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FRANCE TO THE RESCUE

AN EPISODE OF THE FLORIDA BORDER, 1797

by RICHARD K. MURDOCH

The reversal of international alliances pursuant to the Treaty of Basel of 1795 returned Spain to her former position as an ally of France. By the terms of this document, however, Spain found herself in a position considerably more subservient than that assigned her by the alliances of 1761 and 1762.¹ Her Caribbean colonies, heretofore the prey of France, were now opened to possible English attack. East Florida lying close to Cuba and the Bahama Channel, thus in a strategic position, was one of the points most exposed to enemy attack. Constant troop withdrawals rendered the defense of this outlying area most difficult. Fearful of an easy enemy victory in the Florida region, the French government ordered its representatives in the United States to render all possible assistance to the Spanish in uncovering and frustrating hostile English projects.

As a result of the Pyrennes campaigns of 1794, French officials did not have a high opinion of Spanish military capabilities.² This lack of confidence was openly voiced by the French diplomatic officials in the United States, particularly by those in the southern portion of the country. These men or their predecessors in office had worked hard to create an anti-Spanish atmosphere in the years 1793 and 1794. They had discovered that it was a fairly easy matter to find citizens of the United States who were willing to give more than lip service to French Republican schemes directed against Spanish territory.³ With

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1. These treaties are more commonly referred to as the Family Compact of the Bourbon monarchs.
 2. The rapid advances of Generals Dugommier and Muller drove the larger Spanish forces out of southwestern France and resulted in the easy capture of San Sebastian and Irun.
 3. For an account of French efforts directed against East Florida in 1793 and 1794, see Richard K. Murdoch, "Citizen Mangourit and the Projected Attacks on East Florida in 1794," *The Journal of Southern History*, XIV (1948), 522-540.

the new turn of events in Europe, it now seemed logical to take advantage of this atmosphere favorable to the French and hostile to the English. Three obstacles blocked the path to complete success, however: the anti-Spanish views of the French sympathizers must be converted, the rising tide of anti-French sentiment among the merchant class must be checked, and Spanish officialdom in the new world must be convinced of the necessity to employ the proffered support. This paper is in no way concerned with the first two problems. The third problem reduced itself to the question of admitting recruits, mostly non-Spanish, into Spanish territory in direct contradiction to established practice of several centuries. This paper is written as an attempt to relate the efforts of the French officials in the United States to bolster the defenses of East Florida with recruits drawn from the Charleston region of South Carolina.

Enrique White, the recently appointed governor of East Florida, had taken up his duties early in 1796 at a moment when that province was settling down after the incipient threat of a French invasion.⁴ Within a few month there came rumors of English plans to seize St. Augustine and construct a naval base for privateers and warships. These rumors indicated that English agents intended to make use of the identical groups of American volunteers who had been engaged by the French in their earlier venture against St. Augustine. It therefore behooved the governor to initiate steps to prepare his province for the new eventualities. A rapid survey of the situation revealed the necessity of making use of every method of defense available. One of the first steps considered essential was the re-establishment of the defense line along the south-

4. White had received information late in 1796 about the probability of a war between Spain and England. Irujo to White, September 19, 1796, East Florida Papers, b103 L8. All future reference to this documentary source will be abbreviated as EF and then the box number.

ern bank of the St. Marys River, opposite the Georgia shore.⁵ A second step, one long recommended by the captain general in Havana, was the reoccupation of Amelia Island with an armed force sufficiently large to hold off a seaborne attack.⁶ Unfortunately for both these plans, the military situation in East Florida had deteriorated steadily because of constant withdrawal of garrison troops to the island of Cuba and to the European continent. Although the efforts of his predecessor to obtain assistance from Cuba had generally met with failure, White continued to send urgent requests for both ground and naval re-enforcements.⁷ The successful defense of the province with a handful of able-bodied troops in 1794 and 1795 was a strong argument against the urgency of sending fresh troops to St. Augustine. It mattered little to the captain general that the successful defense had resulted from the failure of the enemy to put forth a vigorous offensive campaign.

