



Fort San Agustín

TWO VIEWS: The Spanish Attack on the French Settlement at Fort Caroline, 1565

French Huguenots (Protestants) built Fort Caroline in 1564 on the southeast Atlantic coast, just north of the site where the Spanish would build St. Augustín a year later in order to protect its Atlantic shipping corridor from the French encroachment. Who would attack the other first? Attack plans were devised simultaneously, but the Spanish succeeded after the French ships en route to attack them were destroyed in a hurricane.



Fort Caroline

SPANISH

Francisco López de Mendoza Grajales

Chaplain of the Expedition

Memoir of the Happy Result and Prosperous Voyage of the Fleet Commanded by the Illustrious Capt.-General Pedro Menéndez de Avilés

EXCERPTS

FRENCH

Jacques le Moyne de Morgues

Artist of the Expedition

A Brief Narration of Those Things which Befell the French in the Province of Florida in America

EXCERPTS

With orders to eradicate the new French colony, Pedro Menéndez establishes Fort San Agustín about forty miles south of Fort Caroline in present-day northeast Florida.

I have previously stated that our brave captain-general set out [from St. Augustine] on the 17th of September with five hundred arquebusiers and pikemen [men armed with muzzle-loading firearms and with spears], under the guidance of two Indian chiefs who showed them the route to the enemy's fort. They marched the whole distance until Tuesday evening, the 18th of September, 1565, when they arrived within a quarter of a league of the enemy's fort, where they remained all night up to their waists in water. When daylight came, Captains Lopez, Patino, and Martin Ochoa had already been to examine the fort, but when they went to attack the fort a greater part of the soldiers were so confused they scarcely knew what they were about.

On Thursday morning, our good captain-general, accompanied by his son-in-law, Don Pedro de Valdes and Captain Patino, went to inspect the fort. He showed so much vivacity that

Although warned of the danger of "houragans" (hurricanes) in September, the French commander, Ribaud, resolves to attack the Spanish by sea before they can stage an attack.

All the troops being now on board, a fair wind for an hour or two was all that was needed to bring us up with the enemy; but just as the anchors were about to be weighed, the wind changed and blew directly against us, exactly from the point where the enemy were, for two whole days and nights. . . [Because Le Moyne is recovering from an injury, he is sent back to the fort.] But just as they had weighed anchor and set sail, there came up all at once so terrible a tempest that the ships had to put out to sea as quickly as possible for their own safety; and the storm continuing, they were driven to the northward some fifty miles from the fort, where they were all wrecked on some rocks and destroyed. All the ships' companies were, however, saved except Capt. La Grange . . . The Spanish ships were also wrecked and destroyed in the same gale.

As the storm continued, the Spaniards, who were informed of the embarkation of the French



A General Map of the Southern British Colonies in America, 1776, details



St. Augustin and, about thirty-five miles north, the St. Johns River, site of Fort Caroline

he did not seem to have suffered by any of the hardships to which he had been exposed, and seeing him march off so brisk, the others took courage, and without exception followed his example.

It appears Diego the enemy did not perceive their approach until the very moment of the attack, as it was very early in the morning and had rained in torrents. The greater part of the soldiers of the fort

forces, suspected, what was not so very far from the truth, that the troops had been cast away and destroyed in it, and fancied that they could easily take our fort. Although the rains continued as constant and heavy as if the world was to be again overwhelmed with a flood, they set out and marched all night towards us. On our part, those few who were able to bear arms were that same night on guard; for, out of about a hundred and fifty persons remaining in the fort, there were scarcely twenty in a serviceable condition since Ribaud, as before mentioned, had carried off with him all the able soldiers except fourteen or fifteen who were sick or mutilated, or wounded in the campaign against [Indian chief] Outina. All the rest were either servants or mechanics who had never even heard a gun fired, or king's commissaries better able to handle a pen than a sword; and, besides, there were some women whose husbands, most of them, had gone on board the ships. . . .

