

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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Malaspina at Monterey in 1791

by Eric Beerman

Concerned with Russian and British expansion in the Pacific Ocean and on the west coast of North America, Spain gave close attention to this region in the latter part of the 18th century. The French, for instance, had sent an expedition commanded by the Comte de Laperouse, which visited Monterey in 1786. Spain sent a series of expeditions which explored in California, Canada, and Alaska, using Monterey Bay as an advance base for Spanish ships sailing out of San Blas in Mexico. One such Spanish voyage was the famous scientific expedition commanded by Alejandro Malaspina, stopping at Monterey Bay five years after Laperouse.

Alejandro Malaspina was born on November 5, 1754, in the village of Mulazzo in the Italian province of Massa, some 30 miles north of the city of Pisa in northern Tuscany. He was the third-born son of the Marquis de Carlo Morello and Catalina Melilupi of the family of the Princes de Soragna. The Malaspinas were descended from Adalberto I, 9th century Marquis de Tuscany, Count de Lucca and de Garfagnana, and Signore de Lunigiana.

From early in the 16th century and the reign of King Charles V of Spain, large portions of present-day Italy had been under the rule of Spain. So it is not surprising that men of ability, such as Malaspina, left their native land and went to Spain, where many gained great distinction. At twenty years of age, Malaspina left Mulazzo and entered the *Guardia Marinas* at Cadiz, Spain, which was comparable to a naval academy. His background and service must have been pleasing to his superiors, for he was soon made a member of the prestigious Military Order of San Juan de Jerusalem (Malta). He graduated at Cadiz in 1776, was promoted to *alferez de fragata* (ensign), and began a series of voyages in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. He was even on one long expedition to the Philippine Islands and China. His naval expertise continued to be highly satisfactory to his superiors, so he was promoted two years later to *teniente de fragata* (lieutenant junior grade). At the time of the American Revolution, which Spain actively supported, he was assigned to the *San*

Julian, a recently launched *navio* or man-of-war and soon took part in his first naval combat. The Spanish naval squadron was commanded by Admiral Juan de Langara, who engaged the superior British fleet off Gibraltar. Commanded by Admiral George Rodney, the British decisively defeated the Spanish. Taken prisoner, Malaspina was soon released in a prisoner exchange and reassigned to Cadiz. In 1780, he jumped the rank of *lieutenant senior grade* and was promoted to *teniente de navio* (lieutenant commander). Assigned to a ship with its home port at Algeciras, which faced the British bastion at Gibraltar, Malaspina shortly put out to sea in a fleet commanded by Admiral Luis de Cordova. They engaged the British fleet under Admiral Howe off the Straits of Gibraltar, with the battle ending in a draw.

In 1782, promoted to *capitan de fragata* (commander) of the *Asuncion*, Malaspina made an extended voyage to the Indies and then onward to the Philippines. On his return to Spain, he was assigned as deputy commander of a *Guardia Marina* company at Cadiz. Land duty was not prized by a sailor of stripe, so naturally he was overjoyed with his next assignment to the *fragata* (frigate) *Astucia*, which made a round-the-world expedition.

Another long expedition was being prepared and now Malaspina came to the attention of the high naval command. Various candidates had been reviewed as possible commanders for the prestigious voyage, then Malaspina was selected and promoted to *capitan de navio* (captain). His flagship was the *corbeta* (corvette) *Descubierta*, which was equipped with a single tier of cannons. A second corvette joined the expedition—the *Atrevida*, commanded by *capitan de fragata* Jose Bustamante. As the voyage was to be scientific as well as exploratory, Malaspina chose two naturalists, Antonio Pineda and Tadeo Hainke, and a botanist, Luis Nel, to sail on the *Atrevida*.

In July 1789, the two-ship expedition departed the Spanish naval base at Cadiz with the next destination Montevideo, on the eastern coast of South America (and today the capital of Uruguay). After a needed rest and replenishing of water and other supplies there, Malaspina continued south. Exploring along the coast of Argentina, he named the Peninsula Valdes in honor of the sponsor of the expedition, Spanish Minister of the Navy Antonio Valdes; Bahia Bustamante, after Malaspina's second-in-command, Jose Bustamante; and the town of Descubierta, after Malaspina's flagship. The expedition continued due south and prepared for the dreaded passage through the Strait of Magellan, near the southern-most point of the South American continent, named for the intrepid Portuguese mariner who had sailed for Spain more than two and a half centuries before. Fortunately, providence was with the two corvettes and they managed a relatively calm crossing and soon entered the benign waters of the Pacific Ocean, off the Chilean coast. Malaspina set a course due north, exploring up the coast of South America and with smooth sailing the *Descubierta* and the *Atrevida* soon reached Acapulco, Mexican port for the Manila galleons.

After an extended stay at this Pacific port, Malaspina set sail for the bay

at Nootka (Vancouver Island), which was rapidly becoming an area of great rivalry between Spain, Great Britain, and Russia. After exploratory work in the area, Malaspina continued on a northwestern course up the coast of Canada, finally reaching 60° N at Yakutat Bay in Alaska. (Here his name would later be immortalized in history with the naming of the Malaspina Glacier.) By this time the two crews were weary from the rigors of the North and the lack of fresh provisions; Malaspina gave orders to turn south for the next destination, Monterey Bay.