While the governor was attempting to put his province in a state of readiness, unexpected assistance was being prepared outside the province. There were many residents of the southern portion of the United States, discontented with their economic and social status, some veterans of the American Revolution and frontier Indian wars, who were ready to take up arms for any cause, even a foreign one. In addition to these citizens of the United States, there was a fairly large number of French refugee families recently arrived from Haiti where they had been forced to abandon everything in the face of the growing

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5. All troops except mounted Patrols had been withdrawn behind the St. Johns River in 1795 when it seemed out of the question to Governor Quesada to attempt a defense of the region lying between the two rivers. No concerted effort had been made by either Quesada or White to reoccupy this region in force.
 6. The island had been abandoned in 1795 as lying outside the defense perimeter as established by Governor Quesada and his military advisers.
 7. Little effort was made after February, 1794, to send fresh troops to St. Augustine. One ship loaded with re-enforcements was captured by a French privateer hovering off the coast of East Florida. See Las Casas to Campo Alange, February 13, 1794, Archivo General de Simancas, legajo 7235.

slave insurrection. These new arrivals had mingled with numerous French settlers already in the United States, many of them also veterans of the American Revolution. They had preferred to remain in the new republic rather than return to the France of Louis XVI. A large number of these war veterans had married into local families and thus had personal connections with individuals of importance in local, state and federal governments. South Carolina because of its heavy French Huguenot population acted as a magnet for later French migration. As a result of a combination of these factors, Charleston became the center of foreign efforts to raise recruits within the United States.

Many of these settlers of European origin had been approached by the French consul in Charleston in 1793 with the prospect of rendering aid to a France-American expedition against St. Augustine. Although this project had been nipped in the bud, these people were still of a mind to take up arms in the name of the French Republic.⁸ Many of them were not finding their new existence to be to their liking, especially among the rather conservative and anti-revolutionary Charleston families. It was among these seemingly discontented people that the French consul, Victor DuPont, planned to propagandize the cause of France-Spanish friendship. He knew from personal investigation that many of these French refugees feared that a rupture in Franco-American relations was a definite possibility and that they were therefore willing to leave the United States for a more friendly haven. With this consideration in mind, East Florida seemed to offer just such a location. Thus it was that early in April, 1797, DuPont sent a note to the lodgings of Diego Morphy, the Spanish vice-consul in Charles-

8. It might be noted in passing that a goodly number of the newly arrived refugees from Haiti were monarchists and were not in sympathy with French Republican schemes. Some of these people made vigorous efforts to uncover and betray French schemes to the American and English governments.

ton, requesting that the latter prepare passports for four French citizens who desired to pass from that city to St. Augustine.⁹ Although the information contained in Dupont's note stated that the four men were either carpenters or blacksmiths, only one of the group was known personally to him. DuPont vouched for this man's character and professional skill.¹⁰ Nothing was mentioned in the note about these men being desirous of volunteering for military service in East Florida. As there was nothing unusual about this request, Morphy sent the necessary papers to DuPont by special messenger. Similar requests had been made of him at various time, usually for French refugees who desired either to return to Europe by way of St. Augustine and Havana or to continue to New Orleans and the safety of Spanish Louisiana. Spanish restrictions on alien settlers did not apply to persons of this sort.

On the other hand vague rumors had already reached Morphy about possible projects to send large numbers of French settlers to East Florida. In order to protect himself, he wrote to White in East Florida requesting advice as to what course of action to follow if DuPont made an increasing number of such requests in the future.¹¹ While waiting for a reply from St. Augustine, Morphy received a dispatch from the Spanish minister in Philadelphia with instructions to cooperate in every way with the local French authorities in suppressing English efforts to prepare an attack on St. Augustine.¹² Since these instructions were couched in vague generalities, it is no wonder that he interpreted them to mean Franco-Spanish cooperation in building up a potent defense force for East Florida. He had the wholehearted support of DuPont in this interpretation of his orders.

