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THE OCCUPATION OF PENSACOLA BAY,
1689-1700
Part III

The second French invasion of the Gulf region.

On the morning of January 26, 1699, a fleet of vessels arrived before the entrance to the harbor at Santa Maria de Galve (Pensacola), and announced its presence by firing five cannon shots. A dense fog prevented the ships from being clearly perceived from shore, and, fearing that they might attempt some hostile move under cover of the fog, Arriola replied to the salute by firing three shots charged with ball. At the same time he gave orders for a boat to go forth to reconnoiter the strangers. The squadron was found to consist of five vessels, three of them being large frigates, and two small ketches. As the mist cleared away before the morning sun, they could be plainly seen anchored at the entrance to the channel some two leagues away. The flag of France was flying in the breeze. The Spanish colors were immediately hoisted on the unfinished fort, and preparations made to resist the expected attack. The presidio was placed in the best possible state of defence, the two vessels in the harbor were made ready for action, and men were stationed at possible landing points. One of the vessels, having no guns, was converted into a fire ship. Arriola assumed command of the meager naval forces, while Martinez was entrusted with the defence of the presidio. All of the recently apprehended deserters were pardoned in order that they might assist in the approaching battle. The rest of the day, however, passed without incident.

At sunrise of the following day the flagship of the French squadron fired a blank shot, to which Arriola

replied in like manner, and a launch put forth for the presidio. In order to present as formidable an appearance as possible all the soldiers were stationed at their posts, care being taken to conceal their half-naked condition by arranging them so that only their heads could be seen over the parapets. Arriola received the launch on the beach, allowing only the envoy and one companion to land. The visitors were then escorted to headquarters, where all the officers were assembled. After the usual courtesies had been exchanged, the emissary delivered a message from his commander-in-chief, the Marquis de Chasteaumorant. The latter sent word that he had come at the command of the king of France to reconnoiter the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and to drive out certain Canadian adventurers who were said to have taken refuge in that region. He asked permission to enter the bay in order to obtain shelter for his ships, as well as to secure fuel and water for the return voyage to France. He trusted that this request would be granted in view of the friendly relations then existing between Spain and France. If the Spaniards were in need of provisions, he would be glad to supply them with anything they might desire from the ships under his command. The envoy obligingly gave full details concerning the size and strength of the squadron. The flagship, named the *Francois*, carried fifty-eight guns; the second ship, the *Marin*, had thirty-eight guns; the third, the *Badine*, had thirty-two; and the two ketches, six guns each.

Arriola drew up a reply to the French commander in which he complimented that officer in most extravagant Spanish fashion but expressed his regret at being unable to accede, to the request that had been made. He had strict orders from his king, he said, to prevent any foreign vessel from entering the bay.

In view of the good harmony then prevailing between the two crowns, however, he would send his sergeant-major, with a good pilot, to assist in anchoring the vessels at a safer place along the coast, where they would be able to secure the wood and water for the continuation of their voyage.

Francisco Martinez, a pilot, and several other men accordingly returned with the emissary to the flagship, where they were royally entertained by the French. They learned that the expedition consisted of one thousand men, all splendidly equipped, with a large number of cattle and horses, and abundant supplies of all kinds. The two smaller vessels were kept secluded at a considerable distance away. The Spaniards were told that these vessels were captured corsairs, which had been taken off the coast of Cuba, but Martinez thought that they contained women and children destined for the founding of a colony. He was asked many questions in regard to the Gulf, especially about the Palizada, San Bernardo, the Rio Bravo, and Panuco, but gave his hosts little information, beyond stating that all of those places were shallow and uninviting.¹

The verbal request made through his envoy having been refused, Chasteaumorant wrote a formal letter to Arriola, again asking leave to enter the bay. This letter read as follows:

Sir : The officer whom I sent to you has doubtless acquainted you with the reasons for which my master, the king of France, has ordered me to these coasts. For my own part, I greatly appreciate the compliments with which you honor me, and should like to have an opportunity of showing my appreciation. The necessity of procuring wood and water obliges me to recur to the aid of Your Lordship. I

¹ Martinez to the governor of Havana, Feb. 21, 1699.

therefore entreat you to allow the vessels of the king to enter that port in order that they may be sheltered in case of bad weather. As soon as we can supply our needs, we shall begin our return voyage to France. The good union existing between the two crowns should induce you to grant this request. Moreover, I pledge you my word that not a man shall go ashore except with your permission, and that there will be no trading except as you desire. I am, very sincerely, Monseigneur, your most humble and obedient servant,
The Marquis de Chasteaumorant.

