

The Gálvez Family and Spanish Participation In the Independence of the United States of America

Light Townsend CUMMINS

Austin College, Sherman, Texas, USA
Department of History
lcummins@austincollege.edu

Recibido: 3 febrero de 2006

Aceptado: 6 julio de 2006

ABSTRACT

This article examines the role that the Gálvez family played in setting and implementing the policy by which Spain implemented her participation the American Revolution. The members of the Gálvez family played an important role at every stage of Spain's involvement in the conflict. This essay analyzes the activities of José de Gálvez as Minister of the Indies, his brother Matías de Gálvez as commander in Central America, and Matías's son, Bernardo de Gálvez, as governor of Louisiana. Their activities also resulted in the beginnings of diplomatic relations between Spain and the United States when José de Gálvez sent Juan de Miralles and Francisco de Rendon to Philadelphia as observers at the Continental Congress. The work of the Gálvez family created a situation that materially assisted the United States and the activities of the family were an important reason why the Revolution resulted in the defeat of Great Britain.

Keywords: Gálvez, American Revolution, Louisiana, Miralles, Rendon, Mississippi Valley, Gulf Coast.

La Familia de Gálvez y la participación de España ante la independencia de los Estados Unidos de América

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el papel que la familia de Gálvez jugó en cada etapa de la participación y aplicación de la política de España en el proceso de la Revolución Americana. Los miembros de la familia de Gálvez tuvieron un papel importante en cada etapa de la intervención de España en el conflicto. Se analizan las actividades de José de Gálvez como ministro de las Indias, de su hermano Matías de Gálvez como comandante en la América Central, y del hijo de Matías, Bernardo de Gálvez, como gobernador de la Luisiana. Sus actividades tuvieron también que ver con el comienzo de las relaciones diplomáticas entre España y los Estados Unidos, cuando José de Gálvez mandó a Juan de Miralles y Francisco de Rendon a Filadelfia como observadores en el Congreso Continental. La actuación de la familia de Gálvez generó una situación que condujo a la ayuda material española a los Estados Unidos, y sus maniobras y gestiones fueron un factor a tener en cuenta en el triunfo de la Revolución y en la derrota de Gran Bretaña.

Palabras clave: Gálvez, la Revolución Norteamericana, Luisiana, Miralles, Rendon, el Valle del Mississippi, la costa del Golfo de México.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. The Gálvez family and the spanish policy. 3. José Gálvez and the Revolution. 4. Matías Gálvez in Central America. 5. Bernardo Gálvez in Lousiana. 6. The campaigns of Bernardo Gálvez. 7. Conclusions. 8. Bibliography.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Spain's role in the American Revolution is of great importance in assessing the history of that struggle, especially regarding the Spanish military operations that occurred throughout the Americas². Spanish victories at Baton Rouge, Mobile, and Pensacola represented important contributions to Great Britain's defeat in North America. Moreover, the campaigns of the Spain's armies in Central America, naval successes in the Bahamas, Crillon's victories in the Minorcan Islands, and even the siege of Gibraltar all had a significant impact on the eventual military resolution of the Revolution³.

These military events had a tremendous subsequent influence on the westward expansion of the United States. After 1783, the young United States of America faced a Spanish colonial empire that spanned the entire northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico, westward across most of the Mississippi valley, into the mid-continent reaches of North America⁴. One particular Spanish family, the Gálvez clan from the Province of Malaga, played an important and determined role in the struggle. Indeed, the contribution of these scions of «La Familia de Gálvez» to the independence of the United States of America constitutes one of the great stories of the American Revolution⁵. Although some historians have stressed the role of Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana, the participation in the American Revolution was a family affair and must be seen as such. Indeed, it is almost impossible to over estimate Gálvez family's inter-related role in collectively setting and implementing Spanish military policy regarding the American Revolution.

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the annual meeting of Southern Historical Association, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, November 4, 2005 and at the Third Annual Gulf Coast Consortium of Latin American Colonialists Conference, Louisiana Tech University, USA, April 1, 2006. The author would like to thank Professors Hunt Tooley and Stephen Webre for their assistance in that regard

² CHÁVEZ, 2002; BEERMAN, 1992, pp. 297-203; CUMMINS, 1992, pp. 209-222; CUMMINS, 1982, pp. 194-205; MIDDLEKAUFF, 1982.

³ CUMMINS, 1993; HIGGINBOTHAM, 1971; MCKESY, 1965.

⁴ HERNÁNDEZ, 1957, pp. 3-6; SÁNCHEZ-FABRES, 1977, pp. 87-109.

⁵ CAUGHEY, 1934.

Spain's role in the American Revolution grew out of international forces set in motion during the period of intercolonial warfare that lasted from 1689 to 1763. Spain, along with its traditional ally France, was intermittently at war with Great Britain for almost a century. During this time it fought the British in four major international conflicts: The War of the League of Augsburg, which lasted from 1689 to 1697; the War of Spanish Succession, which was fought from 1701 to 1713; the War of Austrian Succession, which began in 1744 and ended in 1748; and the Seven Year's War, which saw fighting from 1755 to 1762⁶.

In the Seven Year's War, which was the great contest for colonial empire in the Americas, Great Britain definitively defeated France and Spain. The Spanish, in this war, lost Havana and Manila to invading British armies. By early 1763 and the end of fighting, both France and Spain were at the peace table in Paris, where they were forced to accept a humiliating defeat in the signing of a treaty. The Peace of Paris, signed in that year, was a resounding international embarrassment for Spain. By its provisions, France gave Canada to the British while Spain ceded the Floridas to King George of England. In addition, the French king gave Louisiana to Spain since the British did not want it for themselves. The monarch, King Charles III, and his ministers stewed in rage over the Peace of Paris and waited for the chance to work revenge against Great Britain⁷.

