

HUGUENOTS AND CATHOLICS – THE FIGHT FOR COLONIAL FLORIDA

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HUGUENOTS AND CATHOLICS – THE FIGHT FOR COLONIAL FLORIDA

As the sun rose on the 20th of September 1565, so did Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and his men. Their woolen clothes reeked of sweat and swamp, moldering from the four-day journey and the overnight rainstorm so common to La Florida. They bivouacked several hundred yards from their objective the night before after hacking and wading through swamp and jungle in the oppressive heat. Their matchlocks, pikes and swords needed maintenance - the men double-checked their apostles of powder for dampness and wiped down their dully-gleaming steel weapons. Menéndez again polled his officers as to their feelings concerning their mission and many still declined support. However, Chaplain Mendoza who accompanied the soldiers, supported Captain-General Menéndez, offering that he stood with him in thought and deed. The lieutenants soon acquiesced and the 500 Spanish soldiers set off, stealthily creeping toward Fort Caroline. The damp ground deadened the sound of their approach. This was fortunate, as they were laden with weapons and ladders. They soon saw that most of the fort was unguarded and cheerfully slinked closer, saying their last prayers before the slaughter of the heretic French began.¹

The vignette above is not prose written for some Hollywood spectacle attacking the evil Europeans and their mistreatment of the natives in the new world. It is an account of a small part of the drama that played out on the coast of Florida in the early years of European colonization.

¹ Charles E. Bennett, *Fort Caroline and Its Leaders*. (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1976), 33-44.

The area known now as the “First Coast” from Amelia Island to the Matanzas Inlet in Northeast Florida was the set of the beginning scene of the ethnic cleansing of a native population, the holy war between Christians and the founding of what is the oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in the United States. The colonization of the New World provided opportunities for many, from those in pursuit of religious freedom like the French Huguenots to those seeking to expand their empire in the name of God like the Spanish Catholics – but when the two collided in 16th Century Florida, kindly Christian values waned and killing in the name of God became the norm.

CHAPTER I
THE CONTINENT OF LA FLORIDA AT FIRST CONTACT

The modern Saint John's River basin was to the French and Spanish explorers of the 16th century the River May. The climate ranges from temperate to sub-tropical with relatively mild winters offset by humid, sweltering summers with highs in the upper nineties Fahrenheit. The coastal plain is a mix of sandy beaches, salt marsh, jungle, hammocks, woodland and barrier islands with inter-coastal waterways spider webbing between the islands and mainland. The elevation is relatively flat with a few high bluffs of both ancient dune and indigenous shell midden origin. The flora and fauna are abundant for foodstuffs and agriculture, although much of both are dangerous to man with many poisonous plants and man-eating animals in abundance.² This rich but challenging environment is where the drama takes place.

We know the native population at the time of first contact and colonization in Northeast Florida as the Timucua. Timucua language group natives lived largely off the land, hunting, gathering and growing crops.³ However, that is not to say that they were primitive savages. They had established permanent villages with working governments that coexisted largely in a peaceful manner with their neighbors and participated in trade circuits that stretched all the way

² National Park Service, "History Of Fort Caroline," *National Park Service*, May 29, 2011, http://www.nps.gov/timu/historyculture/foca_history.htm (accessed September 20, 2011).

³ Aleck Loker, *La Florida* (Williamsburg, VA: Solitude Press, 2010), 1-32.

to the Midwest.⁴ The Timucua dominated the coastal hammocks of the area and would soon find themselves embroiled in a struggle for dominance and survival with the Europeans.⁵ As they were not a homogeneous nation but a collection of many smaller tribes, their role in the fight over La Florida found Timucua fighting for both sides and often switching allegiances as the local situation dictated.⁶

⁴ University of South Florida College of Education, "The Timucua," *College Of Education, University Of South Florida*, 2002, <http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/lessons/timucua/timucua1.htm>. (accessed October 1, 2011).

⁵ National Park Service

⁶ University of South Florida College of Education

CHAPTER II

THE SPANISH ARRIVE

The Catholic Spanish sent several expeditions to Florida before finally deciding to colonize in response to incursions by the French. The initial explorers included de Leon, de Vaca, de Soto and de Luna. Nevertheless, in spite of all of these expeditions, it was not until Pedro Menéndez de Avilés arrived in La Florida on orders from King Phillip II to rid the Spanish Main of French interlopers and establish a base of operations there that the Spanish became much more than a passing curiosity and annoyance to the locals.⁷ Spain began her conquest of the New World as rapidly as her explorers could find resources to exploit. The quest for gold, silver and other precious commodities was the priority and driving force behind this early exploration.⁸ While Cortez and Pizarro were having their way with the natives and their gold and silver in more southern climes, other explorers were less successful in finding such riches, or dominating the locals.⁹ Nevertheless, these explorers had an equally lasting impact on the course of history in the New World. With the arrival of Juan Ponce de León in 1512, the long process of colonizing what was then known as the Continent of La Florida began.¹⁰ That is not to say that

⁷ Anthony Kerrigan, *Barcia's Chronological History of the Continent of Florida* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1951), 45-47.

⁸ Loker, 33, 237.

⁹ Ibid 33-39.