Arriola replied to this second appeal in the following words:

My Dear Sir: I could not better manifest the esteem in which I hold Your Lordship's person than by the letter which I wrote you in order to assure you of my friendship, and of my desire to serve you as far as may be within my power. It grieves me exceedingly that I am not able to grant the request which Your Lordship was pleased to communicate to me through your emissary, the Ship-Lieutenant, and now repeat in your letter . . . since I have express orders from my king and master (may God guard him) to prevent the entrance of any foreign vessels whatsoever. In view of this, and since Your Lordship understands with what exactness such sovereign orders must be obeyed, you will not consider me discourteous if I confess that my hands are tied ; and that, just as Your Lordship tries to serve your king, so I should strive to fulfill scrupulously what my master commands me to do. Nevertheless, in view of the courtesy due a person of Your Lordship's rank, and of the perfect union now existing between the two crowns, I offer to furnish you with wood and water through the labors of my own men, in case you do not find it convenient to use your own at the point immediate-

ly opposite the place where you are anchored, as I have given you to understand through the Lieutenant and my Sergeant-Major. I have also sent a pilot with orders to remove the ships to a safe position on the coast It thus appears that I have observed the laws of good faith and correspondence. I can frankly and in all amity assure Your Lordship that, according to the reports of the size of your vessels, there is not sufficient depth for them to enter the bay. If Your Lordship or any officer wishes to land, you will be received and entertained as well as the limited resources of this region will permit. I protest against any action beyond that which I have offered to concede. I shall consider any other measures as a manifest infraction of the peace secured at such great cost, and shall be obliged to defend myself in order not to violate the instructions of my king *and* master as specified above. I am at Your Lordship's service, with all good will and desire to assist you to the utmost of my ability. May God protect Your Lordship many and happy years. Bay of Santa Maria de Galve, January 26, 1699. I kiss Your Lordship's hand, your most affectionate servant, Andres de Arriola.²

On the morning of the 29th the boats from the French ships were observed to be engaged in sounding the channel. Arriola at once sent an officer to order them to retire. The leader answered in good Spanish that they would obey, and the sounding party immediately returned to the ships. Upon receipt of Arriola's second letter, a council of war was held on the flag-ship, and it was evidently decided not *to* tarry longer at Santa Maria de Galve. Chasteaumorant wrote a farewell missive to Arriola, announcing that he would proceed to carry out the orders of his king for the extermination of pirates in the Gulf.

² This correspondence is enclosed with a letter of Arriola to the king, dated May 9, 1699.

He could not refrain, he said, from protesting against the inhospitality of the Spaniards during a time of peace, when Spanish ships would be cordially welcomed in any port belonging to France. He appreciated, however, the courtesy with which he had been treated. On the 30th the squadron took its departure, and was lost to view on the western horizon.³

Such was the nature of the first encounter between Spanish forces and the Iberville expedition, for such, of course, was the identity of the squadron which had appeared at Pensacola.

As soon as the French squadron had departed, Arriola called a council of his officers to discuss the situation. The flimsy falsehoods of the visitors had deceived no one. It was clear to all that the French had come fully prepared to found a colony in the Gulf region. It was supposed that since they had found Pensacola already occupied, they would seek a suitable location further west. Arriola believed that if they did not settle at Mobile Bay, they would explore the Rio de la Palizada, and probably establish themselves at San Bernado Bay, which he thought to be identical with the place called "Mississippi". In the council of war, Arriola submitted three questions, first as to the advisability of sending a boat to observe the movements of the French ; second, as to whether Arriola should remain at Pensacola, or embark at once for Mexico, to secure needed supplies and naval forces to prevent the French from accomplishing their designs ; third, any general suggestions for defense were invited. The officers were unanimously opposed to sending a vessel in pursuit of the squadron. There could be no doubt as to the intentions of the French, the vessel would only be captured, and valuable time

³ The preceding account is based on a number of letters written by the officers at Pensacola: Arriola to the viceroy, Feb. 20, 1699, Martinez to the viceroy, Jan. 31, etc.

lost in giving the alarm. With one exception all the members of the Junta urged Arriola to leave at once for Mexico and make a personal appeal to the viceroy for supplies and reinforcements.⁴ In accordance with the resolution of the council—a resolution which, we may be sure, was entirely in harmony with the wishes of the commanding officer - Arriola sailed for Vera Cruz on February 2, leaving Francisco Martinez in charge of the garrison and presidio.

