

The Florida Mutineers, 1566–67

By Eugene Lyon*

Ordinary soldiers have often affected the outcome of battles and thus changed the course of history. Mutineers have cut their own notorious swath across the years. In Spanish Florida in the year 1566, soldier-mutineers almost cost the Spanish Crown its newly-established colony. Conditions in Florida helped breed the revolts, but their root causes lay deep in the past of the soldiery of Spain.

Three successive phases of development brought the rough and enduring peasant soldiers of Castile to the attention of the world. The last struggles against the Moors in the Kingdom of Granada helped to strengthen and unify the inchoate feudal levies which had featured the earlier reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Artillery helped overcome enemy resistance in town after town while lightly-armed cavalry proved its value in rough terrain. But the basic infantry arm was ill-equipped for the mission Ferdinand's Mediterranean diplomacy set for it in Italy. In 1495, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the "*Gran Capitán*," led the Royal troops to battle in Calabria. The initial successes of the French soldiers and Swiss pikemen who had opposed them led Fernández de Córdoba to make basic and lasting changes. Based upon a national militia, the Spanish infantry and cavalry were thoroughly reorganized. During the next century, they became the most feared and admired soldiers in the world.

Heavier armor and stronger cavalry were provided, and there was greater reliance upon the use of the long pike and arquebus. But the most vital reform was that of formation and leadership. Larger units

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of manpower were formed upon the basic company, commanded by a captain, and the *cornelia*, led by a colonel, was created. Philip II's military reforms set the larger unit, the *tercio*, at 3,000 men, composed of ten companies, two of which would be arquebusmen and the rest pikemen. Each *tercio*, commanded by a *maestre de campo*, featured a sergeant-major. Each company had its ensign, the adjutant and flag-bearer; the companies were subdivided into four squads of approximately twenty-five men each, commanded by a squad-leader, often a corporal. The men often lodged and drew rations and pay in a smaller unit, the *camarada* group.¹

In the wars in Italy and with the French through the mid-16th century, the Spanish soldier became a professional, loyal to his company's flag. Recruitment into the King's service was done among youth eager to advance themselves and to live the free life of a soldier. In continual tension with the form and control imposed upon the Spanish soldier, there co-existed a tradition of individualism and pride. As the Conde-Duque of Olivares observed of the Castilian: "One sees, along with loyalty to their Kings, the brio and liberty with which the sorriest commoner treats any noble, even though he be greatly unequal in power..."² Although such men were capable of the most striking deeds of individual valor, they could also commit acts of infamy. The seeking of prizes for valor could degenerate into a search for booty. As well as noblemen, the professional soldiery included an admixture of the foul scrapings of society. When unpaid or otherwise unhappy, these men could and did rebel. Once when the Great Captain could not pay his troops, they gathered to insult him; "one Biscayan captain bawled, 'Sell your daughter, and you will find the money.'"³

After the discovery voyages, the major Spanish 16th-century colonial conquests were made by adventurers who often assembled their forces in the Indies. But the men in the little armies which captured the city of Mexico and took the empire of the Incas were direct inheritors of the Spanish spirit and military knowledge of that time.⁴ Against Indian warriors who often battled them with ferocity and skill, the Spaniards opposed their own valor while keeping the discipline of formation. In entering new, strange, and unconquered lands, Spanish soldiers clung to what James Deetz has termed a "corporate alliance"—in this case their comrade-group, squad, or company.⁵ They also felt loyalty to their commanders. Yet there were mutinies against both Hernando Cortés and Francisco Pizarro. The great effort of Tristán de Luna to settle West Florida failed after mutiny. Discipline was harsh,

and their captains held the power of life or death. Soldiers were caught between the twin poles of organization and anarchy. Deference to superiors always contained the seeds of mutiny.

The 1565 Spanish attempt to conquer Florida was not at first intended to be a largely military expedition. Although it was known in Spain that Frenchmen had established Port Royal, in present South Carolina, in 1562, it was understood that their colony had failed. When Philip II approved the contract of March 20, 1565 with Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, the newly-created *Adelantado* was required to build two cities, transport one hundred settlers, and bring four hundred armed men to protect the whole. When belated news of René de Laudonnière's Fort Caroline reached Spain, the King agreed to add three hundred soldiers of his own to Menéndez' force. As further news reached Spain of the reinforcement which Jean Ribault was planning for French Florida, Philip approved a larger Royal expedition, which did not sail until the spring of 1566, too late to affect the events which this paper treats.⁶

Under the urgent pressures of time and Royal exigency, the organization of Menéndez' main forces at Cádiz was hasty. Although this was a matter for later controversy, the *Adelantado* evidently enrolled some five hundred soldiers on his own account. Crown soldiers (288) and eleven corporals were enlisted.⁷ Although Menéndez equipped his men with arquebuses as their primary weapon, pikes, swords and crossbows were also brought. Many of Menéndez' men were craftsmen; 117 were soldier-farmers. The King's soldiers were given two months' pay as arquebusiers (at four ducats per month), discounted for the cost of their weapon. A basic difference among the soldiery was that Menéndez furnished his own men rations like the rest, but gave them no pay. His agreements with them promised their passage to Florida, lands for farms and stock-breeding, and a part of any gold, silver, pearls or precious stones which might be found.⁸ There were thus created at the beginning two classes of soldier: the paid and the unpaid. The King's men, however, had received no great sum for those going on a lengthy expedition, when Menéndez' ships finally sailed from Cádiz on June 27, 1565.

