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JEAN RIBAUT'S COLONIES IN FLORIDA

by M. ADELE FRANCIS GORMAN

A STORY OFTEN told but still begging for a fuller explanation is the tale of the French settlers in sixteenth century Florida. It is possible to determine to an extent why they came, where they settled and how they fared, what happened to them, and the strong points and weak points in their organization. What is more illusive is the measure of sincerity in their undertaking. A few questions which baffle the historian arise, and there are only partial answers to some of the questions. Was the motive for colonization religious ? Did the English, especially Queen Elizabeth I, collaborate in founding and financing the expeditions? How valid were the French claims to the area of Terra Florida? Could the Spanish really justify the measures taken against the French?

France was relatively free of the impact of Luther's revolt in the early part of the sixteenth century mainly because the "reformer" was a foreigner who offered no orderly plan to the orderly French mind. The appearance of the second edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1539 from the pen of John Calvin appealed to the logical French and offered an organization which even the Catholic Church lacked at that time. Within twenty years, the followers of Calvin had established at least seventy churches and were holding their first national synod. French Protestantism embraced all classes of society, invading even the court of Catholic France. Henry II maintained a kind of balance until his death in 1559, which the Protestants hailed with a sigh of relief. Regent for both Francis II and Charles IX was their vacillating mother, Catherine di Medici, a *politique* to her finger tips, whose duplicity brought about open conflict between the Catholics and Protestants.

The leader of the French Huguenots was Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France, who convinced Henry II that colonization would develop the country's industrial resources, and, at the same

time, help ensnare part of the Spanish wealth of the New World. Under the Treaty of Vaucelles of February 5, 1556, Henry had agreed that neither his French subjects nor others at their behest would traffic, navigate, or trade in the Indies without the express permission of the Spanish king. Any violation of this treaty would mean that Philip II might consider France his enemy. In June of 1556, Pope Paul IV was struggling with Philip about the temporalities of the Church in Sicily and Naples, and the pontiff asked Henry to break the treaty. This led to a war which ended in 1559 with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, which among other things restored the right of plunder to Spain. France agreed to respect Spanish rights in the New World and to penalize pirates and privateers as public enemies. Nothing explicit was stated about the Indies, and while France promised to punish pirates and privateers, she insisted upon freedom of the seas. At practically the same time, Admiral Coligny was arranging a convention of French and English privateer captains in London and was issuing letters of marque freely to those who wished to plunder Spanish shipping.

After the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, the French Huguenots fell from favor and were replaced by the House of Guise, the group that led the Catholic party after Henry's death. Furthermore, a marriage between Philip and the French Princess of Savoy, sister of Francis II and Charles IX, eased the strain between the two Catholic countries.

Although in John Cabot's charter the English had agreed to respect the Papal Line of Demarcation, neither France nor England in the sixteenth century regarded the Treaty of Tordesillas, marking the second demarcation, as binding. Consequently, when Coligny first suggested American colonization, the French had little difficulty deciding upon a site for the venture. The initial attempt to colonize in Brazil in 1555 proved a disastrous failure. The new venture would take the French into *La Florida* which reached, according to Spanish claim, from the Atlantic to present New Mexico and from the Gulf of Mexico to some undetermined area towards the Arctic Ocean.

Having convinced Catherine di Medici that a new settlement would relieve France of the unwanted Protestants, Coligny chose as leader Jean Ribault, an ardent Huguenot who has been de-

scribed as "the greatest corsair of them all."¹ Ribault had long been in the employ of the English where he had learned much about the arts of war and plundering.² He had returned to France from expeditions in Scotland only a short time before being drafted by Coligny for the Florida settlement. The area chosen for the colony lay along the route used by the Spanish treasure fleets. The French were also aware that Philip had decided against further colonization in Florida since so many Spanish efforts had failed.