¹⁰ Ibid 165.

de Leon had any intention of starting a colony, but he did lay the groundwork. He claimed La Florida for Spain on the 8th of April 1512, landing somewhere on the East Coast of what is the modern day US State of Florida between Jacksonville and Melbourne.¹¹

This claim is one of many important events that took place in this initial foray. De Leon continued to explore the coast toward the south and probably back up toward Tampa Bay on Florida's West coast.¹² As he did, he and his men discovered the major currents that form the backbone of trade routes back toward Europe. The currents flowing out of the Gulf of Mexico between Florida and Cuba and hence up the East coast of North America onward across the North Atlantic to Europe are steady, reliable and strong enough to guide weather patterns, as well as shipping back across the mighty and daunting Atlantic. De Leon and his men also encountered locals and began an amicable trade. However the harmony did not last. Soon the Spanish and Natives were in what was effectively a low intensity conflict along the coast – foreshadowing native relations in the New World for centuries to come.¹³

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and the Narváez Expedition would come along in 1527 to occupy the Spanish Main of La Florida, landing in the environs of Tampa Bay.¹⁴ They were hungry for gold and they explored making their circuitous route from modern Florida around the Gulf Coast arriving finally in Mexico City, never finding a substantial source of the yellow metal.¹⁵ However, only four of the original 600 explorers would make the entire trip. The hostile

¹¹ Kerrigan, 1.

¹² George R. Fairbanks, *History of Florida: From its Discovery by Ponce de Leon in 1512 to the Close of the Florida War in 1842* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincot & Co, 1871), 13.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Kerrigan, 7-11.

¹⁵ Ibid

land along with extended running battles with the natives quickly sapped the manpower, material and foodstuffs of the explorers and degraded the expedition to little more than a fight to survive and return to friendly lands.¹⁶

Undaunted the Spanish would try again in May of 1539 with the infamous de Soto expedition. Hernando de Soto led another 600-700 men into the hostile land of La Florida, landing near modern Bradenton, Florida and working his way north, exploring most of what is now the Southeastern United States over the next several years.¹⁷ De Soto was prepared to dominate the local populace through martial means from the start and indeed fought with the natives as often as not. His harsh treatment and demands of the local population made the Spanish hated among the locals and marked for constant military harassment.¹⁸ This would be one of the lasting legacies of de Soto on the Spanish Main and specifically the Florida peninsula; the natives remembered and often hated the Spanish in this new land.¹⁹

By 1559, another major expedition arrived on the Continent of La Florida with a mind to taming it. Tristán de Luna would lead this expedition.²⁰ Landing in the fall near modern day Pensacola, Florida, this expedition would meet with disaster nearly from day one. A hurricane destroyed many of the laden ships at rest in Pensacola Harbor.²¹ Adding to this was de Luna's poor leadership, the slow resupply ships and a mutiny that destroyed any hopes of a permanent

¹⁶ Fairbanks, 29.

¹⁷ Kerrigan, 12-22.

¹⁸ Loker, 92-126.

¹⁹ Fairbanks, 73-91.

²⁰ Kerrigan, 29-44.

²¹ Fairbanks, 77-91.

colony. This expedition abandoned their pitiful village the following year and La Florida remained wild and free of major European influence. Nonetheless, the Spanish Crown claimed this wild northern continent and would pacify it, eventually.²²

²² Fairbanks, 111-115.

CHAPTER III

THE FRENCH INTERLOPERS

By 1562 the Catholic French monarchs, Charles IX and Catherine de Medici had designs on establishing a French overseas empire in the New World as well.²³ Jean Ribault, a famous sea captain and explorer of the day, was given this opportunity to establish a French Claim in the Americas, in spite of being a member of the minority Protestant Huguenot sect in France.²⁴ King Charles IX charged Ribault with finding prospective places to establish French settlements on the East coast of what is now the United States.²⁵ The three-fold venture would establish a foothold in the promising New World, put French forces in striking distance of Spanish treasure fleets as well as Cuba, and establish a home for the religiously outcast French Huguenots. Ribault, René Goulaine de Laudonnière and others sailed into the mouth of the St. John's River on the 1st of May 1562 and found the land and the friendly native population quite pleasing.²⁶ Ribault named the waterway the River May in honor of the month of their arrival. On a high bluff, now known as St. John's Bluff in present day Jacksonville, Florida, Ribault erected an

²³ F. A. Mann, *The Story of the Huguenots* (Saint Augustine, Florida: Mann & Mann Publishers, 1898).

²⁴ Laudonnière, 17.

²⁵ Ibid, 17-25.

²⁶ Bennett, 2001, 12-17.

obelisk to commemorate the event and claim the site in the name of France.²⁷ He then sailed North to modern day Port Royal and adjacent Parris Island, South Carolina, erected another monument and established the French Colony of Charlesfort, named for Charles IX of France.²⁸ News of this transgression would soon reach the Spanish court and the fight for control of Spanish Florida would commence.²⁹

However, the ensuing months and years that it took for a Spanish response would not see a thriving French presence in North America. Ribault left behind a contingent of 27 men to build up the fort and colony on Parris Island.³⁰ He motivated them by appealing to their desire for fame and fortune and reminded them that they were on the cusp of founding what would surely become “New France”. The soldiers and craftsmen that stayed behind began building in earnest as Ribault sailed back to France with promises of reinforcements and supplies in a year’s time. However, it would be much longer before the intrepid seaman returned to the New World and the colonists would have long abandoned their toehold in New France.³¹

Captain Albert de la Pierria and the local Cacique (Native Chief) took care of the colonists in the first months of occupation as the natives shared in their harvest and gathered bounty.³² However, as the months wore on, the French failed to provide sustenance for

²⁷ Bennett, 1976, 12-17.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Gonzalo Solís de Merás, *Menéndez de Avilés and la Florida: chronicles of his expeditions* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 7.

³⁰ Chester B. DePratter, "Charlesfort History Of The French Settlement," *The Charlesfort/Santa Elena Project*, December 15, 1999, <http://www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/staff/depratcer/chas1.html>. (accessed October 1, 2011).