The Florida *Adelantado*, en route to his clash with the French in Florida, appointed commissioned and non-commissioned officers to train and control the ill-assorted body of men under his command. Although his forces by no means approximated the number in a *tercio*, the *Adelantado* appointed a *maestre de campo*, his future son-in-law Pedro de Valdés. Valdés had more military experience than many in

Menéndez' entourage of mariners—he had served five years as a soldier in Italy. Ten of the twelve Captains he named were from among his own personal soldiery, while two were from the body of the King's men. Menéndez always believed in making his appointments where possible from among the Asturian or at least north-of-Spain noblemen who were tied by blood, marriage or close friendship to himself. By this stiffening, Menéndez hoped to insure loyalty and discipline and overcome the disadvantages of his heterogeneous soldiery, in which there were many raw troops.⁹

It appeared that the results of Pedro Menéndez' hastily-arranged expedition justified the risks. When, after enduring storm and the loss of some of his ships, the *Adelantado* arrived at Florida, he was able to build his base at St. Augustine, capture Fort Caroline, and erase the forces of Ribault and Laudonnière in rapid order. The Spanish infantry, well led by virtue of Menéndez' clever tactics, had triumphed. Philip II had his Florida colony. But the victory had its price. After Menéndez' major ship had been sent away to avoid the French and then was lost, supplies began to run low in the two garrisons he had built. His royal soldiers had not been paid since they had left Spain four months before; Menéndez did share out with them a clothing allowance, for which he charged the men against their future pay. The last of October, 1565, he left St. Augustine, promising his men to return soon. En route to Havana, Menéndez captured a group of Frenchmen at their makeshift fort on Cape Canaveral and then marched southward along the beaches to Ays. There he encountered friendly Indians and determined to leave a garrison. Captain Juan Vélez commanded at Ays, with two hundred men and fifty French prisoners.¹⁰ At Fort Caroline, which now bore the name of San Mateo, there remained Captain Martín Ochoa de Argañarás and the former Sergeant-Major of the *tercio*, Gonzalo Villaroel, acted as Governor. In St. Augustine, Valdés commanded military forces, while Pedro Menéndez' brother Bartolomé served as civil governor there.¹¹

The *Adelantado* had promised Captain Vélez to return within twenty days at the outside, but left rations for fifteen days only. Once in Cuba, Pedro Menéndez made every effort to send food to his Florida garrisons, but obstacles put in his way by Governor Garcíá Osorio and the link-up with his Asturian ships took time. By the time the *Adelantado* had the first goods on their way, it was too late. The first of a chain of mutinies among the Florida soldiers had already begun.

By November 28, rations at Ays had run out, and the men had to

subsist on fish, shellfish, cocoa-plums and cabbage-palm berries. The soldiers foraged in the woods, and relations with the Indians, who could not long support such a large body of men, deteriorated. Some soldiers had already died when one named Escobar preached open rebellion. The men should, he stated, make their way to Mexico or some other rich land. Chaplain Francisco López de Mendoza Grajales came to the Captain, advising that the rebels planned to kill him and take the small boat Menéndez had left. When Vélez defended himself and the boat, Escobar left with a hundred men, walking the beach or the river shoreline southward until they reached an inlet too wide to swim—probably the present St. Lucie River or inlet.

Guiding his own few loyal men and prisoners southward, Captain Vélez caught up with the mutineers. Careful to stay offshore in the small boat, he shouted to them that he would attempt to bring supplies to them from Havana. But shortly after leaving the inlet for the open sea, Vélez encountered Diego de Amaya, Menéndez' supply ship captain, with a shipload of foodstuffs. It had been thirty-three days since the departure of the *Adelantado*. Before they returned to succor the soldiers, the two discovered another port further south and moved the whole garrison there. Since it was discovered on December 13, the day of St. Lucie, the fort they shortly built was called Santa Lucía.¹²

