

An Example of Successful Leadership at the Operational Level of Warfare: Bernardo de Gálvez during the American War of Independence

A Monograph

by

MAJ Carlos Vázquez Martín
Spanish Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
US Army Command and General Staff College
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14. ABSTRACT Soon after the declaration of Independence, the Second Continental Congress requested support from Spain. The King of Spain committed to providing secret aid to the Continental Army while preparing for the likely conflict against the British. It was in this context when Bernardo de Gálvez arrived in Louisiana in late 1776. Appointed colonel of the infantry regiment in New Orleans, and later governor of the province and military commander of the region, Gálvez channeled most of Spain's covert financial and logistical support for the American rebels and developed a comprehensive approach involving all the instruments of national power to shape the operational environment and prepare for the probable conflict against the British. As soon as Spain declared war on Great Britain, Gálvez started a successful offensive campaign. Before the British forces could learn about the declaration of war, Gálvez had captured the British forts on the Mississippi River. After that, Gálvez raised a joint and multinational force that, in May 1781, conquered the defenses of Mobile and Pensacola. This monograph examines Gálvez's relationship with the political authorities, his employment of the instruments of national power to shape the operational environment, and his ability to get support from the local population. It also analyzes his military campaign, the challenges he faced related to the command of joint and multinational forces, and his leader attributes and competencies on the battlefield. In doing so, this essay reminds readers of an often forgotten and crucial part of US history: Spain's contribution to US independence.					
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Name of Candidate: MAJ Carlos Vázquez Martín

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Approved by:

//signed/17 FEB 21/RAH//, Monograph Director
Ricardo A. Herrera, PhD

//signed/17 FEB 21/JP//, Seminar Leader
Jürgen Prandtner, COL

//signed/18 FEB 21/BAP//, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Brian A. Payne, COL

Accepted this 20th day of May 2021 by:

//signed/24 FEB 21/DFS//, Assistant Dean of Academics for Degree Programs
and Research, CGSC
Dale F. Spurlin, PhD

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Abstract

An Example of Successful Leadership at the Operational Level of Warfare: Bernardo de Gálvez during the American War of Independence, by MAJ Carlos Vázquez Martín, 39 pages.

Soon after the Declaration of Independence, the Second Continental Congress requested financial, diplomatic, and military support from Spain. Acknowledging that his country was ill-prepared to fight the British, the King of Spain refused to declare war on Great Britain but committed to providing covert assistance to the Continental Army. The secret aid bought Spain time for the likely future conflict against the British while it also helped sustain the American cause.

It was in this context when Bernardo de Gálvez arrived in Louisiana in late 1776. Gálvez was initially appointed colonel of the infantry regiment in New Orleans, and later governor of the province and military commander of the region. To prepare Louisiana for the probable conflict against the British and shape the operational environment, Gálvez developed a comprehensive approach involving all the instruments of national power.

Instead of using the military to impose his will on the population, Gálvez applied an ingenious use of diplomacy that captivated Louisiana's inhabitants shortly after his arrival. He used various methods to gather intelligence in peacetime that he would exploit later, once the conflict started. Regarding the economy, Gálvez successfully channeled most of Spain's covert financial and logistical support to the American rebels. As for the military, the forces he inherited were not enough to defend Louisiana, let alone begin an offensive. Consequently, he developed a transformation model involving the army, navy, and militias that completely changed his capabilities.

In April 1779, Spain and France signed a bilateral agreement to support each other fighting Britain: the Treaty of Aranjuez. Shortly thereafter, Spain declared war on Great Britain. The Treaty of Aranjuez detailed each of Spain's objectives in the war, including three direct orders for Bernardo de Gálvez: conquer the river and fort of Mobile, take Pensacola, and recover West and East Florida.

As soon as Spain declared war, Gálvez started a successful offensive campaign. Before the British forces on the Mississippi River's left bank could learn about the declaration of war, Gálvez had captured the British forts of Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez, thus securing his rear area. After that, Gálvez raised a joint and multinational force that, in May 1781, conquered the defenses of Mobile and Pensacola. The last of the objectives, Florida, returned to Spain during the peace negotiations.

This monograph examines Gálvez's relationship with the political authorities, his employment of the instruments of national power to shape the operational environment, and his ability to get support from the local population. It also analyzes his military campaign, the challenges he faced related to the command of joint and multinational forces, and his leader attributes and competencies on the battlefield. In doing so, this essay reminds readers of an often forgotten and crucial part of US history: Spain's contribution to US independence.

Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Historical Background.....	5
Military Career Before Louisiana.....	8
Governor of Louisiana.....	12
On War	20
Conclusions	34
Bibliography	38

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Figures

Figure 1. Territorial Modifications in North America After the Treaty of Paris.....	6
Figure 2. The Gulf Coast during the American Revolution.. ..	22
Figure 3. Pensacola Bay in 1781.. ..	30

Introduction

The Spaniard that has not been to America does not know what Spain is.

—Federico García Lorca

The influence and legacy of Spain in the Americas is unparalleled. A Spanish expedition reached the islands of the Caribbean Sea on 12 October 1492, starting one of the most important moments in history. For centuries, Spain extended its control of the American continents, which at its summit extended from the southernmost point of Argentina to Alaska. The typical mental image of a Spanish conquistador places him mostly in Mexico or in the jungles of Peru. Nevertheless, the Spaniards were also the first Europeans to see the Grand Canyon, the first to cross the Mississippi River, the first to populate the Great Plains, and the first to land in Alaska.¹ In the eighteenth century, Spain governed a considerable part of the territory of the current United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, and claimed even more. Moreover, Spain played a significant role in the success of the American Revolutionary War.

In 1776, soon after the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress sent several American politicians to Europe to obtain financial, diplomatic, and military support. One delegation met the Count of Aranda, the Spanish ambassador to the court of Louis XVI, in France. Aranda realized that the conflict between Great Britain and its colonies could give Spain a unique chance to defeat its long-standing enemy, and recommended that the court in Madrid should officially recognize the American delegation and declare war on Britain.²

Nevertheless, before becoming embroiled in a conflict with Great Britain, Spain had to assess the damage that the British fleet might cause to its possessions in the Americas and in disrupting the flow of gold and silver on which the Crown's finances largely depended. Spain was

¹ Guillermo Fesser, *¿Estados Unidos de... España?* (Madrid: Revista Ejército, 2016), 122.

² José Manuel Guerrero Acosta, *Recovered Memories: Spain, New Orleans, and the Support for the American Revolution* (Bilbao: Iberdrola, 2018), 55-56.

also initially reluctant to overtly support the thirteen colonies, fearing that the example of the rebels could lead to a similar course of action in its own American colonies.

In order to avoid wholly disappointing the American diplomats, the King opted for the following solution: Spain would not declare war on Britain yet, nor would it sign an agreement with the American representatives, but it would provide clandestine assistance to the Continental Army. That would win the Crown time to secure the defenses in the Americas and prepare the armed forces for the conflict. Hence, Spain commenced sending secret shipments of weapons, ammunition, supplies, and financial aid to the American colonies that had declared independence.³ The logistical and financial support lasted until the end of the war. The total Spanish economic aid to the American revolutionaries was close to two billion dollars in today's US dollars.⁴

Spain's contribution to the success of the Revolutionary War was not limited to financial and logistical support. The American victories in the Battles of Saratoga (September and October 1777) proved the rebels' capacity to wage war to gain independence, thus encouraging Spain's official participation in the conflict. The signature of the Treaties of Amity and Commerce between the United States and France in 1778 marked the final countdown for Spain's full involvement in the war. On 12 April 1779, France and Spain signed the Treaty of Aranjuez, which sealed its alliance with France, but not the United States, against Britain. On 21 June 1779, Spain officially declared war on Great Britain.⁵

The political considerations concerning the Spanish American colonies prevented Spain from declaring a formal alliance with the United States. Still, its entry into the war tipped the balance against Britain. France and Spain's numerical superiority and the opening of new fronts

³ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 57-58.

⁴ Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia, *Bernardo de Gálvez: Spanish Hero of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 140.

⁵ Gabriel Paquette and Gonzalo M. Quintero Saravia, "Spain and the American Revolution," in *Spain and the American Revolution: New Approaches and Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2020), 14.

for Great Britain in North America, Europe, Central America, the West Indies, India, and Africa, profoundly changed the general strategy of the war. In Europe, Spain conducted a long siege against Gibraltar, conquered the island of Menorca, and laid plans with France for an invasion of the British Isles. In the Caribbean, Spain fought the British in Guatemala and New Providence (today's Bahamas).⁶ These actions forced Britain to adopt a more global view of the war, which prevented the concentration of its forces against the American rebels.⁷

Still, Spain's most significant contribution to the success of the Revolutionary War took place on North American soil. Before Spain declared war, when acting as the governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez was responsible for channeling most of the covert aid provided by the Spanish government to the American rebels. Shortly after Spain's war declaration, Gálvez started a successful offensive campaign, achieving all his operational objectives.

