The War of the Triple Alliance and related medals (1865-1870)

After its disintegration, the vice-kingdom Rio de la Plata fell apart in three nations, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay (1810).

Paraguay was populated by the indigenous Guarani and governed by Jesuits. Since 1814 Paraguay had been ruled by a number of dictators: De Francia (1814-1840), his cousin Carlos Antonio Lopez (1844-1862), and Carlos' son, the notorious Francisco Solano Lopez (1862-1870). Whereas Carlos Antonio was a moderate despot, who actively stimulated industry and agriculture, his son Francisco turned out to be a "little Napoleon" with megalomaniac military aspirations and with a suspicious nature. The Lopez family considered the country as their own estate and encouraged a self-supporting economy, isolated from the neighbouring countries. The country got his foreign exchange by exporting yerba mate and valuable wood products.

Solano Lopez modernized and expanded the Paraguayan army to an estimated 70,000 men, but most of them were badly equipped. The armies of the triple alliance were far smaller than the Paraguayan forces. Uruguay had about 2000 men and no navy, Argentina 8500 men and a small flotilla of six units, Brazil had only 16,000 men, but a strong navy, comprising 42 ships with a 4000 well-trained crew.

Several causes of this complicated conflict had been mentioned: the aggressive politics of dictator Lopez with his expansionist ambitions, the impending disturbance of the balance of power in the region of the Rio de la Plata by the troubles in Uruguay, and even the role of Britain was discussed as the war turned out to be profitable for its economy. Direct cause was the Brazilian intervention in Uruguay, where two parties were struggling for decades: the Blanco's, supported by Lopez and the Colorado's, supported by Brazil. The legitimacy of the president Aguirre's government (a Blanco) was disputed by general Venancio Flores (a Colorado). Flores fought a guerilla against the Uruguayan government, thereby frequently trespassing the Brazilian border. Brazil demanded from Aguirre compensation for the damage caused by chasing Flores' guerilla troops on Brazilian territory. Aguirre's refusal gave Brazil a reason to invade Uruguay (October 12, 1864) and to besiege Paysandu (December 3 1864 - January 2 1865). Aguirre asked for assistance against the Brazilian aggression. Lopez saw an opportunity to expand his influence in the region of the Rio de la Plata by declaring war on Brazil on December 13, 1864.

Lopez took the initiative by invading Brazil in the north of Mato Grosso in December 1864, and Rio Grande do Sul in the south during the first months of 1865. To reach Uruguay, Lopez had to cross Argentinian territory, the province of Entre Rios. Argentina refused the transit of Lopez' army of 25,000 men, whereupon Paraguay declared war on Argentina (March 18 1865). In the meantime Uruguay had undergone a regime change as a result of the Brazilian invasion. Aguirre was replaced by Venancio Flores (The Colorado general). Uruguay immediately aligned itself with Argentina and Brazil. On May 1 1865 Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay signed the Treaty of the Triple Alliance. They appointed Bartholomé Mitre, Argentina's president, as supreme commander of the allies.

Lopez northern army in the Mato Grosso crossed the Paraguay river, besieged in December 1864 the Coimbra fort, where 120 Brazilians defended the fortification against 3000 Paraguayans during 3 days. After the capture of Coimbra (the Brazilians surrendered because of exhaustion of ammunition), Lopez took Corumbá, Nioque, Miranda and at last Coxim in April 1865.

In the south his troops under leadership of Wenceslao Robles captured the important Argentinian city Corrientes, where Lopez hoped to gain support of Urquiza, governor of the provinces of Corrientes and Entre Rios. Argentina was a federal state with governors, whose
loyalty to the central government could not always be guaranteed. However, in this case Urquiza's support failed to occur. Along with Robles' troops, 10,000 men under col. Estigarriba crossed the Argentinian border at Encarnación in May 1865 and took São Borja (June 12) and later Uruguayana (August 5). A separate division of 3200 men under Duarte, however, was defeated by the Uruguayans under general Flores himself at the bloody battle of Yatay on the banks of the Uruguay River (August 17 1865).

