

First Chilean Antarctic Expedition: Origins and Future Projections after 80 Years

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01 INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

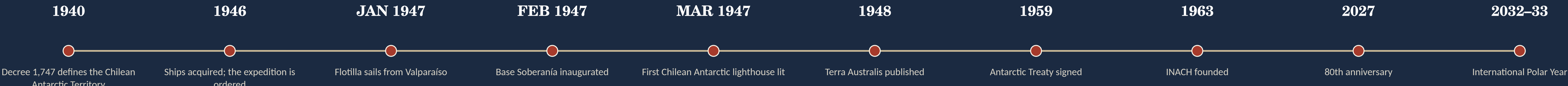
In 1947 Chile mounted its first Antarctic expedition, turning the territorial claim defined by Supreme Decree No. 1,747 (1940) into an effective and continuous presence. A plan first outlined in 1906 finally materialised when post-war naval acquisitions provided the ships — the frigate Iquique and the transport Angamos — and the government of Gabriel González Videla (1946) supplied the political decision. Sailing from Valparaíso in early January 1947, the flotilla under Commodore Federico Guesalaga Toro opened an unbroken chain of Chilean Antarctic campaigns that continues to this day. As the gateway to Antarctica, Chile has since played a leading — and often overlooked — role in exploration, rescue, navigation safety and logistics in one of the most inhospitable regions on Earth.



Inauguration of the commemorative cross beside Base Soberanía, Greenwich Island, 19 March 1947.

02 SOURCES & APPROACH

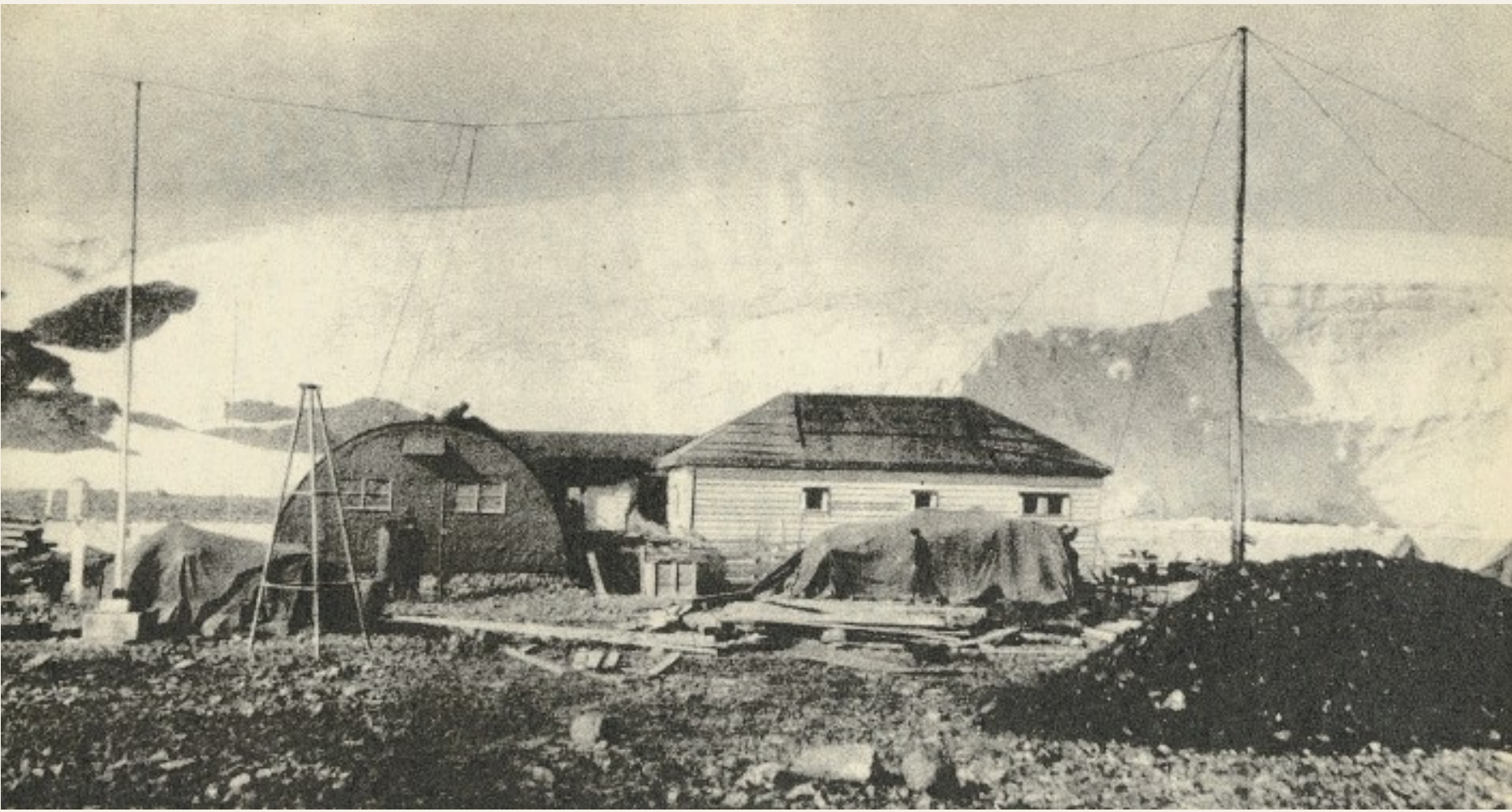
Historical-cultural analysis of primary sources: *Terra Australis* (Orrego Vicuña, 1948), *Valientes muchachos* (León Wöppke & Jara Fernández, eds., 2007), and records of the Chilean Navy, Directemar and INACH. Interpretive framework: collective memory (Halbwachs), sites of memory (Nora) and the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger).