³¹ Fairbanks, 97-110.

³² Mann

themselves and soon the Cacique and his band stopped providing.³³ Captain de la Pierria and his men, growing desperate, began to quarrel. In an attempt to maintain some discipline, Albert grew tyrannical, exiling one man and hanging another for disobedience. This backfired, instead riling his men as their laziness and disobedience grew. Finally, the men mutinied and killed de la Pierria, electing Nicolas Barre as their leader.³⁴ Sensing that the long overdue Ribault was not to return, the ill begotten band built a ship and attempted to sail back to France. The ship was little more than a large raft with precious few provisions and almost no hope with which to set sail. As a matter of course, their provisions expired and eventually they resorted to various depravities, including cannibalism in order to survive long enough for rescue by an English ship.³⁵

Meanwhile Ribault had returned to a France in the throes of a religious civil war. He fled France for England as the Huguenots lost control of Dieppe.³⁶ There he sought and secured an audience with Queen Elizabeth I with a bid to organize a return to the Americas and bolster his colony there. Unfortunately, labeled a spy, Ribault found himself imprisoned in the Tower of London until 1565.³⁷ However, once release he was dispatched to aid the beleaguered colony of La Caroline under the command of his contemporary and partner in his first expedition, Laudonnière.³⁸

³³ Fairbanks, 97-110.

³⁴ John T. McGrath, *The French in Early Florida* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2000), 83.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 83-90.

³⁶ Bennett, 1976, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Laudonnière, 53.

The French Admiralty, specifically Admiral Coligny, was determined to reaffirm and maintain a foothold in the new world and solidify New France in spite of Renault's imprisonment. Coligny enlisted Laudonnière to lead a second expedition to New France to establish a colony at the southern marker placed by the 1562 expedition on the bluff overlooking the River May.³⁹ Laudonnière, known to be a man of good character and as Ribault's second on the previous mission, was a natural fit. In the early spring of 1564, Laudonnière outfitted his small fleet with appropriate weapons, stores and equipment for the expedition as well as enlisting a broad array of talent.⁴⁰ His three primary vessels, *Falcon*, *Petit Breton* and *Isabel of Honfluer*, as well as three others, were loaded with stores and 300 colonists and made for New France on April 22, 1564. They arrived at the River May on the 24th of June and waited a day before venturing inland to locate the site of the 1562 marker.⁴¹

³⁹ Laudonnière, 53-59.

⁴⁰ Bennett, 1976, 17.

⁴¹ Laudonnière, 57-61.

CHAPTER IV

LA CAROLINE

Laudonnière and his colonists settled in the shadow of the 70-foot bluff on the riverbank and named the settlement La Caroline for King Charles IX.⁴² Knowing that they were encroaching on land claimed by the hated Spanish Catholics, they immediately began construction of a three sided earthen and palisade structure to be known as Fort Caroline.⁴³ They enlisted the help of the local Timucua in the construction of the fort, the colony buildings and in learning the native flora and fauna needed to survive in the area for the long term. Laudonnière then sent two ships back to France to request reinforcements to the tune of 500 more colonists and attendant supplies.⁴⁴

Soon the colony was a bustling village with the makings of a good start. They boasted many of the necessities of frontier life as well as setting aside enough time for pursuits of leisure and worship. The French worshiped God in the Huguenot fashion every afternoon at the ringing of a church bell. Additionally the Timucua introduced the French to tobacco and sassafras, which caught on quickly as medicinal products and likewise quickly exported to France.⁴⁵ The

⁴² National Park Service

⁴³ Various, *Fort Caroline: Selected Articles from Papers* (Jacksonville, Florida: Jacksonville Historical Society, Unknown).

⁴⁴ Bennett, 2001, 20.

⁴⁵ Laura Fishman, "Old World Images Encounter New World Reality: Rene Laudonnière and the Timucuans of Florida," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1995).

Timucua also introduced the French to the local grapes, which soon became a favorite refreshment in the guise of wine. The colonial venture seemed to be a budding success. However, not all was going smoothly. Laudonnière and his colony were lax in some respects, most notably agriculture.⁴⁶ While the land was fruitful and there was a fair amount of game, the promise of fresh supplies from France as well as the generosity of the Timucua gave the colonists a false sense of logistical security.⁴⁷

As successive waves of Spanish explorers treated the natives (including the Timucua) roughly, finding that the kindly, gift bearing Huguenots were also enemies of the Spanish made the natives and French natural allies. The good-natured natives were generous to a fault and even allowed the unattached colonists to intermarry (after a fashion) with the unattached Timucua women. Unfortunately, this led to a bit of unseemly debauchery and love affairs not sanctioned by an official Church marriage. The “Moors” (who accompanied the expedition) acted out further wonton sexuality, insomuch as they did not have the background or faith to act with the couth that Laudonnière expected.⁴⁸

The additional promise of riches in the New World in the guise of gold, silver and precious gems that the Spanish had been so successful in finding in Central and South America also motivated some of the French colonists. Their quest for quick easy liquidity was a key factor in prolonged trips from the bosom of the Colony proper that led to reduced production of staples as well as the capture of several colonists by hostile natives in outlying villages.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Fishman

⁴⁷ Bennett, 2001, 25.

⁴⁸ Laudonnière, 57-61.

⁴⁹ Bennett, 2001, 21-29.

