

2002

The Burning of Monterey: The 1818 Attack on California by the Privateer Bouchard

Xavier Maruyama

Peter Uhrowczik

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Maruyama, Xavier and Uhrowczik, Peter (2002) "The Burning of Monterey: The 1818 Attack on California by the Privateer Bouchard," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 55 : No. 4 , Article 25.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol55/iss4/25>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

that would envelop a French thrust into Lorraine. Although Wilhelm Groener and B. H. Liddell Hart later blasted Moltke for his timidity—he reduced the ratio of troops on the right wing to those on the left to three to one—Strachan points out that “an army would [not] behave as a united mass, gaining impetus on its right specifically from the weakness of its left,” for an army “is a combination of individuals and not a weight obeying the laws of physics.” That is precisely the point: the Schlieffen Plan was undone not by its relative weighting but by inadequate transport and insoluble problems of supply. Each German corps required twenty-four kilometers of road space, and there was just not enough of that on the right wing once the Belgians tore up their railways and Holland was foreclosed as a corridor. Add to this the fact that no fewer than 60 percent of German trucks had broken down by late August 1914, and it is easier to explain the German floundering at the Marne. There was also the small problem of French resistance. Having begun the war with tactics that were notoriously “perplexed by the problems of firepower,” the German army faced French forces, commanded by Field Marshal J. J. C. Joffre, that hacked five entire German corps to pieces in the last week of August and the first week of September 1914. Strachan’s larger analysis of this Battle of the Marne is interesting. The German high command’s initial response to the defeat—Moltke and thirty-two other generals were dismissed—was to blame individuals, “to make the debate about operational ideas, not about grand strategy.” In fact, the Marne was a strategic failing that *should* have discredited the kaiser and his army, which “had failed to succeed in its prime role.” Yet there was no

healthy introspection or self-assessment; the imperial army would simply hammer away for another four years.

In contrast to the western front, hammering seemed to work in the East, where the Germans shattered the Russians at Tannenberg and the Austro-Hungarians achieved some early successes in Galicia. However, there too the war stagnated for logistical reasons; with Germany committed on the western front and Russia’s strength divided by French demands for an attack on East Prussia, it was difficult to mass troops and artillery *anywhere* on the eastern front, and yet more difficult to move them, given the poverty of communications.

Although the production of this three-volume history of World War I will take far longer than the Great War itself took to fight, readers willing to enter the trenches with this first volume will be rewarded with a kaleidoscopic and elegantly written presentation of the great issues and problems raised by the war’s origins, campaigns, and home fronts.

GEOFFREY WAWRO
Naval War College



Uhrowczik, Peter. *The Burning of Monterey: The 1818 Attack on California by the Privateer Bouchard*. Los Gatos, Calif.: Cyril Books, 2001. 170pp. \$12.95

I am a resident of Monterey. Everyone here knows about the Carmel Mission and Father Junipero Serra. Colton Hall, where the California Constitutional Convention was held, still stands, as a preserved historic landmark. Cannery Row likewise remains, though John

Steinbeck would barely recognize it. Then there is the hidden history of Monterey.

Recently the biography of Thomas ap Catesby Jones revealed an episode in which the city was seized in the name of the United States. A quick withdrawal after a festive party was required upon the revelation that the war with Mexico had not begun (*Thomas ap Catesby Jones: Commodore of Manifest Destiny*, by Gene A. Smith, Naval Institute Press, 2000, reviewed in the *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2001). More recently, *The Burning of Monterey* has appeared to reveal another fascinating episode in the town's history.

In November 1818 the capital of Alta California fell into the hands of rebels from Buenos Aires, the principal city of the newly independent Provincias Unidas del Rio de la Plata, today's Argentina. The privateering commander was Hipolito Bouchard. Born in France, he had sailed from Argentina around the world seeking to attack Spain's assets from South America to Madagascar to Manila, through the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, and on to Monterey. Bouchard started the journey on *La Argentina* and picked up the Philadelphia-built Argentinean vessel *Santa Rosa* in Hawaii. The crew of the *Santa Rosa* had earlier mutinied off the coast of Chile and found their way to the Sandwich Islands, where they sold the ship to King Kamehameha I. Bouchard obtained the *Santa Rosa*, placed it under the command of Peter Corney, an Englishman, and replenished the crew with whatever ragtag collection of Europeans and Polynesians he could find. Then Bouchard and his crew sailed on to the California coast, where they captured

and burned the town of Monterey, saving the Presidio church (today San Carlos Cathedral) and the mission at Carmel.

Until now, we knew of Bouchard only from cursory paragraphs in local history brochures. Peter Uhrowczik has delved into archives in Californian and Argentine libraries. From original sources, he has given us the most comprehensive work available about Bouchard's 1818 attack on Monterey. This study places the events in the context of its times. One learns nuggets of facts that could not have been easily discovered by studying other histories of the period. For example, the end of the War of 1812 created a slump in Baltimore's privateering industry, which, at least indirectly, made these ships and crews available to the insurgents in the Spanish-American revolutions. The business of privateering was not for the faint of heart. Bouchard encountered the slave trade, scurvy, mutineers, and pirate attacks in his journey around the world. As a consequence of Bouchard's raid, the Anglo-Saxon population of Alta California increased from three to five persons; one of the newcomers was an officer taken prisoner in Monterey, and the other was a Scottish drummer who had deserted. The author has been thorough in providing maps and illustrations so that the reader can visualize the geography of California as it was during the Spanish occupation.

This history is fascinating and entertaining. The contrast in reputations of Bouchard in Buenos Aires and in Monterey is striking. In Argentina, Bouchard's monument sits in the middle of a small plaza honoring him as a brave patriot. In California, those acquainted with Hipolito Bouchard tend to regard

him as a pirate, not a privateer. The distinction between a pirate and a privateer is a fine one separated by a thin letter of marque (as provided for in the U.S. Constitution). *The Burning of Monterey* gives us an understanding of an interesting man who lived in

turbulent times, from the perspectives of both those who admire and those who detest him.

XAVIER MARUYAMA
*Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California*

