

Arturo Prat, Hero of the War of the Pacific

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Agustín Arturo Prat Chacón (3 April 1848 – 21 May 1879) was a Chilean naval officer and lawyer who, in death, became a national hero. Among his many legacies is a noteworthy philatelic one.

He entered the Naval Academy on 28 August 1858 at the age of 10, influenced by a maternal uncle. In July 1861, Prat graduated as the top student in his class and began a nautical apprenticeship with the rank of *midshipman without examination*. On 21 July 1864, he passed the required theoretical and practical exams to become an *examined midshipman*. Between 1864 and 1866, Prat distinguished himself in the conflict with Spain, which had seized Peru's Chincha Islands.

In 1870, Prat began his legal studies. After completing them, much of his legal work focused on reforming the naval legal system, helping to modernize and professionalize it. When war broke out with Peru—the War of the Pacific—Prat found himself in command of the Chilean wooden corvette *Esmeralda*, facing the Peruvian ironclad *Huáscar* off the port of Iquique, Peru, on 21 May 1879. Despite the superior firepower of the *Huáscar*, the battle lasted four hours, aided by Chilean training and Peruvian missteps. Ultimately, the ironclad rammed the *Esmeralda* three times. In a final, futile act of bravery, Prat led a boarding attempt and was killed in the process.

Though Chile lost the battle and Prat his life, his heroism became a rallying cry for the nation, which went on to win the war. In the Battle of Iquique, Arturo Prat commanded two corvettes against Peruvian Admiral Miguel Grau, who led two ironclads. Peru suffered 8 casualties (killed and wounded), while Chile lost 143 killed and wounded, 57 captured, and one corvette sunk.



Three stamps honoring Chilean naval hero, Arturo Prat.



Prat's legacy is extensive, but for brevity, I will highlight three aspects.

First, philatelically. Three Chilean postage stamps have honored Arturo Prat:

- Scott Chile #251 (1948) — 40 centavos, issued for the centenary of his birth.
- Scott Chile #284 (1954) — 2 pesos, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Iquique.
- Scott Chile #1248 (1998) — issued on 3 April to mark the 150th anniversary of his birth. This stamp was demonetized on 31 December 1998.

Second, naval. On 9 January 1951, Chile acquired a U.S. Navy Brooklyn-class light cruiser, the USS *Nashville* (CL-43), which was renamed *Arturo Prat*. It remained in service under that name until 1982.

Finally, memorialized abroad. A bust of Arturo Prat can be found in Miami (top), near the Torch of Friendship at Bayside Marketplace—a tourist area with boat tours of Biscayne Bay. It was this statue that first led me to explore Prat's remarkable legacy.