In less than a month, with few troops and little artillery, Bernardo de Gálvez had boldly occupied several British settlements on the Mississippi River. Later on, he captured Mobile, which was, together with Pensacola, the key to the Gulf of Mexico and West Florida. Some months later, in the Battle of Pensacola, he inflicted the most severe defeat on the British, which led to his promotion to lieutenant general.⁸

Gálvez's victories made the British defeat more definitive and helped the United States gain maximum concessions, especially in the West, during the subsequent peace treaty negotiations in Paris. His activities diverted British men, supplies, and attention away from the Atlantic seaboard colonies, thus aiding the rebel cause from a strategic standpoint.⁹

⁶ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 4.

⁷ Paquette and Quintero, *Spain and the American Revolution*, 15.

⁸ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 238.

⁹ Thomas E. Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 11.

President George Washington believed the United States owed a significant debt of gratitude to the King of Spain, both for his military and economic support. The courage and military strategy of Bernardo de Gálvez moved him, as he stated in his complimentary letters to His Catholic Majesty. During Washington's presidential inauguration parade in 1789, the Spanish Ambassador, Diego Gardoqui, had the honor to stand at President Washington's right in such a historic moment for the young nation. The barge that displayed the flags of all nations and fired the salute of thirteen guns during the parade was General Gálvez's ship-of-war *Galveston*.¹⁰

Americans celebrated Gálvez by naming sites in his honor. Several geographic locations of the United States, including Galveston Bay, Galveston County, Galvez, and St. Bernard Parish, located in Texas and Louisiana, are named after Bernardo de Gálvez.¹¹ In 2014, President Barack Obama conferred honorary citizenship on General Gálvez, which is the highest honor the US government can bestow upon a foreign citizen, and has only been granted eight times. According to the resolution, Bernardo de Gálvez was "a hero of the Revolutionary War who risked his life for the freedom of the United States people."¹²

Bernardo de Gálvez's leadership and operations provide useful insights for the operational level of warfare because of his management of all the instruments of national power and his capacity to command what today doctrine terms Joint and Multinational Operations. Additionally, his ability to overcome political constraints and his leadership skills in battle also provide significant lessons for current planners and leaders.

¹⁰ Fesser, *¿Estados Unidos?*, 122.

¹¹ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 2.

¹² H.J.Res.105 *Joint Resolution, Conferring Honorary Citizenship of the United States on Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, Viscount of Galveston and Count of Gálvez*, approved 16 December 2014, accessed 25 August 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-joint-resolution/105/text>.

Historical Background

The origin of Spain's involvement in the American Revolution dates back to the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). The territorial changes derived from the Treaty of Paris, which put the conflict to an end, left the Spanish government with a strong desire for revenge and the will to recover Florida at the earliest possible moment despite the acquisition of the province of Louisiana for the Crown.

Better known in the United States as the French and Indian War, the Seven Years' War was one of the great conflicts of the early-modern era. Considered by many historians as a world war, the Seven Years' War was a global conflict arising from territorial disputes between Prussia and Austria in Europe, as well as colonial rivalries between Britain and France, particularly concerning the control of the Ohio River Valley in North America. France won a number of early victories in North America, but Britain's naval superiority eliminated France's ability to supply its forces. At a last attempt to avoid a complete loss, France turned to Spain for help.¹³

Carlos III had recently been crowned King of Spain, inheriting the problem of British harassment of Spain's merchant marine and of its overseas ports. In 1761, he agreed to the Third Family Compact, an alliance between the Bourbon kings of Spain and France against the British. By supporting the French in the Seven Years' War, the King intended to recover Gibraltar and prevent Britain from inflicting a crushing defeat on France that would alter the balance of power in Europe and the colonial world.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Spain's intervention failed to influence the outcome of the war. Spain was ill prepared, so it shared France's defeats. Spain lost Havana in the West Indies and Manila in the

¹³ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States*, 6.

¹⁴ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 54.

East Indies.¹⁵ In Europe, Spain attacked Britain's ally Portugal with a large army. British troops supported the Portuguese, and the Spanish were heavily defeated. The losses showed how vulnerable the empire had become and how poorly prepared were its army and navy.¹⁶

In 1763, the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War. Great Britain gained all of Canada and the Mississippi River's East bank except New Orleans from France. Havana and Manila returned to Spain under the condition that Spain cede Florida to the British, which they divided into West and East Florida. As compensation for the loss of Florida, in the Treaty of Fontainebleau, the French ceded Louisiana to the Spaniards, which at that time was an enormous extension of territory west of the Mississippi River. Figure 1 shows the distribution of territory in North America before the Treaty of Paris and the territorial changes it implied.

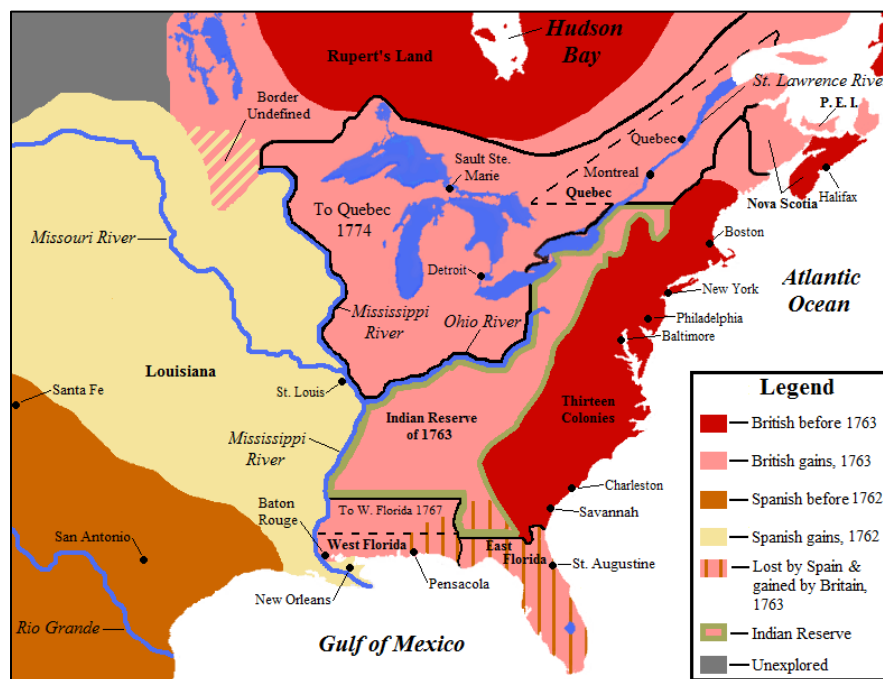


Figure 1. Territorial Modifications in North America After the Treaty of Paris. The Treaty of Paris, accessed on 29 August 2020, <https://www.slideserve.com/cameron-mays/treaty-of-paris-1763-ends-the-french-and-indian-war-france-relinquishes-canada-to-england>.

¹⁵ The West Indies was the term used in Spain to refer to the islands within the Caribbean Sea, including current Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The East Indies included a myriad of islands in east Asia, including the Philippines, the Spratly Islands, Taiwan, Marianas, Carolinas, and Guam.

¹⁶ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States*, 6.

The size of Louisiana was huge; four times larger than the territory of continental Spain. The capital, New Orleans, was the only remaining Spanish settlement east of the Mississippi, with over 3,000 inhabitants. The French and Spanish agreements stipulated that Spain must maintain the French system in the territory. Despite that, a spirit of resistance by the local French population was unavoidable, similar to that which the British in their thirteen mainland colonies were starting to feel. Under these circumstances, the Spanish government asked itself if it was worth conserving this territory that was not only poorly populated and unproductive, but also burdensome on the treasury. Nevertheless, Louisiana's strategic value was significant. The region provided an extensive buffer zone capable of cushioning any British attack directed from the Mississippi Valley toward the Viceroyalty of New Spain, which was the wealthiest Spanish colony of the time.¹⁷

Despite gaining Louisiana for the Crown, the Seven Years' War left Spain with a strong desire for revenge and the will to recover Florida to make the Gulf of Mexico a Spanish lake again. Before the war, French colonies on both banks of the Mississippi River had hindered the British colonies' expansion to the west. Now, Spain and Great Britain would share a long border along the Mississippi. East and West Florida constituted a looming threat pointed at Cuba and the Caribbean. An inevitable conflict loomed, a conflict in which Bernardo de Gálvez was to play a leading role.¹⁸

¹⁷ Germán Segura García, "El Trascendental Papel de España en la Independencia de los Estados Unidos," In *George Washington y España: El Legado del Ejército Español en los Estados Unidos de América* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, Secretaría General Técnica, 2019), 119.