9. DuPont to Morphy, April 9, 1797, enclosed in Morphy to White, April 10, 1797, EF b103 L8.

10. According to DuPont's note to Morphy, this man's name was Abadie Tachon. *Ibid.*

11. Morphy to White; April 10, 1797, EF b103 L8.

12. Irujo to Morphy, April 7, 1797, EF b103 L8.

Prior to April 25 the two men held at least one conference at which time, according to one of Dupont's reports, it was agreed that in the spirit of cooperation, the two of them should strive to raise at least two companies of French volunteers in the Charleston area.¹³ It was likewise agreed that once these men were assembled, they should be sent off as soon as possible to East Florida with passports prepared by the Spanish consul.¹⁴ Strained relations between the United States and France made it seem wiser to find passage for the volunteers on Spanish vessels. Apparently Morphy was enthusiastic enough about the entire scheme to agree to prepay passage and subsistence allowances with the expectation of later reimbursement from the royal treasury in St. Augustine. He was either ignoring or forgetting frequent warnings from White that the provincial treasury was completely depleted and that under no circumstances was Morphy to embarrass the governor or himself by making additional purchases on credit. In order to abide by the neutrality laws of the United States, it was decided that these volunteers, not to be referred to as troops, should proceed to East Florida in civilian garb where the governor would equip and train them with an ultimate goal of integrating them into the regular Spanish army in the provincial garrison.¹⁵

These manifestations of unity and understanding actually hid a basic difference of interpretation which soon put the entire scheme in jeopardy. The French consul understood that by the integration of all volunteers into the regular Spanish army Morphy meant that these men with their officers would be armed and trained by the Spanish, but would be allowed to function as independent cadres within the Spanish armed forces. It was also his belief that the corps of volunteers would be

13. Both men seemed to be a bit vague as to just how many men would constitute two companies. At one time DuPont used the number 200 which would indicate 100 men to a company.

14. DuPont to Clark, April 25, 1797, EF b103 L8.

15. Assereto to Clark, May 9, 1797, EF b103 L8.

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permitted to select their own officers.¹⁶ In this manner these men would retain their citizenship while fighting under a foreign but friendly flag. Quite to the contrary, it was Morphy's understanding that DuPont realized that any volunteers in the Spanish army would be integrated individually into the regular army and would be assigned to units that had need of replacements. All would then be under the command of Spanish officers. It is to be doubted that any Spanish official would have dared consider the use of volunteer forces in any other capacity without the express agreement of the authorities in Madrid. Although this vast difference of views was not at first apparent, it was soon brought to light by the comments of Governor White upon receipt of Morphy's various dispatches.

The information contained in Morphy's dispatch of April 10 was not of an unusual or alarming nature. On the other hand, the suggestion that an increasing number of French refugees might request passports to enter East Florida did cause the governor considerable misgivings as he feared that this might lead to conflict with the terms of the various royal orders governing the admission of alien settlers to Spanish colonial possessions. He hastily penned a message to Havana requesting the captain general to send the latest information about the admission of French refugees to his province. He emphasized perhaps erroneously that these people desired to enter the province as settlers.¹⁷ The governor's unwillingness to take personal responsibility for advising Morphy on this matter was due in part to the changed situation in Europe. The treaty recently concluded with France rendered null and void the royal orders forbidding the entry of all French citizens on the grounds

16. DuPont's correspondence with General Elijah Clark of Georgia indicated that he expected the French volunteers to function as an independent body under the command of Clark. DuPont to Clark, April 25, 1797, EF b103 L8.

17. White to Captain General [Conde de Santa Clara], April 28, 1797, EF b103 L8.

of their being "revolutionists". After sending of this request to Havana, White then informed Morphy that under the unsettled wartime conditions then prevailing, he as governor was willing to risk admitting the four Frenchmen and any others of the same sort who might apply for passports. The presumption on his part was that there would not be a rush of applications before a reply could be received from Havana. Morphy was urged, however, to make absolutely certain that all those who applied for passports were prospective settlers willing and able to abide by the terms of the various royal orders that applied to alien settlers.¹⁸ The general tone of the governor's note indicated little enthusiasm over the projected arrival of French settlers. Food supplies were short, there was no demand for skilled labor, the local treasury was depleted, and the royal hospital was filled with sick military personnel. If charity was available, it was needed for the resident Spanish population of St. Augustine.

A short time later White received further information of a nature sufficiently disturbing as to compel him to hold an immediate consultation with the members of his provincial council. A copy of one of DuPont's letters to a military figure in Georgia reached the governor on May 21.¹⁹ After reading the contents, White was convinced that DuPont had misled Morphy into agreeing to issue passports for a large French volunteer force which was to cross to the south bank of the St. Marys River. The subsequent actions of the governor indicated that he presumed Morphy had mistaken potential soldiers for settlers. It was alarm over the numerous dangers involved that resulted

18. White to Morphy, April 29, 1797, EF b103 L8. The basic royal order referred to by White was promulgated in 1790, and dealt with land grants, religious observance, the taking of oaths of allegiance, etc., of all alien settlers in East Florida. *Spanish Land Grants in Florida* (Tallahassee, Florida, 1940), I, xxi.

