

## = Battle of Caldera Bay =

The Battle of Caldera Bay , or the Sinking of the Blanco Encalada , was an engagement fought in the port of Caldera Bay during the 1891 Chilean Civil War between Balmacedist and Congressional naval forces on 23 April 1891 . It involved two Balmacedist torpedo boats , Almirante Lynch and Almirante Condell , and the Congressional armored frigate Blanco Encalada .

After both torpedoes from Almirante Condell had missed , Blanco Encalada was hit by a torpedo from Almirante Lynch and sank in minutes , with the loss of 182 men . The loss of Blanco Encalada hindered the Congressional forces , but they ultimately defeated the Balmacedist forces that August . Blanco Encalada was the first ironclad warship lost to a self @-@ propelled torpedo . The engagement prompted countries to rapidly grow both their torpedo boat and torpedo boat destroyer forces ( the latter commonly referred to as destroyers ) .

## = = Background = =

In 1891 , after a series of struggles about multinational nitrate interests , Chilean President José Manuel Balmaceda refused to sign the national budget passed by the Chilean National Congress . Balmaceda then dissolved Congress . The dissolution split both the Chilean Army and Navy , with some forces remaining loyal to Congress and others to the President . An armed conflict ensued after a mutiny by the navy , which at that time was docked at Valparaíso .

Supporters of those forces loyal to Congress , including members of the dissolved parliament and their backers among multinational nitrate interests , bought weaponry from Europe and the United States . Better equipped than the forces loyal to the President , they rapidly captured Chile 's northern provinces , which had recently been conquered from Bolivia and Peru during the War of the Pacific .

Since the Congressionalists controlled all of the current ships in the Chilean Navy , the Balmacedists commandeered vessels that were nearing completion in England and France , including the torpedo boats Almirante Condell and Almirante Lynch They were built by Laird Brothers , the same firm that built the Confederate raider Alabama thirty years before . Both Almirante Lynch and Almirante Condell carried an armament of five Whitehead torpedoes , two 14 @-@ pound ( 6 @. @ 4 kg ) guns in echelon on the forecastle and one on the poop , four 3 @-@ pound ( 1 @. @ 4 kg ) guns and two machine guns . Their maximum speed was around 21 knots .

The two ships arrived at Valparaíso on 21 March . Both ships docked at Quintero Bay on 18 April . While at Quintero , their commanding officers , Commander Carlos E. Moraga of the Almirante Condell and Commander Juan Fuentes of the Almirante Lynch , were informed of the possibility that Blanco Encalada , a Congressionalist frigate , was going to be in Caldera Bay in five days . The two commanders consulted with one another and sent their proposal to attack Blanco Encalada to the Balmacedist government , which was approved .

Blanco Encalada arrived at Caldera Bay on 22 April , under the command of Captain Goñi , escorting several transports . The troops on these ships landed and captured the surrounding railroad and town of Copiapó . At about 01 : 20 , Goñi returned to the Blanco Encalada . Although it was known that Balmacedist torpedo boats were nearby , the Congressionalists believed that they would not attack the transports . Because of this , torpedo nets were left onshore , and watertight bulkheads which would have isolated a hull breach were left open .

## = = Battle = =

At 04 : 00 on 23 April , Almirante Condell set out toward Caldera Bay about 450 miles ( 720 km ) away , with Almirante Lynch 20 yards ( 18 m ) behind her. The armed steamer Imperial traveled with the torpedo boats , taking up a position to the left of both boats . It was to wait some distance off Caldera , in order to escort the ships back home when the attack ended . Both torpedo boats entered Caldera at roughly 3 : 30 . When they were 500 yards ( 460 m ) from Blanco Encalada , both boats came under fire by rapid @-@ fire guns on board the frigate , which only had seven men

stationed as guards . About 100 yards ( 91 m ) from Blanco Encalada , Almirante Condell fired her bow torpedo at the Congressional frigate . It missed and landed on the shore , unexploded . Moraga then turned the torpedo boat into the direct fire of the frigate and fired both his starboard torpedoes . The front torpedo hit , but failed to explode , and the rear torpedo passed clear under the frigate .

As all of Blanco Encalada 's guns were occupied by Almirante Condell , the crew did not notice Almirante Lynch approaching from the opposite direction of Almirante Condell . From 50 yards ( 46 m ) out , Almirante Lynch fired her bow torpedo , which missed , and then fired her forward starboard torpedo after executing a turning maneuver like Almirante Condell had done . The second torpedo struck Blanco Encalada , creating a hole roughly 7 by 15 feet ( 2 @. @ 1 by 4 @. @ 6 m ) . The ship sank within minutes , taking 182 men with it . Several of the men who escaped , including Captain Goñi , did so by clinging to animals in Blanco Encalada 's cargo hold , including a llama and a cow .

As she was sinking , the torpedo boats fired their 3 @-@ pounder Hotchkiss guns at the survivors , killing about forty . The torpedo boats also fired at the transport Biobio , which had been trying to rescue the surviving crew . Including Captain Goñi , 106 men survived out of the 288 aboard. The entire engagement lasted nine minutes , and Blanco Encalada sank two minutes after the torpedo hit . As Lynch and Condell left the harbor , they spotted the transport Aconcagua , which they attacked with their 14 @-@ pounder guns ( after ruling out their Gatling guns due to their potential for overkill ) . The Aconcagua surrendered after an hour and a half battle , but the torpedo ships were unable to seize her due to an approaching ship which they thought was the Chilean cruiser Esmeralda . It turned out to be the neutral HMS Warspite . The Almirante Lynch was slightly damaged in the battle , suffering hits to her steam @-@ pipe and flooding in her aft compartment , but besides that , the two torpedo boats were undamaged .

= = Aftermath and impact on torpedo use = =

The sinking of Blanco Encalada led to an attack by Almirante Condell and Almirante Lynch on her sister ship , the Almirante Cochrane , at that time moored at Iquique . Almirante Cochrane retreated before any torpedoes were fired . On 28 August , the Balmacedist army was defeated at the Battle of La Placilla . Their army lost about 1 @, @ 000 men , and three days later Congressional forces marched into Santiago , effectively ending the Chilean Civil War . The Blanco Encalada underwent some re @-@ floating attempts after the war , which were ultimately unsuccessful , and she was left in Caldera Bay until being demolished in 1954 when a new bridge was under construction . The Chilean government launched another Blanco Encalada , a cruiser , in 1894 .

The battle had a wider impact on naval weapons development because Blanco Encalada was the first ironclad warship sunk by a self @-@ propelled torpedo . News of the attack spread and as a result of the action , navies of several major powers realized the potential of torpedoes as a cheap counter to expensive pre @-@ dreadnoughts , which led to the acceleration of submarine and torpedo boat production , the addition of torpedo nets to ships for use when they were moored in port , and the addition of torpedo tubes to surface ships . During the Russo @-@ Japanese War , over 300 self @-@ propelled torpedoes were fired , in one instance finishing off the already seriously damaged Russian flagship Knyaz Suvorov at the Battle of Tsushima . Torpedo boats also sank two armored cruisers and two destroyers during the course of the war . By the start of World War I , torpedo boats and submarines were in widespread use in many navies .