¹⁸ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 20.

Military Career Before Louisiana

Captain Bernardo de Gálvez has succeeded in destroying several Apache settlements, dispersing them far away from our borders, overcoming the roughness of such a big country, the speed of an errant nation, and the frequent calamities brought about by long days suffering hunger and thirst.

—Account of the Military Expedition of Sonora and Sinaloa

Before his designation as governor of Louisiana in 1777 at the age of thirty-one, Bernardo de Gálvez had acquired a broad military experience for such a young officer. He participated in the invasion of Portugal as a junior lieutenant. He deployed to Spanish North America's border territories, where he had his baptism of fire and survived his first wound. He expanded his professional military education in the Royal Military Academy of Ávila, in which only a select cohort of army officers received an education. Finally, he first tasted defeat during the Spanish expedition against Algiers in the Mediterranean Sea.

Bernardo de Gálvez was born in 1746 in Macharaviaya, a small village near Málaga in southern Spain. He reached sixteen, the minimum age for joining the army, the same year in which Spain entered the Seven Years' War. He signed up as a cadet in the Royal Cantabria Regiment and, in June 1762, received his commission as lieutenant. Lieutenant Gálvez took part in the Franco-Spanish invasion of Portugal. His regiment moved back and forth across the Spanish-Portuguese border without taking part in significant engagements by the time the belligerents signed an armistice.¹⁹

Three years later, in 1765, Bernardo de Gálvez arrived in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (present day southwestern United States and Mexico), in an expedition with the America Regiment, created to serve as a model for the creation of military units in New Spain. In 1767, Gálvez transferred to the northern province of Nueva Vizcaya, where, now as a captain, received command of a dragoon company. As a company commander, Gálvez defended the border

¹⁹ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 13-16.

territories of the province, which were under constant harassment by various tribes of the Apaches.²⁰

In August 1770, Gálvez received a new assignment: military commander of the frontiers of Nueva Vizcaya and Sonora. Following his characteristic offensive spirit, he immediately launched a military campaign against the Apaches. During more than a year, Captain Gálvez and his troops performed several sorties in search of the Indians that were ravaging the valleys of the Grande and Pecos Rivers. In one of the sorties, the Apaches attacked his outpost, wounding Gálvez with an arrow to his left arm and two spears to his chest.

Despite his wounds, two months later Gálvez led a new sortie to punish the Apache attacks. During this expedition he fell from his horse, striking his chest. The consequences of the fall would bother him until his death.²¹ As a consequence of his wounds, Gálvez left his command and returned to Spain in 1772. He was then twenty-six years old and had earned great prestige by his own merit.

Gálvez's years in New Spain provided him with a sound operational background. During his time in North America, he composed a detailed document relating his experiences and lessons learned, titled, "Account and reflections on the current war against the Apache Indians in the provinces of New Spain."²² The document helps to understand his open and comprehensive mindset to solve conflicts. In it, Gálvez intended to find better ways to conduct military operations against the Indians, but Gálvez's approach went beyond simple military considerations. He acknowledged that to defeat the Apache, it was necessary to understand their culture, customs, moral codes, provide them with economic incentives, and negotiate with their key leaders.

²⁰ Mariano Alonso Baquer, "Defensa de las Provincias Internas de Nueva España en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVIII," special issue, *Revista de Historia Militar* no. 1 (2016): 21.

²¹ Ibid., 22.

²² Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 57.

In 1774, Gálvez entered the military academy of Ávila, recently created to further the education of military leaders. Despite its name, it was closer to a staff college than a military academy. According to its first director, the academy's purpose was to educate officers of outstanding capability, good conduct, and brilliant aptitude in the art of war. The idea was not to train all officers of the army but only whose rapid training was most important to the service because of their talent, conduct, and prospects of being promoted to regimental commanders and generals.²³

The military academy of Ávila was part of the reforms carried out by Carlos III under the influence of the Enlightenment ideals, which included developments in the university, urbanism, royal treasury, industry, agriculture, trade, and of course, the military.²⁴ The necessity of reforming the army and the navy took especial relevance after the disaster of the Seven Years' War. It included several organizational reforms, a modernization of the defenses and garrisons of the overseas provinces, and a focus on military education. Thus, Bernardo de Gálvez learned the principles of rational modern warfare in the new Royal Military Academy of Ávila, which favored a model of fighting based on Frederick II of Prussia's scientific approach.

In April 1775, Gálvez volunteered to participate in the Spanish military expedition against Algiers. It would be the first time that Gálvez would taste defeat. It was a massive effort by Spain to finish off the main hub of piracy in the western Mediterranean. Captain Gálvez received command of a light infantry company of the Seville Regiment. The company's main tasks were reconnaissance, skirmishes, infiltration, finding the enemy's weakest points, and providing information to employ artillery with precision.²⁵ His military background in North

²³ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 63.

²⁴ Anthony McFarlane, "The American Revolution and Spanish America," in *Spain and the American Revolution: New Approaches and Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2020), 47.

²⁵ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 71.

America and his combat experience against the Apaches made him well suited for the command of a unit with such missions.

The entire Spanish plan relied on surprise. However, the enemy's spies had sent information about the landing's location and had established a deliberate defense accordingly. When the fleet arrived in the Bay of Algiers, the general commanding the operation saw the Algerian troops deployed and waiting. Still, instead of changing or adapting the plan, he simply proceeded with it, which resulted in a massive failure.²⁶

The number of Spanish casualties ranged between 25 and 30 percent. Gálvez's company took part first in the landing and later in the guard operation to protect the re-embarkation and withdrawal. During the action, the enemy wounded Gálvez in the leg, but he refused to abandon the battlefield and receive medical assistance until his company was safe. After returning from Algiers, Gálvez spent some months recovering from his wounds. His actions in combat did not go unnoticed. Due to his performance in the battlefield, at the age of twenty-nine, Bernardo de Gálvez received a promotion to lieutenant colonel. The average age for a lieutenant colonel at that time was fifty.²⁷

By the moment Gálvez arrived in Louisiana in 1776, he had a vast military background despite his young age. His years fighting the Apaches in New Spain provided him with a knowledge of the American geography and the indigenous population's peculiarities. Both in New Spain and Algiers, he took part in combat actions and was wounded several times. Gálvez suffered defeat in Algiers and learned that war is never an easy endeavor. His military education and operational background helped shape his character for the challenges he would have to face when acting as Louisiana's governor and during his military campaign against the British.

²⁶ Jose Manuel Guerrero Acosta, "Recordando a Bernardo de Gálvez y la Ayuda de España a la Revolución de los Estados Unidos," special issue, *Revista de Historia Militar* no. 1 (2016): 11.

²⁷ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 70-76.

Governor of Louisiana

It is time to fill the vacancy, and it goes to Lieutenant Colonel Bernardo de Gálvez, who has proven spirit and good conduct, who speaks the French language well, and who has knowledge of the character of that nation so that his manners and command will be agreeable to that colony.

—Alejandro O'Reilly

Bernardo de Gálvez arrived in Louisiana in 1776, appointed colonel of the Louisiana Infantry Regiment in New Orleans. Several months later, on 1 January 1777, the King designated him governor of the province. Gálvez inherited multiple challenges related to the idiosyncrasies of the recently acquired region of Louisiana and Spain's implication in the conflict between Great Britain and the American revolutionaries.

Concerning the peculiarities of Louisiana, the domain was officially a Spanish territory, but soon after taking possession of it in 1766, the Spaniards confronted a spirit of resistance of the mostly ethnic French population. The relationship with the American Indians was also challenging. Gálvez's predecessors had opted for a hardline approach to deal with both the French and the Indians. However, Gálvez decided to earn the locals' trust instead of imposing his will, in line with his lessons learned as a captain during his years in New Spain.

As for the American rebellion, the second half of 1776 witnessed a succession of tactical retreats by the American forces. Precisely when Bernardo de Gálvez was setting foot in Louisiana, General George Washington, aware of the United States' critical situation, launched a surprise attack crossing the partially frozen Delaware River against Trenton on Christmas Day.²⁸ The Spanish covert logistical and financial support were crucial to the continuation of the patriots' fight. Gálvez's prolongation of the aid was increasingly difficult since the British suspected Spain and officially called for the help's cease.

