the greatness it objectively possessed and, above all, to draw from it the keys that illuminate Chile's Antarctic present and future. This work is thus inscribed within the recent and fruitful effort to return to national memory an epic that for decades was known only through its headlines.

The photographs illustrating this edition come from *Terra Australis* by Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (Editorial Zig-Zag, 1948), a writer and historian who took part in the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition and whose visual testimony constitutes one of the most valuable pictorial records of that feat.

CHAPTER II

Roots of a Southern Vocation: Historical and Legal Background

The 1947 expedition did not arise out of nothing. It came to crown a southern vocation whose roots, as Chilean legal doctrine maintains, reach back to the era of the overseas Spanish Empire. Chile claims to have been invested at an early date with titles over the lands lying to the south of the continent, at a time when the very features of that immense frozen landmass — the *Terra Australis Nondum Cognita* of the old maps — were still unknown. Those titles were derived from the sixteenth-century capitulations and governorships, in particular from the grants received by Pedro Sancho de la Hoz and Pedro de Valdivia, and from the administration of the far south assigned to Jerónimo de Alderete (Pinochet de la Barra, 1976). With independence, the principle of *uti possidetis iuris* — which fixed the borders of the new republics according to colonial limits — allowed Chile to maintain that those rights extended southwards. To this the national tradition added a geographical argument: the physical continuity between Tierra del Fuego and the Antarctic Peninsula by way of the so-called Southern Antilles or Scotia Arc, which for many authors made Antarctica a natural prolongation of Chilean territory.

Long before any effective occupation, the Republic took concrete administrative steps in the far south. In 1892, under the presidency of Jorge Montt, an ordinance sought to regulate the hunting of seals, sea lions and otters in the southern seas — the first attempt to control the exploitation of resources in those waters. Two years

later, in 1894, the State empowered the Maritime Governorship of the Territory of Magallanes to administer the exploitation of marine resources south of the 54th parallel, and began granting permits and concessions to national and foreign expeditions (Pinochet de la Barra, 1976). Economic presence thus preceded military and scientific presence.

The year 1906 condensed that incipient projection. The Magallanes Whaling Company was founded, establishing operations in the South Shetland Islands — the very islands that four decades later would host the Soberanía station — and operating under the Chilean flag during the summer season until the outbreak of the First World War; part of the historiography regards that installation as a first material act of Chilean sovereignty over the archipelago. That same year, the Foreign Ministry processed a concession over lands and seas south of Cape Horn in favour of Domingo Toro Herrera and Enrique Fabry, and President Germán Riesco created an Antarctic Commission charged with organising a first expedition and establishing a meteorological station that would strengthen sovereignty through effective presence. The earthquake that devastated Valparaíso in August 1906, however, diverted resources and frustrated that pioneering project (Pinochet de la Barra, 1976). The idea of a meteorological station as an instrument of sovereignty — which the Soberanía station would realise in 1947 — had thus already been formulated forty years earlier.

The twentieth century further brought the formalisation of the competing claims that would ultimately precipitate the Chilean response. The United

Kingdom was the first power to delimit an Antarctic sector in writing, through the letters patent of 1908 and 1917 that created the so-called Falkland Islands Dependencies, encompassing precisely the sector of the peninsula that Chile considered its own. To this was added, towards the end of the 1930s, growing Norwegian activity — which in 1939 proclaimed its claim to Queen Maud Land — and German interest manifested in expeditions to the region. The invitation extended to Chile in 1938 to take part in a polar exhibition in Bergen served as a warning signal: the country realised that other nations were advancing in the institutionalisation of rights over a continent that Chilean tradition held to be its own. Decree No. 1747 of 1940 must be read, in that framework, not as an expansive gesture but as a defensive and timely response: the precise fixing of boundaries sought to give legal armour to a territory over which concurrent claims were gathering (León Wöppke et al., 2005; Pinochet de la Barra, 1976).

Those steps did not go unnoticed by Chile's neighbours. In June 1907, Argentina formally protested against Chilean actions in the southern sector, inaugurating a long relationship of crossed claims and, at the same time, of a search for understanding that would mark the entire twentieth century. Out of that tension would in time be born the notion of a South American or American Antarctica, whose defence both countries would attempt to undertake jointly in the face of British pretensions (León Wöppke et al., 2005). The 1947 expedition, in short, was not an absolute beginning, but the culmination and systematisation of a

vocation the nation had been exercising, intermittently and with precarious means, for more than half a century.

That southern projection rested, moreover, on a prior territorial achievement worth bearing in mind. The Boundary Treaty of 1881 with Argentina had enshrined Chilean sovereignty over the Strait of Magellan — declared neutralised and open to free navigation — and divided Tierra del Fuego, setting the framework within which Chile would consolidate its dominion over the continental extreme. The founding of Punta Arenas in 1848, the colonisation of Magallanes and the establishment of governorships and garrisons in the region had transformed, over the second half of the nineteenth century, an unpopulated frontier into an effective human and administrative platform. Without that southern rearguard — ports, shipyards, knowledge of navigation through the channels, a population seasoned in the rigours of the subantarctic climate — the undertaking of 1947 would simply have been impracticable. Chilean Antarctica was thus projected from a territory that was already fully national: the Magellanic region was not a mere geographical point of departure, but the logistical, technical and moral base of the entire polar adventure. In that continuity between the mainland and the ice lies one of the keys to the singular legitimacy Chile invokes over the sector: that of a country which reached Antarctica by prolonging, not by inventing, its southernmost frontier.

CHAPTER III

A Continent in Dispute: The Post-War International Scene

If the roots were centuries old, the trigger was rigorously contemporary. The Second World War reordered the interest of the great powers in the white continent and left Antarctica a distant, but not detached, theatre of confrontation. The British had remained on the peninsula throughout the conflict and, on the strength of that permanence, felt themselves entitled to greater rights over the American sector than the Latin American countries themselves (León Wöppke et al., 2005). To that backdrop was added, towards the end of the decade, growing Soviet interest in taking part in any agreement concerning the continent, and an incipient Cold War that would end by colouring the entire polar dispute with ideology.

The immediate trigger of the Chilean reaction was the statement made by the United States admiral Richard E. Byrd in Washington on 18 November 1946, to the effect that the United States recognised no territorial claim whatsoever in Antarctica, even as it prepared an expedition of unprecedented proportions — with ships, aircraft carriers and thousands of landing troops — to train its naval detachments on the frozen continent. Byrd's words, as the press recorded, produced the deepest disquiet in Chile and Argentina (León Wöppke, 2017). The Chilean government quickly understood that the long-standing American ambiguity — known since 1923 — was now backed by unprecedented logistical and military capability,

capable of impressing not only the South American countries but even Washington's own allies.

The magnitude of that American deployment, known as Operation Highjump, helps to gauge the Chilean alarm. It was the largest expedition ever sent to the white continent up to that time: a naval force of thousands of men, dozens of vessels and numerous aircraft, officially intended to train personnel and test equipment in polar conditions, but whose strategic reach no one in the region ignored. That the foremost power on the planet should mobilise such capability towards a territory claimed by Chile, while denying recognition of any claim at all, set off every alarm in Santiago and in Buenos Aires. The Chilean expedition of 1947, modest to the point of poverty when set beside Byrd's armada, acquired by contrast a political value inversely proportional to its means: it was the affirmation of a right that no asymmetry of forces could cancel.

Within days, the Chilean state machinery was set in motion. On 14 November 1946, chiefs and officers of the General Staffs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force met at the Ministry of National Defence under the direction of Minister Manuel Bulnes Sanfuentes, and it was agreed to appoint a commission of soldiers and sailors to establish Chile's position regarding its Antarctic territory and to gather the relevant records from the foreign ministries (León Wöppke, 2017). Diplomacy and arms marched hand in hand from the very first moment: while Foreign Minister Raúl Juliet prepared an official declaration on national sovereignty, the Undersecretariat of the Navy was already

announcing the fitting out of vessels for a reconnaissance expedition. The speed of the response reveals the extent to which the matter, far from being new, was ripe in the mind of the State.

The reaction had, moreover, a neighbourly dimension. From the outset the Foreign Ministry communicated with Buenos Aires in order to act by common accord, and the government invited the Argentine Navy to be represented by three officers in the national flotilla, in return for an equivalent invitation received years earlier (León Wöppke, 2017). Lieutenant Commander Óscar Rousseau and two officers from across the Andes thus joined the expedition. The underlying aspiration was ambitious: to articulate a Chilean-Argentine bloc that would uphold South American rights over the so-called American Antarctica. Yet despite the cordiality and friendship that flourished between the sailors of both nations during the voyage, a fully joint course of action never materialised, weighed down by mistrust inherited from the old boundary question and by Anglo-American interference in every rapprochement between La Moneda and the Casa Rosada (León Wöppke et al., 2005). The expedition was thus an exercise in coordination both among the branches of national defence and among the states of the Southern Cone.