When the day broke, nobody being seen about the fort, M. de la Vigne, who was the officer of the guard, pitying the drenched and exhausted condition of the men, who were worn out with long watching, permitted them to take a little rest; but they had scarcely had time to go to their quarters and lay aside their arms when the Spaniards, guided by a Frenchman named François Jean, who had seduced some of his messmates along with him, attacked the fort at the double quick in three places at once, penetrated the works without resistance and, getting possession of the place of arms [armory], drew up their force there. Then parties searched the soldiers' quarters, killing all whom they found, so that awful outcries and groans arose from those who were being slaughtered.

. . . [O]n coming in from my watch, I laid down my arquebus [firearm], and, all wet through as I was, I threw myself into a hammock which I had slung up after the Brazilian fashion, hoping to get a little sleep. But on hearing the outcries, the noise of weapons, and the sound of blows, I jumped up again, and was going out of the house to see what was the matter, when I met in the very

–Full text of Mendoza Grajales, *Relacion de la Jornada de Pedro Menendez de Aviles en la Florida*, Engl. ed., 1875, in Early Americas Digital Archive at mith2.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=lopez_de_mendoza_staugustine.xml, and from the Library of Congress at hdl.loc.gov/loc/gdc/gcfr.0018_0209.

–Full text of Le Moyne, *Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae . . .*, 1591; Engl. ed., 1875, in University of Florida Digital Collections at www.uflib.ufl.edu/ufdc2/UF00025242_00001.html.

were still in bed. Some arose in their shirts, and others, quite naked, begged for quarters [mercy]; but, in spite of that, more than one hundred and forty were killed. A great Lutheran cosmographer and magician was found among the dead. The rest, numbering about three hundred, scaled the walls, and either took refuge in the forest or on their ships floating in the river, laden with treasures; so that in an hour's time the fort was in our possession, without our having lost a single man, or even had one wounded.

There were six vessels on the river at the time. They took one brig, and an unfinished galley and another vessel, which had been just discharged of a load of rich merchandise, and sunk. These vessels were placed at the entrance to the bar to blockade the harbor, as they expected we would come by sea. Another, laden with wine and merchandise, was near the port. She refused to surrender, and spread her sails, when they fired on her from the fort, and sunk her in a spot where neither the vessel nor cargo will be lost.¹

The taking of this fort gained us many valuable objects, namely, two hundred pikes, a hundred and twenty helmets, a quantity of arquebuses and shields, a quantity of clothing, linen, fine cloths, two hundred tons of flour, a good many barrels of biscuit, two hundred bushels of wheat, three horses, four asses, and two she-asses, hogs, tallow, books, furnace, flour-mill, and many other things of little value. But the greatest advantage of this victory is certainly the triumph which our Lord has granted us, and which will be the means of the holy Gospel being introduced into this country, a thing necessary to prevent the loss of many souls.

On Monday, the 24th September, 1565, at the vesper hour, our captain-general arrived [at Fort San Agustín] with fifty foot-soldiers. He was very tired, as well as those who accompanied him. As soon as I learned that he was coming, I ran to my room, put on a new cassock, the best I possessed, and a surplice; and, taking a crucifix in my hand, I went a certain distance to receive him before he arrived in port; and he, like a gentleman and a Christian, knelt, as well as all those who came with him, and returned a thousand thanks for the great favors he had received from God. My companions and I walked ahead in a procession, singing the *Te Deum laudamus* [Catholic hymn] so that our meeting was one of the greatest joy.

doorway two Spaniards with their swords drawn, who passed on into the house without accosting me, although I brushed against them. When, however, I saw that nothing was [to be seen] except slaughter and that the [armory] itself was held by the Spaniards, I turned back at once and made for one of the embrasures [narrow opening in the fort wall], where I knew I could get out. [There] I found five or six of my fellow soldiers lying dead, among whom were two that I recognized, La Gaule and Jean du Den.

Le Moyne and several other Frenchmen escape to the woods. After four depart for an Indian village, Le Moyne's remaining companion decides to surrender to the Spanish.