²⁸ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 79-80.

Therefore, the tasks ahead of Bernardo de Gálvez as governor of Louisiana were multiple. Nevertheless, as important as they all were, both he and the royal authorities in Madrid had an overarching priority: prepare Louisiana for the more than likely future conflict of Spain against Great Britain.²⁹ To face all the challenges described before and shape the operational environment for an eventual war with Britain, Gálvez developed a holistic approach, covering the elements of what today are termed the instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic.³⁰

Diplomatic

Gálvez intended to obtain the loyalty of Louisiana's rebellious populations to transform the province into a bastion of the Spanish Empire in North America. Focused on preparing for a conflict with Great Britain, he worried about consolidating and securing his rear area before starting an offensive against the British when Spain eventually decided to declare war. Gálvez had to identify each social group's different interests and decide how to influence them to accommodate its demands.

The most relevant group of population was the French-origin creole elite. The creoles amounted less than half the total number of inhabitants in the region but were extremely relevant from the social and economic perspective. The French elite also posed the most severe challenge to the stability of the province. Nine years before Gálvez's arrival, restrictions placed upon trade and French exports led some French colonists to revolt, claiming the independence of the so-called Republic of Louisiana and expelling the Spanish authorities.³¹ Spain sent Governor Alejandro O'Reilly to control the rebellion and restore order, which he did by establishing hard measures that increased the colonists' resentment against Spain.

²⁹ Quintero, Bernardo de Gálvez, 82.

³⁰ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), II-5.

³¹ Segura, *El Trascendental Papel de España*, 119.

When Gálvez took command, instead of using a military-only approach, he offered trade concessions to the powerful creole merchants in New Orleans and the wealthy planters of the province. Most of the measures relied on an economic model that allowed the economic and social elite to survive and even flourish. Sometimes he granted them special trade concessions. Other times he simply under-zealously enforced specific laws, rules, and regulations that came from across the Atlantic and, if strictly enforced, could harm the privileged class.³² Gálvez soon made himself popular within Louisiana's French people due to his diplomatic approach, character as a leader, personal qualities, and magnificent education, which included a perfect knowledge of the French language.

As for the Indians, Gálvez's intentions were twofold: incorporate them into the social structure of Spanish North America to successfully control them, and employ them in the future conflict with the British. He was fully aware that, with the limited forces in Louisiana, it would be impossible to resist an enemy attack without the Indians' support, let alone start an offensive.

Building on his experience as a captain in New Spain, he instituted a new Spanish policy toward indigenous groups. Instead of applying military force alone, he demanded that his countrymen come to understand the Indian culture. He designed a new policy that aimed to attract indigenous groups by gift exchanges and commerce. He was inflexible regarding the practice of Indian slavery. According to the Spanish laws, the Indians were free, and any abuses inflicted on their freedom were harshly punished. He also worried about ensuring peace among all the native groups living in the area, carrying out several expeditions to mediate between them.³³

Step by step, Gálvez's efforts concerning the Indians produced results. In September 1777, the Biloxi asked for his blessing in declaring war on the Atakapa, demonstrating that they recognized the Spanish governor of Louisiana as relevant enough to settle their disputes with

³² Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 111-112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

other groups. In December 1777, a Choctaw delegation asked Gálvez for Spanish flags to raise in their villages as proof of their loyalty.³⁴

Because of his charismatic personality and his use of diplomacy, Bernardo de Gálvez captivated Louisiana's inhabitants soon after his arrival. When Spain declared war against Britain in June 1779, Gálvez not only could disregard all concerns about his rear areas but also could count on the strong support of the local population. Hundreds of men volunteered to fight against the British.³⁵

Informational

Bernardo de Gálvez was fully aware of the critical importance of information. From the day he became governor, he used various methods to shape the operational environment and gather intelligence, including reconnaissance, interrogation of prisoners and deserters, propaganda, and of course, spies.

Gálvez took advantage of New Orleans's geographical proximity to British West Florida and the rebelling colonies to collect information. He quickly set up a system to gather information that would complement the intelligence received from the American patriots, who were more than willing to cooperate in exchange for Spain's aid. Taking advantage of his predecessor's connections, Gálvez got details of the colonial conflict, British strengths, and weaknesses in West Florida, as well as the British plans for a potential attack on Louisiana.³⁶ Gálvez's informants also reported that spies were rampant in New Orleans. Consequently, he developed a counterintelligence program to detect enemy agents operating in the capital.

Gálvez's major threat was his main objective: Pensacola. From there, the British could launch an attack on New Orleans that would lead Louisiana to collapse and threaten Havana.

³⁴ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 105-106.

³⁵ Ibid., 6.

³⁶ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States*, 90.

Following his offensive mindset, he focused on collecting information about the British defenses for the future attack he had in mind. With this purpose, he sent a person of confidence to Mobile and Pensacola to get firsthand information of the strongholds. The mission ended being one of the most successful operations carried out by Spanish spies.³⁷

The agent provided an impressively detailed report describing the disposition and configuration of the garrisons, armaments, artillery calibers, ammunition's location, the status of the fort's walls, thickness, and so forth. The importance of the mission was crucial. The accuracy of his reports was extremely useful in the coming military campaigns, with the spy taking an active role in the drafting of the military plans to conquer both British strongholds.³⁸

Gálvez also used the information to shape the perception of the civilian population. In April 1777, he heard that Pensacola was suffering from a lack of critical goods because the regular supply ship had not arrived. With studied generosity, he sent one of his frigates with 150 barrels of flour to Pensacola to alleviate the food shortage ravaging the settlement.³⁹ With this generous gesture, Gálvez intended to help Pensacola's citizens. Nonetheless, he was also setting the stage for his relationship with the civilian population during and after the Pensacola's siege.

Military

Bernardo de Gálvez was both supreme military commander and governor of the province, thus he combined Spanish military and political leadership in the area. When he arrived in Louisiana, the region could not defend against a British attack, much less go on the offensive. Gálvez suspected, and his intelligence confirmed, that Great Britain was contemplating striking its first blow at Spain by attacking New Orleans. Gálvez considered that his forces and defenses

³⁷ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 92-93.

³⁸ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 98.

³⁹ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 98.

were not strong enough and felt exposed. Consequently, Gálvez developed a transformation model involving the army, navy, and militias.

Regarding the army, Gálvez needed professional soldiers in infantry, cavalry, and artillery units to secure a proper defense of the province. When Gálvez arrived in New Orleans to command the Infantry Regiment of Louisiana, it was a regiment on paper only. It only had one battalion in a deplorable state. The unit was almost without personnel, and most of its soldiers were near retirement age.

As he desperately needed more men, Madrid decided to send Gálvez reinforcements recruited in the Canary Islands and New Spain. Recruiting and traveling such vast distances required time, so it took Gálvez almost two years to consider the regiment formally filled. Gálvez ordered repairs on the wooden palisades in New Orleans and the forts around the city, but the defense of the capital required also mounted troops and artillery units. Despite his requests, he did not receive such units until the war with Britain began. Until then, he could rely only on a small artillery unit and a minimal number of cavalrymen.⁴⁰

Concerning the navy, Gálvez wanted frigates to operate along the Mississippi River. He considered frigates to be of more use in the river than any other vessel type since they could move by sail and oars, therefore, providing superiority over any warship that entered the river. Still, frigates and gunboats were enough to protect New Orleans, but they could not defend the Mississippi's mouth or control the ships crossing through nearby waters. Hence, Gálvez asked for more warships from his superiors in Havana. His demands were fruitful since, within six months, Louisiana received several vessels with orders to remain under Bernardo de Gálvez's command.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

Gálvez needed the active participation of the authorities in Cuba and Madrid to strengthen regular army and navy units, but had more freedom to act by himself concerning the militias. The estimated minimum number of militiamen to protect Louisiana was 700. On his arrival, Gálvez found fewer than 150 militiamen. As a result, he began an aggressive recruitment campaign, including enrolling free blacks and mulattoes, which were to play an important role during his campaigns against Britain. The results were impressive. At the beginning of 1779, Louisiana had seventeen militia companies with a total of 1,478 men.⁴²

Gálvez's military reform succeeded in strengthening his capabilities and resources to what he considered the minimum assets to defend against a potential British attack. Still, right after the declaration of war against Britain in 1779, he would start a fierce negotiation with his military superiors in Havana to get more resources for his offensive campaign along the Mississippi River and West Florida.