The most important battle, which turned out to be decisive, took place at Riachuelo on June 11 1865. In this naval battle the Brazilian fleet under command of adm. Barroso annihilated the powerful Paraguayan navy under capt. Mesa. Lopez realised that without adequate naval support military actions across the Paraguay River and the Paraná could not be carried out. From that moment on Lopez was forced to retreat on his own territory. The initiative was taken over by the Triple Alliance. The Paraguayans were driven out of Corrientes, and Estigarriba yielded Uruguayana on September 18 1865 against an allied force of 30,000 men. By the end of 1865 50,000 allies were prepared to invade Paraguay. They crossed the Paraná and Paraguay River during the first months of 1866 and set up their camp near Tuyuti. With a force of 24,000 men divided in three columns Paraguay attacked the allies, 35,000 men strong. In this first battle of Tuyuti on May 24 1866 the Paraguayans lost 13,000 men, the allies 5000. After Tuyuti the Paraguayan army was not able to carry out offensive operations of comparable size anymore.

In the province of Mato Grosso the Brazilian col. Drago captured Coxim, and later on Miranda in September 1866. Corumbá fell in June 1867. On September 12 1866 Lopez, realising that the war was lost, invited Mitre for peace negotiations. One of the important articles of the Treaty of the Triple Alliance pointed out, that the war should continue as long as the present regime was in charge. As expected, Lopez refused and the negotiations failed.

After the conference the Allies moved on Paraguayan territory north along the Paraguay River towards the Curupaití fortifications. The battle of Curupaití resulted in an catastrophic defeat for the allies. They lost over 10,000 men against 100 Paraguayan losses. The Duke of Caxias resumed the advance to Asunción but had to deal with the strong fortifications of Humaitá and Curupaití. He bypassed both places successfully. Humaitá fell on July 25 1867 after a long siege.

Next defense was set up at the Piquissiri River, where 18,000 men were defending a fortified line. Caxias decided to cross the Paraguay River to bypass the line, and return to the eastbank a few miles north at Villeta, in order to attack the Paraguayan army from behind. This strategy appeared to be a great success: the road to Asunción lied open. Lopez tried to charge the allies in vain at Tatayiba on October 21 1867 and at the 2nd battle of Tuyuti on November 3 1867.

The capital was occupied on January 1 1869. Count d'Eu, son-in-law of Emperor Dom Pedro II, was appointed as military commander in Paraguay. Lopez fled to the north east to start a guerilla. There, on March 1 1870 troops of gen. Cámara surprised the last Paraguayan camp in Cerro Corá. Lopez got wounded during the ensuing fight and was carried away to the banks of the Aquidaban River. Eventually he was found and killed by Cámara and his men after refusing an offer to surrender.

At the peace treaty on June 20 1870 Paraguay lost 55,000 sq.miles to Brazil and Argentina, the most industrialized part of the country (25% of its original territory).

The consequences of the war for the Paraguayan population were devastating as could be expected. An 1871 census recorded 221,079 inhabitants, of which 106,254 women, 86,079 children and 28,746 men. The pre-war population in 1864 was estimated at 450,000. So,
more than 50% of the population died as result of the war, making this war the most
destructive one in modern times. Due to the competition between Argentina and Brazil,
Paraguay remains as an independent state, serving as a buffer nation. The war caused a
prominent position of the South American army in state matters, which is still the case today.

**Medals related to the war**

Argentina
Medal for Corrientes 1865
Issued August 19, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 34x26mm
Ribbon light blue at sides, white centre, equal stripes

Argentina
Metal Escudo for Curupaity 1866
Issued September 1866 in gold, silver, copper Escudo's
Oval 40x31mm
No ribbon

Argentina
Medal of Corrientes for the National Guard 1865-1869
Issued December 10, 1869 by the province of Corrientes in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 31mm
Ribbon light blue at sides, white center, equal stripes

Argentina
Medal of Cordoba for the National Guard
Issued December 14, 1869 by the province of Cordoba in gold, silver