The American Revolution provided them with the opportunity for which they waited⁸. Spanish aid and assistance to the American rebels, especially for the army led by George Washington, would help set in motion events which would weaken Great Britain and the British Empire. Indeed, by the time of Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, Spain had long been following events in North America by dispatching espionage agents and observers to locations scattered throughout the region⁹. These persons provided a steady stream of information and served as initial points of both diplomatic and commercial contact between the governments of the infant United States and Spain¹⁰. The information provided by these observers allowed King Charles III and his ministers to set their own goals for reacting to the American Revolution. In short, the American Revolution would provide Spain with an unsolicited but effective weapon by which the British Empire might be humbled, if not destroyed. Spain hoped that a weakened and defeated Great Britain would allow a return of Gibraltar to Spanish control. Spain could also regain the Floridas, clear the British from the lower Mississippi valley and the Gulf of Mexico, and remove the British from the logwood coasts of Central America.

⁶ MARTÍNEZ, 1965, p. 17.

⁷ RODRÍGUEZ, 1976, pp. 19-21.

⁸ CONROTTE, 1920, pp. 3-10; GARCÍA, 1977, p. 24.

⁹ CUMMINS, 1980, pp. 39-49.

¹⁰ Letter of the Marqués de la Torre to José de Gálvez, 13-VII-1777. AGI, Santo Domingo, 1598-a.

2. THE GÁLVEZ FAMILY AND SPANISH POLICY

Various factions at the Spanish court had different opinions about the military role that Spain should play in the conflict. This was especially the case from the spring of 1776 until Spain entered the war during the summer of 1779. Two powerful groups of Spanish ministers at court vied with one another in setting Spain's policy regarding the British colonial revolt in North America. A bellicose group, known as the *Aragoneses* because they were led by the Conde de Aranda, desired Spain's immediate intervention in the conflict during 1776 as soon as news of fighting in North America arrived in Europe¹¹. Taking a more cautious approach, a second group, including the politically powerful Gálvez family, preferred to wait until an opportune time in order to enter the conflict so that Spain's military machine in the Americas and Europe could be fully mobilized. The second faction, who included two successive Ministers of State in the persons of the Marqués de Grimaldi and the Conde de Floridablanca, therefore cautioned neutrality in the contest between Great Britain and her recalcitrant colonists well into 1779¹². Both the *Aragoneses* and the moderates united in common national purpose when Spain finally declared war against Great Britain in June 1779. Differences of opinion, however, between them continued thereafter when the Spanish King and his advisors attempted to identify and articulate specific military goals to be achieved in the war. Some ministers at court, especially the *Aragoneses*, favored placing primary military emphasis on European-based objectives including the retaking of Gibraltar, the restoration of Spanish control over Minorca, and gaining greater diplomatic independence from France¹³. Others, including Minister of the Indies, José de Gálvez, desired that Spain focus on American based war goals, namely, the elimination of British settlements from the lower Mississippi valley and northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico, along with the removal of the British establishments on the eastern coast of Central America. Minister Gálvez also wanted reassertion of Spanish control over East Florida¹⁴.

Hence, by 1775 and 1776, Spanish colonies bordering on English America, especially Louisiana and Cuba, became important centers by which Spain could animate the American rebels, thereby hoping to destroy the international power of the British Empire¹⁵. This consideration was especially the case for Louisiana, which shared the lower Mississippi valley and Gulf coast region with British West Florida after 1764¹⁶. This brings us to a consideration of the Gálvez family, one of the most prominent in the court of King Charles III. In spite of humble origins in the Spanish Province of Malaga, the generation of Gálvez brothers born in the tiny village of Macharaviaya during the 1710s and 1720s rose to high posi-

¹¹ RODRÍGUEZ, 1946, pp. XIII-XV.

¹² OLAECHEA, 1967; YELA UTRILLA, 1925, Vol. 2, pp. 192-193.

¹³ YELA, 1925, Vol. 2, pp. 208-209.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 201-204.

¹⁵ THOMSON, 1967, pp. 22, 43-45.

¹⁶ SÁNCHEZ, 1991.

tions in the Spanish government during the mid-eighteenth century. All men of talent and ability, the Gálvez brothers individually distinguished themselves either as career military officers or as university-trained governmental administrators. The eldest brother, Matías de Gálvez, served as Viceroy of New Spain, the vast American territory which contained most of colonial Mexico and Central America, while his brother José de Gálvez enjoyed a long career as a minister at court and advisor to the King of Spain. During the era of the American Revolution, their brother Antonio commanded the Coast Guard force at the major Spanish port city of Cadiz, the nation's major port of entry and exit to the Americas. Another brother, Miguel de Gálvez, served as chief military advisor of the Spanish court and held a seat on the Council of War, Spanish highest military policy-making body. By the 1760s, as well, a younger generation of individuals from the Gálvez family had also risen to prominence in Spanish military circles. Matías's son, Bernardo de Gálvez, served as Governor of Louisiana during much of the American Revolution¹⁷.

3. JOSÉ DE GÁLVEZ AND THE REVOLUTION

Of the members of the family, José de Gálvez was arguably the most important. He had daily contact at court with the King from 1776 until his own death in 1786. Born in the Province of Malaga at Macharaviaya in January of 1720, José de Gálvez attended the University of Salamanca and became a lawyer. He rose to be a successful member of Spain's *letrado* bureaucracy and advanced rapidly in the Civil Service¹⁸. He served as an advisor at the Spanish embassy in Paris before going to New Spain as Visitor General in the 1760s and 1770s¹⁹. There he reorganized the administrative structures of the viceregal government, motivated the founding of Spanish California, set in motion the creation of the Provincias Internas, and enacted other important reforms²⁰. As minister of the Indies (Spain's Colonial Secretary) he had complete administrative responsibility for the Spanish empire in the Americas. José de Gálvez clearly saw the American Revolution as an opportunity to end British international and territorial influence in the Gulf of Mexico (the *seno mexicano*) and northern Caribbean. He pushed aggressively at court for material assistance and supplies for the American rebels to be sent by way of Spanish military centers at Havana and New Orleans²¹. Largely because of his efforts, Spain began sending shipments of blankets, gunpowder, medicines, weapons, and other supplies to the American rebels.