03 FINDINGS



Officers of the Antarctic flotilla, 1947.



Base Soberanía: metal dome and wooden quarters, February 1947.



The wintering party gathered around the radio, Base Soberanía.

A multidisciplinary national effort

Far from a purely military operation, the expedition brought together the Navy, Army, Air Force and Foreign Ministry with naturalists (G. Mann Fischer, C. Oliver Schneider), a filmmaker (H. Correa) and leading writers — E. Orrego Vicuña, F. Coloane, M. Serrano, E. Bunster. The State conceived the venture as an act of knowledge and narration: not

Base Soberanía and the first lighthouse

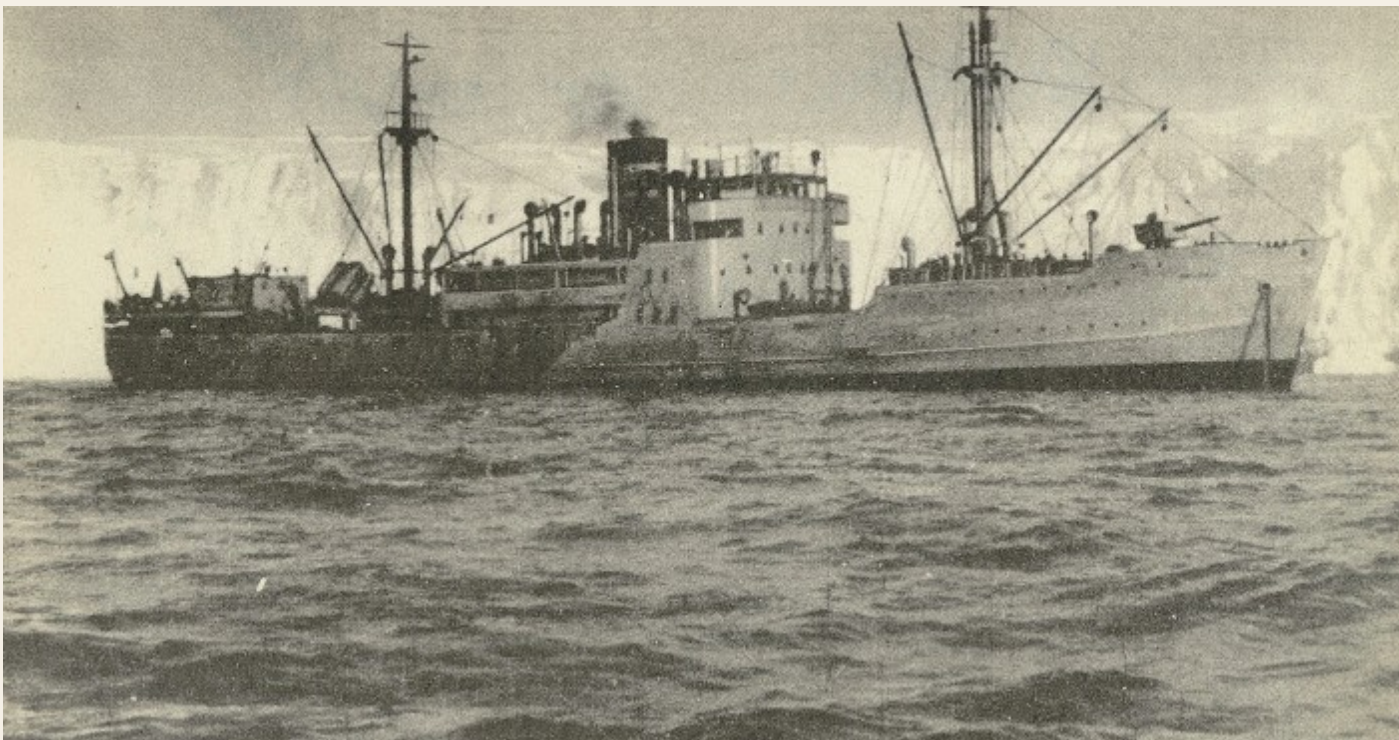
On 6 February 1947 Commodore Guesalaga inaugurated the Soberanía meteorological and radiotelegraphic station — today Base Naval Antártica Capitán Arturo Prat. A volunteer wintering party led by Lt. Boris Kopaitic remained for nearly a year: the first Chilean overwintering. On 21 March 1947, in winds above 70 km/h, an acetylene-gas

