

June 2021

Triumphant Victory at Pensacola

Bernardo de Galvez

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Recommended Citation

Galvez, Bernardo de, "Triumphant Victory at Pensacola" (2021). *Early Visions Bucket*. 37.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/early_visions_bucket/37

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Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Bernardo de Galvez, Triumphant Victory at Pensacola



— Portrait of Bernardo de Galvez
(Courtesy, State Archives of Florida,
[Florida Memory](#))

Bernardo de Gálvez, Spanish governor of Louisiana and unsung hero of the American Revolution, was born on July 23, 1746, in Macharaviaya, Spain. Following in his father's footsteps, Gálvez chose a military career that quickly found him colonel of the Louisiana Regiment after years helping Spain fight Portugal and Apaches in New Spain.

During the early stages of the American Revolution, Gálvez supplied patriots with arms and supplies, becoming an active ally. Once Juan Carlos III declared war on Great Britain in 1779,

Gálvez, after direct communication with Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, soon became a more enthusiastic participant, helping the patriots by securing the port of New Orleans and defeating the British at Mobile, Alabama and Natchez, Mississippi. One of the most important defeats against the British came after a two-month siege on the capital of West Florida, what is known today as, Pensacola. Great Britain's defeat at the Battle of Pensacola eventually secured Spain's control of East and West Florida in 1783 and ultimately ensured Gálvez's reputation throughout parts of Europe and the Americas.

Gálvez's poem, from a rare copy graciously provided by the Library of Congress, is translated into English for the first time by Jonathan Tharin as "The Triumphant Victory at Pensacola." Gálvez creates a two-part ode glorifying the defeat of the British by his Spanish forces and the subsequent celebration of their victory. Upon returning to Spain, Gálvez was given a royal commendation, named governor of Florida, and eventually given the title of viceroy of New Spain after the death of his father. In honor of his role during the American Revolution, Congress finally fulfilled their promise made 232 years earlier by hanging his portrait in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee room in the Capitol.

Edited by Nicole Darbois

Translation by Jonathan Tharin

Further Reading

Baker, Maury and Margaret Bissler Haas. "Bernardo De Gálvez's Combat Diary for the Battle of Pensacola." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56:2 (1977): 176-99.

Mitchell, Barbara. "America's Spanish Savior: Bernardo De Galvez Marches to Rescue the Colonies." *MHQ* 23:1 (2010): 98-104.

Washington, George. *The Writings of George Washington*. Ed. Jared Sparks. Harper, 1847.

Gálvez, Bernardo De. *Recordado en Washington*. Málaga: Biblioteca Virtual de la Provincia de Málaga, 1971.



Noteworthy, True, Triumphant, and Victorious Report that declares, and gives news of the happy victory, and victorious applause had by the Catholic Armies of our August Monarch the Lord Charles the Third (God Save Him) in the restoration of the Site of Pensacola, Florida, and other different lands that the Spanish Crown goes restoring from the British King, all obtained at the request and care of the Most Excellent Sirs Mr. Josef Solano, General of the Sea, and Mr. Bernardo Galvez, General of the Land as occurred the 8th day of May of 1781, with all else that will be seen curious in this First Part.

The Trumpet sounds of the fame

from the ethereal Regions

of the Catholic Armies

proclaiming laurels, feats,

praises, and victories,

5

and in engravings forever eternal

time inscribes their triumphs

with characters

of false alabaster pearls.

May the manifestations everlasting

10

remain to astound the world,

why England trembles,

because her Ships fall

before the Spanish Flag,

that she surrender her pride,

15

and punish her arrogance;

watching, a severe God

desires that she return to his Church,

desires that she embrace the Faith,

desires that she do penance: 20

but leaving aphorism

I will follow the System.

On the 28th day of April

of the past year of [seventeen]eighty,

out of the Port of Cadiz, 25

a City rich, and opulent,

departed a Convoy of very large number,

an Expedition so regal,

that the Sun formed lattices

of the masts, because it was as if 30

their number was seen between curtains,

between Clouds and Flags;

The Sea almost became,

with so many Vessels in its Arena,

a new world populated 35

with very diverse Cities;

favorable was the west wind

that blowing the route

upon the waters it appeared as if

each Ship an Arrow, 40

each Frigate a Falcon,

each Vessel a Dart,

that being flying sirens,

they were Eagles with Sails;

but luck changed, 45

as the Air its path changed,

the wind all of its course

to the contrary route,

had the effect that time

prolonged our plan: 50

but God evenso sent

this contrary weakness,

in order to test Spain's

invincible fortitude,

that Spain would not lose heart 55

in good or bad fortune.