. . . In order to see what should happen to him, I got up to a height nearby and watched. As he came down from the high ground, the Spaniards saw him and sent out a party. As they came up to him, he fell on his knees to beg for his life. They, however, in a fury cut him to pieces, and carried off the dismembered fragments of his body on the points of their spears and pikes. I hid myself in the woods where, having gone about a mile, I came upon a Frenchman of Rouen, La Crete by name, a Belgian called Elie des Planques, and M. de Laudonnière's maid-servant, who was wounded in the breast. We made our way towards the open meadows along the seashore . . . [W]e travelled in water more than waistdeep for two days and two nights through swamps and reeds . . . before we could get sight of the two vessels. On the third day, by the blessing of God, and with the help of the sailors, we got safe on board.

Le Moyne and his fellow survivors decide their best option is to return to France. Other shipwrecked survivors, led by the commander Ribaud, decide to return to the fort. On seeing the Spanish flag flying over the fort, they surrender and hope their lives will be spared. Le Moyne recounts their surrender as he heard of it from a sailor who escaped their fate.

. . . [It] was decided to send some messenger to the fort to learn something of the intentions of the Spaniards, and what disposal had been made of the Frenchmen left in the fort. The Spaniards, on seeing them, came in a boat to the other bank of the river and held a parley with our men. The French asked what had become of the men left in the fort. The Spaniards replied that their commander, who was a humane and clement person, had sent them all to France in a large ship

Our general's zeal for Christianity is so great that all his troubles are but repose for his mind. I am sure that no merely human strength could have supported all that he has suffered, but the ardent desire which he has to serve our Lord in destroying the Lutheran heretics, the enemies of our holy Catholic religion, causes him to be less sensible of the ills he endured.

On Friday, the 28th September, and while the captain-general was asleep, resting after all the fatigues he had passed through, some Indians came to the camp, and made us understand, by signs, that on the coast towards the south there was a French vessel which had been wrecked. Immediately our general directed the admiral to arm a boat, take fifty men, and go down the river to the sea, to find out what was the matter. . . [H]e commanded me and the captains who remained at the port to accompany him. He said there should be in all twelve men to go in the boat, and two of them Indians, who would serve as guides.

We set off immediately to descend the river to the sea, in search of the enemy; and to get there, we had to march more than two leagues through plains covered with brush, often up to our knees in water, our brave general always leading the march. When we had reached the sea, we went about three leagues along the coast in search of our comrades. It was about ten o'clock at night when we met them, and there was a mutual rejoicing at having found each other. Not far off, we saw the camp fires of our enemies, and our general ordered two of our soldiers to go and reconnoiter them, concealing themselves in the bushes, and to observe well the ground where they were encamped, so as to know what could be done.

About two o'clock the men returned, saying that the enemy was on the other side of the river, and that we could not get at them. Immediately the general ordered two soldiers and four sailors to return to where we had left the boats, and bring them down the river, so that we might pass over to where the enemy was; then he marched his troops forward to the river, and we arrived before daylight. We concealed ourselves in a hollow between the sand-hills, with the Indians who were with us; and when it became light, we saw a great many of the enemy go down to the river to get shell-fish for food. Soon after, we saw a flag hoisted, as a war-signal. Our general, who was

abundantly supplied, and that they might say to Ribaud that he and his men should be used [treated] equally well. The French returned with this message. Ribaud, on hearing it, believed too hastily this story about his men having been sent back to France, and summoned another council. Here most of the soldiers began at once to cry out, "Let us go, let us go! What is to hinder our going over to them at once? Even if they should put us to death, is it not better to die outright than to endure so many miseries? There is not one of us who has not experienced a hundred deaths while we have been making this journey!" Others, more prudent, said they could never put faith in Spaniards; for, they urged, if there were no other reason than the hatred which they bear to us on account of our religion, they assuredly will not spare us.