Argentina
Cross of Buenos Aires for the National Guard 1865
Issued December 16, 1869 by the province of Buenos Aires in gold, silver
Ten-pointed star 43mm
Ribbon is trapezoidal and white with two lateral light blue stripes

Argentina
Medal for the Paraguayan War 1865-1870
Issued September 28, 1866 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 31mm
Ribbon light blue with white striped centre

Argentina
Medal for Allies in the Paraguayan War 1865-1870
Issued August 20, 1889 in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 31mm
Ribbon light blue sides, white centre in equal stripes

Brazil
Medal for Coimbra 1864
Issued July 8, 1865 in silver, bronze
Oval medal 35x23mm (var. 25x20mm)
Ribbon red on both sides and black centre in equal stripes

Brazil
Medal for Uruguay 1865
Issued June 28, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon half red, half blue, 2" for officers, 1" for troops

Brazil
Medal for Uruguayana 1865
Issued September 20, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 20mm
Ribbon green-light blue-green in equal stripes

Brazil
Naval medal for Riachuelo 1865
Issued November 18, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 26mm surmounted by an imperial crown
Ribbon white with ¼" green stripes at both sides

Brazil
Medal for Matto Grosso
Issued August 7, 1867 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon with four equal stripes light blue-green-yellow-light blue

Brazil
Medal of bravery, Paraguay 1867
May 1, 1867 in silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon red with ¼" green stripes on both sides

Brazil
Medal of Bravery 1868
Issued March 28, 1868 in silver, bronze
Oval medal 32x25mm
Ribbon dark green-red-dark green in three equal stripes
Bars with dates of the several engagements

Brazil
Naval medal for Humaita
Issued March 14, 1868 in silver, bronze
Round medal 35mm
Ribbon light blue-red-light blue in equal stripes

Brazil
Cross for Paraguay 1868-1870
Issued August 20, 1870 in gold, silver, bronze
Double-pointed cross 25mm
Ribbon green-white-light blue-white-yellow in equal stripes
Bars with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 for years of service

Paraguay
National Order of Merit
Issued April 8, 1865 for military merit
Five-pointed ball-tipped gold star. On the central medallion is a star encircled by "HONOR ET GLORIA", on the reverse "PREMIUM MERITI"
Ribbon purple with three narrow stripes of red-white-blue on each side.
Plaque double the size of the cross.

Paraguay
Medal for Riachuelo
Issued July 2 1865 in gold, silver, copper
Round, cast medal 30mm
Ribbon black with blue edges

Paraguay
Cross for Corrales
Issued February 13, 1866 in silver, copper
Cross with trefoil ends 58x42mm made of engraved sheets of silver/copper
Obv. "VENCIO EN CORRALES 31 ENERO 1866", RevPLAIN.
Ribbon blue with central white stripe

Paraguay
Medal for Tuiuti 1867
Issued November 15, 1867 in bronze (for the second battle of Tuyuti)
Round medal 35mm
Ribbon half green, half blue

Paraguay
Medal for Tataiyba 1867
Issued October 24, 1867 in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 30mm
Ribbon half red, half yellow

Paraguay
Medal for Acaiuasa
Issued July 24, 1868 in gold, silver
Cross with four double-pointed arms, made of engraved sheets of metal
Ribbon six stripes, alternately blue and red.

Uruguay
Medal for Yatay 1865
Issued September 30, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 34x28mm
Ribbon five equal stripes of alternately blue and white

Uruguay
Medal for Paraguay 1865-1869
Issued April 4, 1891 in bronze
Cross with four pointed arms surmounted by gold, silver, or copper sun
Ribbon red

Uruguay
Medal for Paysandu
January 2, 1865 in silver
Round medal 30mm

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(1872)

Hooker T. The Paraguayan War, in: Military Modelling (sept. 1992): 76-80

Schulman, Amsterdam (1970)
War of the Pacific and related medals (1879-1884)