By December of 1564, the situation had turned dire. A few French ships had ventured into the mouth of the River May bringing little in the way of news, supplies or relief. With starvation a real worry, the Timucua at their limit for handouts to the colonists and Laudonnière himself refusing to let their flock of chickens be consumed or the men fight on the side of the friendly Chief Saturiba in an inter tribe war, the colony was ripe for revolt.⁵⁰ At first, only thirteen made off with one of the small ships and began a short-lived life of piracy against the Spanish, who soon captured them. However, a different contingent of 66 mutinied, clapped Laudonnière in chains and made off with a ship with an eye toward taking Spanish prizes. The remaining loyal French freed Laudonnière as the mutineers sailed off. While successful at first, the Spanish Navy was soon in hot pursuit and captured some of the mutinous pirates. Those that escaped returned to La Caroline – only to be tried and executed by Laudonnière.⁵¹

Keeping a vigil for their relief until summer, the French colony finally gave up hope of rescue and began to build a ship large and strong enough to navigate the course back to France in 1565. However, before they could complete the vessel and embark, a small English fleet appeared at the mouth of the River May. The captain of the flotilla, a pirate by the name of Sir John Hawkins, had put into land to find fresh water. He was amicable toward the French as they had a common enemy in the Spanish. He offered to return the poor colonists to France, but Laudonnière knew that he would be remiss in his duties to France to abandon the claim on Florida. Instead, the English pirates and French colonists worked out a trade that left the colonists with a seaworthy vessel and enough supplies to last them until they were able to get

⁵⁰ Fishman

⁵¹ Laudonnière, 92-101.

back to Europe in exchange for a cannon and ammunition. This trade was a turning point for the overwrought colony and boosted their spirits for a return voyage home.⁵²

⁵² Bennett, 2001, 31.

CHAPTER V

SAN AGUSTIN

The French colony was insult to injury in the eyes of the King Phillip II of Spain. As soon as the news reached the Iberian Peninsula, the King dispatched yet another group of Spaniards to establish a permanent settlement in La Florida, eliminate the heretical Huguenots and expand Spanish control over the continent. Captain-General Menendez was eager to return to La Florida to search for his son, marooned there on a previous trip, and the King needed an able leader for his punitive expedition.⁵³ Menéndez pled his case to his sovereign and Phillip II honored him with sponsoring the expedition as well as titling him Governor over the territory and all previous claimants to La Florida were nullified. Menéndez and his descendants were to retain control over a vast tract, effectively all of North America. Menéndez, being of some means and seeing an opportunity for gain, began to gather his assets.⁵⁴

Menéndez gathered over 600 soldiers, a fleet of five ships with *San Pelayo* in the van and made ready for the voyage. However, as word spread, the expedition grew and this time nearly 3000 Spaniards and thirty-four ships - including over two dozen clergy and a large ship with 250 soldiers directly funded by the crown - would sail for La Florida in early 1565.⁵⁵ Menéndez's

⁵³ Loker, 164-183.

⁵⁴ Fairbanks, 111-122.

⁵⁵ William W. Dewhurst, *The History of Saint Augustine, Florida* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), 35-45.

fleet sailed first for the Caribbean, but the weather scattered the fleet and only six ships with about 1,500 colonists arrived in Puerto Rico with Menéndez for the final stage of the voyage, although he expected the rest to follow.⁵⁶ The devout Catholics saw the delay of their brethren as a terrible omen and the hand of God. They despaired, but Menéndez rallied them with drive and leadership. Meanwhile the governor received word that the French intercepted a ship carrying documents addressed to Menéndez himself, causing them to set out quickly for the Spanish Main Land of La Florida from Puerto Rico on the 15th of August 1565.⁵⁷

After three days of fruitless searching by sea for the French at La Caroline (which was well inland on the River May), Menéndez decided to make landfall. He arrived in what is now Saint Augustine Inlet on Saint Augustine's day in August of 1565. This day would give a name to the Spanish settlement that included the established Timucua village of Seloy.⁵⁸ The village sat in a hammock, ideally situated near the calm waters of the inlet, and the Spaniards immediately seized the land from the Timucua. Menéndez ordered his men and attendant slaves to occupy and fortify the village and begin scouting for the hated French. In fact, Ribault had simultaneously returned to La Caroline with an additional 600 Frenchmen and supplies to assist the struggling colony on the same day that the colony, freshly supplied by trade with the British were to set course back to France.⁵⁹ Within a few days, Menéndez convinced his timid lieutenants that waiting for the remainder of the fleet to arrive before engaging the French was a

⁵⁶ Kerrigan, 44-150.

⁵⁷ Fairbanks, 111-120.

⁵⁸ Dewhurst, 35-45.

⁵⁹ Bennett, 1976, 31.

waste of time. Having learned from the Timucua the location of La Caroline, they sailed north on the 4th of September.⁶⁰

As the Spanish fleet sallied and sighted the French ships in the mouth of the River May, they devised a plan to close distance with the Huguenots and board them. However, navigating the waters in the area proved easier said than done and the Spanish did not arrive until nearly midnight. They guided their vessels within shouting distance of the French, announced themselves and asked them from whence they came, to confirm their enemy status. The Huguenots responded honestly and Menéndez allowed good treatment for any Catholics who wished to surrender – implying that the Protestants were to meet a gristly end.⁶¹ The French, who had been quietly preparing to set sail since detecting the Spanish, suddenly released full sail and anchor lines, getting a start on the Spanish.⁶² The Spanish engaged the Protestants with ineffectual cannon fire while in pursuit. The French slipped away and the Spanish returned to the River Seloy and San Agustin.⁶³

⁶⁰ Dewhurst, 35-45.

⁶¹ Fairbanks, 121-130.

⁶² Bennett, 25-35.