On February 20, 1562, two small vessels sailed from Havre de Grace with 150 persons aboard. Ribault published his own account of the first trip, describing the unexpected beauty of the new country.³ As soon as the expedition had explored the lower east coast of *La Florida*, Ribault decided to return to France to make his report. When he asked for volunteers to remain in the New World at Charles Fort, the whole group of men stepped forward. He chose thirty men, according to his account, and with the others he returned to France where he found the religious wars again raging.

Working with the English, Ribault served the Huguenot cause admirably after his arrival back in Europe in July 1562.⁴ In correspondence between diplomats his name appeared frequently, suggesting that he was the person who could intervene with Elizabeth of England and who could also seek some agreement between the French king and the people of Dieppe.⁵ He loaned the English a ship when they had to retreat suddenly from the city,⁶ and he went to England himself when the Catholic forces defeated the Protestants in France. Naturally, Coligny was in no position to listen to Ribault's story of thirty men waiting for reinforcements and supplies in faraway Florida.

1. Menendez to Philip II, October 15, 1565, St. Augustine, Parkman Papers, *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* (1894), VIII, Second Series, 438. Cited hereafter as Parkman Papers.
2. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 1545, 21 vols. (London, 1907), XX, Pt. 2. Cited hereafter as *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII. Ibid.*, 1546 (1908), XXI, Pt. 1, 706, 707, 1055; *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign: 1518-1559* (London, 1963), I, 586. Cited hereafter as CSP. *Ibid.*, 1561-1526 (London, 1866), 458.
3. Jean Ribault, *The Whole True Discoverye of Terra Florida* (London, 1563).
4. CSP, *Foreign: 1562*, 544.
5. *Ibid.*, 239, 423.
6. *Ibid.*, 614.

These men left behind in *La Florida* had suffered every kind of privation, mutiny, and intrigue. In desperation they built a makeshift pinnacle of wood and caulked moss whose sails were strips of shirts and sheets held in place by vegetable cordage supplied by the Indians. Their voyage across the sea was ghastly. Their water and food supply was quickly exhausted, and they resorted to cannibalism, eating the man who lost when lots were cast. The survivors were eventually picked up by an English vessel which took most of them to England.

Chantone, Spanish ambassador to France, informed Philip that, although the French queen denied it, she knew all about the American colony. In fact, Chantone listed the names of those who had contributed money, including the queen mother, Vendome (Antoine de Bourbon), the Prince of Conde (brother of Vendome), and Madame de Cursot.⁷ A minister had accompanied Ribault, and the expedition included at least one Englishman and a Portuguese pilot.

When Philip received Chantone's report, he transmitted it to the Council of the Indies with orders to collect more information about the French settlement. The governor of Cuba dispatched a force to drive the French out, but when its leader, Don Hernando de Manrique de Rojas, arrived he found only Guillaume Rouffi, a boy of sixteen, who had stayed with the Indians rather than trust the fragile craft used by the men who had left Florida. He was taken to Cuba by the Spanish.

In Europe, meantime, the Peace of Amboise of March 1563, ended the civil war in France and made it possible for Coligny to return to court. Once more he instituted plans for a colony in Florida, but this time he could hardly stress religious motives since the treaty had ended religious strife. With Ribault in England, where he had fled when Dieppe was invaded in October 1562, by the Catholics, Coligny chose Rene de Laudionniere as leader of the new expedition.

