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THE DAY GOVERNOR CABRERA LEFT FLORIDA

by LUIS RAFAEL ARANA

I

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 1687, the presidio of St. Augustine, Florida was going about routine activities. Captain Antonio de Arguelles' infantry company had guard duty, and the captain was at the presidio's main guardhouse. A galliot, one of the vessels of the garrison's naval complement, rode at anchor in Matanzas Bay. She was ready to sail that afternoon. Her crew (partly made up of sailors under contract for just that trip), supplies, arms (including 36 flintlock muskets), and ammunition, were already on board. Adjutant Juan Pinto, one of the three regular adjutants, was the galliot's officer in charge.¹ The

1. Acting Governor Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda to the Crown, St. Augustine, April 28, 1687. Archivo General de Indias (hereafter cited as AGI) 54-5-14, No. 41 (photostat in Stetson Collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, hereafter cited as SC). This 56-page manuscript consists of (1) letter of transmittal by Aranda, and the Consejo de las Indias' and the Junta de Guerra's resolutions on the matter; (2) Auto provisto por oficiales reales para hacer testimonio de lo sucedido y de las demas diligencias hechas en esta razon, 14 de abril; (3) Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana, escribano publico y de gobernacion, 14 de abril; (4) Orden del sargento mayor don Juan Marquez Cabrera, gobernador y capitan general de la Florida, 11 de abril; (5) Auto y acuerdo entre el gobernador y oficiales reales sobre navegacion de la galeota, 10 de abril; (6) Auto provisto por oficiales reales para recibir informacion de los enviados a Matanzas y Mosquitos, 15 de abril; (7) Declaraciones de los soldados Francisco Martin de Utrera y Francisco Alberto y del ayudante reformado don Jose Benedit Horruytiner, 15 y 16 de abril; (8) Peticion del sargento mayor don Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda y traslados de cedula reales, [April 16]; (9) Acuerdo de la junta y testimonio de pleito homenaje, 17 de abril; (10) Auto provisto por el gobernador interino y oficiales reales para obtener testimonio del estado de la plaza, 17 de abril; (11) Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana, escribano publico y de gobernacion, sobre el estado de la plaza, 18 de abril; (12) Auto provisto por oficiales reales para tomar declaraciones a 5 soldados, 18 de abril; (13) Declaraciones de los soldados Pedro Hernandez, Luis de Granados, Francisco Pacheco, Domingo Gonzalez y Alonso Fernandez y del artillero Manuel Palma, 18 de abril; and (14) Listas generales de la infanteria y gente de mar y artilleros y plazas muertas que tienen plaza de S. M. en este presidio de San Agustin de la Florida en 24 de abril de 1687. The portion of the article footnoted here is based on Auto provisto por oficiales reales . . . , 14 de abril; and Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril.

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vessel was to proceed to the southern coast of Florida, watch out for pirates, and patrol the waters between Key Largo and Key West. In this area she was to meet the St. Augustine frigate, which would leave later, and escort it to the Havana coast; or meet the subsidy vessel, expected any moment from Veracruz, and convoy it to St. Augustine. Under no circumstances was the galliot to enter the port of Havana.² There was no hint that day that the sailing would be altogether different from other departures in the past.

Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Sergeant Major Juan Marquez Cabrera, governor and captain general of Florida, sent for reformado Adjutant Alonso Solana, the public and governmental notary. Solana went to Castillo de San Marcos, where the governor had his quarters and was at the time. Governor Cabrera asked the notary to accompany him in a visit to the galliot before it cleared the harbor. The lieutenant of the Castillo, Captain Francisco de Fuentes, detailed Privates Luis de Granados, Francisco Pacheco, Domingo Gonzalez, and Alonso Fernandez, and Gunner Manuel Palma, to man the rowboat which was to carry the governor to the vessel.

On the way to board the boat at the Castillo pier, Governor Cabrera met Captain Francisco de la Rocha, the treasurer and supply officer, and pointing toward Matanzas Bay with his baton,³ pressured him.