The Antarctic episode was inscribed, furthermore, within the emerging logic of the Cold War, which charged the polar dispute with an ideological connotation from which Chile knew how to draw advantage. As Antarctica became a stage for the growing rivalry between the great powers, Chilean

geopolitical thought — and very particularly that of General Cañas Montalva — sought to present the country as a reliable and democratic partner of the Western world, in step with the United States (Garay Vera, 2008). The ideas of the American geopolitician Nicholas Spykman on the strategic value of peripheral positions offered a propitious framework for that reading: Chilean custody of the southern interoceanic passages and its Antarctic projection could be presented as a contribution to hemispheric security, capable of reinforcing defence cooperation with Washington. The assertion of sovereignty in 1947 therefore had a double destination: southwards, to occupy the territory; northwards, to place Chile on the mental map of the great powers as a responsible and predictable actor. That diplomacy of reliability — which set cooperation above noise — prefigured the style with which the country would conduct itself, decades later, within the Antarctic Treaty System.

CHAPTER IV

From Delimitation to Occupation: Decree 1747 and Presidential Resolve

The 1947 expedition was the direct heir of a more recent and more precise sovereign decision. On 6 November 1940, President Pedro Aguirre Cerda issued Supreme Decree No. 1747, which fixed the exact boundaries of the Chilean Antarctic Territory between the meridians 53° and 90° west of Greenwich, over an area of close to one million two hundred and fifty thousand square kilometres. That decree, as the Foreign Ministry would later insist, did not create new rights, but determined with exactitude frontiers that the nation had long considered its own (León Wöppke, 2017). In the chronology of national Antarctic policy, Chile thus moved from a diffuse claim to the cartographic delimitation of its territory (León Wöppke et al., 2005). What remained, nonetheless, was the decisive step: turning that line drawn on a map into physical and continuous presence.

It fell to Gabriel González Videla, a lawyer and Radical politician who assumed the Presidency on 3 November 1946, to take that step. The editors of the naturalist Oliver Schneider's diary express it clearly: the first expeditions to Antarctica were made possible by President González Videla's drive to complete what Aguirre Cerda had begun in 1940 (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The new head of state understood that sovereignty is not exercised through declarations but by occupying territory. His celebrated premise — that Antarctica had to be felt as one feels

going out into one's own garden — sums up a conception of the polar territory as a natural prolongation of Chile rather than as a remote frontier. Under that conviction he backed, within a few weeks, the organisation of the flotilla that would sail in January 1947.

Presidential resolve translated, moreover, into institutional and financial backing that revealed a rare national consensus. In late 1946 Congress approved Law No. 8,723, which allocated resources to the Antarctic undertaking, and the decision enjoyed cross-cutting support in a country otherwise riven by political tensions. That figures of such diverse persuasions embarked in the flotilla — from the socialist senator Salvador Allende to officers and officials of the strictest military tradition — illustrates the extent to which the Antarctic cause managed to place itself above partisan divisions. González Videla knew how both to capitalise on and to nourish that consensus, presenting the southern projection not as the banner of one government but as a permanent task of the State. That cross-party character, born in 1947, would explain the remarkable continuity of Chilean Antarctic policy over the following decades, above and beyond changes of political colour at La Moneda.

That resolve would find its highest expression a year later. In the framework of the second Antarctic campaign, on 17 February 1948 González Videla disembarked from the transport *Presidente Pinto* on Greenwich Island to inspect the Soberanía station and, the following day, inaugurated the General Bernardo O'Higgins military station on the peninsula, becoming the first serving head of state in the world to set foot on

Antarctica (Instituto Antártico Chileno [INACH], 2018). Before the assembled garrison he decorated its members and delivered words that radio broadcast throughout the country, addressing the valiant members of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and reminding them that they were not alone in the defence of the national patrimony (INACH, 2018). The gesture, profoundly symbolic, sealed the continuity between the delimitation of 1940, the occupation of 1947 and the consolidation of 1948, and gave the undertaking backing at the highest level of the State.

It is worth pausing on the legal architecture that the 1940 decree established, for from it would derive much of the subsequent coherence of national policy. By fixing the boundaries of the territory between two meridians converging at the South Pole, Chile adopted — without expressly naming it — the logic of the polar sector or cap, according to which a state with coasts near the southern continent projects its sovereignty over the portion of ice comprised between the extreme meridians of its continental territory and the pole. That conception was in dialogue with the sector theory that various powers had been advancing for the Arctic and Antarctica, and it endowed the Chilean claim with a precise geometrical form, easily mapped and therefore legally robust. Unlike the British letters patent, which delimited a sector overlapping the Chilean one, Aguirre Cerda's decree had the merit of articulating with clarity what tradition had maintained in diffuse fashion, translating centuries of colonial titles and geographical arguments into the modern language of coordinates. The 1947 expedition came, strictly speaking, to fill that

paper continent with factual content: without effective sovereignty, the most impeccable of legal constructions ran the risk of being reduced to a cartographic abstraction that rival powers could dismiss.

CHAPTER V

The Thought That Sustained the Feat: Ramón Cañas Montalva

Every great national undertaking rests on a body of ideas that precedes and justifies it. In the case of Chile's Antarctic projection, that body of ideas had a principal architect: General Ramón Cañas Montalva (1896–1977), recognised as a pioneer of national geopolitics and a leading figure of Chilean strategic thought (Garay Vera, 2008). His career unites, in uncommon fashion, doctrinal reflection with executive responsibility: he was Commander-in-Chief of the Army between 1947 and 1949, precisely during the taking of possession of the Chilean Antarctic Territory. In his person, the thought and the action that in others are shared among different protagonists are concentrated in a single biography.

The biography explains the doctrine. An officer of deep European formation — he undertook missions and studies in Sweden, Germany, France and England — Cañas Montalva had already taken part in 1916, from the Pudeto Regiment, in the commission that organised the rescue of Shackleton's expedition, an episode that marked him as a man of the far south (Garay Vera, 2008). Relegated for years to southern commands, in Magallanes he matured the ideas of classical geopolitics and applied them to Chilean and regional reality. In 1941 he assumed command of the Southern Regional Military Zone, promoted the creation of the 5th Army Division and proposed articulating a Southern Antarctic Zone that would integrate the Magellanic and Antarctic territories with their natural supply bases; in 1943, following Admiral Byrd's expedition, he published a

study on the southern-Antarctic zone that would serve as the basis for subsequent national debate (Garay Vera, 2008). His ideas, in short, were not an improvised response to the circumstances of 1946, but the fruit of long meditation on Chile's southern destiny.

The core of his thought may be summed up in a luminous thesis: Chile is not one more South American country, but a tricontinental power. His geopolitics, three-dimensional in character — terrestrial, maritime and aerial — conceived Chile as a small power of the South Pacific, endowed with a privileged American continental position, a natural projection towards Oceania and an Antarctic sovereignty that made it, in his own words, the most southerly and therefore the most Antarctic country on Earth (Garay Vera, 2008; Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024). What is truly remarkable is that this vision was not romantic but strategic: in the middle of the twentieth century Cañas Montalva identified the displacement of the world's centre of gravity from the European Atlantic towards the Asia-Pacific, anticipating by several decades a phenomenon only fully acknowledged today (Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024). Where most were looking to Europe, he was already looking to the ocean that, by contemporary consensus, would define the century.

Within that vision, the southern interoceanic passages occupied a central place. For Cañas Montalva, control of the Strait of Magellan and projection over the Drake Passage — the junction where the Pacific and the Atlantic meet around Cape Horn — conferred on Chile a geographical key of global value, whose custody demanded a robust southern base and an effective

Antarctic presence. Polar sovereignty was not, in his scheme, an end in itself, but the strategic depth that gave meaning and protection to that privileged position. Hence his insistence on strengthening the military units of the south, on rebuilding Fuerte Bulnes as a symbol of the first republican settlement in the area, and on fostering the cultural and sporting life of Magallanes: sovereignty, for him, was exercised as much through garrisons as through regional consciousness (Garay Vera, 2008).