The records show that, in December 1562, Ribault had writ-

7. Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States, Florida: 1562-1576* (New York, 1959), 31. Lowery has possibly the most complete version of the expeditions which are not given in detail in this article. Many writers have covered the story using mainly de same sources; e.g., see Sherwood Harris, "The Tragic Dream of Jean Ribaut," *American Heritage*, XIV (October 1963), 8-15, 88-90.

ten to William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief secretary of state, asking for money to pay his men and to furnish ships.⁸ Whether this money was for back pay and replacement of lost ships or if it was for future use is not clear. In any case, the English considered Ribault to be reliable and capable, one who should be returned to active service.⁹ In an interview with Elizabeth he had told her about Florida, and Bishop Alvarez de Quadra, the Spanish ambassador in London, informed Philip II, in a letter written on April 24, 1563, that Elizabeth apparently did not dislike the French.¹⁰ Two months later, Quadra noted that Thomas Stukeley, an English Catholic, was going to Florida which was three days sail from Cuba. Florida, Quadra said, was "known only to a few French."¹¹

In his audience with Elizabeth, Ribault was told that he would have to act alone. The queen offered him one half of all that he found, a pension of 500 ducats, and a house.¹² He and Stukeley were acting in partnership when suddenly Ribault left England with his pilots and ships. Ribault, according to Quadra, had repented his promises to Elizabeth and had fled for that reason. Ribault and the pilots were quickly apprehended and he was imprisoned in the Tower for nearly a year. The pilots were held until Stukeley would be ready to use them.

In France, in the meantime, preparations for the Florida expedition were continuing, and, on April 22, 1564, Laudonniere set sail with a fleet of three ships bearing 300 men and four women. He arrived at the River May (St. Johns) on the northeast coast of Florida on June 22. This colony seemed doomed from the beginning. Many of the men were more interested in seeking precious metals than in making Fort Caroline a strong settlement. Laudonniere was ill much of the time and there were several plots made against his life. Through desertions and treachery, the colony soon found itself without a ship, and Laudonniere ordered his men to build two new ones.

Winter brought new hardships including a serious food shortage. Mutineers had taken the two newly constructed vessels, and

8. *CSP, 1562*, 423.

9. *CSP, 1563* (London, 1869), 242.

10. *CSP Relating to English Affairs: 1558-1567* (London, n.d.), I, 332.

11. *Ibid.*, 335.

12. *Ibid.* Also in Woodbury Lowery, "Jean Ribault and Queen Elizabeth," *American Historical Review* (April 1904), IX, 456-59.

Laudonniere ordered a third ship built. Elated at the prospect of abandoning Fort Caroline, the colonists demolished their houses and started dismantling the fort for wood.

On August 5, 1565, Laudonniere happily noted four vessels flying English colors approaching. This was the fleet of Sir John Hawkins, the noted privateer, approaching, and he offered to take the French back to Europe. While Laudonniere refused the invitation, because he did not know how matters then stood between the French and English, he did arrange to purchase one of the English ships. He paid for it with guns and ammunition so that the English could lay no claim to the fort.¹³

The English left on August 7, and the French prepared to abandon Fort Caroline as soon as the wind and tide were right. Just as they were hoisting sail, seven ships were sighted approaching shore. Not recognizing the vessels at first, Laudonniere lined his men in battle formation on shore and waited for a small boat to land. Ribault's fleet had come quietly because rumors had reached France by way of some of the deserters that Laudonniere was acting against the crown. Ribault quickly landed, and was greeted warmly by Laudonniere to whom he handed a letter from Coligny relieving him of his command and citing the charges against him.

Ribault's expedition included 500 soldiers and artisans and seventy women. The Spanish knew about Ribault's activities, his leaving England and gathering a crew and fleet for his second trip to Florida. The Spanish ambassador to France had kept Philip well informed.

France and Spain were at peace, and Philip did not want to provoke a war with the French; particularly not over the Florida settlement. He and the Council of the Indies agreed to try to settle the matter through diplomacy while at the same time sending Pedro Menendez de Aviles to Florida to drive out the French. Menendez, at forty-seven, had proved his loyalty to his king and was willing to finance the expedition himself in order to rid the New World of Lutherans. All Protestants were "Lutherans" to the Spanish.

Menendez was ordered to drive out any who were not Span-

13. Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow, 1904), IX, 78-80.

ish, especially any corsairs.¹⁴ He had hoped to reach Florida before Ribault, but storms delayed him. Even though Ribault had cruised slowly along the Florida coast, he arrived a few days before Menendez landed at St. Augustine.