Evidently it was an early and stormy winter in northern Florida. The Spanish garrisons there remained alert for the possible return of the French, and against the attacks of enemy groupings of the Timucuan Indians. According to Juan de Junco, a faithful member of the Menéndez entourage, serious murmuring and discontent began in the St. Augustine garrison within a month after the *Adelantado* left. When Bartolomé Menéndez, who never possessed the charisma of his brother, ordered soldiers to make themselves houses, they swore that they had no intention to cultivate or populate Florida. "Why," they asked, "build in a bad land?" Only the Devil himself, they thought, could have ever brought them there. Three Captains—Juan de San Vicente, Diego de Alvarado, and Francisco de Mexía—became openly disaffected, together with several of their subordinates and many of their men. The garrison chaplain, Father Rueda, was of the same mind. Rations grew short, though food was still available. Late in December, Pedro Menéndez sent a supply ship. St. Augustine's portion, though, had to be shared out with the San Mateo garrison after the vessel grounded and broke up in the heavy winter surf off the St. John's River bar. Word was sent to Pedro Menéndez in Havana that more than a

hundred men had died from hunger or cold in the two northern forts.¹³

Growing bolder, the malcontents began to meet; they exchanged letters with others in Fort San Mateo. At noon one Sunday, Captains San Vicente and Alvarado challenged Bartolomé Menéndez in the main plaza of the fort and town. Saying that he governed “*no nada*,” nothing, they belittled his authority and said they would trample the flags of his companies. They stamped their feet on the ground. When the governor reprehended them saying, “Gentlemen, what insubordination is this?” they drew their swords and daggers. Cooler-headed bystanders separated the men, but an unmistakable challenge to authority had been made. Another moment of defiance came when the rebels began to prepare a small boat at St. Augustine for their escape. They began to cut wood and make pitch, and came to chief smith Alonso Vélez with an order to make nails for the boat. Vélez told Captain San Vicente that the Governor had ordered him to work on the garrison’s arquebuses. San Vicente said that he, not the Governor, gave the orders, and that the smith would make nails or be hung. At that moment, Bartolomé Menéndez arrived, having heard the conversation, and said “Watch what you say; you have put yourself forward, and you are in the wrong.” San Vicente shook his walking-stick at the Governor, saying “Count yourself lucky! Go to your fort and hole up there.” From that moment, Bartolomé Menéndez withdrew to his quarters, the rebellion gathered its own momentum, and there was little royal authority left.

Meanwhile, events at Fort San Mateo proceeded apace. A key figure in spreading the infection of mutiny was Sergeant Gutierre de Valverde of Captain Mexía’s company. The rebel party in St. Augustine forced *Maestre de Campo* Valdés to give Valverde written permission to go to San Mateo. There he worked openly to subvert the garrison, and to prepare for launching a sizeable galley left by Laudonnière. Spanish soldiers and French prisoners joined in the work. St. Augustine chaplain Reuda had opened correspondence with Captain Francisco de Recalde in San Mateo, and he had come over to the rebels. Governor Villaroel suspected that Valdés’ letter had been signed under duress, but there was little that he could do. Captain Martín Ochoa later said that the watchword of the rebels was that they “would finish the ship, burn the fort, and kill any who oppose us.” Since their superiors in St. Augustine had yielded to the spirit of mutiny, what could they do? Yet both parties—the loyal and the disaffected—lived in a shadow-land. The threat of the death penalty for treason was strong. Remaining officially in the background, the military captains at St. Augustine put forth

Christoval Rodriguez and Sergeant Sebastián de Lezcano as nominal leaders, while the San Mateo rebels chose Gregorio de Robles at “*electo*” of mutineers. Ensign Sargüero, Sergeant Goyán, and a soldier named Miguel de Mora were also among the rebel leaders at San Mateo. But no overt act to overturn formal authority had yet occurred.

If the rebels’ plot could have matured fully, they would have struck when both sailing craft were ready. Then the San Mateo contingent was to ship the garrison aboard the galley, stop at St. Augustine to pick up more soldiers there, and go in company with the smaller vessel to seek their fortunes away from Florida.

In the meantime, Pedro Menéndez, on his mission of exploration and evangelism, had made an expedition to the town and village of Carlos, on Florida’s lower southwest coast. Instead of returning to his peninsular garrisons, he continued to send small supply ships to Florida. Late one afternoon in the first week of March, the *fregata La Concepción* crossed the St. Augustine bar and anchored in the river by the town and fort. Its captain, García Martínez de Cos, came ashore. Together with the corn, meat and wine he brought, Martínez carried a message from the *Adelantado*, promising his return within three weeks with more supplies. This precipitated the crisis. Now the rebels had to act quickly; another ship with supplies had been put into their hands, the better to support their escape.

Captain San Vicente went to San Mateo to warn his fellows there to finish preparing the galley for sailing. Pedro de Valdés sent his own letter to Gonzalo de Villaroel, warning him to be alert for signs of mischief. When Pedro Menéndez’ letter was read at San Mateo, Gutierrez de Valverde gathered all the rebels in the plaza and declared “To the Devil with (future) supplies! We want to leave this land!” Then he and San Vicente, two leading spirits of mutiny, went to St. Augustine to be in on the final act there.

First, the rebels seized the *fregata*. They tied the hands of Martínez de Cos behind him, took him ashore to a little room in the fort, and put him in the stocks. A little after midnight on Friday, March eighth, the mutineers came with torches and matchcord lighted, carrying their swords and arquebuses. Crying “Open up!” they beat upon the door of the fort storeroom with lances and halberds. Pedro de Valdés, ill and discouraged, had locked himself inside. The rebels finally broke through and captured Valdés, Juan de Junco, storekeeper Diego de Hevia, Martín de Argüelles, and Sergeant Pedro de Coronas—and imprisoned them with Martínez, also in the stocks.