19. The "military figure" in Georgia was none other than General Elijah Clark who was known to be in direct communication with DuPont concerning the leadership of the projected volunteer group.

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in the calling of a meeting of the council. This group was to sit as a *junta de guerra* to determine the line of action to adopt to thwart DuPont's plan to send such a force to St. Augustine. After a lengthy discussion, it was decided that the governor should write at once to Morphy to emphasize two points: one, the inadvisability of sending any volunteers to East Florida; and second, if it turned out to be beyond Morphy's power to prevent volunteers from starting out, he was to try to prevent them from travelling in a single large group. With these problems settled, the council then proceeded to the matter of how to deal with any volunteers who might then be on the way or who might depart from Charleston before the governor's instructions could reach that place. Rather than turn these people back at the frontier, it was agreed that they might remain in the province to be armed and trained in St. Augustine prior to integration into the regular Spanish forces. They would be given no special consideration in the matter of pay or armament. It was likewise decided that although there might be men of potential officer qualifications among the volunteers, they would have to prove their metal before being considered as candidates for commissions.²⁰ In accordance with the advice of the *junta* White immediately forwarded a copy of the findings to Morphy together with a brief summary of his own views. He stressed the urgency of avoiding any agreement with DuPont the terms of which might not be within Morphy's authority to carry out.²¹

While the letter with the enclosed decisions of the *junta* was on its way to Charleston, Morphy was requested to issue another passport; this one to a Major Bert, a French veteran of the American Revolution, and a man well known along the southern border of the United States. Because of previous associations with Georgia and South Carolina military leaders and a knowl-

20. *Junta de Guerra*, May 22, 1797, EF b277.

21. *White to Morphy*, May 22, 1797, enclosed in *White to Assereto*, May 22, 1797, EF b103 L8.

edge of the Spanish language, Bert was commissioned by DuPont to explain to the governor of East Florida all the advantages of admitting a large organized group of French volunteers. Bert reached St. Augustine on June 1 and at once requested and was granted an interview with White. His purpose was to discuss all aspects of DuPont's schemes both for recruiting volunteers in the United States and for the defense of the province. The major's plan of action called for the protection of the northern frontier of the province by establishing the headquarters of the volunteer force on Amelia Island which lay across the mouth of the St. Marys River. After listening patiently to Bert's long discourse, the governor limited himself to pointing out that there were many difficulties involved which rendered DuPont's suggestions unacceptable to the Spanish authorities. The fundamental difficulty was financial, as the treasury of the province was empty and he as governor could not authorize any activities that might result in the expenditure of additional funds. After this conversation Bert was then requested to wait in another room while White conferred with his council. This group sitting as a *junta de guerra* listened to the executive's account of his interview with the French officer. Little debate was needed to reach agreement that DuPont's schemes were impossible of implementation at that time and that both consuls in Charleston should be so informed.²² White then asked Bert to return to Charleston to deliver dispatches to both Morphy and DuPont suggesting that the entire matter be dropped before more complications developed.²³

While the governor and his council were pondering measures to take and advice to proffer Morphy, the latter was in frequent communication with his French colleague in Charleston. DuPont apparently convinced the Spaniard that there was great need for

22. *Junta de Guerra, June 2, 1797, EF b277.*

23. *White to Morphy and White to DuPont, both dated June 2, 1797, EF b103 L8.*

speed in getting the French volunteers to St. Augustine. Morphy agreed to hasten the issuance of the necessary papers to permit the entry of this group into East Florida, but he asked that he be informed as to the names and exact number of the applicants. By making these stipulations Morphy really refused to issue an unlimited number of blank passports that DuPont might fill in at his leisure. A new difficulty soon developed, for the Frenchman came to Morphy's office with a proposition that the Spaniard advance the necessary funds to pay the passage of the volunteers to St. Augustine. DuPont's personal bank account was overdrawn and the prospective volunteers were all without funds. The consul promised that all accounts would be squared just as soon as the French minister in Philadelphia could send a draft to cover DuPont's outstanding commitments. With these paid, the consul indicated that he could then negotiate an additional loan. Morphy was unwilling to touch his official funds, but he did agree to advance sufficient funds from his personal account to cover the cost of passage of a "small number" of French volunteers.²⁴ It was agreed that when the first group of volunteers had been collected in Charleston, DuPont should come to Morphy who would then turn over the necessary papers and the requisite passage money. These people would then be taken to the south by Major Bert.