Arriola arrived in New Spain during a period of great excitement, for it had been learned that a large number of Scotch settlers were planning to found a colony on the Isthmus of Darien. This effectually destroyed any chances that Arriola might have had for obtaining prompt relief for the two hundred and sixty men he had left at Pensacola, or for securing naval forces with which to expel the French from the Gulf region. He was asked to submit a report setting forth the needs of the presidio. He stated that he had left provisions enough to last only until the end of May, and that supplies of all kinds were sorely needed. He drew up a list of the most urgent necessities for a period of four months and asked that they be sent as soon as possible. On account of the laborious nature of the work in which the soldiers were compelled to engage, he requested one hundred additional men to supply the places of those who had died or were unfit for service.⁵ By decree of March 28 the viceroy had ordered Arriola's recommendations to be carried out, adopting the fiscal's suggestions that the new men could be conscripted from the gambling houses and jails. Several months were to pass, however, before these orders were executed. Preparations for the Darien expedition to expel the Scotch ab-

⁴ These opinions are given in Testimonio de Autos ejecutados.

⁵ Ynforme de Arriola, March 14, 1699.

sorbed the attention of the officials, and not until May was definite action taken in regard to the larger problems connected with Pensacola.' A junta general of the 18th of that month was devoted to a consideration of the Pensacola question. In spite of the adverse reports of Arriola, Franck, and most of the officers of the garrison, it was decided that the only possible course to follow would be to hold the bay until the king should give orders for its abandonment. Arriola was continued in chief command of the presidio, much to his disappointment. In order to clear up any doubts in regard to the French he was ordered to undertake another extensive exploration of the whole Gulf region as soon as he should return to his post.⁷

Rumors of English settlement on the Gulf coast. On February 8 Martinez sent a pilot and four men to Mobile Bay to learn if the French squadron was still there. No ships were seen, but evidence was obtained that the French had visited the bay. At one place a number of pines had been cut down and a cross had been erected bearing an inscription that could not be deciphered. From this time on, the French scare seems to have subsided to a considerable degree, but in its stead came the fear of a still more formidable enemy, the English.

⁶ In the meantime, Arriola's stay was enlivened by a controversy with Siguenza. As a result of the unfavorable reports which Arriola had spread concerning Pensacola Bay, the old professor accused him of neglect of duty, and of general misrepresentation of conditions at the new post. On April 6 Arriola addressed a letter to the viceroy complaining of Siguenza's accusations and asking that the matter be settled for once and all by a joint expedition to be made by himself and Siguenza. He offered to pay all expenses of the voyage, so that his reputation for veracity might be vindicated. The fiscal thought Arriola's proposition a fair one and thought that Siguenza should be ordered to accompany Arriola on the voyage. Siguenza was in failing health, however, and asked to be excused from the mission. The old scholar died in the following year.

⁷ Junta general of May 18, 1699.

⁸ Jordan to the governor of Havana, Feb. 15, 1699.

On April 22 a number of Panzacola Indians arrived at Santa Maria de Galve and reported that some of their people had seen six ships in a bay (ensenada) between the Palizada River and Mobile, about five days' journey from the presidio. Some of the men from the vessels had landed to treat with the natives. They wore furlined caps and carried red flags. From the descriptions given by the Indians, Martinez came at once to the conclusion that the strangers were English, and resolved to send a few men in a canoe to investigate the matter. They were to leave the canoe at Mobile, and continue their journey on foot until the ships were discovered. The party was able to go no further than Mobile. The bay was reconnoitered, but no trace of foreigners was found, save for the cross that had been left by the French.

