

De Gourgues left France August 22, 1567, sailed to Africa, thence to the West Indies, and reached the River May (St. Johns) at Eastertide, 1568. In passing by the mouth of the river he received the salute of the Spanish posts and returned it to keep his identity secret. He came to anchor in the St. Marys River, called the Somme by the French. The Indians soon gathered and an alliance was quickly made with them for an attack upon the Spanish forts. Several days were required to perfect the plans. A youth, Pierre Debre, who had escaped from Fort Caroline and was afterward found and kindly treated by the Indians, was brought in and his services as interpreter were invaluable. On the Saturday morning following Easter, De Gourgues with his whole force, except 20 left to guard the vessels in the St. Marys River, and a great number of Indians were concentrated in the woods behind the fort on the north side of the river.

* Circumstances point almost without the slightest doubt to Pilot Town as the location of this fort.

The attack was made in the forenoon. Captain Cazenove with a company was ordered to set fire to the gate, while the main forces attacked from the rear. A guard happened to mount a platform just at this moment, noticed the French and sounded the alarm. He fired a culverin twice and was loading it for a third shot when he was killed by an Indian. By this time the French and the Indians were inside the fort. Not a Spaniard escaped; of the 60 in the fort, 45 were killed, and 15 captured and reserved for another fate.

The garrison in the fort across the river, seeing the commotion, opened a cannonade, which the French replied to by turning the guns of the captured fort to bear upon the other. Haste was necessary to intercept the garrison on the south side of the river before it should reach the great fort San Mateo (at St. Johns Bluff). Captain De Gourgues with 80 soldiers entered a boat that had come around into the river by prearranged plan and crossed over to the south side below the second fort. The Indians swam across in great numbers, holding their bows and arrows above their heads with one hand and swimming with the other. The garrison fled, but not in time to escape, for when they got to the woods they found themselves cut off and partly surrounded. All were slain except 15 reserved as before.