Before these preparations could be undertaken, the major arrived in Charleston with White's dispatch of June 2. If the governor's recommendations to the two consuls had been followed, the future of the volunteers would have been settled then and there. DuPont, not a man to be put off so lightly, penned a quick reply to the governor in which he protested that he was trying to save East Florida for the Spanish government in accordance to the new treaty of friendship between the two countries. In his opinion, a well organized group of French

24. Morphy to White. June 17, 1797, EF b103 L8.

volunteers was the answer. He completely ignored the governor's statement that people of this sort were not wanted in East Florida and he went on to stress the need for more money to hasten the departure of his countrymen. As he put it: "Your Excellency knows that money is the principal nerve of all military operations; I find that amongst the number of French citizens who had expressed to me their desire of serving in Florida, several cannot go for want of a small advance of money to discharge their debts here."²⁵ After this demand for money, DuPont turned his attention to the passports that Morphy had agreed to issue. He urged that when the volunteers reached St. Augustine, White collect the passports and return them to Charleston in order that they might be used a second time. To complete this rather arrogant dispatch, the consul suggested that White place those of the volunteers who preferred to remain in East Florida as settlers in the urban or rural militia. In this way they could render a double service to the Spanish government. These people, the prospective settlers, were having to pay their own passage money for the trip to the south as Morphy did not feel that they were migrating primarily to aid in the defense of the province. The remainder of the group who were going to St. Augustine to fight for the Spanish, might be organized and armed by White in any way that he might desire. In this the consul appeared to be agreeing that the Spanish should have the last word on the disposition of the volunteers once they reached St. Augustine. He closed this long dispatch with a special recommendation for the two men whom he had picked to be the leaders of the group, Captains Lavalette and Greinel.²⁶ As an after-thought, DuPont included a blank copy of the form that he was giving to each of the volunteers. The wording in-

25. DuPont to White, June 9, 1797, EF b103 L8. There is some indication that DuPont may have been trying to borrow passage money from Morphy at the same time that he was trying to get White to pay passage funds. This would have netted the consul a neat profit.

26. *Ibid.*

cluded at least one obvious untruth and was couched in rather arrogant terms.²⁷

DuPont's disregard of White's comments seemed to be contagious, for Morphy likewise ignored what amounted to a direct order from his superior. In a meeting between these men in the week immediately after DuPont's lengthy remonstrance to St. Augustine, agreement was reached whereby the Spanish consul provided passports for a group of twenty French refugees then present in the town. DuPont wrote to White to inform him of the decision but by employing generalities, he managed to avoid mentioning the exact number and names of the prospective volunteers.²⁸ A more complete report of these arrangements was prepared on the next day by Morphy. According to his dispatch, there were twenty men involved, all listed by name,²⁹ who were about to depart from Charleston on board a Spanish merchant ship, the *Santa Rosa de Lima*, commanded by Captain Jose Taaneda.³⁰ It had been necessary for Morphy to haggle with Taaneda over the exact amount the latter demanded as passage money for the twenty volunteers. The amount finally agreed upon was 340 pesos, 200 to cover the fare and 140 to provide the necessary provisions for the seven day voyage. The consul promised that the governor would pay this amount to Taaneda when the *Santa Rosa* reached St. Augustine. It was

27. "The undersigned Victor DuPont, consul of the French Republic in the Carolinas and Georgia, certifies to all to whom it may be of concern that Citizen has declared to me [his intention] to depart for Florida where he intends to remain in conformity to the invitation offered by Don Enrique White, governor of that province, to whom I take the liberty of recommending [the bearer]. Signed in Charleston in the consular office of"
Enclosed in DuPont to White, June 9, 1797, EF b103 L8.

28. DuPont to White, June 16, 1797, EF b103 L8.

29. According to Morphy's report, the names of the twenty volunteers were as follows: Lavalette, Mauroy, Remboeut, Ferdinand, Dalifouret, Erambert, Girard, Chabert, Allige, Buisson, Levual, Soumere, Goutrau, Daix, Armelin, Pinsun, Waek, Reveilla, Faure and Fleury. Morphy to White, June 17, 1797, EF b103 L8.

