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Spanish Account of the Battle of Fort Mose, June 1740.

In these letters, Governor Manuel de Montiano, governor of Florida, sends news to Cuba about an English attack. He notes first that forces from Georgia and South Carolina have come overland into northern Florida, crossed the St. Johns River, and attacked the Espinosa plantation at Diego Plains, about 20 miles north of St. Augustine. Montiano tried to repel the invaders, but enemy ships arrived to blockade St. Augustine’s harbor, and soon the English forces controlled Anastasia Island, Fort Mose (2 miles north of St. Augustine), and many other areas. From the island the English forces began to fire at the Castillo de San Marcos with large mortars.

Compare Montiano’s account of the retaking of Fort Mose with the accounts by English soldiers who survived. How are they the same and how do they differ? Which account is probably more accurate about life in the English camp? Which one is probably more accurate about the size of the Spanish attacking force? Which one do you think is more accurate about the numbers of people killed and taken prisoner? Do winners and losers give the same account of a battle? How do you know which account to trust?

Notes

Although both the English and Spanish accounts talk about a battle that occurred on the same day, they give different dates for the battle. This is because England and Spain used different calendars in 1740.

Vocabulary

Castillo A fort.

Creeks, Yucees..... Indian allies of the English from Carolina and Georgia.
and Uchices

Letter No. 201

Governor Montiano seeks aid from his superior on Cuba

Sir:

On the 25th ultimate, I sent Your Excellency news. Since then, I learn in addition from a foreman of Espinosa's, that while his master and some other workmen were busy at San Diego on field works, 50 Indian allies of the English suddenly surrounded them, firing a volley into them, and so killing one trooper and a negro of Don Diego de Espinosa's. Nevertheless the others managed to get into shelter, except a negro of the monastery of Saint Francis, who took to the woods. Him they consider dead. The Indians having failed to capture anyone withdrew. These things being so, I took the resolution of sending a sergeant and 12 men with a surgeon, to bring back the wounded, and if necessary, to leave some people as reinforcement, and then return. The sergeant not having returned in two days, I sent a corporal of cavalry with six men, to discover anything that might have occurred. He returned the next day, saying that he was unable to reach Diego Plains, the enemy by spreading out far and wide having given him no chance . . . The captains have learned that the enemy is stationed on this bar, and on that of Matanzas, and is in possession of the Island of Santa Anastasia, and its watch-tower, of all the beach of San Mateo, and maintains a camp at the village of Mose. The ships blockading us are seven frigates of 23 to 30 guns, two packets of 10 or 12 guns, three sloops, six schooners, and twelve scows exclusive of boats and launches belonging to the vessels.

At this moment, which is nine o'clock in the forenoon, they have opened with a mortar, firing large shells, a few splinters of which have fallen into the Castillo, but most of them have passed over the lines, and beyond them.

I assure Your Excellency that it is impossible to express the confusion of this place, for we have here no protection except the Castillo, and all the rest is open field. The families have abandoned their houses, and come to put themselves under protection of the guns, which is pitiable, though nothing gives me anxiety but the want of provisions, and if Your Excellency for want of competent force cannot send relief, we must all indubitably perish. With this information, I am assured Your Excellency will excuse the hyperboles in which the conflict we are in may be portrayed, and I hope every attention will be given to measures conducing to relieve this eminent peril, as a matter of such moment, and of the first service to the King.

St. Augustine, in Florida, 24th June, 1740.

Letter No. 203

Montiano reports on retaking Fort Mose

Sir:

On the 24th ultimate, I sent Your Excellency by way of Apalachee an accurate account of the siege by sea and land of this place by the English, a duplicate of which I enclose.

I have now to inform Your Excellency, that at eleven o'clock on the night of Saturday the 25th of June, I sent out from this garrison, 300 men to make an attack on the fort of Mose, which was executed at daybreak on Sunday morning. Our people swept over it, with such impetuosity that it fell, with a loss of 68 dead, and 34 prisoners.¹

I have ascertained that the garrison of this place consisted of 140 men according to some of the prisoners, and of 170 according to others. It was composed of one militia company of Scotchmen, 70 men, including officers, of 15 infantry, 40 horsemen, and 35 Indians, Yucees and Uchices, with a white man for chief. This detachment or garrison was commanded by Colonel John Palmer who with one of his sons was evidently left dead in the action. An Indian prisoner affirms positively that he saw Colonel Palmer dead, and his head cut off. He further infers that both of his sons were dead, though he did not see them dead; but he saw their hats in the hands of our people (of whom ten have died, among them the Ensign, Don Joseph de Aguilera). The affair being terminated, I ordered Fort Mose to be demolished, and the dead buried. From such investigation as I have been able to make among the prisoners, I have acquired the following news. Three or four prisoners agree in saying, that both by rumor and by gazette, they have learned of the preparation in England of a considerable expedition against Havana, consisting of 30 ships of the line, and of a landing party of 10,000 men. I am sending this dispatch to give you this information as possibly of great importance to the service of the King.

Of the armament besieging us, the prisoners say it is composed of 7 frigates, one of 50 guns from Bermuda, another of 40, another of 27, and the rest of 20; the number of dispatch boats, *bilanders*, or of other small boats they do not know. They vary in their estimate of the main body of troops, some putting it at 2,000 others at 1,500, or 1,200, and still others at 900. In respect of batteries, they have brought among others, three bronze 18-pounders from Carolina. Up to today they have made no assault, but it would seem that by reason of the blow at Mose, they have all assembled on the Island of Santa Anastasia, where they have collected eleven small mortars, two of them for shells of half a quintal, and

¹ This extract is to be found in *Southern Quarterly Review* for April, 1844, p. 406; it is used here with many corrections and alterations.

the other nine for smaller ones. With these, and one other larger one formerly on the coast of San Mateo, 12 in all, they fired on us the 30 of June, from 6 in the evening until 10 at night.

My greatest concern is for supplies, and if we get none, there is no doubt we shall die of hunger.

From the beginning of the firing up to this day they have thrown 122 large shells and 31 small, from which, glory be to God, we have received no corporal injury. On the Island of Santa Anastasia, they have emplaced a battery of 5 guns, three of 18-pounders and two of 6-pounders, the first to batter the Castillo and town, and the others directed against our ships, and with them they make incessant fire; but ours answer them, and we are informed that they receive more damage than ourselves.²

On the first day of the month, after beating a call, they sent us a white flag, with three letters, making a demand the nature of which Your Excellency will perceive by their tenor. Our answer Your Excellency will learn from the enclosures; and from that day they have fired with increased vigor, but in vain, for it appears that God has given greater accuracy to our fire.

My patrols have found four more men killed in the affair of Mose, two of them white, the others Indian.

From a deserter that arrived here on the 14th ultimate, we learn that General Oglethorpe brought 900 men, 300 of his regiment of regulars, and 600 Carolina militia; that it was unknown if others would come to him from Virginia or other parts; that the Carolina militia came supplied for four months. But the prisoners of Mose say that even if necessary to remain one year before this place, General Oglethorpe will do it, until he subdues it.

Saint Augustine, in Florida, July 6, 1740.

² This paragraph and the next may be found in *Southern Quarterly Review* of April, 1844, p. 409.