"Let's go in the boat to the mouth of Nombre de Dios creek, and see the galliot go out."

Soon the rowboat tied to the vessel, and the governor, the treasurer, and the notary went on board.⁴ Almost at once, Governor Cabrera spotted 29-year old Private Pedro Hernandez. Pedro had official permission to leave St. Augustine for a few days. Cabrera ordered him off the galliot and into the boat. Hernandez could go on leave some other time.⁵ Cabrera then

2. Auto y acuerdo entre el gobernador y oficiales reales sobre navegacion. . . , 10 de abril, AGI, 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

3. A baton was the sergeant major's insignia of rank in the 16th Century Spanish armies, and then and later it was also the distinction of an officer exercising chief command. Francisco Barado, *Museo militar - Historia del ejercito espanol* (Barcelona: circa 1883), II, 20, 407.

4. Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

5. Declaracion del soldado Pedro Hernandez, 18 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

ordered the anchor weighed and the vessel taken to the mouth of Nombre de Dios creek. This location was directly opposite the inner end of the channel connecting the port with the sea.

As the galliot neared Nombre de Dios, with the rowboat trailing astern, still within cannon shot of the Castillo, Governor Cabrera pulled some papers out of his pocket. He handed one to Notary Solana, another to Adjutant Bernardo Nieto de Carvajal, another one of the regular adjutants, and a third one to Diego Polo, the governor's secretary. Cabrera said that the paper would be read aloud so that everyone would understand it, and added: "Check those two copies of this order. These are the instructions for Adjutant Pinto."⁶

Those present were thunderstruck when the reading began. The document was actually a statement by Governor Cabrera. He was leaving St. Augustine because he had been refused confession, and was going to Havana to obtain it. If he stayed, he would be censured and scandal would follow. This had been the intention behind the refusal, judging from partisan talk already being heard in the city. The situation was bound to bring factionalism, and more disorder and disobedience than that already existing. Trouble makers were vulgarly voicing disrespectful half-threats toward those loyal to the king. To prevent more of this sort of thing, it was better that he leave.

The document was more than a statement of reasons for his departure. Governor Cabrera had provided that in his absence the governorship was to be divided into civil and military branches. He designated the two royal treasury officials (the accountant and the treasurer) as the civil governors, and the two regular infantry company commanders as the military governors. Before taking any action, these executives were required to obtain the written advice of the artillery commander and the Castillo lieutenant. These governors would not shift personnel nor change standing orders. Especially, they would forbid any other person to become governor, nor matter what documentation was shown to them, unless the person was appointed as governor by the crown.⁷

6. Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

7. Orden del sargento mayor don Juan Marquez Cabrera, gobernador. . . , 11 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

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When the reading was over, Governor Cabrera made Alonso Solana attest the two copies of the paper, and handed him the the original for delivery to the royal officials. At this point, Treasurer Rocha spoke up.

Your Excellency, what are you doing? You can't go away! In the name of His Majesty, I ask you to stay; I protest your action. The king, our lord, has appointed you as governor, and entrusted you with this garrison, the fort, and the provinces. We, as loyal and obedient subjects to the laws and commands of our king and natural lord, obey you. You can't go away!

"I have considered it well," Cabrera replied. "As a Christian and a Catholic, I must have confession to save my soul. Here I have asked for everything owing to a Christian, but no priest wants to hear me. What they want is to excommunicate me and toll the bells for me, as it is rumored in the streets. If this happens, obviously there will be a scandal. I am going to find the remedy for it all."

"That is not enough reason to leave this garrison and province, which have been entrusted to you by His Majesty," said the treasurer. "In the name of the king, I protest because of the harm and injury which may befall this garrison through your misdeed. The king will prefer serious charges against you because it is in the royal interest that you not leave here."⁸

"What garrison!" the governor exploded angrily. "I s-t on it!"