¹⁷ BEERMAN, 1992, pp. 203, 217, 292-93, 296; HOLMES, 1990, pp. 52-56; MONTERO, 1979, pp. 34-44; LAFARELLE, 1992.

¹⁸ RUBIO, 1949, pp. 1-6.

¹⁹ PRIESTLEY, 1916; NAVARRO, 1964, pp. 156-168.

²⁰ CROSBY, 1994, pp. 387-393; DEL RÍO, 1972, pp. 1-13.

²¹ Letter of José de Gálvez to Luís de Unzaga, 24-XII-1776, AGI, Santo Domingo, 2596.

As minister of the Indies, José also set in motion, along with Minister of State the Marqués de Grimaldi, an espionage and observer network in the Americas which was designed to provide the court in Spain with news and information about the revolt in British North America²². These observers and agents sent a steady stream of news and information about the revolt and also served as initial points of both diplomatic and commercial contact between the governments of Spain and the United States²³. The Captain General of Cuba and his military subordinate, the governor of Louisiana at New Orleans, superintended Spain's surveillance activities²⁴. The Captain General enlisted ship's masters in the commercial fishing fleet based in Cuba to provide regular observation of British maritime movements. The Cuban commander also corresponded secretly with Luciano de Herrera, a Spaniard living in St. Augustine, who became a spy for the Spanish. Herrera provided regular reports from British West Florida about military affairs in English America²⁵. The governor of Louisiana sent Juan Surreret and Bartolome Beauregard, an ancestor of the American Civil War general, to New York and Philadelphia under the guise of being private merchants. Both men talked with leaders from both sides of the revolt. In particular, Beauregard visited with leaders of the Continental Congress and George Washington²⁶.

The most important observers were Juan de Miralles and Francisco Rendon, who went to Philadelphia to serve as contact points between the rebel leadership and the Spanish government. Miralles departed first, arriving in Philadelphia in 1779. The success of Juan de Miralles as the first permanent Spanish observer at the site of North American government provided for open, yet unofficial, diplomatic relations between Spain and the United States. Even though his arrival was for the secret purpose of sending news and information under the cover of being a merchant, Miralles responsibilities soon developed a diplomatic character. He became personal friends with George Washington, Henry Laurens, John Jay, and other important leaders of the United States government²⁷. Upon his death in 1780, he was replaced by Francisco Rendon, who remained in Philadelphia as a link between the two governments until the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1786. What Miralles and Rendon did while serving as observers for José de Gálvez and the Spanish court constituted the beginnings of diplomatic and commercial relations between the United States of America and Spain.

²² Letter of José de Gálvez to the Marqués de la Torre, 22-VI-1776, AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 1143.

²³ ABBEY, 1928, 56-68.

²⁴ Instrucción que V.M. manda guardar y observar a Don Diego José Navarro, Mariscal del Campo, 6-I-1777, AGI, Santo Domingo, 1598-a.

²⁵ Letter of the Marqués de la Torre to Luciano de Herrera, 6-IX-1776, AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 1227.

²⁶ Noticias adquiridos de los vecinos colonias ingleses por Mr. Suriret vecino de Punta Cortada, 2-XI-1777. AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 1146; Letter of Bernardo de Gálvez to José de Gálvez, 21-III-1777, no. 26, AGI, Santo Domingo, 2547.

²⁷ CUMMINS, 1992, pp. 113-139.

4. MATÍAS DE GÁLVEZ IN CENTRAL AMERICA

José's brother Matías also played an important role in Spain's participation in the American Revolution²⁸. Born in Malaga in 1717, Matías followed a military career. He married Josefa Gallardo in October 1745. Their son, Bernardo de Gálvez y Gallardo, was born in 1746. Matías de Gálvez served with distinction in the Canary Islands, where he commanded the castle at Paso Alto²⁹. In 1778, the King named him as the Inspector General of royal troops in Guatemala, a position which made him second in command of the troops in that Spanish colony. In actuality, his promotion to this post came as a result of his brother José's influence. The King of Spain had been monitoring the British colonial revolt in North America with growing interest and thereafter he began military preparations in 1778. Although the Spanish court decided against military participation in the revolt during 1776, Charles III decided to increase preparedness throughout the Indies. In the fall of 1777, José de Gálvez accordingly sent additional troops to Central America in order to protect Spain's colonies there and prepare for a possible attack on British establishments at Belize and on the Black River. Minister of the Indies Gálvez decided to dispatch his brother Matías to oversee these military preparations. Matías arrived at the great Spanish presidio of Omoa in present-day Honduras in July 1778. As Inspector General of all Spanish forces in the region, General Gálvez reformed the militia structure of the region and improved the readiness of the infantry and cavalry corps under his command³⁰. In April of 1779, he was promoted to the position of president of the Audiencia and Captain General of Guatemala³¹. By that time, the possibility of war with Great Britain had increased tremendously. José de Gálvez had already sent orders in March 1779 that warned: «prepare for imminent war with England.» Matías de Gálvez did just that. He spent several months thereafter planning attacks against the British posts in the region, augmenting his supplies and forces, and training his officers and men. When Spain formally entered the war, General Gálvez commanded 30.000 troops, along with the Fortress at Omoa that existed as one of the largest fortified military positions in the Western Hemisphere³².