Conditions at Pensacola were now too critical for Martinez to make further efforts to clear up the rumors brought by the Indians. The garrison was practically on the verge of starvation. In response to an urgent appeal for aid, the governor of Havana dispatched a vessel with provisions early in April, but sufficient only to last one month. The men were reduced to famine rations. Many died from lack of nourishing food and proper medical attention. Several went stark mad. The clothing of the troops had fallen into rags. Their faces had become blackened from sitting around the pine-knot fires until they bore little resemblance to human beings. To make the situation more intolerable, a mutiny broke out on the part of Jordan and his men, which was quelled only through the intercession of Franck, who arranged a compromise. Jordan was allowed to maintain a separate command. He posted his own sentinels and kept entirely aloof from the rest of the company under

Martinez.⁹ As the days went by and no relief came from Mexico, the exiles began to fear that Arriola's ship had been lost. It was finally decided that the vessel which had arrived from Havana should be sent to Vera Cruz to report the miserable state of the company, as well as to transport the incapacitated men, who had merely become a useless burden. Some eighty of the sick and dying were placed on board. Just before the vessel sailed an incident occurred which was regarded as further corroboration of the reports that had been received regarding the English settlement. On May 2 two English sailors arrived at the presidio in a small boat, claiming that they had been shipwrecked off the Florida coast while en route from Jamaica to New England. Martinez was convinced that they were bound for the new settlement. The men denied any knowledge of a town to the westward, but admitted that there was an English colony called Santiago (Jamestown) not far from Pensacola. Martinez drew up a full report in regard to the danger from the English, and resolved to send the two prisoners to Mexico for further examination. The vessel sailed on May 4, and reached Vera Cruz on May 20, the dispatches from Martinez being forwarded immediately to the viceroy.¹⁰

The fiscal, Baltasar de Tobar, rendered his opinion on June 5. He had been one of the advocates of immediate offensive measures against the French, and at once came to the conclusion that the ships told of by the Indians were not English, as Martinez believed, but that they undoubtedly belonged to the very squadron which had visited Pensacola. He asked the viceroy to take immediate steps to carry out the king's

⁹ Franck gives an interesting account of this mutiny in a letter to the governor of Havana, May 15, 1699.

¹⁰ Martinez to the viceroy, May 4, 1699; Franck to the governor of Havana, May 15, 1699; Martinez to the same, etc.

orders to protect the region from the encroachments of the French.¹¹

The Count of Monctezuma was still skeptical, however, and refused to consent to the adoption of any measures that would interfere with the success of the Darien expedition. He believed that the exploration which Arriola had already been authorized to make would set at rest all rumors concerning French and English settlements on the Gulf coast. In lengthy dispatches of July 12 and 14 Monctezuma informed the king of all developments up to that time. He recommended the maintenance of the presidio at Santa Maria de Galve, in spite of the adverse reports that had been made against it. While the new post would not benefit the colonies in a positive way, it would obviate great evils which would be sure to follow its occupation by the French ; for, although the bay was uninviting and incapable of being fortified, it would furnish the French a good base from which they would be able to paralyze the commerce of the Indies.

Plans for an offensive expedition against the English, and the discovery of the French settlement at Biloxi. While the authorities of New Spain had been discussing important questions of state, the garrison of San Carlos de Austria had continued its hand-to-mouth existence. The failure of the viceroy to send supplies had made it necessary for Martinez to make another appeal to Havana in the latter part of May. A prompt response had been given, but the quality and quantity of the provisions sent were far from what had been expected?¹² The men were forced to supplement their meager rations by acorns and roots,

¹¹ Respuesta fiscal, June 5, 1699. The Englishmen were later released.

¹² Testimo de los autos fijos sobre dar su ssa; prouidencia de Bastimentos Para la Nueva Poblacion de Sancta Maria de Galve alias Pensacola, etc., accompanying letter of Diego Cordoba Laso de la Vega to the king, Oct. 10, 1699.

which only increased the sickness and misery. On August 15 another cargo of patients was sent to Mexico, in charge of Juan Jordan, whose departure removed a long-standing source of dissension. At this time were sent letters by Martinez, Franck and Jordan, telling of continued and unmistakable evidence of the existence of the English settlement. The repeated declarations of the Indians, the passage of various boats that were undoubtedly bound for the new town confirmed the early reports. The site of the settlement, as nearly as could be determined, was said to be about eighty leagues west of Pensacola, on the mainland opposite the Cayos de San Diego.¹³

The vessel reached Vera Cruz on September 17. One of the first to receive the news it brought was Arriola, who was now making active preparations for his return to Pensacola. He lost no time in sending in suggestions for the expulsion of the English, and urged that an expedition be sent against them before they had time to strengthen their fortifications. In a junta general of October 29, it was ordered that Arriola should be ordered to sail at once for Pensacola, and undertake the expulsion of the English. He was furnished with a small frigate of twenty-six guns and the vessel which had brought the last cargo of patients from the bay. The additional one hundred men, who had been promised many months before, were now recruited from the slums and prisons of New Spain, and constituted Arriola's chief reliance for the campaign he was to undertake. More inefficient preparations for an aggressive expedition against unknown forces could hardly be imagined.