The economic interests in the mineral-rich region of the Peruvian provinces Tacna, Arica and Tarapacà and the Bolivian Antofagasta province laid the foundation of the conflict between Chile on one hand and Peru and Bolivia on the other side, ultimately leading to war. The refusal of the powerful Chilean Antofagasta Nitrate and Railway Company to pay a 10 cent tax per quintal for the exploitation of nitrate to the Bolivian government, led to a Bolivian threat to confiscate the Company. Chile considered this threat as a casus belli and dispatched a warship with 500 soldiers to Antofagasta. As 90-95% of the population of Antofagasta was Chilean, the soldiers didn't met any resistance. On March 23 1879 the Chileans, on their way from Antofagasta to Calama, defeated 135 Bolivian soldiers at the Topáter river. It can be regarded as the first battle in the War of the Pacific (also known as the Guerra del Pacifico, the Salpeter War, Guerra del Salitre, the Cents War, Guerra del Guano). Due to a secret Treaty of Mutual Defense between Bolivia and Peru (1873) Chile was at war not only with Bolivia, but with Peru as well. Because of a lack of proper transport overland, the superiority at sea would be decisive in the outcome of this conflict. Bolivia had no navy. So the naval battles were fought by the Armada de Chile and Marina de Guerra del Peru.

The blockade of the Peruvian port Iquique on April 5 1879 could be broken on May 21 where Captain Miguel Grau on the monitor Huascar was able to sink the Chilean corvette Esmeralda. During entering the Huáscar the Chilean commander Arturo Prat was shot. The Peruvian ironclad Independencia chased the Chilean schooner Covadonga, but collided a rock and sank. The battle of Iquique was a Pyrrhus victory of the Peruvian navy: the loss of one of Peru's important ships turned out to be disastrous. Grau's monitor Huáscar participated in the first and second battle of Antofagasta and captured the steamship Rimac on July 23 1879 with a cavalry regiment onboard. However, the Chilean naval superiority was demonstrated in the decisive battle of Angamos on October 8 1879 where the Huáscar was captured and Grau was killed, making him a Peruvian national hero. Now Chile "rules the waves" and serious land campaigns could be carried out. The theatre of war was situated in the southern, most important Peruvian provinces Tacna, Arica and Tarapacà.

The campaign of Tarapacà began on November 2 1879 when Chilean troops landed at Pisagua, 500km north of Antofagasta. The Chilean forces were defeated in the battle of Tarapacà on November 27 1879, where they lost 691/2300 men. However, the Peruvian army (4500 men) was unable to exploit this succes and retreated to Arica after an exhausting march in the desert during which half of the troops were lost. Thereby leaving the province of Tarapacà to the Chileans and losing nearly all export earnings of £ 28 million in nitrate to Chile!

On February 26 1880 11,000 men in 19 ships landed in Ilo without resistance. The direct supply from Lima to Tacna was cut off after several engagements. The death blow came in the battle of Tacna where on May 26 1880 a Chilean army (14147 men) under leadership of Manuel Baquedano crushed the allied army of 5150 Bolivian troops and 8500 Peruvians, under leadership of the Bolivian president Narciso Campero. On June 7 the last Peruvian bastion in the Tacna region fell in the battle of Arica. The regular combined Peruvian-Bolivian army ceased to exist. Bolivia left the war to Peru. During the peace conference on the USS Lackawanna in Arica on October 1880 the belligerent powers could not come to a settlement. The negotiations failed. A month before the Chileans dispatched an expedition of 2200 men to northern Peru under command of captain Patricio Lynch to collect war taxes from wealthy landowners. Death penalty or total destruction of property awaited the reluctant Peruvian!
After the failure of the peace negotiations president Piérola ordered the construction of two defense lines between Lima and the Chilean army, which occupied the southern provinces Arica, Tacna and Tarapacá. The lines at Chorillos and Miraflores were situated a few miles south of Lima and were defended by untrained civilians. During the battle of Chorillos on January 13 1881 23129 Chilean troops defeated 18000 defenders. After clearing the line Miraflores as well, the Chileans could enter Lima on January 17 1881.

