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Brian Vale, *Cochrane in the Pacific: Fortune and Freedom in Spanish America*, I.B. Tauris, 2008. 238 pp. Maps, illustrations, end notes, bibliography, index.

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(Note: The views expressed in this review are those of its author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force Academy, the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.)

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Brian Vale's study of the exceedingly popular Thomas Lord Cochrane and his exploits on behalf of Chile is not likely to win him friends in any Cochrane fan club, but should suffice to make him popular with those appreciating good critical accounts of prominent figures in naval history. Whereas Cochrane and his partisans produced accounts of his service in the Pacific designed to aggrandize his role by describing his numerous triumphs as being won against not only Spanish imperialists but also small minded locals and disloyal subordinates, Vale endeavors to tell a more nuanced and accurate story. The crux of Vale's argument is that while Cochrane was truly a great man in a fight, he was far less admirable once the battle ended.

Cochrane was one of the best known officers in nineteenth century naval affairs—serving first in Britain's Royal Navy and then assuming increased responsibilities as the principle fleet commander in the Navies of Chile, Brazil, and Greece. His exploits as a fighting sailor captured the imaginations of contemporaries and succeeding generations in a manner only to be surpassed by Nelson. Indeed, Cochrane's renown was so great that in addition to his being sought after to command fleets half a world away from his native land, he also became the inspiration for several fictitious heroes, most notably Patrick O'Brien's Jack Aubrey.

While Cochrane's record as a ship's commander is the stuff legends are made of, Vale represents his trials and tribulations as a flag officer in the service of the infant Chilean Navy as being of an entirely different nature. From his much heralded arrival in December 1818 until his somewhat less celebrated departure in January 1823, Vale illuminates both Cochrane's heroic exploits and his often paranoid and petty fleet administration. For instance, readers will find chapters detailing Cochrane's leadership in the seizing of the Spanish fortress of Valdivia and the later cutting-out of the frigate Esmeralda, as well as the unseemly court martial that followed these events. According to Vale, Cochrane's paranoia was so extreme that he used a letter written by some of his

officers in opposition to the renaming of the Esmeralda to Valdivia as pretext to launching a vendetta. Cochrane brought these subordinates to trial to expose their plotting against him, when there was in fact no malice intended in their actions. By providing actual testimony, Vale not only exonerates the beleaguered officers, but also offers compelling evidence of some of the less savory aspects of Cochrane's character.

Vale describes Cochrane as a man who was constantly at war with would-be friends as well as Chile's more obvious foes. Vale's account is far more detailed and balanced on this period than what one will find in works such as Robert Harvey's *Cochrane: The Life and Exploits of a Fighting Captain* or contemporary accounts by Cochrane and his friends.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many of the claims made by Cochrane and his intimates that gain a second airing courtesy of Harvey are taken to task by Vale. Using an abundance of official communications and personal accounts from leading figures from South America's struggles for independence, Vale provides ample evidence that Cochrane's imagination was the source of his greatest vexation while in Chile.

Vale's is neither an excessively harsh condemnation of a complex character, nor is it a laudatory account of a beloved hero. While Vale takes nothing away from Cochrane's reputation as a warrior, offering considerable testimony to his bravery, he takes care to explore the conflicts off the ocean from more than Cochrane's point of view. Cochrane in the Pacific is above all a well-documented and well-written study of a famous captain who had numerous flaws as a human being.



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<sup>1</sup> Robert Harvey, *Cochrane: The Life and Exploits of a Fighting Captain* (New York, Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 2000).