30. The *Santa Rosa* was often employed as a dispatch vessel on the Havana-St. Augustine-Charleston route.

Morphy's expressed hope that White would fulfill this promise to the *Santa Rosa's* captain.³¹

There were other French refugees in Charleston who apparently left at about the same time on board a small American coastal vessel which landed them at Savannah where they sought out Manuel Rengil, the local Spanish vice-consul. Major Bert who accompanied these people from Charleston had paid their passage at the rate of 10 pesos each. This money had been given him by Dupont without mention of its source. Six members of this group indicated their desire to continue to East Florida as settlers but not as recruits for the Spanish service. This decision was not to the liking of the major as it was his impression that these people were supposed to be soldiers under his command. For the time being he lost interest in their efforts to find transportation from Savannah to the south. It may be that it was through Rengil's assistance that they eventually found a small vessel to take them as far as the northern end of Amelia Island.³² Once transportation was found, the Frenchmen were able to convince Bert that he should accompany them to East Florida where he was known to the authorities. He agreed that a proper introduction to the governor would be the first step in settling in the province.

Two days after the departure of this small group, Rengil reported to White that the *Santa Rosa* had passed Savannah and had gone on to the St. Marys estuary where it was rumored that several additional French volunteers would be embarked for St. Augustine. Evidently the vice-consul was referring to Bert and his six companions. The *Santa Rosa* still lay at anchor off the town of St. Marys several days later while the captain tried to ascertain whether or not he was going to be paid for having brought the volunteers to Spanish territory. He appears

31. Morphy to White, June 17, 1797, EF b103 L8.

32. Rengil to White, June 29, 1797, EF b103 L8.

to have prevented his French passengers from landing and from communicating with friends in the town.

On the basis of the information contained in Rengil's messages about the *Santa Rosa* and her passengers, White wrote a hasty note to Morphy in which he ventured that as the French volunteers had not arrived in St. Augustine to be questioned by him, he could reach no decision on the matter of the royal treasury making good the consul's promise to Taaneda of a payment of 340 pesos.³⁴ White was obviously referring to his earlier warning not to make commitments that could not be kept. Five days later, he repeated this same information in another letter to Charleston, this time mentioning the arrival of Major Bert and his companions.³⁵ He had summoned Bert for a consultation and the latter had revealed that those on board the *Santa Rosa* were not coming as volunteers but as settlers. They had no interest in fighting to assist the Spanish hold the province. After the conclusion of this interview with Bert, the governor questioned Bert's companions individually. In summing up the statements of the French refugees, the governor wrote Morphy that they lacked all interest in and knowledge of international affairs, especially as far as current Franco-Spanish relations were concerned.³⁶ He doubted very much that DuPont had attempted to inform them of the conditions incumbent on all aliens entering Spanish territories. These remarks were undoubtedly directed in part at Morphy for his failure to take greater precautions prior to granting passports.

In order to ascertain that he was doing the proper thing in admitting these new settlers, Bert's traveling companions, White called a session of his council to meet as a *junta de guerra*. This

33. Rengil to White, July 1, 1797, EF b103 L8.

34. White to Morphy, July 7, 1797, EF b103 L8.

35. Obviously Bert and his companions had not embarked on the *Santa Rosa* at St. Marys.

36. White to Morphy, July 12, 1797, EF b103 L8.

group decided that since the number of Frenchmen already arrived in the province was negligible, far below the two company figure promised by DuPont, there was no need to consider setting up independent French units. It was agreed that if the new arrivals so chose, they would be trained and armed at the government's expense, and then be integrated into the Third Battalion of the Cuban Infantry Regiment.³⁷ The same offer was to be made to the major, in case he preferred remaining in East Florida to returning to Charleston. Any additional arrivals in the province would receive a similar proposition, but the members of the *junta* did not consider it likely that many more would appear once the news reached Charleston that French volunteers were not in demand in East Florida.³⁸

Much of this information was included in a note sent by the governor to Morphy. As an after-thought, he wrote a separate letter containing an amplified statement to warn the French consul that the Spanish government in East Florida had no intention of honoring the debts contracted by the representatives of the French Republic in the name of the Spanish consul in Charleston. Once again White emphasized that there was no need for a large volunteer French force in East Florida and that the royal treasury had no funds available to pay for the transportation of additional settlers. He urged greater consideration of the results of hasty action and more consultation with Morphy before taking any new measures. Finally, in answer to repeated questions from DuPont, White reported that the Santa Rosa with its twenty volunteers was still at anchor off the town of St. Marys on the Georgia side of the river.³⁹ He did not indicate, however, why the Spanish captain refused to take his ship to its agreed upon destination.