⁶³ Fairbanks, 111-120.

CHAPTER VI

SLAUGHTER

When Ribault returned to the French Colony at La Caroline, he made plans with a reluctant Laudonnière to attack the Spanish instead of waiting for another attack.⁶⁴ Leaving a few hundred colonists with only a few soldiers at La Caroline, Ribault embarked with the majority of the able-bodied soldiers for his amphibious attack on the Spanish at San Agustin.⁶⁵ He set sail on the 8th of September and headed south. Although, when they departed the seas were calm and the sun was shining, a hurricane was not far off shore and the winds battered the little fleet, shipwrecking all of them south of their objective, between what is modern Matanzas and Mosquito Inlets.⁶⁶ All but one of the Frenchmen made land, as the shore in that part of Florida is sandy with a broad beach; the ships merely ran around and were not broken up. These men sheltered behind the dunes and regrouped over the next few days.⁶⁷

Simultaneously, Menéndez began to urge his less-than-spirited lieutenants to follow him in an overland campaign to attack La Caroline.⁶⁸ They departed San Agustin on the 17th of

⁶⁴ Bennett, 33-44.

⁶⁵ Laudonnière, 149-170.

⁶⁶ Albert C. Manucy, *The History of Castillo de San Marcos & Fort Matanzas: From contemporary narratives and letters* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1945).

⁶⁷ Dewhurst, 35-45.

⁶⁸ Bennett, 33-44.

September with 500-600 soldiers to attack the French fort. A pair of Timucua chiefs and a French traitor named Francis Jean guided them through the sub-tropical jungles of Northeast Florida in the hottest part of the year.⁶⁹ The insects, wetlands and multiple bodies of water swollen with rains from the hurricane, made what they thought to be a day's march turn into several. They sighted the fort on the 19th, and bivouacked near a small pond a few hundred yards away, well inland. That night another storm pounded the area, and the Spanish suffered through in silence.⁷⁰

The French under Laudonnière at the fort had not been idle. Although they had torn down much of the fort as they prepared to leave prior to the arrival of Ribault, Laudonnière had his men do what they could to make the defenses adequate.⁷¹ He had less than twenty effectives out of the total occupancy in the garrison, most of who had never seen combat and the rest were boys and artisans. Laudonnière himself was sickly and appointed two men as captains of the guard with instructions to keep a strict and vigilant watch posted. However, on the night of the 19th with the storm thrashing the fort, the captains relieved the watch and allowed them to find shelter, never thinking that anyone would attack in the foul weather.⁷² Regardless, it is arguable that a posted watch would not have had an effect on the outcome of the battle at dawn, as the French were vastly outnumbered.

Menéndez's men were still reluctant to attack at dawn and only the encouragement of their Captain General and the padre persuaded them that an attack was a good idea. The ensuing

⁶⁹ Bennett, 37-39.

⁷⁰ Dewhurst, 35-45.

⁷¹ Fairbanks, 111-120.

⁷² Bennett, 1976, 33-44.

battle was little more than a slaughter as the superior numbers of Spanish quickly overwhelmed the few actual soldiers able to engage in the defense of the fort – including Laudonnière.⁷³ When the French leader realized that all was lost, he fled with several others through the jungle to swim for the remaining ships waiting in the River May. The Spanish, by their own account, cut down men women and children in a bloodbath that only stopped when Menéndez finally reined them in and gave them orders to spare the women, children and invalids.⁷⁴ They killed all others summarily.⁷⁵ The Spanish then turned the guns of the fort on the ships that were desperately trying to rescue swimmers.⁷⁶

The Spanish completed their zealous erasure of the Protestants with the destruction of all artifacts of faith, burning bibles, breaking crosses and finally erecting a sign to assuage the French government while explaining their actions. The sign read “No por Franceses, sino por Lutheranos” or “Not as Frenchmen, but as Lutherans.”⁷⁷ They immediately began to reestablish the fort in their own image, renaming it Fort San Mateo, establishing the site for a Catholic church and placing Catholic style crosses in many prominent locations in the area.⁷⁸ Menéndez left the majority of his men in the captured garrison with the idea of holding against the return of Ribault and trekked back south to San Agustin for a celebration of his victory.⁷⁹

⁷³ Dewhurst, 35-45.

⁷⁴ Kerrigan, 44-150.

⁷⁵ Fairbanks, 111-120.

⁷⁶ Bennett, 1976, 37-39.

⁷⁷ Kerrigan, 44-150.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Dewhurst, 35-45.

In the intervening time, Ribault and his party found themselves trapped on the barrier island that they landed. They found sustenance in fishing, but had little else. The Seloy Timucua informed the Spanish at San Agustin of the French and their plight. The newly returned Captain General set off to deal with the interlopers.⁸⁰ The Spanish made haste to the northern inlet and hailed a French sailor from the opposite side of the channel. He swam across and advised the well-informed Menéndez of the identity of the castaways. Menéndez offered up a boat to the sailor and invited him to return with his captain for a parlay. The French captain in charge and several of his men returned to beg help from the Spanish in the form of a boat to ferry his men back to La Caroline. Menéndez then informed them of the fate of the garrison on the River May and inquired whether the survivors were Catholic or Protestant. Hearing that they were actually Huguenots, Menéndez intoned that he would not help them at all and indeed sworn to make war on them “unceasingly.”⁸¹

The Frenchmen asked for terms or ransom as was the custom, but Menéndez denied terms and told that they were at his mercy of whim. Eventually the French capitulated and were ferried across the inlet in groups of ten (Menéndez’s force was so small that they could not effectively handle more) and asked if they were Catholic.⁸² Only eight answered in the affirmative and the Spanish transported them to San Agustin via boat. The Spanish bound two hundred others as they arrived, summarily executing them on the orders of Menéndez – their bodies left to rot in the sun.⁸³

⁸⁰ Manucy

⁸¹ Dewhurst, 40-60.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Dewhurst, 40-60.