His institutional imprint was equally vast. Before and after his term as Commander-in-Chief, Cañas Montalva directed the Military Geographical Institute — the very body that in 1947 would produce the Antarctic cartography — presided over the Boundary Commission with Argentina and promoted the creation of bodies devoted to geographical knowledge of the country. He conceived of geography not as an auxiliary discipline but as strategic knowledge, a semiology of territory that the State ought to cultivate in order to understand and defend its own body. That conviction led him to promote historical research and the defence of the southern heritage, anticipating the role that national Antarctic bodies would later assume. Few Chileans have articulated thought and institution, the idea and its administrative realisation, with such coherence (Garay Vera, 2008; Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024).

That conception had a direct institutional translation in the years of the expedition. In 1946, Cañas Montalva was appointed a member of the Chilean Antarctic Committee, under the Foreign Ministry, and founded the *Revista Geográfica de Chile "Terra Australis"*, a

platform from which he disseminated, together with other authors, a national geographical consciousness oriented towards the south. He was, strictly speaking, a formidable communicator and populariser of geopolitical ideas, whose preaching in the Magellanic press and in his lectures took hold in the military and political spheres of the three Radical governments (Garay Vera, 2008). Appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Army on 2 August 1947, he organised and directed the taking of possession of the Chilean Antarctic Territory, prepared President González Videla's voyage and took part in the inauguration of the General Bernardo O'Higgins station on 18 February 1948 (Garay Vera, 2008). In his figure the circle between doctrine and action closes: the ideas he had matured in the solitude of Magallanes became, within a few years, stations, flags and meteorological records upon the ice.

The importance of Cañas Montalva for a reading of 1947 lies in the fact that he supplies the interpretative key uniting the other dimensions of the expedition. If the military executed and the scientists legitimised, it was geopolitical thought that supplied the meaning: it explained why Antarctica was not a remote frontier but a natural prolongation of Chile, and why presence and science had to march together. He underscored, moreover, a factor that contemporary Antarctic policy has forcefully rediscovered: the need for the State to generate a geographical consciousness among its citizens, so that the southern territory is felt as its own by the whole nation and not merely administered by its institutions (Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024). That pedagogy of territory is perhaps his most topical legacy.

His influence did not expire with his death in 1977. Disciples such as Colonel Julio von Chrismar Escuti took up and projected his school within subsequent military doctrine, and Chilean scholarship has recovered his work in recent compilations (Garay Vera, 2008; Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024). Óscar Pinochet de la Barra himself — a member of the 1947 expedition and, in time, the father of the national Antarctic institutional framework — described him as a privileged Chilean who knew how to divine the direction of the age, whose dream of a Chile in the Pacific and in Antarctica took half a century to be realised, but which today forms part of national life (cited in Griffiths and Masalleras, 2024). Few summaries better express the debt Chile's Antarctic projection owes to his thought, nor more aptly anticipate the forward-looking outlook with which it is fitting to close this work.

CHAPTER VI

The Chilean Navy: The Nation's Prow

The success of 1947 was, above all, a joint achievement, and it is worth examining separately the indispensable contribution of each branch before weighing their articulation. If one institution embodied the operational leadership of the undertaking, it was the Chilean Navy. The speed and determination with which the Navy prepared to sail towards then-unknown southern territories is admirable, given the very scarce means at its disposal and the fact that it financed much of the undertaking from its own diminished institutional funds (León Wöppke, 2017). To the budget of three million pesos transferred by Congress through Law No. 8,723 of late 1946, the Navy had to add a further three or four million for repairs to boilers and propeller shafts, expenses arising from the intense work of the engines in polar waters. The undertaking was thus born of institutional self-denial rather than of budgetary comfort.

The flotilla was composed of two units: the frigate *Iquique*, under the command of Commander Ernesto González Navarrete, and the transport *Angamos*, commanded by Commander Gabriel Rojas Parker. Command of the expedition fell to Captain Federico Guesalaga Toro, head of the Department of Navigation and Hydrography, appointed commodore of the flotilla. Neither vessel was an icebreaker: although they were the most suitable in the Squadron for those waters, they lacked the optimal technical conditions for the mission. The *Iquique*, acquired in Canada, at least offered the

advantage of having sailed previously in the Arctic and of having taken part in the wartime convoys to Russia (León Wöppke, 2017). In that disproportion between the modesty of the means and the magnitude of the objective lies much of the greatness of the enterprise.

The mettle of the crew was captured in a remark by Commander González Navarrete who, on sailing from Valparaíso, declared that he trusted more in the performance of his men than in the instruments of his ship (cited in León Wöppke, 2017). The sentence condenses a truth of the period: the available technology was modest, but the human factor would more than make up for its shortcomings. The farewell was given by the Director General of the Navy, Admiral Emilio Daroch, whose words proved prophetic in foretelling that, on their return, the country would know that the expedition members had accomplished a magnificent work (cited in León Wöppke, 2017). Time would confirm the prediction, and more.

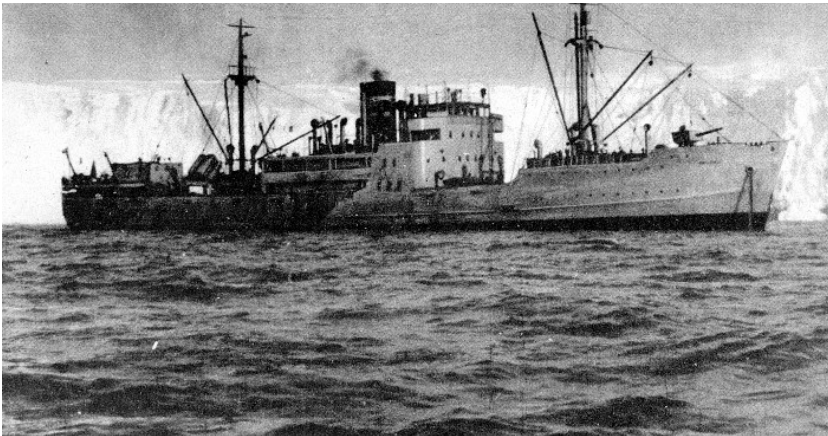


Figure 1. *The transport Angamos during the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

Naval work was not exhausted in transport. The Navy installed and staffed the radio-meteorological station at the Soberanía base and left in charge of it a group of men responsible for keeping it operational through the winter, in a feat of endurance we shall examine further on. That feat, it is worth recalling, rested on an invaluable asset: the seasoned knowledge of southern navigation possessed not only by the Navy but by the inhabitants of cities such as Punta Arenas, heirs to the tradition that in 1916 had enabled the pilot Luis Pardo Villalón to rescue, aboard the cutter *Yelcho*, the castaways of Shackleton's expedition (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). The prow that in 1947 pointed south thus prolonged a seamanship forged over generations in the labyrinth of channels at the end of the world.

The naval undertaking also had a component of pure exploration that the press of the day barely managed to appreciate. Once the founding of the station was complete, the *Iquique* continued southwards on hydrographic reconnaissance, reaching the vicinity of Charcot Island and Alexander Island, at around seventy degrees south latitude, the southernmost point achieved by the expedition. Every mile sailed in those iceberg-strewn waters added a datum to the nautical charts and an argument to the sovereign case: to explore and to name were, in the law of the day, tangible forms of possession. Hydrography, a silent and demanding discipline, was in this way one of the Navy's most enduring contributions, for without reliable charts no human presence could be sustained safely on the continent. The Department of Navigation and

Hydrography, which Commodore Guesalaga himself directed, laid in 1947 the foundations of Chilean maritime knowledge of Antarctica.

CHAPTER VII

The Chilean Army: Cartography, Mountaineering and Sovereign Mission

The participation of the Chilean Army was decisive and, often, less remembered than that of the Navy. Aboard the *Angamos* travelled the Army General Staff, represented by Majors Raúl Silva Maturana and Sebastián Carbonell Santander, entrusted with a strictly military mission and authors, moreover, of one of the first technical reports on the expedition published in the *Memorial del Ejército de Chile* (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). Their presence underlined that the occupation of Antarctic territory was not the affair of a single branch, but a task of national defence as a whole, conducted at its summit by the Commander-in-Chief himself, General Cañas Montalva.

Special mention is due to the Military Geographical Institute, upon which a fundamental task fell: to begin the geographical reconnaissance and topographical survey of the entire Chilean Antarctic Territory. The team, made up of Major Pablo Ihl, Captain Arturo Ayala — a photogrammetry specialist — the surveyor Próspero Madrid and the geographer Eusebio Flores, began that task with the measurement of a baseline and the plotting of triangulations, traverses and astronomical coordinates, the first link in a body of work destined to extend over many years (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018; León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). To map the territory was, in the logic of the day, an act of sovereignty as eloquent as raising the flag: the precise map fixed on paper what the ships fixed at sea.