37. The Third Battalion of the Cuban Infantry Regiment formed the main body of the garrison in Fort San Marcos.

38. *Junta de Guerra*, July 8, 1797, EF b277.

39. White to DuPont, July 17, 1797, EF b103 L8.

This vessel finally crossed the bar at St. Augustine some days after the governor's last dispatch to Charleston. The twenty passengers were not on board, however. It appears that Bert had made up his mind to undertake a personal investigation of the cause of the delay in reaching East Florida. He received permission from the governor to travel overland to the St. Marys River where he met with Captain Taaneda and apparently reached an agreement, for a short time later he returned to St. Augustine with the twenty volunteers who had been stranded on board the *Santa Rosa*. White then summoned Bert to clear up the mystery of the long delayed arrival of these French volunteers in his province. After a lengthy and apparently stormy interview, Bert retired to his quarters to draw up a memorandum covering all that had transpired at the governor's residence. This was done at the request of the governor to make certain that there had been no misunderstandings and no misinterpretations due to language problems. According to Bert's testimony about what had transpired at St. Marys, he had found that the twenty Frenchmen were reluctant to proceed further after hearing a rumor that the governor of East Florida was contemplating the enforced incorporation of all French volunteers into the regular Spanish army.⁴⁰ As Bert had informed the governor during their meeting, the volunteers were firm in their determination not to submit even provisionally to any form of incorporation into Spanish units. In addition, the twenty had no desire to start training under any conditions until more of their friends arrived from the north. The major expressed apprehension lest the attitude of the governor and his council in this matter might discourage further departure of French volunteers from Charleston.⁴¹

40. This rumor was obviously based on the decision of the *junta* held on July 8, information of which must have leaked out to the St. Mary region.

41. Bert to White, July 23, 1797, EF b103 L8.

As White had always shown himself to be a man of considerable patience, he gave Bert's memorandum careful attention and then wrote a most courteous reply refuting the Frenchman's arguments point by point. He reiterated his contention that it was impossible to organize a few scattered French volunteers into independent units, unless at least eighty-five arrived to form an entire company. As only twenty were on the spot, it seemed advisable to incorporate them in the manner determined by the *junta* in its meeting of July 8. As a clinching argument he stressed the amity and cooperation that their respective governments were trying to achieve. As he asked rhetorically, "What better way [was there] for a perfect union than in arms with Spanish soldiers."⁴² By employing language of this sort, the governor was copying a leaf from the book of Genet, Mangourit and DuPont.

The governor's arguments were weighty enough to dissipate all Bert's contentions and the latter took up quite a different line of argument. His next request to the governor stressed the miserable financial state in which the French volunteers now found themselves as a result of their refusal to enter the Spanish armed service under the conditions laid down by White. Most of them were foraging for themselves among the sympathetic townspeople, many of whom were of French or American origin. According to the major's story, they were split into three groups as far as their desires for the future were concerned. Two or three had decided that they wanted to return to Charleston and then to Europe, if the governor would pay their passage as far as the first place; another small group wanted to join the urban militia as career soldiers; and the remainder were determined to settle in or near St. Augustine as permanent residents. This last group believed that as artisans they could manage to make their own way

42. White to Bert, July 24, 1797, EF b103 L8.

in the town, if given the necessary permission by the governor to practice their respective trades.⁴³ A few days later, a second dispatch from Bert requested medical assistance for one of the volunteers who apparently was mortally ill and utterly destitute. The major asked that he be admitted to the local military hospital for emergency treatment.⁴⁴

Still indicating his desire to be as helpful as possible, White replied to Bert's first note with a suggestion that all those volunteers dissatisfied with conditions in East Florida, apply to him for the return of their passports and permission to leave the province. He would be glad to allow them to retrace their steps to Charleston with everything they had brought with them into the province, all free of taxes. But he made no mention of prepaying their transportation or of granting them permission to sail off to Europe by way of Havana. As to those who desired to remain in the province, he was willing to assist them if they would take the required oath of allegiance to the Spanish king, and if they would abide by the laws established to govern East Florida. He failed to mention offering them positions in the local militia, perhaps recalling what had happened in 1794 and 1795 when the militia was composed largely of alien American settlers.⁴⁵