Economic

Bernardo de Gálvez was crucial for the American rebels' success in their fight for independence by channeling Spain's financial and logistical support from his privileged position as governor in New Orleans. Gálvez continued and incremented the aid that his predecessor, Governor Luis de Unzuaga, had already provided to the patriots.

When the American rebels' struggle started, the King of Spain gave Unzuaga clear guidance: Spain would remain officially neutral but would favor the rebels when possible. Hence, Unzuaga started providing covert assistance to the Americans. In late 1776, American delegates began talks with Spanish officials in Europe, requesting that Spain enter the war on their side. The conflict provided an opportunity to harm Great Britain severely and secure terms with the emergent power in North America. Nevertheless, the Spanish King, Carlos III, was prudent and decided to remain officially neutral while increasing the secret economic and logistic aid to the

⁴² Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 106.

insurgents. The goal was to prolong the conflict so that Spain could build up as much combat power as possible and get ready for war.

After replacing Unzuaga, Gálvez provided financial and logistical support from Spain and its American empire to the American rebels until the end of the war. He regularly delivered money, woolen cloth, shoes, blankets, muskets, gunpowder, quinine, and other weapons and medicines to Oliver Pollock, an agent of the Continental Congress in New Orleans. Major General Charles Lee himself sent correspondence to Gálvez requesting financial and logistical support, highlighting the necessity to get antimalarial cinchona bark (quinine). In this respect, the Spanish Crown had the medicine's monopoly, originally from Peru, which was essential for the troops' survivability in the field.⁴³

Especially relevant was a shipment in half 1777. Gálvez channeled a load received from Spain that provided the American rebels with 215 bronze cannons, 13,000 grenades, 30,000 bayonets, 30,000 muskets, 50,000 rounds of ammunition, 300,000 pounds of gunpowder, 4,000 tents, and numerous uniforms. Major General Horatio Gates employed these resources in the decisive Battles of Saratoga in September and October 1777. The British defeat in Saratoga was a tipping point in the conflict, which contributed to France joining the war in 1778 and Spain in 1779.⁴⁴

Spain's aid, personalized in the figure of Gálvez, provided the Americans with priceless help that certainly influenced the outcome of the war. As early as late 1777, when the support has just started, the Continental Congress's Secret Committee sent Gálvez a letter stating, "We are informed by means of Mr. Oliver Pollock of the favorable disposition you have been pleased to manifest towards the subjects, interest, and cause of the United, Free, and Independent States of

⁴³ Guillermo Calleja Leal, "Actitud de España ante la Revolución de las Colonias de la América del Norte," special issue, *Revista de Historia Militar* no. 1 (2016): 54.

⁴⁴ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 137.

America upon every occasion that has presented since your Excellency's accession to the government of New Orleans and Louisiana, for which we express our utmost gratitude.”⁴⁵

On War

I have the pleasure of informing you that Spain has finally taken a decisive position. It is to be hoped that this formidable junction of the Houses of Bourbon will not fail to establish the Independence of America in a short time.

—George Washington to Major General John Sullivan

The rebel American colonies began the war in a very challenging situation; they had no navy, little artillery, and a limited army and militia that lacked weapons and even gunpowder. Without the help of France and Spain, the Americans knew they could not succeed. Spain was initially reluctant to support the Americans and declare war on Great Britain formally. The American Revolution was a warning for the Spanish Americas' future. The rebellion of the United Colonies fostered domestic debate whether Spain could continue to exercise authority over an American empire far larger than the British. Official support to the rebels' cause would encourage independence movements in the Spanish colonies and, therefore, the Spanish authorities vacillated.⁴⁶

Spain also needed time to get ready for the war with the British. Carlos III's military reforms had improved the preparation of the army and navy. Still, a conflict of such magnitude demanded a thorough preparation. Besides, the Crown needed a certain likelihood of success before committing to the rebels' cause. In this respect, the Battles of Saratoga were a breaking point. The victory of the revolutionaries caused great amazement in all European chancelleries and achieved international recognition.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Secret Committee to Bernardo de Gálvez, 12 June 1777, quoted in Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 139.

⁴⁶ McFarlane, *The American Revolution*, 43.

⁴⁷ Calleja, “Actitud de España,” 84.

In February 1778, the French signed the Treaties of Amity and Commerce with US delegates, officially entering the conflict against the British. Spain delayed its decision to join France with the hope of pressing Great Britain to recognize the independence of the thirteen colonies and avoid war. Nevertheless, the British government rejected all arrangement proposals. As a result, in April 1779, Spain and France renewed the Third Family Compact with the Treaty of Aranjuez, and in June 1779, Spain officially declared war on Great Britain. Given the possibility of the American Revolution extending to some of the Spanish overseas territories, Spain entered the war against Britain with France as an official ally, but not the United States.⁴⁸

The Treaty of Aranjuez detailed Spain's desired end state. The seventh article of the treaty stated, "The Catholic King intends to acquire through war and the future peace treaty the following advantages: first, the restitution of Gibraltar; second, the possession of the river and fort at Mobile; third, the restitution of Pensacola with the entire Florida coast near the Bahama Canal; fourth, the expulsion of the British from the Bay of Honduras and their compliance with the prohibition in the Treaty of Paris of 1763 to establish there or in any other Spanish territory any settlement; fifth, the revocation of the privilege granted to the British of cutting wood on the coast of Campeche; and sixth, the restitution of the island of Menorca."⁴⁹

The ambitious list included three direct orders for Bernardo de Gálvez: conquer the river and fort of Mobile, take Pensacola, and recover East and West Florida. Before the British forces of the Mississippi River's left bank knew about the declaration of war, Gálvez captured the British forts of Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez, thus securing his rear area. Then, Gálvez raised a joint and multinational force that, in May 1781, conquered the defenses of Mobile and Pensacola (see figure 2 for physical reference of the campaign's objectives).

⁴⁸ Segura, *El Trascendental Papel de España*, 131.

⁴⁹ Alejandro del Cantillo, *Tratados, Convenios y Declaraciones de Paz y de Comercio desde el Año de 1700 hasta el Día* (Madrid: Alegría y Charlain, 1843), 554.

Bernardo de Gálvez's victories were decisive not only for the Spanish Crown but also for the Revolutionary War's success. Gálvez's campaign diverted a significant number of British forces from the conflict against the American rebels. Besides, the Spanish Navy committed to secure the French possessions in the Caribbean, allowing the French Navy to focus exclusively on supporting the Americans in critical locations, like Yorktown.



Figure 2. The Gulf Coast during the American Revolution. The Hispanic-American History Timeline, accessed on 15 September 2020, <https://www.hiddenhispanicheritage.com/timeline-1781---spanish-troops-defeat-the-british-capture-pensacola.html>.

Attacks along the Mississippi River

The Mississippi River operations provide a noteworthy illustration of Bernardo de Gálvez's creativity concerning military operations. He succeeded in seizing three strongholds using three different approaches: direct assault, smart employment of deception, and negotiation. This first part of the campaign also portrays the challenges derived from the command of a heterogeneous force, the importance Gálvez gave to morale and cohesion, as well as one of the main characteristics of his leadership: resilience.⁵⁰

Gálvez knew about the war a month before the official declaration. He did not wait for confirmation to begin his long-formulated plan for attack. Concerned about his rear area's

⁵⁰ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 3-2.

security, Gálvez planned a rapid upriver sweep using surprise, one of today's Principles of Joint Operations.⁵¹ With this action, Gálvez intended to defeat the British settlements and forts that populated the lower Mississippi River before focusing on Mobile and Pensacola.⁵²

Gálvez immediately sent a request to the governor and captain general of Cuba, Diego José Navarro, requesting reinforcements to start his offensive campaign without compromising the defense of New Orleans. Additionally, Gálvez embarked on a recruiting mission among the settlements along the river to supplement his contingent. Hence, he assembled a heterogeneous force composed of 170 veterans, 330 raw recruits, twenty carabineers, sixty militiamen, eighty free blacks and mulattoes, two American officers, and seven American volunteers. Later on, along the march to Manchac, around 600 men from the German and French settlements and 160 Amerindians from different groups joined the Spanish forces.⁵³ The rapid muster of such a multiethnic force shows that his diplomatic approach during the previous years had indeed made him very popular within the local population.

Right before departing, a strong hurricane hit the area. The devastation was enormous. The city of New Orleans was in complete disarray. The hurricane sank or destroyed many of the transport vessels. Most of his soldiers had families and were confronted with unexpected problems resulting from the storm. This was the kind of chaotic situation that required resilience and strong leadership.⁵⁴ Gálvez assembled the inhabitants and gave them an emotional speech that succeeded. Gálvez postponed the mission to have time to fix the most urgent matters in the city but resumed it as soon as feasible. Gálvez argued that if before the hurricane, the British could hardly believe that the Spaniards were going to attack, now they would certainly believe

⁵¹ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2018), A-3.