Four of Ribault's ships were too large to enter the river, and it was these that were first sighted by Menendez, who asked whether they were French and part of Ribault's force. Demanding to know whether those aboard were Catholic or Lutheran, he announced that he would rid Florida of Lutherans by order of his king. Menendez likely would have attacked immediately but his cable fouled, and the French moved out to sea.

The French believed that the Spanish would attack Fort Caroline from the river and probably soon, since the storm season would shortly set in. Left in charge of the partially demolished fort, Laudonniere ordered it repaired as quickly as possible. No one took too seriously, however, the need to repair every breach in the fort because no one believed there would be a land attack. Meanwhile, Ribault, waiting for the return of the Spanish, took 400 soldiers and 200 sailors and most of the ammunition and put out to sea.

A severe hurricane struck the Florida east coast, and Ribault's fleet was scattered before he could carry out his plan to attack St. Augustine. The defenders of Fort Caroline relaxed a little during the worst of the storm, believing that no one could possibly threaten them in such weather. But the French underestimated the Spanish, and Menendez led a force of 500 soldiers overland to attack the fort.

His battalion found the fort unguarded and, within an hour, 132 men were dead and the Spanish flag was flying over the bastion. Women and children under fifteen were saved because Menendez feared that God would chastise him if he dealt cruelly with them.¹⁵ He mentioned that eight or ten of the babies had been born at the fort. Menendez captured six drummers and trumpeters and fifty women.

Outside the fort, anchored in the stream, were two ships, one, the *Pearl*, was captained by Jacques Ribault, son of the com-

14. Francis Parkman, "Pedro Menendez de Aviles," *Dictionary of American Biography*, 22 vols. (New York, 1933), XII, 533, citing Jeanette T. Connor, *Pedro Menendez de Aviles*, 261.

15. Menendez to Philip II, Parkman Papers, 427.

mander. Menendez sent an envoy to Ribault asking for his surrender on the promise that he would be allowed to return to France with the women and children. Jacques Ribault refused to surrender, and the Spanish, using cannon from the captured fort, fired on the two ships, sinking one. Ribault rescued the men from that vessel and went down stream to meet the larger ships anchored there. A council of war was held, and the final decision was that they sink the smaller boats and return immediately to France. Two ships set sail on September 25 with all the exhausted, half-naked fugitives they had picked out of the woods and all the supplies they could carry. Jacques Ribault's vessel made it directly to France where he was severely criticized for not having fired a shot. The other ship bearing Laudonniere, who had fled through the woods in Florida, arrived in England because it had been blown off course by bad weather.

After five days, the Spanish at St. Augustine became uneasy when Menendez had not returned. The small group at St. Augustine heard of a French vessel stuck on the rocks, and the Spanish found it and floated it, returning with it to St. Augustine. Later Menendez returned with sixty of his retainers to report the successful capture of Fort Caroline. Then an Indian reported Frenchmen stranded on an inlet. Going to the spot, Menendez found 250 men waiting for some sort of transportation to Fort Caroline. After proving to them that the Spanish had taken the fort, Menendez said he could offer no ship to the French Lutherans. When the unhappy French asked if he would spare their lives, he answered, "Surrender your arms and place yourselves at my mercy, that I may do as Our Lord may command me."¹⁶

The Lord did not command Menedez differently. As the starving French were brought in groups of ten to Menendez, they were promptly massacred. Only sixteen of the first group found in the inlet were spared—twelve Breton seamen who said they were Catholics and claimed that they had been kidnapped, and four caulkers and carpenters whose services Menendez needed. A second band of Frenchmen, some 200 with Jean Ribault, had been driven ashore by the hurricane. According to reports reaching Menendez in St. Augustine, they had lost their provisions in the storm and were living on roots and grass and impure

16. *Ibid.*, 438-39.

water. Using the same tactics as he had earlier, Menendez dispatched a force which captured the French and killed them. Ribault was murdered by Menendez' brother-in-law, Solis de Meras, and an officer named San Vicente. Sixteen Catholics were spared, including the drummers and fifers and four German youths. The Spanish leader thought himself fortunate to have rid the world of Jean Ribault because "he would do more in one year than any other in ten."¹⁷ French refugees later captured by the Spanish were saved; the inhabitants at St. Augustine had had a surfeit of killing.