Violently he threw his baton into the sea, and shouted as he faced the treasurer again.⁹

"Go back to land! I am going to have the king chop off my head! Now it will be known who is loyal to His Majesty."¹⁰

Flushed with ire and disgust, Cabrera forced Rocha and Solana to get off the galliot into the rowboat. In vain the treasurer still protested Cabrera's action.

"In the name of the king, I object to your leaving!"

8. Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

9. Declaraciones de los soldados Alonso Fernandez y Francisco Pacheco, 18 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

10. Declaracion del soldado Alonso Fernandez, 18 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

"To hell with the king and the queen!" rejoined the governor carelessly.¹¹

Unheeding Rocha's repeated objections, Cabrera ordered full sail, and with her oars flashing, the galliot headed for the channel. Keeping well in its middle, the vessel reached the open sea at sunset. It turned south, and as the night fell, it disappeared from view.¹²

II

The Gotterdammerung for Juan Marquez Cabrera came when he had been governor of Florida for nearly seven years. His advent to the governorship had originated in 1678, when the Junta de Guerra de las Indias began searching for a successor to Governor Pablo de Hita Salazar, whose term was expiring. Cabrera then ranked in seventh place among 49 prospective candidates for chief executive positions in America. Previously he had been considered for such posts in Florida, Trinidad, Guiana (today a portion of Venezuela), and Santa Marta. He had also been considered for the wardenship of the Puerto Bello and the Puerto Rico fortifications. More recently he had been the governor of Honduras.¹³ In April, 1680, the Camara del Consejo de Indias formally submitted to the crown the names of three persons for the Florida governorship. Cabrera's was in first place. The king chose him,¹⁴ and appointed him to that post in May 14, 1680, for a five-year tenure.¹⁵

Governor Cabrera's unexpected leaving should have been predicted from the tactlessness he displayed throughout his term of office. From the very moment he took possession of the governorship in November 30, 1680,¹⁶ he had managed to antagonize irreconcilably the native-born St. Augustinians, the higher

11. Declaracion del soldado Luis de Granados, 18 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

12. Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

13. Minuta de la Junta de Guerra y Chara del Consejo de Indias, Madrid, June 13, 1678, AGI 58-2-1, No. 21 (SC).

14. Chara del Consejo de Indias to the Crown, Madrid, April 3, 1680, AGI 58-1-20, No. 19 (SC).

15. Crown to Captain and Sergeant Major Don Juan Marquez Cabrera, Madrid, May 14, 1680, AGI 58-1-21, No. 259 (SC).

16. Governor Juan Marquez Cabrera to Don Jose de Veitia Linage, St. Augustine, December 8, 1680, AGI 54-5-11, No. 67 (SC).

military and royal treasury officials, the regular and the secular clergy, the Indians, and even his second in command and compatriot, Sergeant Major Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda. Cabrera was an extremely authoritarian, stubborn, and single-minded man. To make it worse, he was a foul-speaking person.¹⁷

As the end of his term approached, Cabrera had expected relief from the controversies of his administration. He had, however, been deprived of this hope in 1684, when the crown ordered him to stay on until further orders. The Junta de Guerra was having difficulty in finding a qualified individual to take up the Florida governorship.¹⁸ This had been a bitter blow, but it did not change Cabrera's boorish manners. His headstrong actions at last brought him to this dilemma: if he stayed in St. Augustine without confession, his fear of a challenge to his authority might materialize; on the other hand, if he abandoned the post he had sworn to keep until properly relieved by the crown-appointed successor, he was taking an equally disastrous step. His much-despised subordinates had contrived to weave a web around him. No matter which way he broke out of it, disgrace awaited him.