⁵² Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 169.

⁵³ Paquette and Quintero, *Spain and the American Revolution*, 18-19.

⁵⁴ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 169.

that New Orleans was almost defeated. Thus, it was the perfect opportunity for a surprise attack.⁵⁵

On 6 September, the Spanish forces reached their first objective: Fort Manchac. Also known as Fort Bute, it was a fortified post with a small garrison. Gálvez could probably have succeeded in capturing the garrison without fighting. Nevertheless, he considered that his army needed a quick victory to raise morale, provide the raw recruits with experience, and give cohesion to his heterogeneous force.⁵⁶ Hence, at dawn on 7 September, the Spanish attacked Fort Bute, and Gálvez won its first military victory in the war, without a casualty. The garrison was small but strategically important since it interrupted the British supply lines to Baton Rouge.

During the next two weeks, Bernardo de Gálvez's army moved and positioned for a siege of the fort at Baton Rouge. It was an impressive stronghold protected by thirteen cannons and 900 men. The safest way to get hold of the fort would have been to starve the garrison, but Gálvez did not have the time needed for this kind of siege since British reinforcements could arrive at any time. Hence, Gálvez decided to excavate trenches and position the artillery, whose cannons were of larger caliber and longer range than the British.⁵⁷

Gálvez successfully conducted what today's US doctrine calls military deception to mislead the enemy.⁵⁸ He sent militiamen and Indians to a close forest to build a fake artillery emplacement and draw the British artillery's attention. At the same time, the rest of his forces worked on two artillery emplacements on the other side of the fort. The result was that the enemies fired in vain on the fake position without hurting anyone, while the construction of the real emplacements was unnoticed.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 147.

⁵⁶ Paquette and Quintero, *Spain and the American Revolution*, 18-19.

⁵⁷ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 150-151.

⁵⁸ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, III-23.

⁵⁹ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 226-227.

When the British realized their mistake, it was too late. The Spanish batteries started firing and, after four hours, the fort was so damaged that the British surrendered. Gálvez cleverly included in the negotiation terms that the surrender must incorporate that of Fort Panmure in Natchez, which the British accepted. Gálvez allowed the inhabitants and the black men to return to their home and took around 400 prisoners of war. Before returning to New Orleans, he sent a detachment to Natchez to take over Fort Panmure.⁶⁰

Gálvez's conquest of Baton Rouge earned him the prestigious army rank of brigadier general. His operations along the Mississippi's left bank secured his rear and captured British forces that might otherwise have fought Spain or the American rebels. Additionally, controlling the river guaranteed that the Spanish aid to the revolutionaries would safely reach the Continental Army. Due to a combination of surprise, resilience, audacity, deception, and diplomacy, the first phase of the war in North America was entirely favorable to Spain. Those that followed would require significantly larger military and naval forces against a much better prepared enemy.⁶¹

Mobile

The siege of Fort Charlotte in Mobile provided Bernardo de Gálvez with another significant victory and the momentum to achieve his final objective in Pensacola. The most useful lessons of the operation are Gálvez's ability to overcome the frictions with his military superiors in Havana, his determination, his magnanimity toward the defeated enemy, and his generosity and recognition of all his men after the battle.

Right after returning to New Orleans, Bernardo de Gálvez started the preparations for Mobile and Pensacola. He received some reinforcements from Havana, but his total number of forces was very short for the endeavor he had to accomplish. His superiors in Havana were reluctant to provide him with more troops. Governor Navarro and Admiral Juan Bautista Bonet,

⁶⁰ Guerrero, *Recovered Memories*, 226-227.

⁶¹ Paquette and Quintero, *Spain and the American Revolution*, 19.

chief of the navy in the West Indies, were more concerned about the security of Havana than about Gálvez's offensive. They also considered Gálvez too junior and inexperienced an officer to be a general and insisted that the strength of the defenses of Mobile and Pensacola demanded a commander with more experience. Additionally, they personally disliked Bernardo de Gálvez, who they believed benefited from the position of his uncle José de Gálvez, Minister of the Indies.

From late October 1779 to early January 1780, Gálvez waited in New Orleans for the arrival of reinforcements from Havana to start the expedition. Tired of delays and procrastination from the Spanish authorities, Gálvez decided to force them to react. He began forming his own forces and arranging for their transportation. Gálvez did not have the troops necessary to attack Pensacola, but he believed he could seize Mobile.⁶² Gálvez also commissioned the spy, who in 1778, had obtained intelligence about Mobile to prepare a plan for its conquest, which would become the basis for his line of operations.

On 14 January, Bernardo de Gálvez left New Orleans with about 1,300 men and a small flotilla of fourteen ships. He believed this maneuver would force the authorities in Cuba to send a large contingent of at least 2,000 men to support the Mobile assault and subsequent operations against Pensacola. Two weeks later, when arriving at the entry of Mobile Bay, a severe storm shipwrecked most of his flotilla. His flagship and another four ships wrecked on a sandbar. Four hundred men died in the storm.⁶³

This severe setback was a backdrop to Gálvez's characteristic determination and resilience again. Overcoming such adversity, he managed to recover weapons and equipment, refloat various ships and continue the march towards Fort Charlotte. He set up camp eight miles

⁶² Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 174.

⁶³ Manuel Olmedo Checa, "La Participación Española en la Guerra de la Independencia Norteamericana," in *España y la Independencia Norteamericana* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, Secretaría General Técnica, 2015), 88.

away from Mobile and ordered his command to make scaling ladders from the wrecked ships' remains. In the meantime, four small transports arrived from Havana carrying 200 men.⁶⁴

Fort Charlotte was a remarkable structure defended by forty-nine cannon of various calibers. However, the Spaniards outnumbered the British: 350 British troops faced 1,100 Spanish attackers. The Britons' only hope was to receive reinforcements from Pensacola. Days after the siege started, a Spanish reconnaissance platoon reported 1,100 British troops inbound for Mobile from Pensacola. The news of the British force's proximity made the Spaniards redouble their efforts to conquer the fort as soon as possible. Unaware of the incoming of reinforcements, the British commander capitulated on 12 March. The Spanish took 307 prisoners and assumed positions inside Fort Charlotte, which led the British reinforcements to return to Pensacola.⁶⁵

Bernardo de Gálvez was magnanimous toward the defeated and granted the British the privilege of surrendering with the honors of war. The British marched out according to the traditional military ritual at the time, which allowed the commander of the garrison to report his superiors that his garrison had not tarnished the honor of the British Army. Gálvez also showed generosity toward his own men. Immediately after taking possession of Fort Charlotte, he rewarded them, on the King's behalf, with a third of the value of all they captured inside the fort. Gálvez also asked Spain for pensions and promotions for those who distinguished themselves during the battle.⁶⁶

Gálvez's plot to pressure Havana was partially successful. On 7 March, a maritime expedition commanded by Admiral Bonet had departed from Havana, consisting of twenty-six ships with almost 2,200 soldiers on board. But by the time they reached Mobile's bay, Gálvez had conquered Fort Charlotte eighteen days earlier.⁶⁷ The frictions with Navarro and Bonet, however,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 169.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 170-171.

⁶⁷ Olmedo, *La participación Española*, 89.

had just started, and assembling the massive force required for the siege of Pensacola would become a severe challenge. Mobile was another major success for Gálvez. Pleased with the victory, the King promoted him to major general and put him in charge of all Spanish Army operations on the North American continent.⁶⁸

Pensacola

The conquest of Pensacola was Bernardo de Gálvez's greatest achievement. The most valuable lesson extracted from the operation is Gálvez's initiative and courage to lead by example when the operation seemed doomed. It also provides interesting insights into Gálvez's relations with his military superiors and the leadership challenges related to the command of joint operations.⁶⁹

After the arrival of Bonet's 2,200 men expedition at Mobile, Gálvez begged the admiral to continue toward Pensacola to support its siege. Without formal joint command, Bonet was his own man, and was not subject to Gálvez's orders. Bonet refused and returned to the port of Havana on 21 May. Gálvez was distraught by Bonet's lack of cooperation. Since his army lacked the required number of soldiers to take Pensacola, he decided to return to New Orleans. Before leaving, Gálvez left an 800-man garrison in Mobile under the command of Colonel José de Ezpeleta, commander of the Navarra Regiment.⁷⁰

Exasperated with the delays, Bernardo de Gálvez left New Orleans for Havana, where he arrived in August 1780. After arduous negotiations, Gálvez managed to get an expedition of around 3,000 men that departed for Pensacola on 16 October 1780. His joy lasted only a couple of days. On 18 October, a hurricane sank several ships, damaged most of the rest, and scattered

⁶⁸ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 178.