Menéndez returned to San Agustín that day, the 10th of October, but was informed on his arrival that there were even more Frenchmen on the island that he had just left. He returned with his soldiers in all haste and sent a courier across the inlet to inform Admiral Ribault of the fate of the other Frenchmen, offering Ribault safe passage to confirm the truth of the dispatch and the hopelessness of fighting.⁸⁴ Ribault took Menéndez up on his offer and crossed to the north side of the inlet where he observed the site of the slaughter and spoke to one of the spared Catholic Frenchmen.⁸⁵

Ribault also offered himself up for ransom, first doubling the sum offered by the deceased captain and increasing the sum to 200,000 ducats. Nonetheless, Menéndez was single-minded and would accept nothing less than an unconditional surrender.⁸⁶ Ribault discussed the idea of surrender with his remaining men and finally decided to capitulate, trusting the Spanish in spite of the evidence of a slaughter. He and one hundred fifty of the French decided to throw themselves on the mercy of the Spanish, surrendering to Menéndez. Menéndez was as merciful with this group as he was with the first group, slaughtering all but sixteen Catholics and musicians, using the same tactics as before.⁸⁷

The remaining two hundred or so Frenchmen attempted to make seaworthy a vessel from the wrecks and escape Florida. Menéndez returned to San Agustín to regroup and employ his fleet in a multipronged attack on the remaining French.⁸⁸ In the meantime the remaining French,

⁸⁴ Dewhurst, 40-60.

⁸⁵ Gonzalo Solís de Merás, *Menéndez de Avilés and la Florida: chronicles of his expeditions* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

⁸⁶ Kerrigan, 44-150.

⁸⁷ Merás

⁸⁸ Dewhurst, 40-60.

rightfully fearing the return of the Spanish, worked feverishly on their vessel as well as building a small fort to shelter in the event that Menéndez returned.⁸⁹ Eight days later, the Spanish infantry arrived in force at the makeshift French fort, with gunboats in support. Menéndez, seeing that the French were prepared to resist ordered his fleet to open fire with artillery to soften up the defenses.⁹⁰ The fort offered little protection against artillery fire and the French quit the little fort falling back inland, out of range of the Spanish gunboats.⁹¹

The Spanish captured the fort and sent a messenger to the harried Frenchmen to offer safe conduct if they surrendered. Fearing the fate of their countrymen, about fifty of the holdouts fled into the woods further inland, while the remainder decided to surrender. Surprisingly, Menéndez was as good as his word and did not slaughter this group.⁹² The Spanish razed the fort to the ground and fired the remnants of the French vessels and stores. They then embarked with their prisoners, returning to San Agustin. No one ever heard from the fifty that fled the final scene on the beach again. The inlet where this all took place is now called Matanzas Inlet – Matanzas being the Spanish for slaughter.⁹³

⁸⁹ Dewhurst, 40-60.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Merás

⁹² Dewhurst, 40-60.

⁹³ Manucy

CHAPTER VII
THE EXPANSION OF SPANISH FLORIDA

Menéndez sent word back across the Atlantic to the court of Phillip II and hence on to the Vatican. His liege and his Holiness Pope Pius V both sent back congratulations to the victorious Menéndez. The Pope also beseeched him to educate the “Indian Idolaters” and prevent them from learning the evil ways of the Protestants.⁹⁴ The word spread throughout the Old World of Menéndez’s victory – soon reaching the court of Charles IX in France, who appeared unaffected, in spite of petitions from the widows of the slaughtered to act. Apparently, his loyalty to Rome superseded that to his own countrymen when they were Huguenots.⁹⁵

Fearing retaliation by the French, Menéndez prudently continued to improve his position in San Agustín.⁹⁶ He also wrote a charter for the city, establishing rules, rights and privileges for the citizens of his colony. He laid out the plan for the fledgling town in three-square blocks and constructed the first fort, probably on the site of the current Castillo de San Marcos. The log fort commanded both the land approaches to the north side of the small town and dominated the access by water.⁹⁷ He also improved the position at Fort San Mateo (Fort Caroline) and placed more observation points closer to the mouth of the river to guard against surprise attack from that

⁹⁴ Kerrigan, 44-150.

⁹⁵ Fairbanks, 142-156.

⁹⁶ Dewhurst, 40-60.

⁹⁷ Ibid

direction. Finally, the Spanish sent expeditions inland to search for food and other bounty. However, they would find that the locals were less than receptive to their advances.⁹⁸

Saturiva, the principal Timucua chief in the area between San Agustin and San Mateo had been friendly with the French prior to their displacement, and a personal friend to Laudonnière, who had gone to great lengths to cultivate an amicable relationship with the locals, in spite of the transgressions of his company. He apparently felt a need for retribution against the Spanish for their treatment of his friends and his own people. For the next several months, Saturiva's tribe and several other Timucua groups waged guerilla warfare against the Spanish colony, depriving them of food stores, and directly attacking the village.⁹⁹

The Timucua ruthlessly harassed Menéndez's exploration and foraging parties each time that they left the relative safety of San Agustin or San Mateo. In one direct attack on San Agustin, the Timucua succeeded in setting fire to several of the houses and the powder magazine, causing great damage and further depleting the provisions of the colony.¹⁰⁰ By winter, Menéndez had lost around one hundred fifty of his men, including his nephew, Juan. At a loss, Menéndez found himself forced to return to Cuba in search of relief and aid for his colony.¹⁰¹ His audience with the Governor of Cuba, who was jealous of Menéndez's title in La Florida, was fruitless. Nonetheless, Menéndez did locate four of the ships and crew from his original expedition that left Spain with him, and took command of that contingent. He dispatched a vessel

⁹⁸ Fairbanks, 142-156.

