

A SPANISH CAVALIER

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The Patriot cause received aid from sundry sources but perhaps none more meaningful than the aid provided by the Spanish Governor in the Americas, Bernado de Galvez y Gallardo. Galvez governed the Spanish territories from his headquarters in New Orleans and was instrumental in restraining the British from controlling the Gulf Coast and Mississippi waterways in our struggle for independence. The Spanish walked a fine line during our fight with the British as King Charles III did not wish to be seen as overtly aiding in the overthrow of another Monarch's possessions. But, I am getting ahead of the story.

The Spanish first settled the area that became known as Pensacola in 1559 but that settlement only lasted a short time as the ships which were sent to provide supplies were sunk by a hurricane in 1561. A permanent settlement was made there in 1698 as the Spanish moved to prevent the French from overrunning the area. The gulf coast area was controlled by the French, the British and the Spanish at various times up until the middle 1700s. In 1763 the Spanish needed a port in the Caribbean to support their movement of gold and silver so they traded their holdings (including Pensacola) in the Floridas to the British for Cuba. Then prior to 1779 the Spanish mounted several attempts to reacquire Pensacola but were unsuccessful. The British erected Fort George as a defense against further attacks but during this period saw New Orleans, Natchez and Baton Rouge fall to the Spanish who were led by Bernado de Galvez. The British commander at Pensacola did not believe the Spanish would attack and did not realize that control of the gulf area lay with control of Pensacola.

By March of 1781 Galvez had amassed a fleet of over 40 ships and about 1400 troops at Santa Rosa Island in preparation for an assault on Pensacola. The seaway to Pensacola was guarded by gun batteries which appeared to pose such a threat that the

Spanish sea Captains resisted Galvez' orders to attack. He took command of a small brig (The Galveztown) and ran the gauntlet alone. In so doing he exposed a defensive flaw which the British had made; they could not lower the aim of their cannon enough to hit a ship running near them. Galvez captured some 1100 British troops and a number of ships. By April 20th he was reinforced by several French warships and some 1600 men and the siege of Pensacola was started. Galvez devised a covered tunnel approach to the Fort and moved his cannon and mortars forward where he could bombard the fort with relative impunity. In short order the British called it quits and surrendered. The siege lasted from March 9 until May 8. The Floridas were once again under Spanish control. For us it meant that the British could no longer pose a threat to our fight for independence by receiving supplies or reinforcements through the Floridas, the gulf coast area or up the Mississippi.

Authors Note: In 1785 the Spanish explorer Jose de Evia named Galveztown (now Galveston, Texas) in honor of Bernardo de Galvez. The pirate Jean Lafitte, having been driven from his base in the New Orleans area by the United States forces occupied the Galveston Island area from 1817 until 1821 when he left under threat of destruction by the United States Navy.