The plans laid by General Matías de Gálvez for his campaign against the British positions at Belize were made moot by an attack launched by Commodore John Luttrell and Captain William Dalrymple against the Spanish fort at Omoa, commanded by Simon Desnaux, a Spanish officer of Italian origin. This attack, made by a combined land and sea expedition, resulted in the fall of the fort during late October 1779³³. Meanwhile, Matías de Gálvez had mustered an army of reinforcements upon hearing initial reports about the start of the British campaign

²⁸ MENERAY, 1975.

²⁹ RODRÍGUEZ and CONEJO, 1968, pp. 224-26.

³⁰ FLOYD, 1967, pp. 128-9.

³¹ RODRÍGUEZ and CONEJO, 1968, pp. 226-229.

³² FLOYD, 1967, pp. 130-131.

³³ Letter of Matías de Gálvez to José de Gálvez, 12-I-1780. AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 2.

against the fort. During October, General Gálvez personally led one of the most daring forced marches of the Wars of the American Revolution. At the head of over 1.000 men, Gálvez led his men through the jungles of Central America, across the rough terrain of the mountain ranges, down to the coast to Omoa, where he laid siege to the British forces then ensconced there³⁴. Gálvez thereupon turned his attention to fortifying the defenses in Nicaragua, especially around retook the fortress on November 28, 1779, thereby restoring the region to Spanish control the lake region. He established his headquarters at Granada, created a naval patrol from Lake Nicaragua, and coordinated the defensive arrangements at Fort Inmaculada, the military stronghold that guarded the San Juan River that flowed from the great inland lake. The British soon attacked Inmaculada, commanded by Gálvez's subordinate Juan de Ayssa. Matías de Gálvez mobilized his troops for the defense of the province. He constructed a new fort, San Carlos, near to the point where the lake flows into the San Juan River. Entrenched at this second line of defense, he augmented naval forces on the lake and mobilized local militia units. Alyssa, however, was unable to hold Fort Inmaculada and it fell to the British in April of 1780. Undaunted by this setback, Gálvez laid careful plans to retake Inmaculada, which was accomplished without great loss of life because of his meticulous planning³⁵.

The successful retaking of Omoa and Inmaculada then freed Matías de Gálvez to launch his long-anticipated attack against the British positions along the Gulf Coast of Central America at Black River in Nicaragua. He organized a massive campaign that included additional Spanish troops from Spain, Cuba, and Peru, along with an extensive supply effort. He began his campaign in May 1782; The Spanish settlement at Trujillo became the port from which Gálvez launched his concerted assault against the British at Roatan. After several days of bombardment, the English commander surrendered. Matías de Gálvez emerged from these conquests very much a hero for Spain. King Charles rewarded him by appointing him as Viceroy of New Spain, where he governed from 1783 until his untimely death the following year. Spain's military actions in the West Indies during the Revolution also enjoyed some success. Field Marshall Juan María de Cagigal engineered a bloodless victory for Spain when his army invaded New Providence Island in the Bahamas. In early May 1782, Cagigal signed a capitulation by which the British turned over to Spain all the Bahamas Islands³⁶.

5. BERNARDO DE GÁLVEZ IN LOUISIANA

Of the Gálvez men, however, Bernardo de Gálvez enjoys the most important role as a true hero of the American Revolution, for he was the greatest Spanish

³⁴ FLOYD, 1967, p. 140.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 151-152.

³⁶ LEWIS, 1991.

general of the conflict and, as an individual, worked the hardest to insure the independence of the United States. Like his uncle and his father, he was a native of the Province of Malaga, where he was born in 1746. From a very early age, he expressed a desire for a career in military service. After training as a cadet, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant and fought in Portugal in 1762 during the Seven Year's War. Later, he went to New Spain while his uncle was Visitor General and served on the northern frontier where he commanded Spanish troops fighting against the Apache Indians. There he was wounded several times. In 1772, he returned to Spain and took part in the disastrous Spanish invasion of Morocco in 1775, a debacle which ranked as one of Spain's greatest military failures of the era. Nonetheless, he served with valor and bravery in this expedition, once again having been wounded in the line of duty a second time. He later served as a professor at the Spanish military academy at Avila before being promoted to the rank of colonel in 1776. Shortly thereafter, he was posted to New Orleans as commander of the Spanish military garrison there. On January 1, 1777, Bernardo de Gálvez became governor of Spanish Louisiana. His role as governor of Louisiana insured partiality at Spanish New Orleans towards the rebel Americans³⁷. Gálvez and American partisan Oliver Pollock formed a partnership of cooperation that placed New Orleans squarely center stage as a major supply base for the armies of George Washington. Starting in 1777, boatload after boatload of crucial supplies went up the Mississippi and the Ohio, to the American base at Fort Pitt, and then across Pennsylvania to the Continental Army. Many of these vessels which carried vital shipments flew the Spanish flag while they sailed on the inland waterways of North America in order to avoid British harassment.

This aid to the American rebels was increased as a result of a meeting in Spain during 1777 between Arthur Lee, the representative of the Continental Congress, and the Marqués de Grimaldi, the Spanish Minister of State. As a result of their discussions, Grimaldi promised Lee that Spain would continue sending supplies to the colonies. Shortly thereafter, the Bilbao merchant Diego de Gardoqui began shipping large amounts of military supplies from Spain to Havana, and then on to New Orleans, where they were delivered to representatives of the American congress. In addition, the Spanish minister arranged for loans of money to be made directly to the accounts of the Continental Congress at various European banking houses. Spain, throughout the remainder of the American Revolution, loaned a tremendous amount of money to the rebels. The American diplomatic historian Samuel Flagg Bemis estimated that the total amount of this assistance for the entire course of the Revolution amounted to almost one million dollars, including some \$75,000 loaned to Oliver Pollock by Bernardo de Gálvez and \$175,000 loaned to John Jay, who served as American Envoy to Spain in the early 1780s³⁸.