The occupation commander vice admiral Patricio Lynch took his military headquarter in the Governmental Palace, while the Peruvian colonel Andres Avelino Caceres escaped to the Andes region to organize the resistance movement. He started the campaign of the Breña. January 1882 Lynch launched an offensive with 5000 men to annihilate the guerillas. By way of Talma and southeast to Huancayo, reaching Izcuchaca the by cold, snow and mountain sickness depleted troops were engaged in the battle of La Concepción, where they were forced to retreat with a loss of 534 soldiers. A new offensive was successful in the end, where on July 10 1883 the small army of Caceres was destroyed in the battle of Huamachuco.

Hostilities between Chile and Peru came to an end in the Treaty of Ancon. Peru ceded the Tarapacá province to Chile and lost the authority over Arica and Tacna for 10 years. Tacna was returned to Peru not before 1929.

Bolivia lost the complete mineral-rich Litoral Department (Antofagasta), and as a consequence the direct connection to the Pacific.

**Medals related to the war**

Only Chilean medals could be traced. Bolivian and Peruvian medals for the numerous engagements are lacking.

- **Naval medal for Iquique**
  Issued September 12, 1879 in gold, silver
  Shield-shaped medal with green-enamelled laurel branches
  Ribbon dark-blue
  Bars with COVADONGA or ARICA

- **Medal for Angamos**
  Round medal 36mm of white metal
  Obv. bust of General Manuel Baquedano within laurel branches, encircled by "AL EJERCITO Y ESCUADRA EL PUEBLO CHILENO".
  Rev. scene of naval combat encircled by "RECUERDO DE LA CAMPANIA 1879-1880-1881"
  Designer "V.Prinz" on obverse.

- **Cross for Tarapaca 1879**
  Gold star with six double-pointed arms
  Ribbon red with white stripe in centre

- **Cross for 1879-1880**
  Issued September 1, 1880 in gold, silver
  Gold white-enamelled ball-tipped star with five arms, suspended from helmet and flags 40mm
  For junior officers and troops silver without helmet and flags suspension and non-enamelled arms with scales.
  Ribbon red-blue-white.

Cross for campaign of Lima
Issued January 14, 1882 in gold, silver-gilt, silver, bronze (bronze medal unknown to me)
Gold white-enamelled cross with five double-pointed ball-tipped arms of 44mm
For junior officers (silver-gilt) and troops (silver or bronze) with non-enamelled arms with scales.
Ribbon blue
Bars San Francisco (Nov.19-1880), Tarapaca (Nov. 27-1880), Chorillos (Jan.13-1881), Miraflores (Jan. 15-1881), Angamos

Medal of Valparaiso
Issued by the city of Valparaiso in gold, silver
Round medal 30mm with condor-shaped suspension
Ribbon half-red, half-blue
Bars with engagements such as Chorillos, Callao, etc.

Cross for Huamachuco 1883
Red enamelled Maltese cross in gold or silver
Ribbon eight stripes in alternate red and white

Medal for Miraflores
Issued by the city of Quillota
Round medal 24mm in white metal
Obv. "QUILLOTA A SUS HIJOS", Rev. within laurel branches "MIRAFLORES ENERO 1881"

Medal for battalion of Aconcagua
Round medal 24mm in silver
Obv. shield with arms of Chile and "AL BATALLION ACONCAGUA 1884", Rev. within laurel branches "LOS ACONCAGUINOS RESIDENTES EN SANTIAGO"

References


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Argentina
Medal for Allies in the Paraguayan War 1865-1870
Issued August 20, 1889 in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 31 mm
Ribbon light blue sides, white centre in equal stripes

Argentina
Medal for the Paraguayan War 1865-1870
Issued September 28, 1866 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 31 mm
Ribbon lightblue with white striped centre

Argentina
Medal of Corrientes for the National Guard 1865-1869
Issued December 10, 1869 by the province of Corrientes in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 31 mm
Ribbon light blue at sides, white center, equal stripes