The mountaineering component was supplied by the Andean Detachment, whose men — under the command of Lieutenant Jorge González — were called upon to carry out land explorations and glaciological and high-mountain studies not far from the coast. To them is owed the first Chilean Antarctic land expedition, one of those feats sparsely reported by the press yet laden with significance for a country whose economy was faltering under post-war adjustments (León Wöppke, 2017). The Army did not, then, confine itself to accompanying the Navy: it contributed the eye of the cartographer and the endurance of the mountaineer, two capabilities without which the occupation would have remained confined to the shoreline. In the second campaign, that of 1948, it would be this same branch that built the General Bernardo O'Higgins station, securing its permanent institutional presence on the continent.

The deeper significance of the Army's work transcends the list of its tasks. To map, measure and name a territory is to incorporate it into the order of knowledge and, with that, into the order of law. The work begun by the Military Geographical Institute in the summer of 1947 — barely the measurement of a baseline and the plotting of the first triangulations — was the beginning of a cartographic effort that would extend across generations and that still nourishes the official representation of the Chilean Antarctic Territory. Every coordinate fixed, every geographical feature christened with a Chilean name, was an act of sovereignty as real as the station raised in Chile Bay. The Army contributed, in sum, the telluric dimension of the undertaking: while the Navy commanded the sea

and the Air Force the air, the men of the Military Geographical Institute and of the Andean Detachment inscribed Chile in the very earth of the continent, with the theodolite and with the print of their boots on the ice.

CHAPTER VIII

The Chilean Air Force: Wings over the White Continent

Since the days of the explorer Hubert Wilkins, aviation had been a decisive factor in every Antarctic campaign, and the Chilean Air Force did not wish to be left out. The expedition embarked on the *Angamos* a Sikorsky aircraft — the S-43 model — which the naturalist Oliver Schneider would affectionately call the errand pony of the first campaign, predicting that one day it would be kept in a museum as a memento of the feat (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The original plan also envisaged a Catalina reconnaissance aircraft, evidencing the wager on aerial observation as a complement to terrestrial cartography.

The air mission pursued concrete objectives: to carry out flights within the widest possible radius of action in order to obtain photomosaics and photo-sketches of the regions overflown, cartographic input that added to the work of the Military Geographical Institute (León Wöppke, 2017). The team of airmen, headed by Commander Enrique Byers del Campo, included Squadron Captain Eduardo Jensen, the engineer Andrés Martínez Vigouroux and Lieutenants Arturo Parodi Alister, Tomás Franzetti and Humberto Tenorio, among others (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The greatest milestone came on 15 February 1947, when Lieutenant Parodi Alister, at the controls of the seaplane embarked on the *Angamos*, made the first Chilean Antarctic flight, adding the overhead view to surface observation and marking Chile's entry, by air, into the era of contemporary polar exploration.

Meteorology was the natural complement to aviation and navigation. The Chilean Meteorological Office detailed Enrique Torrealba and Raúl Bahamondes who, together with the Air Force meteorologist Millán Toro, worked tirelessly on observations, forecasts and charts from the first day of the voyage. Oliver Schneider called them, with humour, the owners of the weather, and acknowledged that on them rested the peace of mind and the success of the voyage (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). In a setting where a storm or a field of icebergs could decide the fate of the flotilla, an accurate forecast was tantamount to survival, and the air branch contributed, alongside its wings, that silent knowledge on which every day's run depended.

The sum of these capabilities produced something more than a logistical operation: it produced a model. The articulation of naval command, terrestrial and aerial military cartography, and meteorological support, under a single command and with shared objectives, anticipated the logic of coordinated Antarctic operators that prevails to this day. The inter-institutional cooperation of 1947 was not a happy accident, but the first rehearsal of a doctrine of State that time would only perfect.

CHAPTER IX

The "Sages": Intellectuals, Writers and Scientists on Board

Upon that military foundation was deployed a civilian contribution of extraordinary density. One of the most singular features of the 1947 expedition was the inclusion of a substantial group of intellectuals, writers and scientists whom the crew affectionately nicknamed *los sabios*, the sages. They numbered some twenty-seven specialists, among them the historian Eugenio Orrego Vicuña, the naturalist Carlos Oliver Schneider, the zoologist Guillermo Mann Fischer, the marine biologist Parmenio Yáñez, the glaciologist Humberto Barrera, the diplomat and writer Óscar Pinochet de la Barra and the men of letters Enrique Bunster and Francisco Coloane, as well as the architect Julio Ripamonti, responsible for the buildings (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The roll call alone reveals the intellectual ambition of the project.

This presence was not ornamental. It answered to an explicit doctrine: scientific research as the foundation of new titles to territorial dominion (León Wöppke et al., 2005). To do science in Antarctica was to strengthen Chile's right over it. So it was understood by Oliver Schneider, a naturalist from the University of Concepción invited by the Naval General Staff, who described his task as that of tracing Chile's continuity into the polar regions in order to solidify the foundations of the nation's geographical right over the continent (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). His travel diary, published in instalments in 1947 under the title *Proa al Sur* and rescued from oblivion seven

decades later, defines the undertaking with felicitous concision as a voyage of national sovereignty and of knowledge (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). In that formula — sovereignty and knowledge — the entire programme of the expedition was condensed.

The literary dimension was notable. Francisco Coloane, by then an acclaimed Magellanic writer and author of *Los conquistadores de la Antártida* (1945), brought the eye of a man of Fuegia capable of capturing human atmospheres; Enrique Bunster, a cultivator of naval literature, would later leave his own recollection of the voyage in works such as *Mar del Sur*. The historian Eugenio Orrego Vicuña, official representative of the University of Chile, would render the epic in *Terra Australis* (1948), a book from which historiography recovers the celebrated exchange in which Commodore Guesalaga answers the British warning by affirming that his ship belongs to the Chilean Navy and is sailing in the waters of Chilean Antarctic territory (cited in León Wöppke et al., 2005). That constellation of pens turned the expedition into narrative and, with it, into collective memory: the Chilean presence ceased to be a matter of government and became a national task belonging to all Chileans (León Wöppke et al., 2005).

Among the men of letters and of law, Óscar Pinochet de la Barra stands out for his later career: a young Foreign Ministry official who had joined the service on 1 January 1946. Author of the university thesis *La Antártica Chilena*, awarded a prize by the Municipality of Santiago in 1945, he had crystallised in a text the latent national problem, which is why Oliver Schneider pointed to him, half in jest, as the party directly to blame

for the whole expedition (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). He took part in the first three campaigns, filmed part of the earliest footage of the permanent national presence and, years later, would be an adviser to the Chilean delegation at the conference that gave rise to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and would help to found the Chilean Antarctic Institute (Jara Fernández, 2015). His figure illustrates, as no other does, the bridge between the epic of 1947 and the Antarctic institutional framework Chile would build in the decades that followed.



Figure 2. *Eugenio Orrego Vicuña with officers of the transport Angamos. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

The roster of expedition members even included figures from the political world, alongside representatives of the national and international press and the cameramen of the Directorate General of Information and Culture, among them the itinerant Hans Helfritz. Press coverage was, in itself, a strategic component: the clear and well-grounded information

disseminated by the press meant that within a few days the entire country rallied in support of the initiative (León Wöppke, 2017). Through books, chronicles, lectures and films, the expedition members "Antarcticised" Chile, installing the white continent in the national imagination in a way that no official proclamation could have achieved on its own.

The scientific harvest confirmed the value of that wager. The expedition gathered the first samples that allowed geological, botanical, zoological and geographical information to be compiled about a territory that was just beginning to be discovered (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The zoologist Guillermo Mann Fischer devoted his attention to whales — the most positive and tangible of the riches of the Antarctic seas — and systematised his findings in *Biología de la Antártica Suramericana* (1948); the naturalists studied seals and penguins in order to learn their morphology, and the glaciologist Humberto Barrera, the first to address national glaciological problems in earnest, measured ice and terrestrial magnetism. The geological continuity between Tierra del Fuego and the Antarctic Peninsula, which the science of the day sought to demonstrate, amounted to an argument for sovereignty as eloquent as the flag itself. That body of knowledge would in time give substance to Chile's Antarctic scientific institutions.

It is worth dwelling on the singularity of this alliance between uniform and gown, between the sextant and the pen. Few Chilean military undertakings of the twentieth century so deliberately integrated the intellectual and university community. The Navy did not

merely transport the sages as illustrious passengers: it summoned them as an organic part of the mission, its commanders aware that dominion over the territory required the hull of the ship as much as the opinion of the jurist and the observation of the naturalist. Universities such as those of Chile and Concepción were officially represented, and the national and international press was treated not as an awkward witness but as a strategic ally. That broadened conception of defence — one that added knowledge and communication to arms — prefigured the contemporary model, in which science and diplomacy, rather than force, sustain the Antarctic presence. In 1947, without formulating it in those terms, Chile was already rehearsing a sovereignty of science.