⁹⁹ Dewhurst, 50-63.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Kerrigan, 44-150.

to Campeche, Mexico to beg help from the Governor there and returned to Florida with his bolstered fleet.¹⁰²

En route, Menéndez decided to look for his lost son along the coast and landed at Cape Florida. He did not find his son, but did come across an Indian village that held seven Spaniards in captivity. These and several others were shipwrecked on the Cape some twenty years previous and finally captured by the locals. The remaining seven had, over the course of a score of years in captivity, convinced the locals of the greatness of the Spanish crown and the locals had even adopted the name of the once sovereign Carlos as their tribe name. The heavily armed and numerous host of Menéndez readily convinced the Carlos Indians to release the captives and they embarked for San Agustin.¹⁰³

Upon his return to San Agustin, Menéndez found that both of his outposts had been rife with mutiny. The garrison commanders at both colonies had been unable to quell the mutiny and as Menéndez arrived, ships at both ports made ready to sail with mutineers aboard. In both cases, Menéndez parlayed with the leadership, but in both cases, the mutineers forced the Captain-General to let them sail.¹⁰⁴ The Timucua attacked and nearly wiped out the mutinous crew from San Mateo before they even made San Agustin. The remainder made it as far as Cape Florida, where they shipwrecked and the same Carlos tribe that had released the other Spaniards to Menéndez took them in. The mutineers from San Agustin sailed for Puerto Rico, but most of the crew died from heat stroke and sickness.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Fairbanks, 142-156.

¹⁰³ Merás

¹⁰⁴ Kerrigan, 44-150.

¹⁰⁵ Dewhurst, 50-63.

Menéndez restored order to his colonies and began to expand again. He voyaged north as far as the Chesapeake establishing forts in Guale, San Helena and Avista. He then returned south, explored the area around the current city of Miami, and learned of the great lake inland that the locals called Miami that connected the San Mateo River with the ocean (this was probably a reference to the Everglades). Traveling back north again, he brought padres to the new colonies to establish churches and convert the locals to Christianity. All the while Satouriva's Timucua would resist friendship and conversion in the area adjacent to Menéndez's two primary settlements, continuously attacking all Spaniards that left their compounds, leading to another food shortage.¹⁰⁶

Menéndez again departed for the Indies in search of supporters for his colonies. Many of the deserters and mutineers from his outposts preceded his arrival in Cuba, and they had sown ill tidings of his leadership. The Governor of Mexico was also present, and, poisoned by the words of so many of Menéndez's dissenters, offered no help.¹⁰⁷ Menéndez eventually pawned all of his valuables, including his badge identifying him as a Knight of the Order of Santiago in order to secure provisions for his people.¹⁰⁸ He then returned to San Agustín to resupply his garrisons.

Sailing into San Agustín inlet Menéndez must have rejoiced at the sight of fifteen Spanish ships at harbor. Admiral Juan de Avila had arrived with over one thousand men and plentiful supplies to reinforce La Florida. He presented Menéndez with a letter of commendation from Phillip II.¹⁰⁹ Menéndez dispersed the reinforcements, supplies and priests to his many

¹⁰⁶ Fairbanks, 142-156.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Merás

¹⁰⁹ Fairbanks, 111-115.

outposts. In some instances, he made great headway in expanding Spanish dominance, establishing a fort at the mouth of the San Mateo River with the permission of the Carlos and Tocobayo Indians that controlled the area.¹¹⁰ However, Satouriva continued his campaign against the Spanish. Without remorse, he attacked both men from Fort San Mateo and newly arrived Father Martinez, a Jesuit who had arrived with others of the Franciscan order to help minister to the Catholic colonies, killing every Spaniard that he and his tribe could.¹¹¹

Menéndez knew that he would need more support from the crown for his colony to succeed, so he sailed for Spain in spring of 1567 for an audience with the King.¹¹² Upon his arrival, the Court greeted him as a hero, but platitudes were all he received from the Crown, as the King repeatedly sidelined the explorer from an audience. He did however, receive rumor that the French Huguenots were railing against their sovereign for his indifference and demanded retribution for the crimes perpetrated by Menéndez and his men. Indeed, the French Protestants were on the move under the leadership of Dominic de Gourgues.¹¹³

The Spaniards imprisoned de Gourgues after he lost a valiant but doomed defense of Sienna in 1555 and they made him galley slave. His treatment by the Spanish made him a champion of human rights and a sworn enemy of the Spanish Catholics. Later the Turks captured de Gourgues, but ultimately his countrymen freed him and he returned to military service.¹¹⁴ On hearing of the atrocities committed against the colony at La Caroline and the castaways at

¹¹⁰ Dewhurst, 50-63.

¹¹¹ Fairbanks, 111-115.

¹¹² Merás

¹¹³ Fairbanks, 133-142.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 111-115.

Matanzas, he sold his small estate, accepted donations from friends and worked through a close friend in the French court to raise the forces and capital to avenge the insult.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Dewhurst, 50-63.