Next, the mutineers began to load the *fregata* with arms from the fort. They took the books of the city council away. San Vicente vowed that he would put everyone aboard: “sick, well or crippled, dogs or cats.” They gathered 115 of the soldiers from the garrison and ferried them out to the little ship. Sebastián de Lezcano still commanded a small force ashore, detailed to spike the guns of the fort while they awaited the coming of the vessel from San Mateo.

The number of officials and soldiers who remained loyal to their King and *Adelantado* at San Mateo was also small. As at St. Augustine, they included fellow Asturians of Menéndez retinue or others from the north of Spain. One of these, Rodrigo Montes of Oviedo, was fort storekeeper. In true Spanish fashion, he drew up a remonstrance in written form when a mob of soldiers came to clean out the storehouse. But they took all the food anyway, together with sails, an astrolabe and a marine chart to help them on their future journeys. Then, hastily launching the galley from the ways next the fort, they loaded 128 persons aboard. Only twenty-five, including Governor Villaroel, Captain Ochoa, and Montes, remained at San Mateo. The vessel dropped downriver towards the bar, but the mutineers hesitated and the ship remained anchored there. It was later reported that some of their sails had accidentally burned, and repairs held up their departure into the ocean.

Meanwhile, at St. Augustine, the rebels there wondered: where was the San Mateo galley? While they puzzled over the delay, Pedro de Valdés managed to work free of his bonds and escape from his imprisonment. Now he displayed a burst of energy and courage at variance with his previous reluctance to act. Quickly, he freed the other prisoners—eight men in all—and armed them. They made their way to the riverfront, and boldly seized the small boat in which the remaining mutineers were about to embark. These, including Sebastián de Lezcano and Gutierre de Valverde, then surrendered.

The *maestre de campo* then issued a *bando*, calling upon all still ashore or afloat to return to the lawful service of their King. He was quick to work justice upon the leaders of the rebellion in his hands. As soon as Lezcano had confessed his guilt, Valdés issued an order for his execution. That same night, Lezcano was taken out of the fort jail with a rope around his neck, and led with it to the public gallows. There he was hanged with placards at his head and feet proclaiming his twin crimes of mutiny and treason.

At first light the next day, Pedro de Valdés had a fort gun cleaned,

loaded and trained upon the fregata in the river. But his warning shot fell short, as the mutineers' ship moved closer to the bar, so Valdés put a twelve-hundred pound artillery piece in a boat and went after the rebels himself. Coming near the ship, Valdés requested the mutineers in the name of God and King to put back into the port, and that they not leave the city without supplies, lest those in St. Augustine die from hunger. The rebels' response was to cut their anchor line and sail away.

While his garrisons were being decimated by desertion, Pedro Menéndez was returning to them as he had promised. The first of the unpleasant surprises awaiting him was encountered on March nineteenth, when his lookouts spied the caravel *Asención*, which Menéndez had sent from Yucatan loaded with corn. Pedro Menéndez himself went aboard and immediately saw that he had to restore his authority over a boatload of mutineers from Santa Lucía. Captain Juan Vélez and his ensign, Graviel de Ayala, both wounded, had a harrowing tale to tell.

There had been fresh troubles with the Jeaga Indians, and attacks came continually against Fort Santa Lucía. Supplies grew short, and then ran out. There had been no food for four days when Menéndez' supply caravel came into the harbor on March fourteenth. Then a scenario similar to that played out in St. Augustine took place. The soldiery rebelled against Vélez for a second time, took a small boat, and captured the caravel. For three days they waited, while the shipmaster pleaded with the mutineers to allow him to finish his voyage to St. Augustine. When Vélez and Ayala attempted to back up the master, they were wounded. The mutineers held a meeting, and elected their captain—all properly done before a notary. But the second day out, on their voyage south to freedom, Menéndez had caught up with them. Of the two hundred fifty Spaniards and Frenchmen whom Menéndez had left at Ays in November, only seventy-five had survived. One of the survivors, Diego López, swore that some of the men had turned to cannibalism during their long ordeal, and this ugly report spread as ships and men left Florida for other ports in the next few months.¹⁴ Pedro Menéndez de Avilés turned the caravel around, and, in company with his other ships, headed north to St. Augustine.

At that fort, Pedro de Valdés had begun a formal legal investigation of the mutinies, and was taking testimony when the *Adelantado's* little fleet anchored off the bar on March twentieth. The next day, he entered the city. His own appearance with the troops he brought from Cuba was enough to restore Royal authority in St. Augustine. On the twenty-second, the *Adelantado* summoned a notary. He issued a pro-

clamation, giving all his titles, and reviewing the reasons for the Spanish presence in Florida. He noted that the King had licensed him to come to convert the natives to the Catholic faith, and to expel the Frenchman who had preached what he termed their "evil Lutheran sect."