CHAPTER X

The Voyage: From Valparaíso to the White Continent

The frigate *Iquique* sailed from Valparaíso on the night of 8 January 1947, ahead of schedule by government order; the *Angamos*, after coaling at Coronel and taking on aircraft, sledges, provisions and fuel, departed southwards on the night of 28 January (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The enthusiasm was palpable: there were officers who interrupted their honeymoons and civilians who had pursued the polar dream for years, such as the architect Ripamonti, summoned to embark barely eight hours before sailing (León Wöppke, 2017). The departure was charged with emotion: Admiral Daroch reviewed the crew and had affectionate words both for the members of the Armed Forces and for the civilian contingent, while on the quay embraces and tears mingled and the illuminated shoreline of Valparaíso slowly faded into the horizon (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007).

The vessels descended through the Magellanic channels, gliding across waters that seemed a lake between mountains with mantles of limestone and glaciers releasing their first icebergs. Each night, a radio station carried a special broadcast for the mission: the strains of the Naval Academy anthem announced greetings and affectionate messages from families, an acoustic cord binding the expedition members to the mainland (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). The diary of Captain Ayala, of the Military Geographical Institute, preserves the daily pulse of that voyage: the abundance of the mess — unthinkable for a polar

crossing — the quality of the modern transport, and even the singular episode of a sick young man who had stowed away at Valparaíso, who had to be put ashore on Mocha Island and for whom the delegation organised a whip-round (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). These are minor details that humanise the epic and reveal the spirit of camaraderie that held together a heterogeneous group.



Figure 3. A record of the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition.
Source: *Terra Australis*, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).

The last port of call was Punta Arenas, where the southern city poured out its affections: officers of the Naval Station and of the Detachment offered farewell receptions, and a large crowd — not only relatives and friends, but Chileans wishing to share in the tribute — gathered on the quay to see the ships off (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). Ahead lay the dreaded Drake Passage, living up to the buccaneer from whom it takes its name and constituting, according to Oliver Schneider, the nightmare of the expedition members (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). The

Iquique went ahead and made landfall in the South Shetlands around 20 January; the *Angamos*, slower on account of her cargo, would arrive at Greenwich Island on 12 February. The sense of crossing the threshold of an unknown world permeates the testimonies: for Ayala, a man of the interior, the crossing was a source of pride despite sailing through the stormiest zones on the planet (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007).

The crossing of the Drake Passage tested the mettle of all. Those waters, where no land halts the westerly winds in their ceaseless circuit of the globe, raise waves capable of dwarfing any vessel, and the ships of 1947 — without stabilisers or ice-strengthened hulls — pitched and rolled until life on board became a hardship. Seasickness respected neither rank nor learning: hardened sailors and eminent sages shared the discomfort of the crossing equally. As the vessels descended in latitude, the thermometer fell, fog thickened the horizon and the first icebergs began to file past like white sentinels, beautiful and menacing at once. To cross the Drake was, in both the literal and the figurative sense, to pass through the threshold separating the known world from the continent of silence; whoever managed it felt they had entered a geography of another scale, where nature recovered all its sovereignty and the human being discovered himself diminutive and yet resolved.

CHAPTER XI

The Founding: 6 February 1947

The choice of site was made with care. Once the coast had been reconnoitred, the widest and most sheltered bay on Greenwich Island was selected — christened Chile Bay by the garrison, known internationally as Discovery Bay — on the northern shore of Iquique Cove, for its relatively easy access and its shelter from storms. The site having been chosen around 27 January, construction work began at once, in a race against the calendar and against the weather (Armada de Chile, 2017). To raise a station in a matter of days, in one of the most hostile climates on the planet, was in itself a feat.



Figure 4. *A record of the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition during the construction of what is today the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

The construction, directed by the architect Julio Ripamonti Barros together with Lieutenant Commander Emilio Macera, produced a rough jetty, two wooden pavilions and a galvanised-iron hangar of some eighty-

nine square metres — nicknamed the igloo — which had to be secured with ten guy ropes to withstand the storms (Armada de Chile, 2017). Ripamonti, no minor detail, had pursued a place on some Antarctic expedition for six consecutive years; his happiness, he told the press, was immense (León Wöppke, 2017). Over that modest ensemble the national flag was raised and, that same year, a bust of the hero Arturo Prat and a hydrographic reference monolith were erected, today recognised as historic sites of the Antarctic Treaty System.

At around four in the afternoon on 6 February 1947, Commodore Guesalaga Toro read out the deed inaugurating the Soberanía Meteorological and Radiotelegraphic Station, the first permanent Chilean base on the continent (Armada de Chile, 2017). His words have become celebrated: he called upon the sailors of Chile to plant the national colours there and to sing the national anthem, proclaiming that so long as the flag flew at the stern of a ship at sea there would be but one Chile, from Arica to Antarctica (Guesalaga Toro, cited in Armada de Chile, 2017). In that sentence the ultimate meaning of the day was encapsulated: Antarctica was not a new conquest, but the southern prolongation of a territory affirmed as indivisible.



Figure 5. A record of the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition during the construction of what is today the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station, in 1947. Source: *Terra Australis*, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).

The founding act condensed years of legal gestation and was born invested with administrative authority. By supreme decree of 20 January 1947, Lieutenant Boris Kopaitic O'Neill had been appointed maritime governor of Chilean Antarctica, so that the occupation was not a merely symbolic gesture but the formal exercise of jurisdiction over the territory recently delimited by President Pedro Aguirre Cerda and reaffirmed by President Gabriel González Videla (León Wöppke, 2017). Admiral Daroch's prophecy — that the country would come to recognise a magnificent work — was fulfilled that February afternoon, on a frozen beach at the end of the world, where for the first time a Chilean house was preparing to withstand the polar winter.



Figure 6. *First stage in the construction of the first cross in the Chilean Antarctic Territory. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*



Figure 7. *A record of the installation of the first Chilean cross in the Chilean Antarctic Territory. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

It is worth pausing on the symbolic grammar of that act, for each of its gestures obeyed a precise logic of sovereign affirmation. The reading of the deed, the raising of the flag, the singing of the anthem, the erection of Prat's bust and the installation of the hydrographic monolith were not ceremonial ornaments,

but the recognised repertoire by which the international law of the day sanctioned the taking of possession of a territory: continuous presence, formal administration and visible signs of belonging. In appointing Kopaitic maritime governor, the Chilean State added to material occupation the exercise of jurisdiction, completing the triad — presence, authority and symbol — that distinguishes the mere visit from the founding act. There was, moreover, a deliberate economy of gesture: with the poorest of means, the garrison produced the maximum possible significance, aware that the photograph of the flag on the ice and the signed deed were worth, on the diplomatic board, as much as a fleet. On that February afternoon, Chile did not discover a new territory — the Shetlands had been known for more than a century — but executed, in full legal awareness, the act by which a nation declares to the world that a remote space has ceased to be no man's land and become part of its sovereign body.

CHAPTER XII

Six Men Facing the Polar Winter

Once the inauguration was complete and the surveys finished, the flotilla had to return before winter closed the seas. The *Angamos* left the station on 22 March, leaving behind a garrison of six men, all belonging to the Chilean Navy, charged with keeping the national presence alive through the months of darkness (Armada de Chile, 2017). That winter stay — between March and December 1947 — is the heart of the epic, and the moment when the mere visit became effective occupation. Until then, other nations had touched those shores; few had dared to stay for the polar night.

Command fell to Lieutenant Boris Kopaitic O'Neill, first commander of the future Prat station. He was accompanied, as his own diary records, by medical orderly Petty Officer Luis Coloma Rojas, radiotelegraphist Chief Petty Officer Carlos Rivera Tenorio, radio operator Corporal Carlos Arriagada, seaman Aguedo Gutiérrez Sanhueza and cook Luis Paredes Uribe (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). They were one commander, two communications men, a medical orderly, a seaman and a cook: the minimum cell capable of sustaining a scientific and sovereign station at the edge of the world, with a small pen of sheep as a food reserve.

Kopaitic's diary, written without literary pretension, lets us see the daily struggle against cold and isolation. The pipes froze solid and the ice had to be broken with an axe; water was obtained by melting glacier ice; temperatures fell to sixteen degrees below zero and the blizzard confined the men for days on end inside a room

that was no longer a house (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). For diversion they skied on the icy slopes despite the tumbles onto rock, they read, they talked and they attended to the chores of water and fuel. More revealing than any datum is Kopaitic's observation on the temper of the group: the worse the weather, the better the morale (Kopaitic, cited in León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). For him and his men, those extraordinary missions were, quite simply, the doing of their duty.