III

Accountant Tomas Menendez Marquez took the situation firmly in hand as soon as Treasurer Rocha and the party in the boat rowed ashore with the somber news. The twilight was waning rapidly. Governor Cabrera must be found if he was still around. With that in mind, Captain Menendez embarked in a launch, accompanied by Sergeant Major Aranda, Captain Juan Sanchez de Uriza (the other infantry company commander), the artillery's Captain Nicolas Esteves de Carmenatis, and Notary Solana. They proceeded to Anastasia Island, hoping that the governor might have gotten off the galliot outside the port. Their expectations were dashed when Andres Garcia, in charge of the Anastasia lookout tower, told Menendez that the vessel had kept well

17. This article does not pretend to analyze the background of the controversies of Governor Cabrera's administration, but consultation of the index cards of the Stetson Collection for 1680-1687 amply indicates the ones who were antagonized by Cabrera.

18. Junta de Guerra de las Indias to the Crown, Madrid, January 17, 1684, AGI 54-5-19, No. 57 (SC); Crown to Governor Juan Marquez Cabrera, Madrid February 19, 1684, AGI 58-1-21, No. 385 (SC).

away from land as it emerged from Matanzas Bay. It had not touched land anywhere in the area.¹⁹

Not disheartened, Accountant Menendez made two other efforts at finding Governor Cabrera. That same evening he dispatched two soldiers overland to Matanzas lookout, and in the early morning hours of Monday, April 14, he likewise sent five men in a boat to Mosquito Inlet. The governor might have stayed at either of these places. Menendez also sent news of Cabrera's departure to the provincial lieutenant governors, enjoining them to observe strictly all standing orders. At 8 o'clock in the morning, Alonso Solana, the notary, was instructed to start a written record of events.²⁰

The efforts to locate Governor Cabrera failed. On Tuesday, April 15, Privates Francisco Martin de Utrera and Francisco Alberto, who had gone to Matanzas lookout tower, were back in St. Augustine. The men at the lookout had not seen any vessel pass by or enter the inlet. The reformado adjutant in charge, Felipe de Santiago, had even sent a soldier to Nea, the old tower site. The soldier did not detect any vessel nor find anyone with news about it. Next day, reformado Adjutant Jose Benedit Horruytiner, head of the party which had gone to Mosquito Inlet, was back in St. Augustine. He had found nothing in his reconnaissance of all the rivers, creeks, and coves within the inlet, nor any person who could tell about any vessel.²¹

The definite fact that Governor Cabrera was not in Florida brought to the fore the question of a successor to the absent executive. That same Wednesday, April 16, Sergeant Major Aranda appeared before the royal treasury officials, and petitioned that the Florida governorship be handed to him. The post had been vacant since the 13th. Existing royal decrees provided that the proprietary (crown-appointed) sergeant major would become acting governor in the death or absence of the royal governor. If the office were not turned over to him, it would constitute a violation of the expressed royal will.

Major Aranda was absolutely correct in his contention. Royal

19. Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

20. Auto provisto por oficiales reales. . . , 14 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

21. Declaraciones de los soldados Francisco Martin de Utrera y Francisco Alberto y del ayudante reformado don Jose Benedit Horruytiner, 15 y 16 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

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decrees amply and clearly provided for the temporary succession to the governorship. *Cedulas* in 1641, 1652, and 1663 substantially stated that in the demise, absence, or illness of the governor of Florida, the sergeant major of that presidio would take his place temporarily, exclusive of acting sergeants major. Aranda himself had received a privileged decree to the effect, but when he showed it to Governor Cabrera, the governor had intentionally retained the document.²²

The interregnum was ended when a *junta*, or council, finally passed on Major Aranda's petition. The council, convoked by the royal treasury officials, met at the accountancy on Thursday, April 17, at 10 o'clock in the morning. Accountant Menendez and Treasurer Rocha presided over the meeting in the presence of the petitioner. In addition to the two regular infantry captains, the artillery commander, and the Castillo lieutenant, those invited and present were two former governors, Sergeants Major Pablo de Hita Salazar and Nicolas Ponce de Leon II, seven other officers, and two regular sergeants. This military body heard the reading of the record of events, and unanimously voted that the proprietary sergeant major should be the acting governor of Florida. They all signed the written proceedings, except Ponce de Leon, who had become blind. The accountant and the treasurer do not seem to have voted, but Menendez expressed their acquiescence in the council's decision. They would turn over the governorship to the sergeant major, provided he posted the required bond and take the oath of *pleito homenaje*. This oath required the governor to defend the Castillo to the last extremity, and to deliver it only to a crown-appointed successor.