³⁷ KINNARD, 1976, pp. 253-270.

³⁸ BEMIS, 1935, pp. 91-93.

In addition to setting into motion the events which resulted in Spain furnishing material aid to the American rebels, Bernardo de Gálvez also assisted the cause of the Continental Congress by supporting American military expeditions which attacked the British in the Illinois Country and in the Mississippi Valley. The first of these was the military expedition commanded by the Continental army captain James Willing in the spring of 1778³⁹. James Willing, the brother of a prosperous Philadelphia merchant, commanded a small expedition of Americans as they floated down the Mississippi River plundering the holdings of British West Florida planters. Willing and his men took valuable prizes, including a large number of slaves from the British settlements. Oliver Pollock interceded with Governor Gálvez to have Willing and the American troops granted freedom of New Orleans and safety from British retaliation⁴⁰. This Gálvez did, permitting the Americans to sell their plunder in the Spanish Colony⁴¹. Later, when a British Navy vessel appeared at New Orleans to protest Spanish support for the Willing expedition, Governor Gálvez maintained his position without provoking hostilities from the neighboring British colony⁴².

Spanish support for the American cause continued in 1778 and 1779 when Bernardo de Gálvez permitted New Orleans to serve as a supply base for the military conquests of George Rogers Clark in the Ohio valley. Clark, at the head of a troop of Virginians, took Vincennes, Kaskaskia, and Cahokia from the British. Cut off from regular sources of supplies east of the Appalachians, Clark turned to Oliver Pollock at New Orleans. Not only did Governor Gálvez permit Pollock to arrange large shipments of needed materials and foodstuffs for Clark, the Spanish governor who continued to loan money to the congressional agent⁴³. It is clear, therefore, that the rebel conquest of the Ohio River valley would have been impossible except for the assistance afforded the rebels by Gálvez at New Orleans.

6. THE CAMPAIGNS OF BERNARDO DE GÁLVEZ

In spite of assistance to the rebels, Spain remained neutral in the American Revolution from the time of Lexington and Concord until the summer of 1779. It had numerous reasons for doing so, ranging from a cautious distrust of the American rebellion — which, after all, was a rebellion against the concept of monarchy — to a fear of angering Great Britain and provoking a British military retaliation. Nevertheless, during 1777 and 1778, the Spanish government accelerated the amount of material support sent to the Americans, and by 1779, Spain had become an unofficial, *de facto* ally with the United States in the cause against

³⁹ STARR, 1976, pp. 78-121; CAUGHEY, 1932, pp. 5-36.

⁴⁰ HAYNES, 1975, pp. 38-40.

⁴¹ ABBEY, 1944, pp. 397-404.

⁴² ABBEY, 1929, pp. 265-85.

Great Britain. By the summer of 1779, the time for a Spanish declaration of war against England seemed right; but even when this happened, Spain decided not to ally formally with the United States. King Charles III and his advisors, especially the Conde de Floridablanca who had replaced the Marqués de Grimaldi as Minister of State in 1777, worried that the young United States might replace Great Britain as Spain's territorial and commercial rival in North America.

Nonetheless, Spain decided to enter the war for a variety of reasons: several years had been devoted to preparing the Spanish military; a long-planned offensive against the Portuguese in South America had come to an end; France had already been at war against England for over a year; and an attempted peace negotiation sponsored by the Conde de Floridablanca had failed⁴⁴. Hence, Spain declared war on Great Britain on June 21, 1779. On the whole, Spain enjoyed military success in the war — and her campaigns assisted the United States by distracting and diluting British attentions away from the rebel Americans in the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean⁴⁵. Bernardo de Gálvez undertook a series of bold initiatives which would eventually win for Spain most of the lower Mississippi valley and the entire northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico. In doing, he also forged a stronger link between Louisiana and Spanish Texas. Gálvez permitted the importation of Texas cattle in order to supply his troops⁴⁶.

Bernardo de Gálvez undertook three important and crucial campaigns against British West Florida between 1779 and 1781⁴⁷. The first of these occurred in the fall of 1779 soon after the declaration of war. Governor Gálvez, having been given advance notice of the Spanish declaration of war by his uncle José in Madrid, had already planned a surprise invasion of the English posts along the Mississippi River. Then, just as he was ready to launch his attack in late August, a destructive hurricane struck New Orleans, dashing his army, ruining its supplies and provisions, and demoralizing many of his troops⁴⁸. Nevertheless, the young governor rallied his men with exhortations to patriotism, pride, and love of country to attack anyway. After capturing Fort Bute at Manchac, some 770 bedraggled men marched northward up the Mississippi River where Gálvez laid siege to the British post at Baton Rouge. After three hours of an intense artillery barrage, Baton Rouge fell to the Gálvez army on September 21, 1779⁴⁹. Shortly thereafter, the English post at Natchez surrendered before the Spanish could attack it⁵⁰. By this one bold campaign, Gálvez captured over one thousand British troops, took possession of eight British vessels then on the Mississippi, and added some 520 squared leagues of territory to Spanish Louisiana.

⁴³ CUMMINS, 1988, pp. 1-16.

⁴⁴ YELA, Vol. 2, pp. 253-54.

⁴⁵ WRIGHT, 1971, p. 134.

⁴⁶ THONHOFF, 1981, pp. 50-53; WEDDEL and THONOFF, 1976, p. 176; JACKSON, 1986, p. 195-1971

⁴⁷ HAARMAN, 1960, pp. 103-34.

