



World History

Jose de San Martin Reading

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José de San Martín -- The Knight of the Andes

One of the principal liberators of South America from Spanish rule was Jose de San Martin. He is also known as Argentina's liberator, and was one of the principal revolutionary fighters against royalist forces in South America. He was a master of military strategy, a skill which led him to success. San Martin became a national hero in many South American countries, particularly in Argentina, where he also had strong personal ties, as he was born there, and enforced his ties by later marrying an Argentine. In this paper, I will discuss the biography of San Martin, a person who made important history in colonial America.

Jose de San Martin was born on February 25, 1778 in Yapey'u, located in the viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata', which is now known as eastern Argentina. His mother was Gregoria Matorras, and his father was Juan de San Martin, a professional soldier and government administrator of Yapey'u. In 1784, when San Martin was six years old, the family returned to Spain, where he was educated at the "Seminario de Nobles" from 1785 until 1789. He started his military career early in the Murcia infantry regiment (South Eastern Spain). He served as an army officer against the forces of Napoleon between 1808 and 1811.



Even though San Martin was loyal towards his mother country (Spain) when he fought against Napoleon, he disliked the traditional absolute monarchy and the existing colonial system. In 1811, he decided to resign from Spanish service. After meeting revolutionary Spanish Americans in London, England, he sailed for Buenos Aires, and was almost immediately taken into service in the revolutionary regime. As a very experienced soldier, he was a great asset in the revolutionary movement in South America.

Upon his arrival in Buenos Aires in March 1812, he was given the task of organizing an armed force to be used against the Spanish royalists in Peru. These royalists were threatening the government of Argentina, thus endangering the opposition movement in the country. San Martin appears to have always felt that he was tied to the country he was born. He "Reinforced these ties when he married Maria de los Remedios Escalada in September, 1812." Maria came from an Argentine upper-class family of Spanish blood. He became more involved in internal politics of the area by helping to form the "Lautaro Lodge", which was an underground movement which later aligned itself with the opposition to the government that was in power. The organization that the "Lautaro Lodge" was aligned with was the "First Triumvirate", which was led by Bernardino Rivadavia. The political objectives of the two aligned organizations were however quite different, as Rivadavia was interested in Buenos Aires on a local level, and the Lautaro Lodge's main mission was to liberate Spanish America from a broader perspective. These differences created a split in the coalition, and in December 1812, Rivadavia was overthrown.

In February 3, 1813, San Martin entered his first battle in South America, and managed to defeat a royalist force that came up the "Parana River". In 1813, the government in Buenos Aires sent him to the Northern provinces of Argentina, in the purpose of stabilizing and strengthen the anti-royalist movement over there. Unfortunately, his efforts were cut short due to his weakening health. In the middle of 1814, he had to briefly retire for rest. That gave him ample time to make strategic plans, that would facilitate his main objective of overthrowing the royalists in Peru. He believed that the best way to accomplish his plans was to enter Peru through the mountains of Upper Peru. This was the most direct way, but also the most difficult, due to the

physical structure of the Andes. Another, a perhaps more promising route would be to move towards the west, from Argentina to Chile, and by sea to the "Peruvian coast".

San Martín started to prepare his plans, and by asking for reassignment to the governorship of Cuyo, which was located at the foot of the Andes in western Argentina, he was able to design his plans. In 1816, representatives of the Argentine provinces met at the Congress of Tucumán, "San Martín chose the side of an outright declaration of independence from Spain, which the congress issued on July 9." He believed that a liberal-constitutional monarchy was the best hope for stability in the new nations of Spanish America.

In January 1817, he started to cross the Andes. He led his army 15,000 feet above sea level, a feat that has been compared to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps. His force consisted of about 3,000 infantry soldiers, and 250 artillery troops. By winning the battle of Maipú in April 5, 1818, royalists in Chile were defeated. Later that year, San Martín was offered the supreme dictatorship of Chile, but he did not accept it in favor of his friend O'Higgins. Chilean, Bernardo O'Higgins, became a close partner to San Martín in their struggle of creating independent American kingdoms. Tired of the use of military force, San Martín now tried to negotiate with the royalists, and hoped that they would accept a peaceful settlement. He proposed that Peru should be converted into an independent

monarchy. The negotiations led to nothing. The use of military force was now inevitable, and instead of attacking Peru by land, he devised a sea strike, coordinated with rebel Chilean troops. With control of the seas, his army easily conquered Peru, and entered Lima in 1821. San Martín formally declared the independence of Peru on July 28, 1821, and became the "Protector of Peru". He did not take power, instead he met with fellow liberator Simón Bolívar at Guayaquil in 1822, and Bolívar persuaded him to withdraw from Peru. They both disagreed on the type of government that was to be formed, but they were both committed to South American independence, and were both willing to continue the revolution. On September 20, 1822, San Martín reassigned his military command in Peru, and went into voluntary exile in Europe. He went back to Argentina, and in 1824, a year after that his wife died, he took off for Europe with his daughter.

In the end of 1828, he decided to go back to America. He wanted to see if he had anything to contribute to the internal peace between the new nations. He returned to Europe in 1829, after that he decided that he would not be too much help. After this, he lived as a retired man mainly in France. However, he was not totally inactive, as he "gave moral support to the defenders of American sovereignty." José de San Martín died in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France on August 17, 1850.



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