Menéndez reminded his soldiers how they had been recruited for the journey to Florida: he had come openly with drum, fifer, and trumpets to proclaim the expedition, and they had freely enrolled. He had expended much to send a heavy armada, with 1500 men, of whom only three hundred were paid by the King.¹⁵ He recalled the rapid and effective conquest of the French, and how Ribault's sea attack before the Spanish victory had necessitated sending away many of the supplies. Then Pedro Menéndez noted that all had agreed that he go to eradicate the French fort at Cape Canaveral, proceeding from there to Havana for supplies.

All that he had promised, he said, he had done, but returned to find that robbery, mutiny and treason had occurred. Now he took over and continued Valdés' investigation; the leaders of the mutiny would be punished, but he would give the rest another chance. Menéndez feared the coming of another French invasion fleet to avenge the taking of Fort Caroline and the killing of many Huguenots. If this should happen, he wanted no more secret or open disaffection among his soldiers. He gave the men two choices: stay, or go home at their own expense. They had two days to make up their minds, and put their decision in writing.

Pedro Menéndez learned that the shipload of mutineers from San Mateo had not yet put to sea, but lingered in the St. Johns River. He sent to order them to return to duty, while he prepared a force to go thither and supplies to share with those who would obey. Whether out of fear or hope of amnesty, there were now divided counsels among them. First, one Ortuna, a loyal soldier, had come to St. Augustine and told Menéndez that the rebel galley was at the bar. Then Ensign Sargüero and two soldiers came to advise that the ship had returned to the fort, where many of its people had landed; he added that he and many of them had changed their minds and did not now wish to leave. They asked for pardon for what they had done.

On April first, Pedro Menéndez set forth in a *bergantín*; Captain Antonio Gómez accompanied him in a shallop, together with a small boat loaded with corn. Gómez, in the lead, neared the mouth of the St. Johns and sighted a ship: it was the galley. The mutineers had changed their minds again.

Gómez signalled the mutineers to lay-to and anchor for a parley. They did so, but would not allow him to approach the galley; instead, they sent a small boat with armed men, their matchcords smouldering. Gómez told them that they were ruined men if they persisted in their mutinous course. He relayed Menéndez' message that supplies had come. If they would return to duty, the *Adelantado* would grant them full amnesty. If not, he would hunt them down and hang them all.

The mutineers went to talk with their leader Robles, who soon returned, saying he wished to speak personally with Pedro Menéndez. Gómez accordingly went to land, where Menéndez had put ashore to await a favorable wind. But, by the time the two men joined forces, the rebel galley had fled far out to sea. Even though it was dark, Menéndez ordered Gómez to pursue, showing a stern lantern so that the *Adelantado* could follow. The next day, they would take the ship. Although Gómez spoke to the mutineers once more, they were far from land. Menéndez did not arrive, and a storm arose, scattering the ships. The mutineers had escaped.

After initiating the usual legal investigation at the newly-reconstituted San Mateo garrison, Pedro Menéndez went northward to establish his next colony. He took with him Estéban de las Alas, a long-time associate from Asturias, with a hundred soldiers. After traversing the sea islands, they arrived at Port Royal, probably on Easter day, April 14, 1566, for they named the first fort San Salvador. This, with the associated city of Santa Elena, was established upon present day Parris Island. Alas was named civil and military governor of the region, and given seventy-five men. Menéndez left, promising to send supplies shortly. But, when he returned to St. Augustine, he found the fort had been burned together with many supplies. It was again necessary to supply the lack in Cuba, and yet again a garrison was left on short rations.¹⁶

After some time had elapsed, Estéban de las Alas and company Captain Pedro de Larrandia began to lose control of their men. Twenty soldiers went inland to seek food among the Indians; then Alas issued a decree authorizing them to scatter and find food. A small boat loaded with corn, enough food for ten days, arrived from St. Augustine. As had happened further south in March, this inspired mutiny. On June fourth, forty-three soldiers seized their officials and put them in irons. Twenty-eight loyal men, disarmed and with little food, were left at Santa Elena as the rebels left in the small boat.¹⁷

The first half of 1566 in Spanish Florida had indeed been a trau-

matic time; mutiny and disease had reduced the garrisons of 1565 to about half their original number. This had occurred at a critical time, when the Spaniards feared the threat of another French intervention and relations with the aboriginals were unsettled.

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés had to change his military tactics to adapt to Indian warfare. The Timucuan and other groupings did not often fight in large bodies, but often staged ambushes and minor skirmishes. During 1566, many Spanish soldiers were killed in those engagements by clubs and arrows. The Indians could fire more quickly than Spanish soldiers could load, prime and fire their arquebuses. During attacks in the rain, their matchcord would often go out. Menéndez' solution was to import crossbows for more rapid fire, and adopt the protective padded cloth armor developed in Yucatan: the *escupil*. In the vicinity of St. Augustine during 1566, northward through Cumberland Island toward Santa Elena, the soldiers had to live, as Pedro Menéndez put it, "with their beards over their shoulders" in a constant state of alert.¹⁸ Florida was still no easy assignment, and it still offered few compensations for service. Although some booty had been won at Fort Caroline, or traded for with the Indians along the east coast or at Carlos, it was evident that this was no Mexico nor Peru.