So it was very constant,

when the task came,

that in his military fatigue

each Spaniard shone, 60

beacons of bravery, courage,

as dictated by experience,

when the time to achieve,

when the time permits

the Royal Order of the mandate, 65

and to Pensacola directs the conserved apparatus

of this maritime force,

with a very favorable wind

to its immediate arrival,

and on the eighth day of May 70

of the year of [seventeen]eighty one

without any precautions,

nor other prolonged vicissitudes,

they set sail for their Bay;

up against the defenses 75

they were prevented in vain,

it was on this occasion so beautiful

that ten Merchant Ships were captured,

and two War Frigates;

and at once the Spaniards 80

loosing their Troops upon the shore,

like iron Lions

that desired this discord.

They corralled the Enemy

in the Hills, and the Jungles, 85

by sea and land they amazed

the chimera of Pensacola,

as the Warships beat back

its greater forces:

At the entrance of their Port, 90

two Castles were conserved

which beat back the first ones,

and to the earth they struck down

their Walls and Cannons

with magnanimous ferocity. 95

Many were the dispossessions,

effects, fruits, riches,

that were acquired by our Spain

in this bloody invasion.

Long live the power that governs, 100

the Leaders that govern it,

long live the Spanish Lion,

long live the *Fleur-de-lis*,

and let die the heresy

in its rebellious ineptitude. 105

Surrender yourself English to the faith,

watch how the adverse luck

is against you, and that the ire

of the Sum of All Omnipotence

is enraged against you.

110

And here discrete Audience

this first part

gives an end to my rough speech

so that another part may complete

what is missing from the first.

115



— Courtesy, Library of Congress

Second Part, relating the Invasion and Blockade of Florida, and other curious warlike news: the festivals, ovations, and celebrations that in Thanksgiving have been offered to the Divine Majesty of the Port of Havana, and again now the Imperial, and crowned Town of Madrid, with all the rest that will be seen by the curious Reader.

After the laurel crowns

and the warlike laurels

that the noble Spaniards

in Pensacola won,

to the Island of Florida

120

bravery has brought them,

as it is her parallel,

and is on her side,

and immediate situation;

the cannonball has opened free passage 125

to their entrance, so their Leaders,

payed homage the spoils

to Castilla, and Leon,

even though they fought well

they offered tribute 130

to our undefeated King Charles.

The rival Prisoners,

according to the written notes of the Charters,

are five thousand, and among them

three gallant Generals, 135

one hundred and twenty Captains,

and other noble Soldiers

of consequence, so that

in this Spain has won

from the English three hundred Leagues, 140

whose spacious lands

in their fruits and harvests,

according to what is stated

gave fourteen Million

in Incomes ever year; 145

it has remained lacking

in the official documentation

for no Englishman consents

to trade, nor treaty.

The General has mandated 150

to settle all that has been gained

in Weaponry, and bringing Troops

from Havana, and its population

of Provential Militias,

and of the rival's spoils 155

that furnish the Island

he has set in place like a Boulder,

stronger than ever

for defense, and protection

of the Gospel, watchtower 160

against its damned opponents.

This train arrives from Havana,

the one that Morro Castle has saluted

with all its Artillery,

acclaiming the song of the King 165

and the Law before all,

the Ships were dressed,

their Flags made up

Gardens, Flowers, and Forests,

so the same Spring 170

in the Vessels has stayed itself,

there the night became day,

so even though the Sun went away

the fireworks

created generous Suns. 175

To the great God of Battles

the *Te Deum laudamus* was sung

and in our Court of Spain

when these new ones arrived,

with the same ceremonies 180

to God performing burnt offerings

giving the proper worship

for such victorious laurels

attending to the Magnificence

of such a Religious Act. 185

Up to this point notifies

my meager muse has slowly

managed to lyricise

her declared news,

also I declare that 190

the great Don Josef Solano lives,

that he alone in this invasion

has stode with Galvez the Gallant;

English, convert to God

your tarnished pride, 195

giving up that which is not yours,

agreeing to treaties,

see that Spain triumphs

having God on her side.

Long live the Faith that adorns her, 200

long live the zeal, the care,

long live her beloved Patron

the Immaculate Star

of the Pure Conception,

and the Apostle Saint James. 205

Long live, long live the Gospel,

long live our King Charles

that his Reign be

defended, protected, and true.

The End.

With permission: In Sevilla, by Josef Padrino, on Genova Street.



— Courtesy, Library of
Congress