CHAPTER VIII
RETRIBUTION

De Gourgues sailed from France on August 22, 1567 with three small ships and less than two hundred soldiers and crew. He sailed first to Africa and San Domingo and then finally to La Florida. He addressed his host on leaving San Domingo rousing them to a bloodlust to avenge their countrymen.¹¹⁶ Spanish watch posts near the mouth of the River May sighted the ships when they ventured close. The Spaniards assumed that the ships were also Spanish and saluted the vessels with a cannonade. The French, hoping to sustain a ruse, returned the salute and continued north to Tacatacouron (in Timucuan; La Seine in French; present day Fernandina Beach, Florida) at the mouth of the Saint Mary's River.¹¹⁷ The Timucua, led by Satouriva, also assumed that the vessels were Spanish, turned out in full battle kit to repulse the hated Catholics. However, one of the soldiers was a veteran of the Laudonnière missions and went ashore to speak to the Timucua. He was recognized and the French were welcomed ashore.¹¹⁸

Satouriva and the other Timucua chiefs made friends with de Gourgues and the French, who stoked the anti-Spanish fires that burned within the Indians. The locals promised to provide men for the upcoming fight if the French would wait three days. De Gourgues acquiesced and used the time to reconnoiter the Spanish forts on the River May. A French refugee from the

¹¹⁶ Fairbanks, 133-142.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid

slaughter at La Caroline named de Bre, who had sheltered with the Timucua, came forward as a guide and interpreter.¹¹⁹ Upon the arrival of the Timucua warriors, the French waited until low tide and attacked the northern guard fort at the mouth of the river.

It was the First Sunday after Easter in 1568 and the Spanish had been fearful of the return of the French for years.¹²⁰ They had also had grown complacent and there was not a sentry posted as the French and Timucua crept up to the fort. The battle ended quickly with all sixty Spaniards killed or captured.¹²¹ The southern fort observed the fight and opened fire on the French who returned in kind with the captured Spanish artillery. The Timucua began to swim the river to attack the southern fort directly and the French ships arrived to bombard the fort while other Frenchmen landed to attack the fort directly with the Timucua.¹²²

The Spanish in the southern fort fled through the jungle in the direction of Fort San Mateo, but the French and Timucua killed or captured all of them. De Gourgues interrogated his fifteen prisoners and gained quite a bit of intelligence on the disposition of the main fort. He directed his men to begin preparing ladders and sent out Timucua recon parties to confirm the new information.¹²³ The natives captured a Spaniard disguised as an Indian who claimed to be part of the overrun forts at the mouth of the river. The previously captured Spaniards denied this and the newly captured soldier confessed that he was sent out to surmise the strength of the French.

¹¹⁹ Fairbanks, 133-142.

¹²⁰ Dewhurst, 60-83.

¹²¹ Fairbanks, 142-155.

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

The allies surrounded Fort San Mateo in the night two days later and probed it at daybreak.¹²⁴ The fort fired their cannon at the approaching French and then sent out a reconnaissance in force of sixty soldiers.¹²⁵ Soon the French outmaneuvered and cut down the sortie. The allies then attacked the fort in earnest. The surrounded Spaniards panicked and fled but only the garrison commander and a few others escaped with their lives.¹²⁶

De Gourgues and the allies rounded up the captured Spaniards and hung them from the same trees that the Huguenots had been previously hung after explaining to them in detail why they must pay for their crimes. One of the prisoners admitted to participating in the heinous crimes against the Huguenots at La Caroline and allowed that he deserved such retribution. In place of the previous sign placed by Menéndez, he placed a sign reading, “I do this, not unto Spaniards, nor as to outcasts, but as to traitors, thieves and murders.”¹²⁷ De Gourgues then asked the Timucua to raze the fort, which they gladly obliged and asked him to continue the fight at San Agustin. De Gourgues declined on the basis that the fort in San Agustin was too strong, but promised the Timucua that he would keep the faith and return in a year with a larger force.¹²⁸

De Gourgues sailed back to France on May 3, 1568 with full intention of fulfilling his promises to the Timucua. The Spanish court got news of the events on the River May before de Gourgues returned and dispatched naval vessels to intercept him. He made port without being

¹²⁴ Dewhurst, 60-83.

¹²⁵ Fairbanks, 142-155.

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Ibid

captured, and expected to return to fanfare.¹²⁹ However, Charles had received a message from Phillip requesting the head of de Gourgues, as the anti-Huguenots were in power in Parliament. De Gourgues was lucky enough to stay alive and did not return to La Florida, thus effectively ending the fight for the continent between the French and Spanish.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Dewhurst, 60-83.

¹³⁰ Fairbanks, 142-155.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Just after the departure of the French from La Florida, Menéndez returned to San Agustín after receiving funds, support and Governorship of Cuba from the Spanish crown.¹³¹ The little colony was again destitute and in dire straits. He immediately set to work rebuilding again and sending out missionaries to placate the local Timucua – although they continued to harass the Spaniards for some time. Menéndez would not see another French flag on his continent, although only San Agustín remained continuously inhabited until today as his many other outposts in La Florida would not thrive.¹³²

The fight for La Florida had ended for a time. Although the English would hold the peninsula of La Florida for twenty years and the Americans, Mexicans and assorted rebels would try to wrest the peninsula from the Spaniards, it would remain largely Spanish until ceded to the United States in 1819. England would eventually claim most of the East Coast of the continent of La Florida north of the Saint Mary's River and the French would claim the land between Tallahassee and Mexico. The Spanish had repulsed the French and retained San Agustín, establishing Catholic dominance in Florida and a permanent European foothold on the continent of La Florida.

¹³¹ Kerrigan, 44-150.

¹³² Dewhurst, 60-83.

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