Ribaud, however, perceiving that most were of his mind—that it was best to surrender to the Spaniards—decided to send La Caille in to the Spanish commander with orders, if the latter should seem inclined to clemency, to ask in the name of the lieutenant of the king of France for a safe conduct [passage, to France], and to announce that if the Spanish leader would make oath to spare all their lives, they would come in and throw themselves at his feet.

The greater part of the company assented to this, and La Caille was accordingly sent; who, coming to the fort, was taken before the commander and, throwing himself at his feet, delivered his message. . . . [The Spanish commander agrees to spare the Frenchmen's lives if they surrender.]

Ribaud . . . gave orders to proceed, and with all his company came down to the bank of the river near the fort. Upon being seen by the Spanish sentinels, they were taken over in boats. Ribaud himself, and D'Ortigny, Laudonnière's lieutenant, were first led into the fort by themselves. The rest were halted about a bowshot from the fort and were all tied up in fours, back to back, from which, and other indications, they quickly perceived that their lives were lost.

Ribaud asked to see the governor, to remind him of his promise, but he spoke to deaf ears. D'Ortigny, hearing the despairing cries of his men, appealed to the oath which had been taken, but they laughed at him. As Ribaud insisted on his application, a Spanish soldier finally came in and

observing all that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, said to us, "I intend to change these clothes for those of a sailor, and take a Frenchman with me (one of those whom we had brought with us from Spain), and we will go and talk with these Frenchmen. Perhaps they are without supplies, and would be glad to surrender without fighting."

He had scarcely finished speaking, before he put his plan into execution. As soon as he had called to them, one of them swam towards and spoke to him, told him of their having been shipwrecked, and the distress they were in; that they had not eaten bread for eight or ten days; and, what is more, stated that all, or at least the greater part of them, were Lutherans. Immediately the general sent him back to his countrymen, to say they must surrender, and give up their arms, or he would put them all to death. A French gentleman, who was a sergeant, brought back the reply that they would surrender, on condition their lives should be spared. "After having parleyed a long time, our brave captain-general answered, "that he would make no promises; that they must surrender unconditionally, and lay down their arms; because if he spared their lives, he wanted them to be grateful for it; and if they were put to death, that there should be no cause for complaint."

Seeing that there was nothing else left for them to do, the sergeant returned to the camp; and soon after he brought all their arms and flags, and gave them up to the general, and surrendered unconditionally. Finding they were all Lutherans, the captain-general ordered them all to be put to death; but as I was a priest, and had bowels of mercy, I begged him to grant me the favor of sparing those whom we might find to be Christians. He granted it; and I made investigations, and found ten or twelve of the men Roman Catholics, whom we brought back. All the others were executed, because they were Lutherans and enemies of our Holy Catholic faith. All this took place on Saturday (St. Michael's Day), September 29, 1565.

asked in French if he were the commander, "Ribaud." The answer was, "Yes." The man asked again if Ribaud did not expect, when he gave an order to his soldiers, that they would obey, to which he said again, "Yes." — "I propose to obey the orders of my commander also," replied the Spaniard. "I am ordered to kill you," and with that he thrust a dagger into his breast, and he killed D'Ortigny in the same way. When this was done, men were detailed to kill all the rest who had been tied up by knocking them in the head with clubs and axes, which they proceeded to do without delay, calling them meanwhile Lutherans and enemies to God and to the Virgin Mary. In this manner they were all most cruelly murdered in violation of an oath, except a drummer from Dieppe named Dronet, a fifer, and another man from Dieppe, a fiddler named Masselin, who were kept alive to play for dancing; and one sailor escaped . . . [The sailor was discovered near death by the Spaniards, enslaved for a year, and then sent to Cuba and sold as a slave; he was eventually rescued by a French ship.]

This is the story which I heard from the sailor of the destruction of Ribaud and his company, but it becomes us to accuse ourselves and our own sins for blame in the matter, and not the Spaniards, whom the Lord made use of as rods for scourging us according to our deserts. But to God omnipotent alone, and to his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever! Amen.