Therefore, troubles did not cease with the coming, at the end of June, of a major reinforcement force. Fifteen hundred short-term soldiers under six captains had been raised in lower Spain and sent by Philip II to help Menéndez defeat the expected next French thrust. Pedro Menéndez sailed off again to explore the St. Johns, to pacify the Indians in the interior, and to settle affairs in the north. The reinforcements enabled the re-garrisoning of Santa Elena and San Mateo, and enabled the rebuilding of the fort at St. Augustine. Many of the newer soldiers, however, proved as untractable as the first had been. Although an old soldier and diligent engineer, Captain Pedro de Redrobán was soon embroiled with Pedro de Valdés. When Valdés assigned a man from his company to perform carpenter work, Redrobán seized the soldier and beat him, breaking his arm, and swearing that he was a Captain, and owed no obedience to any *Maestre de Campo*. Although Redrobán seemed to have no part in the plot, soldiers from his company were soon conspiring to desert Florida. This time one Pedro de Pando, sergeant in Redrobán's Company and Sergeant Joaquín de Redrobán, nephew of the Captain, led the dissension.¹⁹

Joaquín de Redrobán was arrested at San Mateo by Gonzalo de Villaroel, and put on trial there on the charge of inciting mutiny. The

charges claimed that the Sergeant had “enormous and atrocious guilt” for secretly gathering almost a hundred men of like mind to go inland across Florida to Carlos, seek gold there, and make their way to New Spain. The leaders of the plot had gone inland about five leagues to spy out a route when they were caught. The younger Redrobán was condemned to hang, but appealed his case.

This time, Pedro de Valdés acted promptly and decisively. Under torture, the ringleaders confessed, and Valdés had Pando, a corporal and a soldier hung.²⁰ He exiled three others to serve for ten years as galley-slaves. Upon the return of Pedro Menéndez to St. Augustine, suspicion fell upon Captain Redrobán himself; he was arrested on September eleventh.

Now Pedro Menéndez faced a dilemma: he had been charged by Phillip II to lead many of the ships and men which had come in the reinforcement on a naval expedition to seek corsairs and build the defenses of the island Indies. He had to leave his Florida garrisons in strong condition to withstand external attack and avoid further mutinies. Menéndez set up a system of regional governors, prepared viable supply networks, and addressed the problem of soldier discipline.

The *Adelantado* gathered all his Captains and issued a declaration which was proclaimed by voice and drumbeat in all corners of the fort. He first noted that many past attempts to conquer Florida had come to grief because of insubordination and poor discipline. Once lack of respect for authority had begun, he said, then plots among the soldiers could multiply. Thus, Menéndez averred, the plans of both Emperor Charles V and King Philip II had often gone astray, and the Royal monies had been wasted on the effort. In this way, the holy enterprise of building the Evangel among the Indians had come to naught. Now, Menéndez stated, the latest expedition had been put into danger through mutiny. Therefore, he had agreed with his Captains upon certain ordinances to govern the soldiery and the community’s life. These were published forthwith, and made the law of the land.²¹

The Florida ordinances reflected the closely interwoven nature of Royal government, religion and current military tradition. A scold or complainer would be punished by sitting eight days with his head in the stocks and then eight more with his feet in them; he would also forfeit his wine ration. Any man blaspheming against the saints would lose a day’s wine. A soldier was obliged to recite the catechism twice daily; if he did not know it after a year, he would forfeit three months’

pay. The fine would go to the hospital, and for Masses for the Catholics who died or would die in Florida. Each man had to hear Mass every Sunday and feast-day or lose his ration; anyone showing disrespect in church would be rigorously punished.

To discourage the well-known hot temper of the soldiers, it was forbidden to put hand to sword or dagger against another, on pain of six months at hard labor on the Royal fortifications. Assault was also forbidden; the penalty, perpetual galley service. Libel was punishable by three lashes. Desertion by going from a soldier's assigned post to another fort without permission could result in the death penalty.

The ordinances provided that soldiers should lodge and draw their rations in *camarada* groups of ten men. Finally, it confirmed a system of local government and justice, quite similar to that of the Metropole, except that military Captains would serve *ex-officio* on the Council.