The same day the act of taking possession of the Florida governorship took place in Castillo de San Marcos. There, with Accountant Menendez and Treasurer Rocha administering the oath, Sergeant Major Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda swore the *pleito homenaje* in the way it was done in Spain. The ceremony was witnessed by the regular infantry and artillery commanders, the Castillo lieutenant, and Captain Francisco de Cigarroa, a former acting accountant. The keys to the Castillo were handed to 38-year old Aranda,²³ and thus he became the acting governor of

22. Petición del sargento mayor don Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda y traslados de cédulas reales [April 16], AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

23. Acuerdo de la junta y testimonio de pleito homenaje, 17 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC); Royal Officials of Florida [Accountant

Florida, four days after Juan Marquez Cabrera had unauthorizedly quit his post.

Immediately upon assuming command, Governor Aranda took steps to erase the discredit cast upon Florida by ex-Governor Cabrera's farewell statement. On Friday, April 18, Notary Alonso Solana, in compliance with Aranda's order, attested that it was widely known in the city that no subject of the king had ever been disobedient to Cabrera. Furthermore, there had been no partisan talk, disorders, or altercations of any kind, as the absent executive had claimed. It was true there had been mutterings of dissatisfaction when it became public that the clergy had denied the absent governor the sacrament of penance. The priests had justified their action by saying that Cabrera had not beseeched it in the attitude required of a Catholic and true Christian. This attestation by the notary closed the written record of events dealing with the absence of Cabrera.²⁴

IV

The news of these Florida events reached Spain on December 15, 1687, and the Consejo de las Indias and the Junta de Guerra took cognizance of the matter. These agencies immediately dispatched commission to the lieutenant governor of Havana, Francisco Manuel de Roa, to proceed to Florida and conduct an investigation. Furthermore, at the first opportunity, the wayward Cabrera was to be arrested and remitted to Spain. The Junta further charged that Roa was to look into Aranda's accession to power, in case there had been undue lack of moderation in the sergeant major's conduct. Before these directives reached America, even before the Florida news had reached Spain, Cabrera's arrest and imprisonment had taken place.²⁵

Research into the causes and nature of Governor Cabrera's troubles in St. Augustine is beyond the scope of this paper. His unauthorized departure, nevertheless, poses many questions which for the moment must go unanswered. What made Cabrera think

Antonio Menendez Marquez and Treasurer Francisco de la Rocha] to the Crown, St. Augustine, April 16, 1683, AGI 54-5-14, No. 154 (SC).

24. Auto provisto por el gobernador interino y oficiales reales. . . , 17 de abril; Fe y testimonio del ayudante Alonso Solana. . . , 18 de abril, AGI 54-5-14, No. 41 (SC).

25. Consejo de las Indias' and Junta de Guerra's resolutions.

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he had authority to divide the governorship into civil and military branches? Did he do it to prevent Aranda, whom he disliked, from becoming acting governor? If he planned to come back, did he feel he could not assume the governorship again if an acting governor formally took over?

The proceedings to install Sergeant Major Aranda as acting governor likewise bring up similar queries. Royal decrees were explicit about succession to the governorship. Why, then, did not Aranda take control of the situation immediately instead of letting Accountant Menendez act as "kingmaker?" Why did a military council have to stamp approval upon the individual known to be the crown-designated temporary governor? Was there something lacking in Aranda's character and previous performance in Florida which would have caused the military to object to him? Were the circumstances of the whole affair such as to require the sanction of some kind of procedure? Some answers are buried in the photostats making up the Stetson Collection, and they would shed light on the tragic phase of the life of luckless Juan Marquez Cabrera as governor of Florida.