News of the fall of Fort Caroline arrived in France with Jacques Ribault. Information of the massacres came by a sailor who had been left on the beach as dead by the Spanish, but who had eventually returned to France. The queen mother was incensed, but the interests of France were so involved with those of Spain that there was little that could be done. Catherine complained to Philip and pressed him to punish Menendez, but she was really helpless to avenge the massacre of her subjects. Spanish Ambassador Francisco de Alava listed five reasons why Menendez was justified in putting the French to death: there was not enough food for both French and Spanish in Florida; the French were not regular soldiers, therefore they met pirates' deaths; they were preaching evil doctrines to the natives; they outnumbered the Spanish, therefore, it was a matter of survival; and, there were not enough ships to send them home. The ambassador also complained that Coligny was wrong in encouraging the French to colonize in Florida; the area was too important a locality to the navigation of Spanish vessels to permit foreigners there. Matters remained chaotic between the French and Spanish for some time.

Fort Caroline should have succeeded. Ribault and Laudonniere were able leaders and both were fine seamen. In Florida they found an abundance of food and water and the Indians were friendly. The Laudonniere voyage in 1564 and Ribault's the following year were strides in the right direction, at first including women, then whole families, in addition to artisans. The failure of the colonists to plan for the future and to keep their minds on improving the colony instead of seeking gold doomed the expedi-

17. *Ibid.*, 438.

tions, Ribault in 1565 had only a short while to rebuild Fort Caroline before Menendez arrived.

When potentially successful ventures fail, the question of motive arises. That piracy was involved was rather clear; the French had been making incursions into Spanish shipping since 1504. Ten years before the massacres in Florida, Jacques de Soria had sacked and burned Havana, killing fifty-four in cold blood. Elizabeth of England had made many promises to Ribault to encourage him to go to Florida, promising him half of what he would take. Undoubtedly, she expected him "to take" some of the treasure from the Spanish galleons. When Thomas Stukeley sailed toward Florida, while Ribault was still in the Tower, the Spaniards must have captured part of the English fleet. A Spaniard, Cuerton, wrote: "All the country cry out upon the English men-of-war, for they have done great hurt to Spaniards." Some of the captured vessels were French carrying Spanish goods worth 49,000 ducats.¹⁸

Religious motives are not too difficult to ascertain. Ribault is consistently described as an ardent Huguenot as well as a loyal and patriotic citizen of Dieppe. He had supported the Protestant cause during the religious wars in France and had been an able ally of Anglican England. A Protestant minister accompanied him on his first trip to Florida in 1562, and there were several with him on the 1565 expedition. The name of the first minister did not appear in the list of those returning with Ribault; he may have remained in Florida to work among the Indians. Coligny rebuked Laudonniere for not taking a clergyman with him, but the colonial leader made certain that prayers were always conducted.

To a Spanish spy, historians are indebted for the knowledge that Ribault took on the second trip "todos luteranos, y por no olvidar su mala secta, llevan 7 o ocho ministros."¹⁹ There can be little doubt that the religious motive was an integral part of Ribault's expeditions, even though it might not have been the primary cause. That Menendez considered the religious aspect of utmost importance is seen when he wrote:

These Frenchmen had many Indians for friends who have shown such feeling for their loss; and especially for two or

18. *CSP*, 1563, 619.