What were the immediate results of Florida mutinies of 1566? The mutineers who had left St. Augustine in March made their way to Hispaniola, and Pedro Menéndez could not persuade the authorities there to bring them to trial.²² The rebel galley from San Mateo sailed down the coast, and put in at Tequesta in Biscayne Bay for water. There a rising wind forced them to leave twenty men on shore. The rest of the men sailed to Cuba. Pedro Menéndez later rescued the men at Tequesta, leaving some as a garrison. These he granted amnesty.²³ The Santa Elena mutineers were captured in the port of Matanzas in Cuba, and brought before Governor Osorio, who took their confessions.²⁴

The 1566 mutinies severely endangered and hampered the enterprise of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in Spanish Florida. The innate strength of the Spanish soldier, well-led, seems to have enabled the conquest; his innate weaknesses almost nullified it. Allegiance to the Crown was insufficient to prevent mutiny. The events of first victory set a body of men ashore with insufficient supplies to maintain them through the difficult first period. This sowed the seeds of mutiny, which grew in the absence of the strong personal leadership of the *Adelantado*. Those of especial trust, with close ties to the leader, were too small in number to resist the mutineers' demands.

Menéndez now thought little of the common soldiers who had come on the first expedition to Florida outside of his circle of associates. Compared with the people of good blood who came in his own group, they were "vile," incapable of being led to good behavior. His own

choice would be simple countrymen, instead of these so-called soldiers—men raised with “gazpacho, onion and garlic, instead of those accustomed to inns, banquets, booty and wine.”²⁵

Despite ordinances and organizations, soldiers’ mutiny had not ceased in Spanish Florida; there was more trouble in 1567 over the alleged insubordination of Captain Miguel Enriquez. In 1568, the garrison of San Mateo deserted in the face of the French enemy, Dominique de Gourgues. In 1570, the colony was again threatened by a major refusal of duty by many of its soldiers. But eventually the establishment of the Royal subsidy enabled a more settled military garrison to become the socio-economic base for Spanish Florida. But never to be forgotten was the recollection that ordinary soldiers with weapons in their hands could threaten a conquest from within.²⁶

NOTES

1. A description of the evolution of the Spanish infantry is found in Juan Hippolyte Mariéjol, *The Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella* (Translated and edited by Benjamin Keen; Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1961), 193-208. Philip's reforms were described in his ordinance of 24 December 1560, from Archivo General de Simancas (hereinafter AGS) *Estado* 217.

2. Cited by Américo Castro in "The Spanish Sense of Nobility," in *From Reconquest to Empire: The Iberian Background to Latin-American History* (Editor, H.B. Johnson, Jr.; New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1970), 186-208.

3. Mariéjol, *The Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella*, 208.

4. See, for instance, the similarity between the regulations posted by Hernando Cortés at Texcoco, the ordinances which Pedro Menéndez de Avilés established for the governance of his soldiery, and the discipline suggested by Sancho de Londoño later in the century. Cortés' regulations are described by Bernal Díaz del Castillo in *The Conquest of New Spain* (Translated by J.M. Cohen; New York, Penguin Books, 1981. Thirteenth printing in translation; original manuscript written in 1576), pp. 354-355. Menéndez' Florida ordinances are found in Archivo General de Indias (hereinafter AGI) *Justicia* 99, No. 2, ramo 9. See Sancho de Londoño, *El Discurso sobre la forma de reducir al disciplina militar a meyor y antiguo estado* (Bruselles, Roger Velpius, 1589. Reprint, Madrid, Blass, 1943).

5. See James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, New York; Anchor Books, 1977), 134.

6. Events preceding the Menéndez conquest of Jean Ribault and René de Laudonnière are described in Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida* (Gainesville, University Presses of Florida, 1976).

7. An example of the enlisting of one of the Crown soldiers is found in the personnel file of Antonio de Ornutegui, a native of the town of Zumaya. The excerpt from the muster document, certified by Francisco Duarte, Royal agent of the House of Trade in Cádiz, was done on 17 June 1565. It noted that Ornutegui was the son of Pedro; Fernández de Ornutegui, a native of Zumaya, was twenty-two years old, and had a wound scar on his right temple. Ornutegui was paid two ducats for each of two months and given an arquebus with all its equipment, flask and bullet mold. This is from AGI *Justicia* 905, No. 4. Menéndez claimed that he sent 1,504 men, women and children to Florida, including soldiers, sailors, and twenty-six settlers, in his Cadiz contingent. (Other groups sailed from Avilés, Santander and Gijón in the north of Spain.) It certainly appears that this was incorrect. See Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida*, 97-98, n. 62-65; 114-115, n. 27. Muster of the Royal troops is found in AGI *Justicia* 817, No. 5.

8. The characteristics of the *Adelantado's* soldiers and the lists of supplies he brought from Cádiz are found in "Relación de los navíos, gente, bastimentos, artillería, armas, municiones . . . que lleva el Adelantado Pedro Menéndez de Avilés para la conquista de la Florida," from AGI *Escribanía de Cámara* 1,024-A. Menéndez' agreement with his own private soldiers is dated at Seville, 25 May 1565 and is found in AGI *Justicia* 879, No. 3, piece 1.