The written word as a founding instrument

The books born of 1947 — *Terra Australis* (1948), Mann Fischer's *Biología de la Antártica Suramericana* (1948), Vila Labra's essays — translated the experience of a few expeditioners into the heritage of an entire nation. Six decades later, *Valientes muchachos* (2007), edited by León Wöppke and Jara Fernández, brought together

“A Chilean light in the Antarctic seas.”

Eugenio Orrego Vicuña on the first lighthouse — *Terra Australis* (1948)



The Iquique and Angamos in Antarctic waters.



Landing party on the ice, Greenwich Island.



Hauling construction materials ashore.



Unloading supplies at Discovery (Chile) Bay.

04 FROM SOVEREIGNTY TO COOPERATION

What began as an assertion of sovereignty evolved into a platform for international cooperation. The Antarctic Treaty (1959) and the creation of INACH (1963) consolidated a commitment to peace and science, and the base founded in 1947 became a platform of knowledge. Science was present from the first voyage — the naturalists of 1947 described previously unknown species — anticipating today's National Antarctic Science Programme. Through continuous operations, search and rescue, aids to navigation and logistical support to many national programmes, Chile has been a key operator sustaining the Antarctic Treaty System and the global effort to understand the continent.

05 PROJECTING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY

The commemoration of 2027 should not be limited to ceremonial evocation: it is a platform to project Chile's Antarctic presence into the future — embedding Antarctic content in school curricula, renewing the Antarctic literary corpus for new generations, strengthening public engagement, and preparing Chile's role as gateway to the continent towards the International Polar Year 2032–33. The lesson of 1947 remains: presence is sustained not only by ships and bases, but by stories, knowledge and memory. Since that first voyage, the written word has been as decisive as the ship, the base or the lighthouse.

Key references: Orrego Vicuña, E. (1948). *Terra Australis*. Zig-Zag · León Wöppke, C. & Jara Fernández, M. (eds.) (2007). *Valientes muchachos*. LW Editorial · Mann Fischer, G. (1948). *Biología de la Antártica Suramericana* · Halbwachs (1925/2004); Nora (2008); Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983/2002) · Armada de Chile, Directemar & INACH institutional records.

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Photographs: Hernán Correa, First Chilean Antarctic Expedition (1947), in E. Orrego Vicuña, *Terra Australis* (Zig-Zag, 1948). Author's collection.

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