

Summary of Spain Activities As An Ally in the American Revolutionary War

July 3, 2011 Presentation by Judge Ed Butler

Hyatt Hill Country Hotel Independence Day Ceremonies.

At the end of the “Seven Years War” (which we call the French and Indian War) with the exception of Portugal’s holdings in what is now Brazil, Spain and England were the only European powers in the western hemisphere. It should be noted that England immediately established forts on the Mississippi River at Natchez, Baton Rouge and Manchac (Louisiana). England also made numerous attempts to control the Ohio River.

New Spain occupied much of the new world, including all land in what is now the United States, west of the Mississippi and Canada “to the arctic snows”, plus Mexico, Central America (from the northern border of Panama), Hispanola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.

Spain’s reasons for establishing colonies in the new world were originally to exploit the mineral wealth and to spread Christianity. New Spain was at first a great source of mineral wealth, but during the latter half of the 18th century, most of the easily mined minerals were exhausted. Trade with the Orient through its possession in the Philippines replaced the wealth lost by the diminishing value of minerals it could exploit. Treasure galleons sailed from Manila with silks and spices from the Orient to Acapulco, Mexico, where the Oriental treasures were carried by mule train across the mountains to the Gulf of Mexico port of Veracruz. From Veracruz the goods were shipped through the Spanish Main to Spain, sometime through Havana. Silver, gold and other minerals which continued to be mined in New Spain were also transported to Veracruz for shipment.

1763-1773 Havana was viewed as the gateway to the “Spanish Sea”, which King Charles called the Gulf of Mexico.

By 1773 San Antonio was not only the capital, but also the largest town in Texas, with five active missions, a pueblo and a Presidio.¹

By 1774 Gardoqui and Sons was clandestinely providing arms, ammunition and military supplies to the colonists. It was these arms the redcoats were sent to retrieve in 1775, when the “shot heard around the world” was fired on Lexington Green. Like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, on April 19, 1775, from New England to the Carolinas, the colonial Committees of Safety transformed into Minutemen.

¹ *Spain's Texas Patriots in its 1779-1783 War with England During the American Revolution, id at p. 5.*

Before Jul. 4, 1776 Spain and France entered into a secret agreement with the colonists to support them in their rebellion against England. France would not commit to assist the colonists without Spain's backing. Since supplies were being furnished in New Orleans by May, 1776, this agreement must have been around March or April.

Most of the early secret aid from Spain and France was shipped to Dutch or French ports in the West Indies, and from there, by American ships to the colonies. Later that aid was shipped directly to New Orleans and from there up the Mississippi River to the colonists.

Spain sent 9,000 pounds of gun powder to the colonists up the Mississippi River, and an additional 1,000 pounds by ship to Philadelphia. Part of this shipment was used by the colonists in their victory at Saratoga. This victory, together with Spain's assurance of future financing of the colonists, caused the French to openly enter the conflict against England. This continuing "financial support from Spain throughout the war ensured continued French involvement."

Nov. 26, 1776 Governor Bernardo Galvez received orders from his uncle, Josef de Galvez, the Minister of the West Indies, to start shipping gunpowder to the colonists. By year's end he had shipped \$70,000 worth of gunpowder. In that directive, he was also instructed to send secret commissioners to the English colonies. These commissioners were to collect information.

Jun. 11, 1777 A \$5,000,000 loan from Spain enabled the Continental Congress to purchase supplies and arms.

May 8, 1779 Spain declared war on Great Britain.

20 Jun. 1779 Francisco Garcia, an emissary from Bernardo de Galvez, arrived in San Antonio with a letter for Texas Governor Domingo Cabello, requesting and authorizing the first official cattle drive from Texas to Louisiana. Following the August 1778 hurricane in Louisiana the cattle herds were decimated and his troops in Louisiana needed beef. He also needed horses for his cavalry and to pull artillery pieces.

27 Aug. 1779 Gen. Bernardo Galvez learned of the May 8, 1789 Declaration of War against England on August 16th. Because he knew that war was imminent, he had been prepared – at least until the hurricane struck the week before. One Galliot and three gunboats were salvaged from the bottom of the river and restored. These vessels were equipped ten cannons, one of 24 pounder, five 18 pounders, and four 4 pounders, and ammunitions .

He led the 700 Spanish Army regulars at New Orleans up the Mississippi River 105 miles to attack Fort Bute, in **Manchac**, Louisiana in 11 days.

11 Sep. 1779 Galvez marched upon Ft. Richmond at **Baton Rouge**, some 60 miles to the west.

28 Jan 1780 Galvez departed New Orleans bound for Ft. Charlotte at **Mobile** with twelve ships containing 754 men. His men were well fed on Texas beef. Mobile was the British capital of West Florida.

May 26, 1780 The Spanish authorities at Ft. Carlos in **St. Louis** aided George Rogers Clark in the conquest of the territories northwest of the Ohio River and rallied to defeat the combined British and Indian attack on St. Louis in 1780.

May 30, 1780 The records are unclear about the exact number of **Texas longhorn steers** were delivered to Galvez. The best estimate is that between 9,000 – 15,000 head of cattle, plus bulls and horses were provided.

16 Oct. 1780 Galvez led a Spanish fleet of 15 war ships and 59 transport ships from Havana to attack **Pensacola**. Embarked were 164 officers and 3,829 men.

18 Oct. 1780 A **hurricane** hit the Spanish flotilla. Many were lost. The survivors retreated to Havana. Along the way they seized two British frigates. For fear that the British might seek to retake Mobile before he could take Pensacola, Galvez dispatched two warships and 500 soldiers to reinforce Mobile.

“Galvez's flotilla survived a hurricane in harbor before initiating two months of constant artillery and cannon bombardment of the British forts. By April 23, reinforcements had arrived, increasing **Galvez's total force to 7,800** and, on the morning of May 8, 1781, the 18-year British occupation of Pensacola, Florida, ended with a British surrender.

8 May 1781 The British surrender at Pensacola removed the British threat from the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River. Galvez was assisted by **four French frigates**. He gave them 500,000 *pesos* to reprovision their ships. These ships then proceeded to join the French blockade of Yorktown, which led to the British surrender.

Summary

1. Provided large sums of money
2. Provided arms, ammunition, food, supplies
3. Spanish soldiers and Militia fought the British in what is now Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Alabama, Florida.
4. Fought the British around the world, e.g. Bahamas, Central America, Gibraltar
5. Provided safe harbor to and supplied American War Ships e.g. John Paul Jones
6. Removed the British from the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers
7. Removed the British from the Gulf Coast

General Bernardo Galvez' victories were in part due to the cattle and bulls he received from Texas, which fed his army; and the Texas horses used by his cavalry and artillery.