



Scots who made their mark in.....

The Armed Forces



Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald

John Paul Jones (1747—92) (see SSN for Winter 2012) was not the only Scot responsible for developing the navy of another country.

Cochrane was born in 1775 at Annsfield (now the name of a farm and a road in Hamilton, South Lanarkshire) into an old and noble family. His father Archibald, the 9th Earl had served both in the Navy and the Army, but on the death of the 8th earl, he found himself with a title – and scant other resources apart from initiative. He hoped his own



expensively patented invention of a method of making coal tar would be bought up by the Royal Navy as an alternative to protecting hulls with copper sheathing. The navy did use his invention only after the patent expired though John McAdam (GB 2009) bought the company and adapted Cochrane's idea, for sealing roads. None of his many other inventions were a success and he died a pauper in Paris aged 83 in 1831.

“The Sea Wolf”

From his infancy, much of it spent at Culross in Fife where his family had other land, Thomas, it was assumed, would also have a military career and he joined the Navy at the outbreak of the French Wars aged 17 and served under his uncle Captain Alexander Cochrane on *HMS Hind* and *HMS Thetis* doing service in the Atlantic and on the American seaboard. Cochrane had an assertive character as a young man, being court-martialled for disrespect when a Lieutenant on *HMS Barfleur* and this personality trait did not wane with age !

His first command was over the French prize *Généreux* in February 1800 and the following month when commander of the sloop *HMS Speedy* he escaped from the French using



Cochrane and his deeds are referenced on a dozen or so Chilean stamps from 1910 onwards... left 5c from 1911 right 10d, 1911



great sleight of hand. Indeed Cochrane's exploits throughout his life were to inspire writers like G.A. Henty, Showell Styles, C.S.Forester, Robert Brightwell, Alexander Kent and Patrick O'Brian to create naval hero characters like Horatio Hornblower and Jack Aubrey. Cochrane is also honoured in a suite of poems by Pablo Neruda.

In command of the *Speedy* in just over a year Cochrane took out of enemy service by one means or another 53 French ships. He was then captured but returned in a prisoner swap within a month. After a brief spell at Edinburgh University, Cochrane returned to service in 1803 when war resumed and was immediately embroiled in controversy, complaining about the condition of his new ship *HMS Arab*, which he said “sailed like a collier”. Nevertheless using it Cochrane boarded a US merchant ship the *Chatham*—well before the US and Britain were at war !

One of Cochrane's crew when he was Captain of the frigate *HMS Imperieuse* was Frederic Marryat who used his experiences with him in his *Mr Midshipman Easy* (1836). Throughout his war service Cochrane's tactics were infused with guile and trickery as he became one of the Navy's stars during the conflict with Napoleon, gaining the nom de guerre *Le Loup des Mers* (The Sea Wolf) from his French enemies.

In 1806 Cochrane stood successfully for Parliament in the historical borough of Honiton on the ticket of parliamentary reform. However this was achieved only by his paying voters 10 guineas each, a fact not revealed for a further ten years. A year later however Cochrane was elected on a fairer basis. Unsurprisingly given his temperament he did not get on with many of his peers and few were sad to see him expelled from Parliament in the Great Stock Exchange Fraud, in which share prices soared on a widespread but false belief that Napoleon



Chile 1976 depicts from left Cochrane and his fleet, his capture of Valdivia, Capture of *La Esmeralda* in 1820, and later Chilean naval vessels named in his honour, the cruiser *Cochrane* in 1874 and the destroyer *Cochrane* 1962

had died, which proved to be a hoax. During the resulting enquiry it was established Cochrane was one of six men who had gained by selling in this period.

In retrospect it seems he was stitched up by political enemies but he was fined £1,000 (an enormous sum then) pilloried for an hour and sentenced to imprisonment for a year. He lost all his status also being expelled from Parliament and having his hereditary knighthood stripped off him in a public ceremony in which his personal banner was ripped down and stamped on by those present. Throughout his life Cochrane maintained his innocence but despite a series of parliamentary petitions, his pleas fell on deaf ears until 1830 when the new king, William IV, a former naval officer himself and sympathetic to Cochrane had him pardoned and he was returned to the Navy List as Rear-Admiral. Queen Victoria assuaged public anger about the Cochrane Case by restoring his knighthood in 1847. The day before his funeral in 1860 his banner was returned to Parliament.

Turning his back on those who had spurned him, Cochrane in civil disgrace became a world adventurer selling his skills to a number of countries who were beginning to build their navies like Greece, Brazil and, most notably, Chile. He became a hero to a number of South American countries seeking independence from Spain.

He arrived with his wife and family in Valparaiso in November 1818 at the personal request of Chilean leader Bernardo O'Higgins and becoming a Chilean citizen took charge of Chile's navy in the fight with Spain.

It seems he simply recreated the Chilean navy along the lines of the Royal Navy and resumed the daring tactics which had gained him his "Sea-Wolf" soubriquet years before. Despite being vastly outnumbered he and his forces captured the city of Valdivia (*noted on Chile 1970 below and on 1976 strip opposite below*) one of the two southernmost outliers of the Spanish Empire, tho' he failed to capture the other, the Chiloé Archipelago.



In 1830 O'Higgins charged Cochrane with conveying General San Martin's liberation army to Peru. Having done this Cochrane's forces captured the No 1 Spanish frigate the *Esmeralda*, a important event in producing Peruvian independence and commemorated on two Chilean stamps (1910 above right and in the strip opposite) both which show

Cochrane's *Lautaro* bearing down on the Spanish vessel.



Marquess of Maranhão

His task and contract over—and having fallen out with some of his South American naval officer "friends" who he felt had not valued him enough, Cochrane took command of the Brazilian Navy in the Spring of 1823; now to engage the Portuguese, chasing their fleet across the Atlantic after blockading them at Bahia and forcing them to evacuate. Again using astonishing bluffs about false stories of a vast Brazilian navy just out of sight over the horizon Cochrane gained the surrender of Maranhão, so bringing about Brazilian independence. For this Emperor Pedro made Cochrane Marquess of Maranhão, But again he fell out with his employers and "friends" over what he felt were his due rewards, so he (mis)appropriated a captured Brazilian frigate in November 1825 and sailed for Britain.

Cochrane then went on to assist the Greek Navy in its fight with the Ottoman Empire, but with less success than he had had in South America.

Styled "Lord Cochrane" since an infant, he finally achieved his earldom on the death of his father in July 1831 and a year later he was restored to the Navy List and was regularly promoted in the course of the next 25 years—during which time for three years he served as Commander-in-Chief of the North America and West Indies Station—becoming Admiral of the Red in December 1857. Cochrane is also remembered for a string of technological innovations in ship design.

In 1860 in his 85th year, Thomas Cochrane died in Kensington after complications from surgery for gall stones, which had plagued him for years. He was buried in Westminster Abbey and each year Chilean and Brazilian officials pay tribute to him with a ceremony in the cathedral nave. His epitaph credits him with "*confidence and genius. his science and extraordinary daring inspired by his heroic exertion in the cause of freedom and his splendid services alike to his own country, Greece, Brazil, Chile and Peru achieved a name illustrious throughout the world for courage, patriotism and chivalry*"

Streets in the town of Dundonald are named in his honour and this photo of his bust in Culross shows its famous architecture as referenced on this 1970 GB stamp.



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