19. Antonine Tibesar (ed.), "A Spy's Report on the Expedition of Jean Ribault to Florida, 1565," *Americas* (April 1955) XI, 590.

three Masters of their bad sect, who were teaching the caciques and Indians, who followed round after them as the Apostles followed Our Lord, so that it is a wonderful thing to see how these Lutherans have bewitched this poor savage people. I shall do everything possible to gain the good will of these Indians.²⁰

Since Menendez had made his main reason for going to Florida the expulsion of the Protestants, he would naturally highlight his letters with the theme.

Throughout the story of this unhappy undertaking there runs the suggestion of possible English collaboration. Ribault had served the English under Henry VIII,²¹ and while fighting against the Scots in 1546, he kept the French informed of English progress.²² At the time, France was aiding the Scots, and when French spies were captured and sentenced to death, clemency was asked for Ribault.²³ He remained in English service until after the death of Henry II of France when the regency began. According to both English and Spanish state papers, Elizabeth kept herself informed of Ribault's actions rather constantly.

A second indication that France and England were closely connected was found in Coligny's formation of the corsairs' union. In a day when spying was a finished art, it would have been impossible for him to make progress with this project without Elizabeth's knowledge. It is this kind of chicanery which lends itself to suggestion but offers little proof to the reader. At the same time, from documents which are available, one infers that Coligny acted with questionable loyalty when his country was at war with the English.²⁴ On the other hand, at times when the Huguenots were in favor, both Coligny and Ribault were seen at the French court. Still further, when Sir John Hawkins arrived at Fort Caroline, the French were overjoyed to see him, giving the impression that relations between English and French raiders were somewhat cordial.

One chain of events involving Thomas Stukeley seems to

20. Menendez to Philip II, Parkman Papers, 427.

21. *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII, 1546* (London, 1908), 268, 274.

22. A. F. Pollard (ed.), *Tudor Tracts 1532-1558* (New York, 1903), xix.

23. *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII, 1546*, 434

24. *CSP, Rome, 1558-1571* (London, 1916), 123, 131, 142, 143.

point rather definitely to English participation in Ribault's second trip to Florida. Ribault had been imprisoned in June 1563, and he was released from the Tower in the spring of 1564, shortly after Laudonniere had started for Florida.²⁵ Apparently Stukeley had already made one trip to Florida, as Bishop Quadra had noted in 1563, and was anticipating another. A letter from Seville noted that the queen had delivered some ships to Mr. Stukeley and that he was on his way to Florida.²⁶ Elizabeth had told Stukeley that Florida was very rich. "Ribault assured her that Florida was a rich and important country," wrote Guzman de Silva, Spain's ambassador to England, in October 1565, "and since he has ships and means he could undertake the voyage thither, although she would not help him with money, or in any other way for the present."²⁷

Two questions arise: where did Stukeley get the ships? and who was providing the means? It would seem that he secured both the vessels and the means from Coligny as part of the plan to colonize Florida. It must be remembered that four of Stukeley's French vessels had been captured by the Spanish while Ribault was in prison, and at least one of these ships must have been Ribault's.²⁸ In giving ships to Ribault, Admiral Coligny had the backing of the queen mother who based her claim to Florida on a map seen thirty years earlier by Fourquevaulx, French foreign minister and ambassador to Spain.²⁹ Consequently, since this was evidently a French undertaking, Elizabeth's continued interest might indicate that she had a share in the venture.

Some writers have tried to assume that the French king was ignorant of the colonization plans of Coligny and Catherine de Medici. The queen made it clear that so large a number of sub-

25. *CSP, Foreign, 1564-1565* (London, 1870), VII, 155.

26. *Ibid.*, 192; *CSP Relating to English Affairs*, 644.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Supra*, 55.