⁴⁸ SERRANO, 1912, p. 44.

⁴⁹ DART, 1929, pp. 255-65; HOLMES, 1974.

⁵⁰ HAYNES, 1976, pp. 124-25.

The following year, Bernardo de Gálvez commanded a successful Spanish expedition against Mobile. In January, he left New Orleans at the head of some 2,000 Spanish soldiers in fourteen ships. By March, his men had laid siege to the town, cutting it off from reinforcement from the sea⁵¹. By mid March, Mobile surrendered and Gálvez turned his attention to the conquest of Pensacola⁵². Another hurricane, however, badly damaged his fleet and forced him to delay his expedition against the largest British naval station on the Gulf coast. He traveled to Havana, where in consultation with the Captain General of Cuba and the commander of the Spanish naval squadron, he planned a massive assault against Pensacola for 1781. King Charles III sent a personal emissary, Francisco de Saavedra, to Cuba for the purpose of working with Gálvez in planning a successful assault. Saavedra and Gálvez quickly became a highly effective team. Gálvez's confident manner, aggressive forcefulness, and ready enthusiasm for command blended with Saavedra's grasp of strategy and logistical planning⁵³.

Gálvez's campaign against Pensacola, which began in the spring of 1781, is deservedly the most important exploit of his career⁵⁴. Upon the arrival of the Spanish fleet off Pensacola, the Spanish admiral in command of the fleet refused to sail his ships across the bar from the Gulf of Mexico into the bay while under the guns of the British Fort George that overlooked the seaward approaches. Gálvez valiantly took affairs into his own hands with a display of bravado. He took personal command of a frigate and its crew and sailed it through the artillery gauntlet. This shamed the Spanish admiral into following with the rest of the fleet. For this feat, Gálvez was later ennobled, being named the Conde de Gálvez by King Charles, and, on his coat of arms, was emblazoned the escutcheon «Yo Solo,» (I Alone) in commemoration of his courage in sailing his lone ship into Pensacola harbor. Once the Spanish troops had gained the harbor, Gálvez's army made camp across the bay from the British fort and began a siege which lasted for several weeks. Shortly after three o'clock on the afternoon of May 8, 1781, a lucky grenadier's shot hit the main British powder magazine and a roaring explosion of deadly impact convinced the English commander to surrender. Bernardo de Gálvez had won his greatest victory. This was a major victory for the Spanish. Great Britain had some 3,000 regular troops on the field, and their losses were large compared to the Spanish. There were 382 British wounded and 105 dead. The Spanish, who had twice as many men on the field, lost only 74 dead and had 198 wounded after the battle⁵⁵.

The Siege of Pensacola and Gálvez's victory there was one of the last major military victories for Spanish arms during the long history of Spain's colonial

⁵¹ Diario de la Expedición contra Mobilia por Bernardo de Gálvez, Panzacola, 12-V-1781, AGI, Papeles de Cuba, 2351.

⁵² MEDINA, 1980, pp. 8-30.

⁵³ MORALES, 1969, pp. XXX-XXXVII.

⁵⁴ REPARAZ, 1986, p. 29.

⁵⁵ WRIGHT, 1975, pp. 84-86; PADGETT, 1943, pp. 11-29; RUSH, 1966.

empire in the Americas. It was also of significance in resolving the War of Independence in favor of the United States. Occurring only months before the American victory at Yorktown, the resounding British defeat at Pensacola weakened the British military and deprived Lord Cornwallis of potential reinforcements. Even so, many historians of the United States have largely ignored this important chapter of American history. Indeed, the campaigns of Bernardo de Gálvez have yet to receive their full due attention from American historians concerned with the military history of the American Revolution.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The successful campaigns of Bernardo de Gálvez also marked the start of official diplomatic relations between Spain and the United States at the court in Madrid. In September of 1779, the Continental Congress sent the first accredited United States envoy to Spain, the New York lawyer John Jay⁵⁶. His purpose was to negotiate a treaty of Alliance with the government of King Charles III. Jay remained in Spain from January of 1780 until May of 1782. Although he failed for a wide variety of reasons in fulfilling his goal to draft a treaty, he did establish a good working relationship with the Conde de Floridablanca, the foreign minister⁵⁷. Because Spain did not desire formal diplomatic relations with the United States until after the war was concluded, Jay was never received as Ambassador. His presence, nonetheless, was useful to Floridablanca, who was still hoping to coerce Great Britain into an eventual peace settlement that gave Gibraltar back to Spain. Indeed, by the early 1780s, the combined French and Spanish siege of Gibraltar had become the largest military operation of the war, and one which was destined to fail for Spain. Floridablanca did, however, discuss diplomatic relations with Jay, in addition to giving him a several hundred thousand dollar loan for the United States.

It was not until after the Treaty of 1783 that Spain decided to recognize the United States. Francisco Rendon continued in Philadelphia as Spanish observer. He continued to superintend Spanish concerns regarding relations with the United States⁵⁸.

The disputed boundary between Georgia and Spanish Florida along with navigation rights on the Mississippi River consumed much of his attention. He also wrote long memorials on the financial and governmental structure of the United State in an effort to help the Spanish minister at court understand the new nation⁵⁹. Finally, Diego de Gardoqui was appointed in 1785 as Spain's first acce-

⁵⁶ MORRIS, 1980, Vol. 2, pp. 225-34.

⁵⁷ MORRIS, 1965, p. 305.

⁵⁸ Relación de los meritos y servicios de Don Francisco Rendon, AGI México, 3189

⁵⁹ Memoria sobre las finanzas de los Trece Estados Unidos de America Seteprtrional, 20-IV-1782, AGI, Santo Domingo, 2598; Primera y segunda parte de la memoria sobre las producciones exportacio-

dited envoy to the United States. His mission in Philadelphia began the long period of formal diplomatic relations between Spain and the United States that has continued to the present day.