Figure 8. *The first Chilean Antarctic expedition members listening to the news. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

Life together in an isolated group was not free of tensions, a consequence of the Navy's inexperience in selecting personnel for wintering; but Kopaitic's skill and manner, note the editors of his diary, favoured cohesion, to the point that at times he was less a commander than a welcoming father (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). Emotional support came above all from the radio: communications with Talcahuano,

Valparaíso, Santiago and Punta Arenas, and most especially the messages from Ruby — the fiancée who on his return would become his wife — were the thread that kept alive the bonds with the distant homeland. When transmissions failed, the frustration ran deep; when they arrived, joy overflowed the pages of the diary. Those six men, without knowing it, were writing the first chapter of a human presence that would never again be interrupted.

The polar night added an interior dimension to the physical ordeal. For weeks the sun barely showed above the horizon, and the almost continuous darkness, compounded by confinement and the permanent roar of the wind, subjected the men to a strain that no military training had foreseen. To sustain morale in such conditions — when the days blur together, news from the mainland grows scarce and the distance from loved ones becomes a physical weight — was perhaps the garrison's greatest feat. There was no battle and no shipwreck, but there was a silent struggle against boredom, cold and melancholy, waged with improvised skis, re-read books, endless conversations and the daily discipline of the observations. That those six men returned cohesive, with no tragedy to mourn and an unbroken series of meteorological data to their credit, stands as eloquent testimony to the character of a generation that understood duty as a natural way of being. In their anonymous endurance lies the true founding act: the proof that Chile could not only reach Antarctica, but also remain there.

CHAPTER XIII

The Lighthouse and the Weather Records: Two Founding Cornerstones

Two technical legacies of that first campaign deserve emphasis for their founding character. The first is the lighthouse. On her return voyage, having left the garrison at the station, the *Angamos* installed a lighthouse on Robert Island, helping to mark and signal the approaches to an archipelago until then barely charted (Armada de Chile, 2017). To light a navigation beacon in those waters was no minor detail: it was to inscribe the Chilean presence in the very infrastructure of the territory, an act of sovereignty made of practical usefulness for every mariner crossing those seas. The lighthouse was, in a sense, the perfect metaphor for the whole undertaking: a small but constant light, deliberately kindled in the immensity to signal that those waters and those lands were no longer a void, but a territory watched over, named and inhabited by Chile.

The second legacy is the meteorological record, which gives the station its very name. It was not by chance that the base was called the Meteorological and Radiotelegraphic Station: observing the weather was its daily reason for being and answered an operational need, for in those latitudes a storm or a field of icebergs could decide the fate of a vessel. Once the garrison was installed, the systematic taking of data became a daily routine. Kopaitic's diary is filled with meticulous measurements — air and sea temperature, wind force and direction, barometric pressure, the state of the sea and of the ice — noted at all hours and transmitted by

radio to the mainland (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). Those records, modest in appearance, were the beginning of a series of observations that would in time turn the station into a scientific post of reference, devoted among other tasks to research on the ionosphere and on meteorology. Lighthouse, meteorology and radiotelegraphy thus formed the first fabric of Chilean services on the continent: useful science and effective sovereignty, the two traits that would henceforth define the country's Antarctic endeavour.



Figure 9. *The first records of what is today the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station. Source: Terra Australis, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).*

Radiotelegraphy deserves, at this point, a mention of its own, for it was far more than a means of communication. In the absolute isolation of the station, the radio was at once umbilical cord and scientific instrument: over it travelled the weather reports that fed forecasting on the mainland, the logistical coordination and, no less important, the messages that

kept the garrison's spirits alive. To sustain a stable link across thousands of kilometres, in a zone where the southern auroras and magnetic disturbances distort radio waves, was a technical feat demanding skill and patience. From that inaugural experience there would emerge, over the years, a vocation of the station for the study of the upper atmosphere: research into the ionosphere and into southern geophysical phenomena would find in the old Soberanía station a privileged observation post. What began as an operational necessity — communicating in order to survive — evolved, in time, into a science programme, confirming once again that in 1947 immediate utility and long-term knowledge were born intertwined.

Seen at a distance of eighty years, that first thread of data acquires a value its authors could not have suspected. Unbroken meteorological series are today among the most precious assets of climate science, for only observation sustained across decades makes it possible to distinguish passing variation from deep trend. Every entry that Kopaitic and his men transmitted from Chile Bay was incorporated, unknowingly, into the long record that today allows us to measure the warming of the continent and to anticipate its effects upon the planet. The garrison's modest notebook of 1947 was, strictly speaking, the first page of a national climate archive whose value has only grown with time.

CHAPTER XIV

The Return, the Costs and the International Tensions

Success had its price. The close of the summer season was marked by bad weather, which hampered scientific and exploratory activities, and by the arrival in the area of another North American expedition, apparently unofficial. A diplomatic incident, provoked by an alleged act of vandalism at an abandoned United States station, briefly clouded relations with the Anglo-Americans and foreshadowed the tense situation that would arise in February 1948, precisely when President Gabriel González Videla was to travel to the area (León Wöppke, 2017). The Chilean presence was thus asserting itself on an international board charged with friction, where every gesture was weighed by rival powers.

On their return, the men of letters and of science offered the public an enthusiastic account. They spoke of the still-inaccessible wealth of that prolongation of Chile, of a continent of reserves for the future of the country and of the world which nonetheless demanded almost heroic labour and effort in desolate regions (León Wöppke, 2017). The welcome given to the expedition members extended over time and across the cities of the coast, in a genuine civic celebration that confirmed the extent to which the undertaking had managed to move the entire nation.

A historiographical clarification is called for, one that the narrative itself demands. While 1947 marks the first official expedition organised with the explicit purpose of occupying and administering the territory, part of the

literature recalls that as early as 1916 the pilot Luis Pardo Villalón had carried out, with the *Yelcho*, a successful rescue mission in Antarctic waters, regarded by some authors as an early official Chilean action on the continent (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018; Jara Fernández, 2015). This qualification, far from diminishing the merit of 1947, inscribes it within the older southern tradition that the expedition came to crown and to systematise, and links the account to the centuries-old background examined at the beginning of this work.

CHAPTER XV

From Ice to Law: From the 1947 Expedition to the Antarctic Treaty of 1959

The 1947 expedition did not resolve the international dispute; strictly speaking, it intensified it. No sooner had the Chilean presence been affirmed, and reinforced in 1948 by the presidential voyage and the inauguration of the O'Higgins station, than Great Britain lodged formal protests against what it regarded as an intrusion into its Antarctic sector, and the peninsula area became a theatre of diplomatic friction between London, Santiago and Buenos Aires. The paradox was evident: three countries claimed, wholly or in part, the same territory, and each act of sovereignty by one provoked the protest of the others. Chilean diplomacy soon understood that the mere accumulation of acts of occupation, however heroic, could lead to a dead end and even to an unwanted confrontation at the end of the world.

Out of that lucidity was born Chile's most enduring legal contribution to the Antarctic question. In 1948, the jurist Julio Escudero Guzmán — professor of international law and adviser to the Foreign Ministry — formulated a proposal designed to freeze sovereignty disputes and preserve the status quo while a substantive solution was sought, a formula known as the *modus vivendi* or, in its doctrinal version, the Escudero Declaration. Its central idea consisted in suspending territorial controversies without renouncing them, so as to open the way to scientific cooperation and peaceful coexistence on the continent. That principle — that a conflict of sovereignties should not impede

collaboration — anticipated by more than a decade the spirit that would animate the Antarctic Treaty, and constitutes one of the most widely recognised Chilean intellectual contributions on the matter (León Wöppke et al., 2005).

The road towards a stable order was slow and punctuated by tensions, among them that of the International Geophysical Year of 1957–1958, which multiplied the scientific stations of numerous countries and made an agreement unavoidable. The outcome arrived in Washington in 1959, with the signing of the Antarctic Treaty by twelve nations, among them Chile, Argentina and the United Kingdom. The instrument froze territorial claims without obliging their renunciation — taking up, in essence, the intuition of the Escudero formula — dedicated the continent to peaceful purposes, prohibited all offensive military activity, and erected freedom of scientific research and its international cooperation into pillars of the system. For Chile, an original signatory and a claimant state, the Treaty meant the transmutation of its presence: what had been asserted with flags and deeds would henceforth be sustained, above all, by science and diplomacy.