29. H. de la Ferriere and G. Bogueuault de le Puchesse (eds.), *Lettres de Catherine De Medici*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1885), II, 337n. Much of the claim refers to the Cote des Bretons shown in Justian Winsor (ed.), *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 8 vols. (Boston, 1884), IV, Verrazano's map (1529), 37; Ribero's (1529), 38; Maiollo Map (1527), 39; Baptista Agnese, Terra de los bertoms extends from 45 to 60 degrees; Munster's of 1545 puts Florida at 30 to 55 degrees.

jects could not leave the country without her son's knowledge.³⁰ According to the Spanish spy's account, the number of subjects was between 700 and 1,000. The king had given their leader Ribault the title lieutenant general in Florida for two years and to Jacques Ribault, Jean's son, went the title lieutenant.³¹ When Philip of Spain questioned the right of the French to intrude upon his territory, Catherine wrote to Fourquevaux that she thought commerce on the seas was free among friends, and since the sea is closed to no one, all should be able to come and go in good faith.³² The queen mother did not approve, at least on paper, of any actions which jeopardized the friendship of the two countries because she had promised Philip, through her daughter the queen of Spain, that France had no desire to harm Spanish holdings.³³

When reading such statements by Catherine, one must be cautious because, like Elizabeth, she was not likely to let the left hand know what the right was doing. While it was said that "there is misliking of the French King's answer concerning the taking of Terra Florida, which is that Villegaignon [*sic*] is a rebel and pirate, and against his will is there; yet the French King does not stay ten ships in Normandy which are preparing for that place."³⁴ Furthermore, Catherine refused to disavow and to punish the promoters of the expeditions.³⁵

If the French were trespassing in Florida, their removal by Menendez would be justified. While it is not the duty of the historian to determine the morality of acts, in this case there are facts which nullify what Ambassador Alava called the necessity of Menendez's brutality. For the Spanish there was food sufficient to last, with rationing, until January 1566, and Menendez had already sent to Spain for more supplies. In addition, the rich supplies brought by Ribault to Fort Caroline were still in the fort until after the first massacre when Menendez ordered the burning of the fort. That Menendez thought the French to be pirates

30. *Lettres de Catherine De Medici*, II, 354.

31. Tibesar, "A Spy's Report," 590, 591.

32. *Lettres de Catherine De Medici*, II, 342.

33. *Ibid.*, 332.

34. *CSP*, 1564-1565, VII, 364.

35. J. H. Mariejol, *La Reforme et la ligue L'edit de Nantes*, Tome VI, Partie I, of Ernest Lavisse (ed.), *Histoire de France Illustre's depuis les Origines jusqu'a la Revolution*, 9 vols. (Paris, 1911), 92.

cannot be denied; and, of course, pirates could claim no protection under any flag. The presence of ministers also seemed to verify Menendez's belief that the intruders were preaching evil doctrines.

The minimum number of French saved from Fort Caroline and from shipwrecks south of St. Augustine was 500, including about 440 men. Menendez gave the number for those who traveled with him from Spain to St. Augustine as 800. Of these, 500 were soldiers, 300 of whom were at San Mateo (the new name for Fort Caroline), and 200 were sailors who had remained with the fleet. Therefore, he had approximately 200 men to care for twice as many French captives. Finally, Menendez claimed that he had not enough ships to send all the French prisoners back to their country. Two of the Spanish ships had already returned to Europe for more supplies, and two had gone to San Mateo to take the French women and children to Santo Domingo. None of the French ships had been captured. Reducing the number of captives by the number at San Mateo, and placing a full load of French on the one French ship would have diminished the unevenness in ratio of French to Spanish.³⁶

The sources for this story are eyewitness accounts of French and Spanish survivors, Ribault's written summary of the first expedition, Richard Hakluyt's version of early discoveries, and state papers and related documents. It is almost impossible to find an unbiased recounting by eyewitnesses; one can only try to adhere to a middle course. Both Ribault and Hakluyt were making observations, and neither discussed the massacres. A study of the state papers from the various embassies and other sources uncovers a number of discrepancies which might easily alter what appear to be valid conclusions.