Three of the important Gálvez men, however, did not live to appreciate the full import of Spain's military participation in the American Revolution. José, ennobled as the Marqués de Sonora in reward for his services during the Revolution, died at Aranjuez in 1787. Matías, appointed Viceroy of New Spain, served only a year before he died in office during 1784. His son, Bernardo, replaced him in this high office and soon followed his father's fate. After an auspicious beginning during which he implemented various reforms and undertook a constructions program in Mexico City, Bernardo took sick with a mysterious fever, worsened, and died in 1786. He is buried in the Iglesia de San Fernando in Mexico City⁶⁰. He never lived to understand the role he played to create an independent United States.

The military victories of Bernardo de Gálvez in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, the establishment of diplomatic foundations in Philadelphia by Juan de Miralles and Francisco Rendon, and the attainment of Spanish war goals at the peacetable in 1783 — with the important failure of Spain to regain Gibraltar — left Spain feeling justified for participating in the American Revolution⁶¹. By 1783, King Charles had seen the British Empire defeated, the flag of Spain flying over the entire Gulf of Mexico, and a restoration of Spanish international prestige. Although some ministers in Madrid, including Minister of State Floridablanca, fretted that newly independent United States would supersede Great Britain as an irksome New World rival to the Spanish Indies, their concern did not seem compelling in the years immediately following the Peace of Paris of 1783 which ended the Revolution⁶². Largely because of the Gálvez family, the American Revolution was the occasion of Spain's final flash of military glory in North America.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABBEY, Kathryn T.

- 1928 «Efforts of Spain to Maintain Sources of Information in the British Colonies before 1779». *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 15, pp. 56- 68.
- 1929 «Spanish Projects for the Reoccupation of the Floridas during the American Revolution». *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 9, pp. 265- 85.
- 1944 «Intrigue of a British Refugee against the Willing Raid, 1778». *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., Vol. 1, pp. 397-404.

nes e Importaciones y modo de hacer el comercio con los Estados Unidos: Que Don Francisco Rendon remite al Eximo Señor Don J. de Gálvez, 8-IX-1783, *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ CAUGHEY, 1934, pp. 256-57.

⁶¹ CUMMINS, 1982, pp. 194-205

⁶² WHITAKER, 1934, pp. 254-267; WHITAKER, 1927, pp. 4-14.

- BEERMAN, Eric
1992 *España y la independencia de Estados Unidos*. Madrid. Editorial MAPFRE.
- BEMIS, Samuel F.
1935 *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*. Bloomington. University of Indiana Press. 1975.
- BLANCO, Richard L.
1993 *The American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Encyclopedia*. New York. Garland Publishing Company.
- CALDERÓN QUIJANO, José Antonio
1968 *Virreyes de Nueva España (1779-1787)*. Sevilla. Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos. 2 Vols.
- CAUGHEY, John W.
1932 «Willing's Expedition Down the Mississippi, 1778». *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 15, pp. 5-36
1934 *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana, 1776-1783*. Berkeley. University of California Press.
- CHÁVEZ, Thomas
2002 *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift*. Albuquerque. University of New Mexico Press.
- COKER, Willliam S. and REA, Robert R. (eds.)
1982 *Anglo-Spanish Confrontation on the Gulf Coast during the American Revolution*. Pensacola. Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference.
- CONROTTE, Manuel
1920 *La Intervención de España en la independencia de los Estados Unidos de la América del Norte*. Madrid. V. Suárez.
- CROSBY, Harry W.
1994 *Antigua California: Mission and Colony of the Peninsular Frontier, 1697-1768*. Albuquerque. University of New Mexico Press.
- CUMMINS, Light Townsend
1980 «Spanish Espionage in the South during the American Revolution». *Southern Studies*. Vol. 19, pp. 39-49.
1982 «Spanish Historians and the Gulf Coast Campaigns». In COKER and REA (eds.) 1982, pp. 194-205.
1988 «Oliver Pollock and George Rogers Clark's Service of Supply: A Case Study in Financial Disaster». In HOLDEN, 1988, pp. 1-16.
1992 *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*. Baton Rouge. Louisiana State University Press.
1993 «Spain in the American Revolution». In BLANCO, 1993. Vol. 3, pp. 1555-1560.
- DART, Henry P.
1929 «West Florida. The Capture of Baton Rouge by Gálvez, September 21, 1779, from Reports of the English Officers». *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 12, pp. 255-265.
- DAWSON, Joseph G.
1990 *The Louisiana Governors: From Iberville to Edwards*. Baton Rouge. Louisiana State University Press.
- DEL RÍO, Ignacio
1972 «Utopia in Baja California: The Dreams of José de Gálvez». *The Journal of San Diego History*. Vol. 18, pp. 1-13.