⁶⁹ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, I-1.

⁷⁰ Francisco Cabrera Pablos, "El General Washington y el General Gálvez. Lazos de Sangre," in *George Washington y España: El Legado del Ejército Español en los Estados Unidos de América* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, Secretaría General Técnica, 2019), 167.

the fleet to such disperse locations as Havana, Campeche (coast of Mexico), Mobile, and New Orleans, which forced the cancelation of the expedition..⁷¹

Gálvez returned to Havana on 17 November, where the top military hierarchy celebrated his failure. Navarro and Bonet opposed to provide more men and considered that a new expedition required a new commander in chief. Gálvez disregarded his superiors and started preparations for a second attempt against Pensacola following his characteristic determination and initiative. The attitude of the officials in Havana contrasted with the instructions issued by the Crown in Spain. Eventually, political pressure from Madrid made Navarro authorize a 1,500-man force to try to conquer Pensacola. On 28 February 1781, the new expedition set sail from Havana, with five warships and twenty-seven transports..⁷²

The expedition arrived close to Pensacola Bay on 10 March. The British Red Cliffs Fort dominated the bay entrance. The fort's artillery threatened any ships trying to penetrate the harbor. An additional challenge was the shallow water over a sandbank that connected Santa Rosa to the mainland (see figure 3). It was precisely the sandbank that triggered Gálvez's leadership challenges related to the command of joint operations.

⁷¹ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 190.

⁷² Cabrera, *El General Washington y el General Gálvez*, 167.

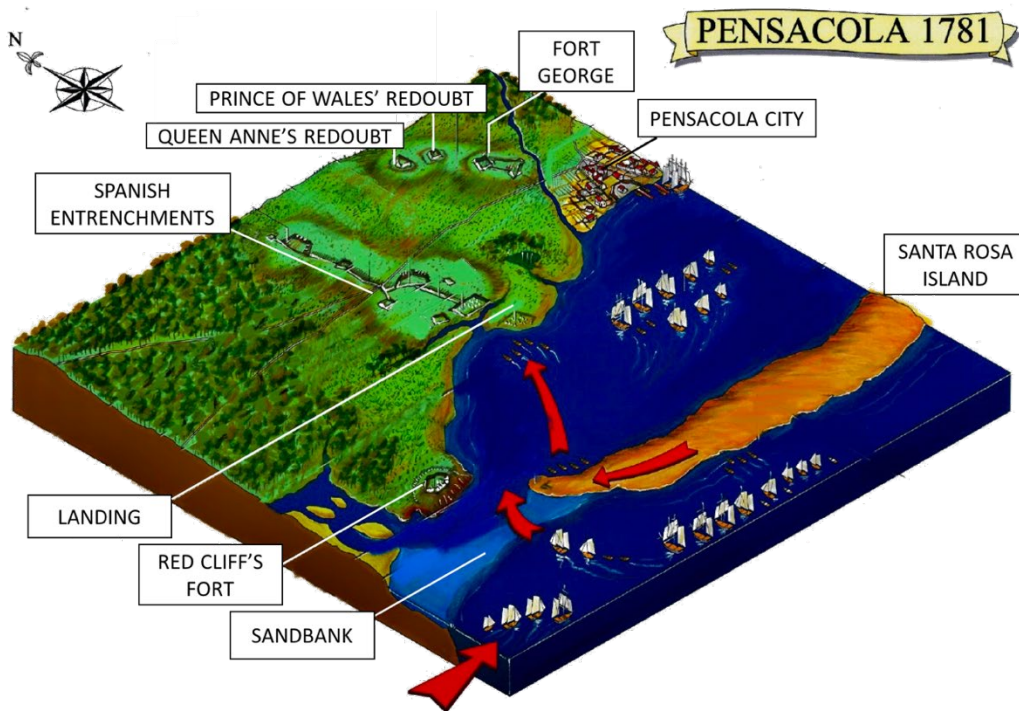


Figure 3. Pensacola Bay in 1781. Adapted from Agustín Guimera Ravina, “Un Liderazgo Compartido: La Conquista de Panzacola,” special issue, *Revista de Historia Militar* no. 1 (2016): 141.

On 11 March, Captain José de Calvo Irazábal, commander of the fleet, gave the order to enter the bay. With the entire convoy sailing close to Red Cliffs, his flagship *San Ramón* grounded on the bay’s bottom. After several attempts, the naval commander decided that the operation was impracticable. Although Gálvez was the supreme commander of all army troops, the navy ships still reported directly to Bonet. Gálvez suggested the naval officers that the *San Ramón* should remain in the rear and be the last to enter the bay, which Calvo interpreted as an affront to the honor of the navy and his own authority.⁷³

In the following days, there were severe conflicts between Gálvez and Calvo. The naval officers supported their commander in his refusal to enter the bay without precise indications about its depth and configuration. Gálvez argued that there was accurate cartography and that the

⁷³ Gobierno de España, Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, *Diario de Operaciones de la Expedición Contra la Plaza de Panzacola Concluida por las Armas de S. M. Católica bajo las Órdenes del Mariscal de Campo D. Bernardo de Gálvez* (Madrid: Archivo Histórico Nacional, 1781), 4.

fleet could cross the bay. Gálvez also worried about the weather since another storm threatened the area and refused to call the expedition off again. The frictions between the army and navy leaders escalated, getting close to insubordination.⁷⁴ Calvo was confident that Bonet would support his decision against Gálvez's interests. After several meetings and the exchange of several letters to convince Calvo without success, Gálvez decided to act and lead by example.⁷⁵

On 18 March, a boat approached *San Ramón* with a message from Bernardo de Gálvez. The courier presented Calvo a cannonball and delivered the following message aloud, "The bullet I send and present to you is from those dispensed by the British fort at the entrance. Whoever has the honor and courage, follow me. I go ahead with the *Galveston* to take away your fear."⁷⁶

Moments later, Bernardo de Gálvez began his entry into the channel, followed by three army transports. According to Gálvez's diary of operations, "the vessels entered the harbor without the least harm notwithstanding the great number of bullets that pierced sails and shrouds, and with the extraordinary applause of the rest of the army soldiers, who with continued cheers demonstrated to the general its delight and loyalty."⁷⁷ Following his lead, the next day, the entire fleet minus the *San Ramón* entered the bay. His performance that day is the origin of his famous motto: Yo solo (I alone). Years later, the King would add the words "I alone" to Bernardo de Gálvez's coat of arms.

Gálvez's action was not reckless. He knew he needed to act personally to motivate the navy, but he thoroughly verified the passage's viability. The days before the crossing, Gálvez charged the captain of the *Galveston* to carry out a detailed survey of the channel's entrance to determine the most suitable route. Additionally, he personally verified that the Red Cliffs'

⁷⁴ Gobierno de España, *Diario de Operaciones*, 5.

⁷⁵ US Army, ADP 6-22, 10-2.

⁷⁶ Bernardo de Gálvez to José de Calvo Irazábal, 18 March 1781, quoted in Cabrera, *El General Washington y el General Gálvez*, 171.

⁷⁷ Gobierno de España, *Diario de Operaciones*, 7-8.

artillery location was not correct and concluded that the probability of a British shot hitting his ship was not very high.⁷⁸

After neutralizing some British frigates inside the bay, Gálvez's forces reached the mainland and approached the three British strongholds: Fort George, the Queen Anne's Redoubt, and the Prince of Wales' Redoubt. Breaking Pensacola's defenses with only 1,500 men was impossible. When the Spaniards arrived, the British garrison of Pensacola, under the command of Major General John Campbell, amounted to between 1,800 and 1,900 men.

The force ratio was well behind the minimum of three to one recommended on current doctrine for offensive operations against a prepared or fortified position.⁷⁹ In the following month, while preparing the siege, Gálvez would receive reinforcements from Mobile, New Orleans, and Havana. The total number of men raised to 7,500, including 725 French troops. He commanded an experienced army of regulars and militia. Like his previous operations, the force contained men of many colors, races, and nationalities.⁸⁰

The siege of Pensacola lasted fifty days. On 10 May 1781, General Campbell capitulated. Essential for the success was the impact of an artillery shot on the powder magazine of the Queen's Redoubt that created a devastating explosion and a major breach in its walls. The Spanish infantry did not hesitate to move in and quickly seized the fort, placing the Spanish guns in a much superior position for firing on Fort George. Gálvez forces suffered 272 casualties. Gálvez himself, who always shared the same risks of his men, was wounded twice. One bullet furrowed his stomach, and another hit him on his left hand. The British lost 155 men. Spain took 1,113 prisoners and 153 artillery pieces.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Cabrera, *El General Washington y el General Gálvez*, 171.