On November 15 Arriola wrote the king that he was making final arrangements for his return to Pensacola. He referred to the scant forces that had been

¹³ Arriola to the king, Oct. 27, 1699. Jordan to the king, Nov. 7, 1699.

given him, the deplorable condition of the presidio, and the little aid which could be secured there for the work before him. He emphasized the utter futility of holding Pensacola. The presidio would not prevent foreign nations from settling in that region, as was proved by the reports of the English settlement. He again suggested the blockading of the harbor, and the abandonment of the place. The funds expended on the presidio could be used in maintaining a squadron of twelve war vessels, which was the only means by which foreign nations could be kept out of that region.¹⁴ A few weeks after this letter was written Arriola sailed to share once more the privations of his forlorn company.

Arriola did not complete the arrangements for the expedition against the supposed English settlement until the beginning of March. He managed to equip a force of one hundred of his strongest troops, which left only about forty at the presidio, for disease and desertion had greatly reduced their ranks. Both Martinez and Franck were detailed to accompany the expedition. The fleet of four vessels sailed on March 4, the first destination being Mobile Bay. Some leagues west of Mobile a party of Indians was sent ashore. They returned with the report that a short distance away there was a fort garrisoned by two hundred men, protected by a fleet of several vessels. Not long afterwards a small boat was sighted, which flew an English flag. It was overtaken and found to contain ten men. To the surprise of the Spaniards these men proved to be not English, but French, and the hoax which the latter had perpetrated was now revealed. The Frenchmen were returning to their fort at Biloxi, which had been established, they said, in the previous April, immediately after the departure of Chasteau-

¹⁴ Arriola to the king, Nov. 15, 1699.

morant. They told Arriola that in addition to the fort called Biloxi, they had built another twenty-five leagues up the Palizada, or Mississippi, River; and that four hundred leagues still further up the river, they had a third fort, which was in direct communication with Canada.

Arriola now seems to have given up all idea of an attack on the French fort. He released the prisoners and sent them on their way with a message to their commanding officer protesting against the invasion of Spanish territory during a time of peace, and announcing that he would soon follow in person. Biloxi was reached on March 23, and the Spaniards were received with great courtesy by the commanders of the French vessels. The half starved men were treated to such dainties as fresh eggs, fresh bread, milk, wine, and brandy, which caused them to reflect unfavorably on their own unappetizing rations. Arriola did not permit this hospitality to interfere with his duty. He addressed another note to the French commandant, protesting against the establishment of the French fort, and warned him that refusal to abandon it would be considered as an infraction of the treaties then in force. Two days later a courteous reply was received from the French officer who was in command. He said that he had occupied that region in order to circumvent the English, who were planning to seize it for themselves. He was acting under the direct orders of his king, and could take no action without authority from France.

Arriola had perforce to content himself with the protest he had made. An attack on the fort was out of the question, and on the 27th he began the return voyage. Three days later a terrific hurricane arose, which caused the loss of all but one of the vessels. Most of the passengers were saved, however. After

five days of untold suffering, the survivors made their way back to the French fort, where they were received with extraordinary kindness, and hospitably entertained until the vessels could be summoned from Pensacola to carry them back to the presidio.

Such was the unfortunate outcome of the only offensive expedition which Spain attempted to send against the French colony of Louisiana. The sole desire of the Spanish garrison at Pensacola henceforth was to be allowed to leave the inferno to which they had been condemned. The reports sent in by Arriola, Franck and others were in complete agreement as to the folly of attempting to maintain the presidio, or cope with the forces of the French. The viceregal government decided to make no changes until the pleasure of the king could be learned. Arriola was given a furlough of four months and Martinez placed in command during his absence. Supplies were ordered sent to the presidio, and the discontented troops were doomed to remain at their posts until their fate should be decided by the distant authorities in Spain.¹⁵

WILLIAM EDWARD DUNN.

¹⁵ The foregoing account is based chiefly on the following: Arriola to the viceroy, June 4, 1700; Franck to the king, June 4, 1700. Additional details are given in the French sources in Margry, *Decouvertes et Etablissements des Francais*, iv, p. 368 et seq.

(The above concludes this series.)