That passage from ice to law had, moreover, protagonists directly connected to the 1947 expedition. Óscar Pinochet de la Barra, embarked as a young official on the first campaign, would years later be an adviser to the Chilean delegation at the conference that gave rise to the Treaty and one of the founders of the Chilean Antarctic Institute (Jara Fernández, 2015). The line running from the sailor who plants the colours to the

jurist who drafts the clause is not one of rupture but of maturation: the same vocation that in the summer of 1947 expressed itself in a wooden house upon the ice found, in 1959, a legal form capable of protecting it without the need to fire a single shot. The Madrid Protocol of 1991, which would later prohibit mineral exploitation and consecrate Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science, would come to crown that normative edifice, in full harmony with the Chilean founding hallmark.

Between the occupation of 1947 and the Treaty of 1959 there also fell a less remembered but revealing episode of southern pragmatism: the tripartite naval understanding. Following the tensions of 1948 — when the convergence of Chilean, Argentine and British warships in the waters of the peninsula raised fears of an armed incident — the three nations signed a naval declaration by which they undertook not to send warships south of the 60th parallel, save for customary routine movements, for the duration of the controversy. That *modus vivendi*, renewed in subsequent years, implied no renunciation of the respective claims, but a shared will to prevent legal rivalry from degenerating into military confrontation. Its importance is twofold. On the one hand, it demonstrated that it was possible to administer a disputed territory peacefully without any party surrendering its titles, anticipating on a small scale the mechanism that the Antarctic Treaty would generalise a decade later. On the other, it confirmed that Chile had understood early a fundamental strategic truth: at the end of the world, diplomatic prudence protected sovereignty better than displays of force. The

nation that in 1947 had planted the colours with heroic determination knew, barely a year later, how to sheathe the sword prudently in order to preserve what it had won.

CHAPTER XVI

The Antarcticization of Chile: Culture, Identity and Southern Memory

Beyond the ships, the stations and the treaties, the 1947 expedition worked a less visible but equally profound transformation: it installed Antarctica in the nation's consciousness. Until then, the white continent had been for most Chileans a geographical abstraction, a datum in school atlases. The campaign turned it into living territory, peopled with faces, stories and images. Through books, chronicles, lectures and films, the expedition members — and especially the sages — "Antarcticised" Chile; that is, they made the polar extremity a deeply felt part of the common heritage (León Wöppke, 2017). That spontaneous pedagogy achieved what no official proclamation could have achieved: that the whole country should recognise itself in its southern projection.

The pen was the principal instrument of that symbolic appropriation. Orrego Vicuña's *Terra Australis*, the work of Coloane — already established through his tales of Patagonia and Antarctica — the chronicles of Bunster and the diary of Oliver Schneider translated the polar experience into an accessible and memorable language. Literature did not merely record the feat: it endowed it with myth, with inner landscape, with shared emotion. The continent ceased to be a map and became an imaginary, and that imaginary — the idea that to be Chilean was also to be Antarctic — was gradually incorporated into education, into place names and into public discourse. The southern region, and

Punta Arenas in particular, has since then proudly assumed its condition as rearguard and gateway of the national effort, a role that General Cañas Montalva had claimed for Magallanes long before the flotilla sailed.

There was, in that symbolic appropriation, an instrument as silent as it was powerful: the name. To christen is a primordial form of possession, and the expedition members of 1947 knew it. In designating as Chile Bay the inlet that foreign charts called Discovery, in fixing in Spanish the names of coves, points, islets and features of the archipelago, and in labelling the station itself with the word *Soberanía* — Sovereignty — the expedition inscribed the national language into the very geography of the continent. Each place name was a legal act in miniature: it imposed a Chilean layer over the pre-existing British or international nomenclature and, in so doing, contested the narrative of who had named — and therefore known and administered — those lands. Toponymy thus joined the cartography of the Military Geographical Institute and the meteorological records as a technology of sovereignty: discreet, cumulative and lasting, for names, once fixed on maps and sailing directions, tend to perpetuate themselves. Decades later, the dense network of Chilean designations covering the sector — many inherited from those first campaigns, others dedicated to their protagonists — constitutes a palimpsest of sovereignty upon which the history of the national presence may be read in geographical key. To name the ice was also a way of inhabiting it.

Cinema and photography added the force of the image. The cameramen of the Directorate General of

Information and Culture, together with filmmakers such as Hernán Correa, shot the first documentary of the national presence on the continent, and Pinochet de la Barra recorded part of those inaugural scenes (Armada de Chile, 2017; Jara Fernández, 2015). To see, for the first time, the Chilean flag flying over the ice on a screen had a mobilising effect that words alone could not match. The visual memory of 1947 thus joined the written memory in fixing the event in the collective sensibility.

That construction of Antarctic identity explains, in good measure, the continuity of national policy across decades and across governments of the most diverse persuasions. Chilean Antarctica has never been the cause of a single faction, but a cross-cutting patrimony sustained by a civic consciousness that the 1947 expedition helped to forge. It is no accident that the Antarctic Strategic Plan now in force expressly incorporates the school system into the task of strengthening Antarctic knowledge and identity from childhood onwards (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2025): the aim, at bottom, is to prolong and deliberately institutionalise that spontaneous Antarcticization which began when the first expedition members returned from the south with their eyes full of ice and their speech alight. Memory, in this case, is not nostalgia: it is the cultural foundation upon which a policy of State rests.

CHAPTER XVII

From Soberanía to Arturo Prat: Memory and Legacy

The work begun in 1947 was consolidated the following summer. In the framework of the second Antarctic campaign, on 17 February 1948 President González Videla disembarked on Greenwich Island to inspect the Soberanía station and decorate its garrison, and the following day inaugurated the General Bernardo O'Higgins military station on the peninsula (Instituto Antártico Chileno, 2018). It was during that visit that the Soberanía station received its definitive name: Captain Arturo Prat naval station, in honour of the foremost hero of Chile's naval glories (Armada de Chile, 2017). The presidential gesture sealed unmistakably the continuity between the delimitation of 1940, the occupation of 1947 and the consolidation of 1948.

The memory of that feat, however, came close to being lost. The diary of the naturalist Oliver Schneider was published in 1947 in instalments in a provincial newspaper and remained all but forgotten for seven decades, until it was rescued from the collections of the National Library and reissued as an incunabular documentary piece (Jara Fernández and Mancilla González, 2018). Much the same happened with the logbooks of Kopaitic and Ayala, recovered and edited only in the twenty-first century (León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, 2007). That documentary rescue, driven by Chilean polar historiography, has made it possible to restore faces and names to an epic that for years was known only through its press headlines, and constitutes in itself an act of sovereignty over memory.

Today, the founding sites of 1947 — the bust of Prat, the hydrographic monolith — enjoy protection as historic sites of the Antarctic Treaty System, and the station, after a temporary closure in 2004 and its reopening in 2008, continues to operate jointly between the Navy, the Chilean Antarctic Institute and the Regional Government of Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica (Armada de Chile, 2017). Between that first garrison of six men and today's scientific campaigns runs an unbroken line of continuity: permanent presence and scientific activity, the hallmark forged in the summer of 1947 and which the following section projects into the future.



Figure 10. Construction work at what is today the Captain Arturo Prat Antarctic Naval Station. Source: *Terra Australis*, Eugenio Orrego Vicuña (1948).

From that seed there grew, over the years, an entire network. To the two pioneering stations — Arturo Prat, of the Navy, and Bernardo O'Higgins, of the Army — were added new installations that extended the Chilean presence across the archipelago and the peninsula: air,

scientific and logistical stations that made King George Island and other enclaves genuine nodes of national activity, reaching as far as camps in the continental interior, much farther south. Each of those installations is, in a sense, a daughter of the wooden house raised in Chile Bay, for all share its founding logic: to occupy in order to know, and to know in order to sustain the presence. The density of that network — one of the most extensive among the claimant countries — today gives material substance to Chile's standing as a first-order Antarctic actor, and constitutes the accumulated proof that the wager of 1947 was not a firework, but the first stone of a patient and sustained construction.