Although the proffered assistance was most generous, Bert was not at all satisfied, as his reply to the governor indicated. He stressed the importance to a Frenchman of not losing his citizenship by swearing allegiance to a foreign monarch, although, as he hastened to note, Spain was a nation most friendly to his own. He suggested that White permit the French to remain in the province if they agreed to swear to a modified form of oath which guaranteed faithful service to the Spanish flag, but without loss of citizenship. The implication was that

43. Bert to White, July 26, 1797, EF b103 L8.

44. Bert to White, July 29, 1797, EF b103 L8.

45. White to Bert, July 31, 1797, EF b103 L8.

no self-respecting Frenchman could take an oath to support the person of a monarch as the latter represented an institution utterly abhorrent to the French Republic.⁴⁶ The governor's answer was a polite but definite refusal to compromise his position by violating the royal order of 1790 concerning the residence and employment of aliens in East Florida. As a result of this fruitless interchange of notes, Bert sent a hasty dispatch to Charleston to inform DuPont that under no circumstances was he to permit further departures of French citizens for East Florida. Conditions in that area were not propitious for friendly cooperation between the two powers.⁴⁷

This depressing news reached Charleston during a lull in the recruiting activities of DuPont and Morphy. All the French refugees willing to migrate to East Florida had been included in the twenty volunteers on board the *Santa Rosa* and in the small group that had accompanied Bert. It would appear that neither of the consuls extended themselves to convince additional French citizens of the advantages of taking up an abode in Spanish territory. Being without funds, both of them were embarrassed when it came to making promises and presenting gifts. After reading Bert's latest dispatch DuPont decided to await the major's arrival in Charleston before taking additional measures concerning the recruiting program. When Bert did finally return, he and DuPont held a conference during which all phases of the scheme for Franco-Spanish cooperation were discussed. The news from East Florida was of such a conclusive nature that the two agreed that any further prosecution of their plans would be utterly fruitless. Having reached this decision, they next informed Morphy that there would be no further requests for passports for French volunteers to pass to St. Augustine. DuPont pressed the Spaniard for a final settlement of accounts, claiming that Bert had paid several sums

46. Bert to White, July 31, 1797, EF b103 L8.

47. White to Morphy, August 2, 1797, EF b103 L8.

from his personal funds. Morphy agreed to investigate these claims and take appropriate action.

With these decisions, the entire fabric of DuPont's scheme to render aid to the Spanish in defending East Florida fell to pieces. No further correspondence on this subject seems to have passed between the two consuls. All that remained was for Morphy to keep his part of the bargain in settling accounts. Apparently White remained firm in his determination not to be forced into acknowledging a debt contracted by the French consul in the name of the Spanish government. As late as November, DuPont was still urging Morphy to appeal to his superiors to repay Bert the \$64 that he had advanced to enable the French volunteers to reach St. Augustine.⁴⁸ Renewed appeals by Morphy brought no reply from East Florida. Finally, in the middle of December, the Spanish consul agreed to repay Bert with funds then in his possession in his official account. He reported to White that he had taken this step to maintain friendly relations with an ally and to bring a close to a long and rather fruitless chapter of intrigue and negotiation.⁴⁹ Evidently White permitted this agreement to stand as the draft was honored and the money paid.

Thus was brought to a conclusion an interesting although fruitless French effort to implement on a limited scale her policy of mutual assistance and cooperation with Spain. As later events were to prove, Spain may have been wise in resisting these offers of assistance.⁵⁰ Perhaps the highlight of these events in 1797 was the manner in which Governor White of East Florida managed to maintain full authority over his province in the face of a friendly but aggressively dangerous French foreign policy. French influence was on the rise in Madrid but East Florida remained staunchly Spanish. White

48. DuPont to Morphy, November 21, 1797, EF b103 L8.

49. Morphy to White, December 14, 1797, EF b103 L8.

50. The retrocession of Louisiana to France might be considered the result of a French offer to "assist" Spain.

was merely continuing a successful policy laid down by his predecessor and one that was to be continued by his successor.

The governors of East Florida during the period of the second Spanish occupation deserve much credit for their loyal efforts to combat forces far stronger than their meager military potential. The efforts of these men belie the too often accepted theory of Spanish decay and collapse in the new world.