⁷⁹ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2014), 9-20.

⁸⁰ Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 216.

⁸¹ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 178.

Aftermath

News of the victory at Pensacola pleased the Spanish authorities in Madrid. The King promoted all of the top military officers, including Gálvez himself, whom he raised to the rank of lieutenant general, the highest in the Spanish Army at the time. With this promotion, Bernardo de Gálvez became the second-youngest man ever to attain this rank, surpassed only by the Duke of Wervik, who was promoted in 1747 at age twenty-nine. The King also decreed that the Bay of Pensacola would bear the name of Santa María de Gálvez Bay from then on.⁸²

The American rebels also celebrated the Gálvez campaign's success. The Spanish had eliminated the British hold and influence in the Mississippi Valley and the Gulf Coast. Hence, the future of the United States was not confined to the eastern seaboard.⁸³ The conquest of Pensacola had another important consequence for the American independence. After the battle, Spain assumed responsibility for the defense of the entire Caribbean, liberating the French fleet from defending France's possessions in the region. This allowed France to commit the entire fleet to confront the British at the Battle of Chesapeake, facilitating the Americans' victory at Yorktown.

George Washington himself would write these lines about Gálvez's cooperation during the final moments of the Battle of Yorktown, "It gives me pleasure to find so good a disposition in Don Bernardo de Gálvez to concert his operations in such a manner against the common enemy that the interests of His Catholic Majesty and those of ourselves and our Ally France may be mutually benefitted. I have no doubt, from Don Gálvez's well known attachment to the cause of America."⁸⁴

⁸² Quintero, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 241.

⁸³ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 195.

⁸⁴ George Washington to Francisco Rendón, 12 October 1781, quoted in Cabrera, *El General Washington y el General Gálvez*, 151.

After Pensacola, the authorities in Madrid removed Navarro and Bonet from their posts in Havana and ordered them to return to Spain. Lieutenant General Gálvez received command of all forces in the Caribbean, including the French. Gálvez still had one objective pending: East Florida. Nonetheless, Spain's priorities shifted, and the main effort went to preparing a Franco-Spanish invasion of Jamaica, the principal British possession in the Caribbean.

In a sort of rehearsal for Jamaica, in mid-April 1782, Bernardo de Gálvez sent 2,000 men and 57 ships from Havana to take over New Providence (current Bahamas). He was tempted to lead his men personally, but had received orders from Madrid to appoint other officers for operations of lesser importance. The garrison in Nassau surrendered soon after the arrival of the Spanish force in early May. The conquest of New Providence was the last military action of Spain in the American Independence War since peace negotiations started shortly afterward.⁸⁵ During the negotiations, Bernardo de Gálvez achieved the last of his objectives. East Florida returned to Spain in exchange for New Providence.

Conclusions

This Federal Republic was born a pigmy. As such, it needed the aid and strength of two powerful states like Spain and France to accomplish its independence. The day will come when it will grow up, become a giant, and be greatly feared in the Americas. Then, it will forget the benefits that it had received from the two powers and will only think in its own aggrandizement.

—Pedro Pablo Abarca de Abolea, Count of Aranda

The analysis of the figure of Bernardo de Gálvez during the US Revolutionary War provides useful lessons for current commanders and planners because of his use of the instruments of national power, his leadership skills in battle, his frictions with the political level, and the leadership challenges he faced related to the command of joint and multinational operations.

⁸⁵ Chávez, *Spain and the Independence*, 195.

Concerning the instruments of national power, Gálvez's position as supreme Commander of the military forces in North America resembles the current figure of the US Combatant Commanders (CCDRs). In charge of an Area of Responsibility that ties with the strategic and political levels, the CCDRs' obligations are not limited to military matters. CCDRs need strong political, diplomatic, and administrative skills to shape their operational environment in peacetime and get ready for potential conflicts..⁸⁶

Gálvez's actions while in charge of Louisiana before the declaration of war provide an example of how to successfully employ all instruments of national power. Gálvez's diplomatic attitude and multicultural approach earned him the trust and respect of Louisiana's French and Indian population in a short period. The value he conferred to the information led him to obtain valuable intelligence in peace that he would exploit later, once the armed conflict started. Gálvez also used the information to affect the perception and attitude of the civilian population in the territories controlled by the British, performing what today are termed psychological operations..⁸⁷ Finally, concerning the military, he developed a force management program that transformed a small and unprepared army into a combat-ready force.

From an operational perspective, any leadership manual could include Bernardo de Gálvez's leadership skills during his campaign against the British. Gálvez's attitude to overcome the hurricanes' devastation that shattered his force on three occasions exemplifies the resilience concept, broadly mentioned in current US doctrine..⁸⁸ On his initial phase along the Mississippi River, he applied another of the maxims for any leader: creative thinking..⁸⁹ Thinking in

⁸⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), III-8.

⁸⁷ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, III-24.

⁸⁸ US Army, ADP 6-22, 3-2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-1.

innovative ways, Gálvez came up with a different strategy to seize each of the three British strongholds.

Time and again, Gálvez proved himself worthy of his men. Wounded on three occasions, he shared the same dangers of his troops, not only as a junior officer but also when he became a general. Leading by example, in Pensacola, he went alone inside the bay to motivate his troops in a critical moment.⁹⁰ Gálvez was generous with his men after battle but also magnanimous toward the defeated enemy. He especially valued morale and cohesion since he commanded a multiethnic and heterogeneous force. Gálvez also possessed an offensive mindset and utilized initiative, surprise, and deception to defeat the enemy.

As for the interaction with the political level, current operational level leaders quite often suffer from manpower restrictions and constraints. CCDRs engage the strategic and political levels to get appropriate resources and capabilities to accomplish their mission. The examination of Gálvez's campaign shows that this is an endemic problem in the military-politicians relation. Almost 250 years ago, one of his main challenges was his frictions and disputes with his superiors to get the appropriate number of forces he needed to achieve the strategic objectives defined by the political authority.

Bernardo de Gálvez's frictions with the navy during the expedition to Pensacola exemplify the leadership challenges related to the command of a joint operation, that are significant even today.⁹¹ This kind of operation is never easy, not only because of technical complexities but because of the cultural differences between the two services. In the Spanish Royal regulations at the time, the army and the navy were utterly siloed structures that ignored each other. Nowadays, there is a more collective mindset that has decreased frictions. Still, Joint Force structures face challenges related to army, navy, and air force's peculiarities.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 10-2.

⁹¹ US Joint Staff, JP 3-0, I-1.

Critics argue that Bernardo's uncle José de Gálvez, who occupied the relevant position of Minister of the Indies, orchestrated his successful military career. It is fair to admit that José de Gálvez's patronage of his nephew allowed him to reach important roles at a young age. Nevertheless, Bernardo de Gálvez demonstrated unusual strong military, administrative, and political talents that earned him the respect of the King of Spain, his subordinates, the French and indigenous population in Louisiana, and even the enemy.

Additionally, Gálvez campaign's analysis allows the reader to get acquainted with an often forgotten crucial part of the US history: Spain's contribution to the American War of Independence. Bernardo de Gálvez was responsible for channeling most of the Spanish government's covert aid to the patriots for years. His campaigns against British settlements on the Mississippi River and later against Mobile and Pensacola prevented British military and naval forces in North America from concentrating solely on the fight against the Continental Army. After Pensacola, Gálvez took command of all military forces in the Caribbean, invading New Providence and liberating the French fleet from its Caribbean responsibilities to focus on Chesapeake and Yorktown.

From a broader perspective, Spain's recovery of the island of Menorca and the siege of Gibraltar forced Britain to fight in several very distant places at the same time. Besides, the Spanish Navy intercepted several convoys in the Atlantic Ocean with soldiers and supplies for North America. The battles against the British in the Spanish colonies in Central America also deviated British resources from the North American scenario.

To be sure, it is difficult to understand how Spain's contribution to the US Revolutionary War's success, personified in the figure of Gálvez, goes mostly unnoticed both in Spain and the United States. Spain made so much effort to conceal its actions not to jeopardize its colonies that they generally passed unnoticed even in history books. Still, it is difficult for such an outstanding example of leadership as Bernardo de Gálvez to remain unknown forever.

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