9. The naming of Valdés is described in "Relación de los bastimentos, artillería, armas . . . municiones que recibió Juan de Junco," AGI *Contaduría* 941, ramo 1. Menéndez describes the naming of the captains and Valdés in his letter to the King, dated at St. Augustine on 11 September, 1565, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 231. The author has described the interlocking familial network which acted as the governing élite in Spanish Florida in "The Control Structure of Spanish Florida," (Unpublished

paper, St. Augustine Restoration Foundation, Inc., 1980), and in *The Enterprise of Florida*, "Network for Conquest," 71–77. The raw nature of the troops was described by witness Antonio Diez Pereyra in a hearing on the mutinies held on 28 March 1566 in St. Augustine, from AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9. Menéndez himself said in hindsight that the admixture of experienced soldiers was insufficient; this from his letter to the King from St. Augustine dated 20 October 1566, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 115.

10. Menéndez' succor of his Royal soldiers with clothing in the fall of 1565 is described in AGI *Justicia* 817, No. 5. The appointment of Juan Vélez de Medrano as commandant of the Ays garrison (also known as Ais, Aiz or Ayz) is found in his petition for benefits from AGI *Justicia* 894, No. 8, and in the Madrid Notaries' archive, Archivo Histórico de Protocolos (hereinafter AHP) 646, fol. 265–59.

11. Gonzalo de Villaroel's appointment is found in AGI *Contaduría* 941, under the date of 20 September 1565; that of Bartolomé Menéndez was done at St. Augustine on 7 September; from AGI *Indiferente General* 1,219. Gonzalo Solís de Merás, Menéndez' brother-in-law, wrote that the military captains left in St. Augustine were also ex-officio members of the *cabildo*, or city council there, and thus had their place in the civil-military hierarchy. See Gonzalo Solís de Merás, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés*; (translated by Jeannette Thurber Connor; DeLand: Florida State Historical Society, 1922; facsimile edition, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 125.

12. The materials relating to the Florida mutinies of November, 1565 to June, 1566 are largely found at the end of a legal case involving the alleged mutinous acts of a few months later, in "El Fiscal con Capitan Miguel Enriquez . . ." from AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9. It may be assumed that the papers relating to all the mutinies were joined together at some later time. The testimony of Juan Vélez de Medrano (taken on 15 May 1566 at St. Augustine) and other data relating to the mutinies has come from this bundle, except as otherwise noted. See also the "Merits and Services of Diego López," "the petition of the chief artilleryist of the garrison who was present at Santa Lucía, found under the date of 16 December 1569, from the Woodbury Lowery Collection (microfilm in the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida), I:2:414: 265–290.

13. Pedro Menéndez described conditions which had been reported to him from Florida in his letter to the King dated at Havana 30 January 1566, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 168.

14. See "Merits and Services of Diego López," 16 December 1569, *op. cit.*

15. With regard to the number of troops Menéndez brought, see note 7 above.

16. For detailed information regarding the settlement and eventual abandonment of Santa Elena, see Eugene Lyon, "A Brief History of the Colony, 1566–1587," in "History and Archaeology: The Spanish Colony of Santa Elena," unpublished paper, Southern Historical Association, Memphis, Tennessee, November 5, 1982.

17. The Santa Elena mutiny is described in testimony taken before Governor Garcia Osorio of Cuba from July 5–19, 1566, and found in "El Fiscal con Capitan Miguel Enriquez," AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9.

18. Pedro Menéndez describes his adaptation to Indian tactics and the state of vigilance of his men in his letter to the King dated at St. Augustine 20 October 1566, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 115. An illuminating chronicle on the similar use of the crossbow by Spaniards in the first exploration of the Amazon by Orellana in 1541–42 is found in George Millar's *A Crossbowman's Story*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

19. The Redrobán case is from AGI *Justicia* 999, No.2, ramo 6.

20. Valdés' letter about punishment of the August-September mutiny attempts is dated at St. Augustine on 12 September 1566, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 168. Another example of judicial torture in St. Augustine occurred when soldier Jorge Cardoso was

given the torture of cord and water to force a confession of petty larceny. This case is detailed under the date of 18 November 1567 and is found in AGI *Escribanía de Cámara* 154-A, fol. 1382-1383vo.

21. Menéndez' statement and ordinances, probably issued in mid-September, 1566, are found in the Enriquez segment, AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9.

22. See "Probanza de Alonso de Grafeda," Santo Domingo, 15 February 1569, AGI *Santo Domingo* 12.

23. See Pedro Menéndez to Crown, St. Augustine, 20 October 1566, AGI *Santo Domingo* 168.

24. The Santa Elena mutineers' inquiry is in AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9.

25. Pedro Menéndez' comment about the soldiers is found in his letter to the King dated at St. Augustine 20 October 1566, from AGI *Santo Domingo* 115.

26. The Enriquez case is in AGI *Justicia* 999, No. 2, ramo 9. The desertion in 1568 is treated by Alas under the date of 5 May 1568, and is found in AGI *Patronato* 254, No. 2, ramo 1; it is also discussed in the case in AGI *Justicia* 1001, No. 2, ramo 5. The 1570 mutinies were described by Juan de Junco at folios 1494-1495vo, from AGI *Escribanía de Cámara* 154-A.