One error which crept frequently into the correspondence of the time was the identification of Villegagnon with either Ribault or Laudonniere. Apparently it was Ribault to whom the writer referred when he called Villegagnon a rebel who was preparing ten ships to leave from Normandy to Florida.³⁷ When William Phayre wrote to William Cecil, Elizabeth's secretary of state, that Menendez was going to Florida, he said it was "to rid

36. Lowery, *Spanish Settlements*, II, 429-31.

37. *CSP, 1564-1565*, VII, 364.

Florida of Villegaignon [*sic*].”³⁸ A report as early as June 30, 1565, stated that it was rumored that “Villegaignon [*sic*] has been eaten in Florida.”³⁹ This, of course, could have referred either to Ribault or to Laudonniere. In July of 1565, Phayre told Cecil, “Villegaignon [*sic*] has finished his fort in Florida and has been joined by John Ribault [*sic*].”⁴⁰ As late as 1630 reference was made to “Port Royal and the whole of Canada. . . . Colonies planted by M. M. Villegaignon [*sic*] and Rene Laudonniere, from which they were expelled by the Spaniards.”⁴¹

From the diplomatic mails it would seem that Ribault had made two separate agreements with Elizabeth of England. When he apparently changed his mind about the first offer in 1563, a certain Smith wrote to William Cecil, “The French can quickly dispense themselves with their oaths.” Smith was sorry “that John Ribaude [*sic*] should at the last declare himself so much ‘oversent’; but the French will always be French.”⁴² This would seem to refer to the promises Ribault had made in exchange for the house, money, and booty Elizabeth had offered him.⁴³ Two years later, Silva mentioned that Ribault and Elizabeth had come to an agreement about the disposition of the wealth found in Florida, mentioning only that Ribault was to have half of what he could take.⁴⁴

In the same letter to Philip of Spain, Silva reported that Elizabeth wanted to be able to swear that she had nothing to do with the French expedition to Florida. Quadra had made a similar observation. On March 38, 1566, it was reported that Elizabeth congratulated Philip on his conquest of Florida, adding that she had herself thought of conquering it and that she apologized for even harboring the thought. Then with wily innocence, she mentioned that she thought the French had conquered Florida.⁴⁵ The next year, she is reported to have contradicted herself by

38. *Ibid.*, 380.

39. *Ibid.*, 399.

40. *Ibid.*, 418.

41. *CSP Colonial Series, 1574-1660* (London, 1860), 119.

42. *CSP, 1563*, 440.

43. *Supra*, 57.

44. *Supra*, 61-2.

45. *CSP Relating to English Affairs*, 536.

telling Philip that she did not know that Spain had discovered and taken Florida.⁴⁶ Such was the mind of a cunning woman.

Spying was a polished art in the Europe of Philip, Catherine, and Elizabeth. What went on in any large capital was known throughout Europe via diplomatic courier almost immediately. Naturally, the collection and dissemination of information gave rise to rumors, grounded and ungrounded, but consistent reports turning up in Rome, Milan, Madrid, Paris, London, and other centers help to verify facts. Consequently, it is possible to arrive at partial answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this article. One of the motives prompting Ribault to make the trips to Florida was religious, to some extent. It seems more likely than not that the English, especially Elizabeth, had a share, or hoped to have a share, in the profits of the undertakings. As for the French claim to Florida - since both France and Spain claimed all the land from the Atlantic to the Gulf and north to some undetermined point, both claims were rather nebulous. By reasons of more exploration, possibly Spain could lay a firmer claim than France. In that case, Menendez was justified in trying to oust the intruders, but he did not seem thoroughly convinced that the French were all pirates. Hence, he was not justified in putting so many to death without separating the pirates from the innocent. And Menendez's other reasons for massacring so many French, as outlined by Alava, were easily refuted.

46. Lowery, "Ribaut and Elizabeth," 458.