- FLOYD, Troy S.
1967 *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Mosquitia*. Albuquerque. University of New Mexico Press.
- GARCÍA MELERO, L. Angel
1977 *La independencia de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica a través de la prensa española («Gaceta de Madrid» y «Mercurio Histórico y Político»)*. Madrid. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores.
- HAARMANN, Albert W.
1960 «The Spanish Conquest of British West Florida, 1779-1781». *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 39, pp. 107-34.
- HAYNES, Robert V.
1975 «James Willing and the Planters of Natchez: The American Revolution Comes to the Southwest». *Journal of Mississippi History*. Vol. 27, pp. 38-40
1976 *The Natchez District in the American Revolution*. Jackson, University of Mississippi Press.
- HERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ-BARBA, Mario
1975 *La última expansión española en América*. Madrid. Instituto de Estudios Políticos.
- HIGGINBOTHAM, Don
1971 *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789*. Bloomington. University of Indiana Press.
- HOLDEN, Robert J.
1988 *Selected Papers from the 1985 and 1986 George Rogers Clark Trans-Appalachian Frontier History Conference*. Vincennes. National Park Service.
- HOLMES, Jack D. L.
1990 «Bernardo de Gálvez». In DAWSON, 1990, pp. 52-56.
1994 *The 1779 «Marcha de Gálvez»: Louisiana's Giant Step Forward in the American Revolution*. Baton Rouge. Baton Rouge Bicentennial Commission.
- JACKSON, Jack
1986 *Los Mesteños: Spanish Ranching in Texas, 1721-182*. College Station. Texas A&M University Press.
- KINNARD, Lawrence
1976 «The Western Fringe of Revolution». *Western Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 7, pp. 253-270.
- LAFARELLE, Lorenzo G.
1992 *Bernardo de Gálvez: Hero of the American Revolution*. Austin. Eakin Press.
- LEWIS, James A.
1991 *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution: Rise and Fall of the Spanish Bahamas*. Columbia. University of South Carolina Press.
- MARTÍNEZ DE CAMPOS, Carlos
1965 *España bélica en el siglo XVIII*. Madrid. Aguilar S.A.
- MCKESY, Piers
1965 *The War for America, 1775-1783*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.
- MEDINA ROJAS, Francisco de Borja
1980 *José de Espeleta, gobernador de la Mobilia, 1780-1781*. Sevilla. Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos.
- MENERAY, Wilbur E.
1975 «The Kingdom of Guatemala during the Reign of Charles III, 1759-1788». Ph.D. Dissertation. University of North Carolina.

- MIDDLEKAUFF, Robert
1982 *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*. New York. Oxford University Press.
- MONTERO DE PEDRO, José
1979 *Españoles en Nueva Orleans y Luisiana*. Madrid. Ediciones Cultura Hispánica.
- MORALES PADRÓN, Franciso
1989 *The Journal of Don Franciso Saavedra de Sangronis, 1780-1783*. Gainesville. University Press of Florida.
- MORRIS, Richard B.
1965 *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence*. New York. Harper and Row.
1980 *John Jay: The Winning of the Peace, Unpublished Papers, 1780- 1784*. New York. Harper and Row. 2 Vols.
- NAVARRO GARCÍA, Luis
1964 *José de Gálvez y la comandancia general de las provincias internas*. Sevilla. Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos.
- OLAECHEA, Rafael
1967 *El Conde de Aranda y el «partido aragonés»*. Zaragoza. Universidad de Zaragoza.
- PADGETT, James A.
1943 «Bernardo de Gálvez's Siege of Pensacola in 1781 (As Related in Robert Farmer's Journal)». *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 26, pp. 11-29.
- PRIESTLEY, Herbert I.
1916 *José de Gálvez, Visitor-General of New Spain, 1765-1771*. Berkeley. University of California Press.
- RODRÍGUEZ, Mario
1976 *La revolución americana de 1776 y el mundo hispánico: ensayos y documentos*. Madrid. Editorial Técnica.
- RODRÍGUEZ DEL VALLE, Mariana and CONEJO DÍEZ DE LA CORTÍN, Ángeles
1968 «Matías de Gálvez (1783-1784)». In CALDERÓN QUIJANO, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 224-226.
- RODRÍGUEZ CASADO, Vicente
1946 *La política marroquí de Carlos III*. Madrid. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- RUBIO ARGÜELLES, Angeles
1949 *Un ministro de Carlos III, D. José de Gálvez y Gallardo Marqués de Sonora*. Málaga. Diputación Provincial de Málaga.
- RUSH, Nixon Orbin
1966 *The Battle of Pensacola: Spain's Final Triumph Over Great Britain in the Gulf of Mexico*. Tallahassee. Florida State University Press.
- SÁNCHEZ, Joseph P.
1991 *A Selected Bibliography of the Florida-Louisiana Frontier with References to the Caribbean, 1492-1819*. Albuquerque. Spanish Colonial Research Center, University of New Mexico.
- SÁNCHEZ-FABRES MIRAT, Elena
1977 *Situación histórica de las Floridas en la segunda mitad del siglo XVII (1783-1819), los problemas de una región de frontera*. Madrid. Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores.

- SERRANO Y SANZ, Manuel
1912 *Documentos Históricos de la Florida y la Luisiana, Siglos XVI al XVIII*. Madrid. V. Suárez.
- STARR, J. Barton
1976 *Tories, Dons, and Rebels: The American Revolution in British West Florida*. Gainesville. University of Florida Press.
- THOMSON, B. Parker
1967 *La ayuda española en la guerra de la independencia norteamericana*. Madrid. Ediciones Cultura Hispánica.
- THONHOFF, Robert M.
1981 *The Texas Connection with the American Revolution*. Austin. Eakin Press.
- WEDDLE, Robert S. and THONHOFF, Robert M.
1976 *Drama and Conflict: The Texas Saga of 1776*. Austin. Madrona Press.
- WHITAKER, Arthur P.
1927 *The Spanish American Frontier: 1783-1795, The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley*. Lincoln. University of Nebraska Press (1969 reprint edition).
1934 *The Mississippi Question, 1795-1803: A Study in Trade, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Lexington. Peter Smith Publishers (1962 reprint edition).
- WRIGHT, JR, J. Leitch
1971 *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America*. Athens. University of Georgia Press.
1975 *Florida in the American Revolution*. Gainesville. University Press of Florida.
- YELA UTRILLA, Juan J. F.
1925 *España ante la independencia de los Estados Unidos*. Lérida. Gráficos Academia Mariana. 2 Vols.