Argentina
Metal Escudo for Curupaity 1866
Issued September 1866 in gold, silver, copper Escudo's
Oval 40x31 mm
No ribbon

Argentina
Cross of Buenos Aires for the National Guard 1865
Issued December 16, 1869 by the province of Buenos Aires in gold, silver and copper
Ten-pointed star 43 mm
Ribbon is trapezoidal and white with two lateral light blue stripes
Brazil
Medal for Uruguyana 1865
Issued September 20, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 20mm
Ribbon green-light blue-green in equal stripes

Brazil
Medal for Matto Grosso 1867
Issued August 7, 1867 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon with four equal stripes light blue-green-yellow-light blue

Brazil
Medal for Uruguay 1865
Issued June 28, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon half red, half blue, 2" for officers, 1" for troops

Brazil
Naval medal for Riachuelo 1865
Issued November 18, 1865 in gold, silver, bronze
Round medal 26mm surmounted by an imperial crown
Ribbon white with ¼" green stripes at both sides
Brazil
Cross for Paraguay 1868-1870
Issued August 20, 1870 in gold, silver, bronze
Double-pointed crass 25mm
Ribbon green-white-light blue-white-yellow in equal stripes
Bars with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 for years of service

Brazil
Medal of Bravery 1868
Issued March 28, 1868 in silver, bronze
Oval medal 32x25mm
Ribbon dark green-red-dark green in three equal stripes
Bars with dates of the several engagements

Brazil
Medal of bravery, Paraguay 1867
May 1, 1867 in silver, bronze
Oval medal 25x20mm
Ribbon red with ¼" green stripes on both sides

Brazil
Naval medal for Humaita
Issued March 14, 1868 in silver, bronze
Round medal 35mm
Ribbon light blue-red-light blue in equal stripes
Cross for Huamachuco 1883
Red enamelled Maltese cross in gold or silver
Ribbon eight stripes in alternate red and white

Cross for 1879-1880
Issued September 1, 1880 in gold, silver
Gold white-enamelled ball-tipped star with five arms, suspended from helmet and flags 40mm
For junior officers and troops silver without helmet and flags suspension and non-enamelled arms with scales.
Ribbon red-blue-white.
Bars with Arica, Anjeles, Tacna, Los Angeles, Tarapaca, San Francisco, Pisagua, Chorillos, Angamos, Miraflores, Chipana, Antofagasta, Sorpresa de Iquique, Noviembre-19-1879,

Medal of Valparaiso
Issued by the city of Valparaiso in gold, silver
Round medal 30mm with condor-shaped suspension
Ribbon half-red, half-blue
Bars with engagements such as Chorillos, Callao, etc.
**Paraguay**

Cross for Corrales
Issued February 13, 1866 in silver, copper
Cross with trefoil ends
58x42mm made of engraved sheets of silver/copper
Ribbon blue with central white stripe

**Paraguay**

Medal for Riachuelo
Issued July 2, 1865 in gold, silver, copper
Round, cast medal 30mm
Ribbon black with blue edges

**Paraguay**

Medal for Acaiunasa
Issued July 24, 1868 in gold, silver
Cross with four double-pointed arms, made of engraved sheets of metal
Ribbon six stripes, alternately blue and red.

**Paraguay**

Medal for Tuiuti 1867
Issued November 15, 1867 in bronze (for the second battle of Tuyuti)
Round medal 35mm
Ribbon half green, half blue

**Paraguay**

Medal for Tataiyba 1867
Issued October 24, 1867 in gold, silver, copper
Round medal 30mm
Ribbon half red, half yellow
Uruguay
Medal for Paysandu
January 2, 1865 in silver
Round medal 30mm

Uruguay
Medal for Paraguay 1865-
1869
Issued April 4, 1891 in
bronze
Cross with four pointed
arms surmounted by gold,
silver, or copper sun
Ribbon red

Uruguay
Medal for Yatay 1865
Issued September 30, 1865 in gold, silver,
bronze
Oval medal 34x28mm
Ribbon five equal stripes of alternately
blue and white