There is, in the very permanence of the Prat station, an eloquence that no monument could match. That the installation raised in 1947 should still be operating almost eight decades later — having become one of the oldest working Antarctic stations on the planet — turns it into living heritage rather than a mere commemorative relic. Unlike so many historic landmarks that survive as museums of themselves, the old Soberanía station continues to fulfil, in updated form, the dual function that gave it birth: sustaining the national presence and producing knowledge. There, where six men broke the ice in the pipes with an axe and noted sea temperatures by hand, today there operate scientific equipment, satellite communication systems and research campaigns integrated into the National Antarctic Programme. That functional continuity possesses, moreover, considerable diplomatic value: on a continent where the antiquity and regularity of a presence weigh as arguments, a station that has not

ceased to operate since 1947 embodies, better than any proclamation, the seriousness of Chile's commitment. The line joining that pioneering garrison to the researchers who winter in the south today is not one of nostalgia but of relay: every campaign that begins re-enacts the founding act, and every datum transmitted to the mainland prolongs the series that Kopaitic inaugurated. At the Prat station, the past is not contemplated: it is inhabited and continued, day after day, against the same unchanging wind.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Forward-Looking Conclusion: Towards the Eightieth Year of a Light Still Burning

What remains of 1947 after eight decades? Far more than a memory. That modest expedition forged a hallmark — permanent presence combined with scientific activity — that still defines the national Antarctic endeavour (León Wöppke, 2017). The Soberanía station, renamed Captain Arturo Prat, continues to operate as the oldest Chilean Antarctic installation still in service, and from it branched a network of stations, posts and refuges that give material form to sovereign continuity. The consolidation of that presence, together with a growing strategic infrastructure and the strengthening of logistical and human capabilities for operating in extreme conditions, is today recognised as a long-duration process whose point of departure was, precisely, the campaign of 1947 (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2025).

The great transformation of recent decades has been the passage from epic to institution. Law No. 21,255, which established the Chilean Antarctic Statute in 2020, endowed the country with a modern legal framework: it reaffirmed sovereign rights over the Chilean Antarctic Territory defined between the meridians 53° and 90° west — the same as in the 1940 decree — brought order to the State's Antarctic operators and articulated long-term direction through the National Antarctic Policy, the five-year strategic plans and the National Antarctic Programme (Ley N.º 21.255, 2020). Where in 1947 there was heroic improvisation, today there exists a

legal architecture that distributes functions among the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Science and the Chilean Antarctic Institute, charged with planning, coordinating and carrying out national scientific activity. The heroism of the pioneers has been exchanged for the solidity of institutions, without the ultimate purpose having changed.

That institutional framework is projected in concrete plans. The Antarctic Strategic Plan 2026-2030, approved by the Antarctic Policy Council in November 2025, sets as its first objective the safeguarding of national interests and the maintenance of an effective presence in Chilean Antarctica, and incorporates innovations that General Cañas Montalva would have applauded: a cross-cutting gender approach, the participation of the school system in building Antarctic identity — that geographical consciousness he called for — the strengthening of logistical infrastructure and even a feasibility study for a fibre-optic cable connecting the continent with the rest of the country (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2025; INACH, 2025). The pedagogy of territory and technological innovation go hand in hand in the roadmap of twenty-first-century Antarctic Chile.

The most eloquent continuity between 1947 and the present is, however, material. That expedition sailed the Drake Passage in ships without reinforced hulls; today, that deficiency has been left behind. The icebreaker AGB-46 *Almirante Viel*, built entirely by the Navy's Shipyards and Arsenal (ASMAR) in Talcahuano and commissioned in July 2024, is the largest vessel of its type ever built in South America and the first

constructed in the South Pacific; with a polar classification enabling it to break one metre of ice and an endurance allowing it to operate for much of the year, it carried out its first Antarctic campaigns in 2025 and endowed the country with an unprecedented logistical and scientific capability (Armada de Chile, 2024). That its design and performance have aroused the interest of Arctic nations seeking to commission similar vessels confirms, eighty years on, a truth that the flotilla of 1947 could only intuit: Chile has moved from improvising its polar presence with borrowed means to exporting Antarctic technology of excellence.

To this are added the modernisation of the Frei Base Complex — destined to become a first-rate logistical hub — and a growing participation of operators and private actors linking Antarctic Chile with American Chile (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2025). The country today bases its leadership on elements that the 1947 expedition inaugurated or anticipated: its geographical proximity as a comparative advantage on a global scale — Chile is the country closest to the continent — a long historical relationship with the southern region, rights recognised by law and a national focus on science. Its condition as a gateway country to Antarctica, which the press of 1947 barely glimpsed, has become the declared axis of national policy (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2025).

Science, the inaugural hallmark of the undertaking, is today Chile's principal title on the continent, and its future horizon is vast. The modest records that Kopaitic noted by hand in 1947 have given way to a national programme that articulates glaciology, marine biology,

oceanography, climatology and the earth sciences around questions of planetary scope. Antarctica is the great laboratory of climate change: in its ice the atmospheric history of the planet may be read, and in its melting the future of the world's inhabited coasts is foreshadowed. The study of krill — the base of the southern food web and a resource of growing economic interest — the observation of Southern Ocean currents and the monitoring of subantarctic ecosystems place Chilean research at the centre of global debates on sustainability and biodiversity. The new icebreaker, equipped with state-of-the-art laboratories and oceanographic instruments, is not merely a logistical tool: it is a floating scientific platform that multiplies the national capacity to generate the knowledge which, as time goes on, will remain the soundest of titles.

To look towards the next eighty years therefore compels us to think of the Chilean Antarctic Territory as a matter of State and of generations, not of governments. The challenges taking shape — pressure on resources, the opening of routes through the melting ice, competition among the great powers for polar influence, the need for connected and sustainable infrastructure — demand a long-breathed policy, endowed with financial continuity, scientific excellence and civic consciousness. It is, point by point, the agenda that Cañas Montalva sketched almost a century ago and that the flotilla of 1947 inaugurated with precarious means: effective sovereignty, rigorous knowledge and an entire country that feels the white continent as part of its own body. The anniversary is thus not a point of

arrival, but a relay station in a race that has barely reached its first century mark.

It is here that the thought of Cañas Montalva regains full relevance and allows us to look to the future with the compass of the past. In a scenario where climate change is opening new maritime corridors through the melting ice and awakening appetites for the resources of the white continent, and where the axis of world power gravitates around the Indo-Pacific, the doctrine of tricontinentality has ceased to be a visionary anticipation and become a framework for public policy. The southern general's intuition — that Chile's geographical position, without a robust Antarctic projection, would lose strategic depth — describes with exactitude the challenge of the coming half-century. The eightieth anniversary of the Prat station does not close a history: it opens the question of the place Chile will occupy in the ocean that will define the future.

It is fitting, nonetheless, to weigh the milestone without idealising it, for in that lucidity lies the maturity of a policy of State. The Chilean presence is exercised today within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty System of 1959, which froze territorial claims and consecrated the continent to peace and science. The sovereignty that in 1947 was asserted through flags and deeds is now sustained, above all, through international cooperation, scientific excellence and environmental protection. The projection that Cañas Montalva imagined in terms of power is realised, paradoxically, by way of scientific prestige and diplomatic reliability. That is perhaps the deepest lesson of the eight decades that have passed: the best defence of the southern territory

is not the resounding gesture, but a sustained, useful presence, respectful of the international regime that makes Antarctica a common heritage of humankind.

At the close of this journey, the First Chilean Antarctic Expedition reveals itself as a work of national synthesis. It was a joint undertaking, in which the Navy supplied the prow, the Army the cartography and the mountaineering, and the Air Force the wings and the forecast; an intellectual undertaking, in which the sages turned occupation into knowledge and into narrative; and the materialisation of a body of thought, that of Cañas Montalva, which conceived of Chile as a tricontinental and Antarctic nation. The continuity between that wind-battered wooden house and the Chilean Antarctic Statute, the Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and the icebreaker *Almirante Viel* is not rhetoric: it is proof that 1947 founded something lasting. Eighty years on, the task is not to repeat the feat, but to honour it with what the feat itself inaugurated — permanent presence, scientific excellence and a national consciousness of the southern destiny. The light that the *Angamos* kindled on Robert Island and the flag that Guesalaga planted in Chile Bay continue, figuratively speaking, to illuminate the course. For if that heroic summer taught anything, it is that sovereignty is not proclaimed: it is inhabited, studied and sustained, day after day, against the wind. Such was the promise of 1947, and such it remains, on the threshold of its eightieth anniversary — its living inheritance and its mandate for the future.

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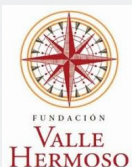
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In January 1947, a country with no icebreakers and no polar experience sent two borrowed ships and a handful of men to the stormiest latitudes on Earth. On 6 February they raised a wooden house on Greenwich Island and called it Soberanía — Sovereignty. Six of them stayed for the winter.

That house is still standing. Renamed after Captain Arturo Prat, it is one of the oldest working Antarctic stations on the planet, and the starting point of everything Chile has done on the white continent since.

This is the story of how it happened: the sailors, the soldiers, the airmen, and the twenty-seven writers and scientists the crew called los sabios — the sages. Told through their own diaries, eighty years on.

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