In early September of 1791, the *Descubierta* and the *Atrevida* sailed off the coast of San Francisco and soon reached Monterey Bay. They were not immediately able to enter the harbor because of a dense California fog. Monterey could not supply a pilot to guide the ships to anchor. Though Malaspina had a detailed map of the bay, in the end it was not of much help in entering the bay with visual sightings at zero. Malaspina's log reported that the sky was black and foggy and he was concerned with the dangers of Point Pinos. The cannons of the two corvettes were fired, which in turn were answered by those of the Monterey presidio, and thus the ships were guided to a safe anchorage.

Finally ashore at Monterey, Malaspina was in a better mood and did not register an official complaint about what he felt was the lack of assistance on entering Monterey Bay. He did, though, note in his log that the *nao* (ship) from Manila had to pay a 4,000 peso fine to port authorities for not observing safety procedures on entering the harbor. However, in the benign climate of Monterey the problems caused by the previous foggy entrance were soon forgotten when the sun broke through. Crews of the *Descubierta* and *Atrevida* were exhausted and looked forward to an ideal shore leave at the California port. Malaspina noted in his log that this was a healthy region and its denizens were without vices. He was especially complimentary regarding the beef supplied by the Franciscan padres at the nearby San Carlos Mission, in addition to noting that the green vegetables were "muy especial." Malaspina was most pleased with this diet as he wanted his crews in top condition before they would soon depart Mexico for the long voyage across the Pacific.

On the first day ashore, Malaspina and Bustamante were invited for dinner at the residence of the interim governor of California, Jose Dario Arguello. A word should be said about Arguello, born in Queretaro, Mexico, in 1753. His marriage to Maria Ignacia de Moraga produced a large clan of twelve children, important figures in early California history. In addition to his position as interim governor, Arguello was lieutenant of the Spanish Army infantry company stationed at the Monterey presidio. The company had a complement of 63 men, with horses, commanded by a *teniente* (first lieutenant) and *alferez* (second lieutenant). There were no dwellings outside the presidio, so married officers and men lived with their families in the presidio and, as Malaspina reported, space was tight. Near the embarcadero, there was an *almacen* (warehouse) used to store supplies brought from San Blas for the missions and presidios of Upper California and for the naval expedition to the north. Malaspina wrote that the San Carlos Mission, located on the Carmel River, was about five miles distant. The mission was under the direction of Padre Junipero Serra, who took care of the Indians' spiritual requirements.

The crews were given an extra ration of meat each day, which was appreciated after many months of a seafood diet. The soldiers at the presidio lent their horses to the sailors, who rode them to the mission and to other points of interest in the Monterey area. Besides giving an opportunity to rest and to replenish supplies before starting another long leg of their journey, Malaspina wanted the stop at Monterey to dry out the luggage and equipment before sailing into the humid, tropical climate of the Mexican coast and the Pacific Ocean. With his instruments, Malaspina correctly charted the exact location of the presidio. The expedition's painter, Suria, made sketches of the Monterey area, which are preserved in the Naval Museum in Madrid.

Malaspina expressed interest in the earlier expedition of the Comte de Laperouse, though news had not yet been received of the tragic loss of *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe* in 1788 near the reefs of Vanikoro Island in the Santa Cruz Islands in the Pacific. (See article by Eric and Conchita Beerman, "The Hospitality of the Spanish Governor of Monterey, Pedro de Fages, to the Ill-Fated French Expedition of the Comte de la Perouse, Monterey, 15th-24th September 1786," *Noticias del Puerto de Monterey*, Vol. XX, No. 2, June 1976, 9-13.) On September 14, talk again returned to the Laperouse expedition and Malaspina was informed that that expedition's painter, Mr. Vancy, had made a small engraving of Laperouse and his second-in-command, Vicomte de Langle, being received at the San Carlos Mission by the Franciscan padres. Apparently these French were much esteemed at San Carlos.

Malaspina expressed special interest in the *presidente* of the San Carlos Mission, Friar Matias de Lasuen, who told of the mission experience in California and of his own botanical work in the surrounding areas of Monterey. The Franciscans informed Malaspina that eleven missions had been installed in Upper California, with two being constructed at nearby Soledad and Santa Cruz. These two, they noted, should rightfully be called "the daughters of San Carlos Mission." The padres said that a total of 13,343 Indians had been converted to Catholicism, with 8,928 actively practicing their faith. While the Franciscans were particularly devoted to the spiritual needs of the Indians, they also instructed them in the latest agricultural techniques. The Monterey region had 19,623 *fanegas* of wheat, corn, and other grains, in addition to 48,149 head of beef cattle belonging to San Carlos Mission.

At noon on September 16, the Spanish schooner *Santa Saturnina* from San Blas entered Monterey Bay with supplies. She joined the packet boat *San Carlos*, commanded by Francisco Eliza, which had been on an expedition to Nootka and was now taking on supplies for a return trip to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Four days later, Malaspina commenced preparations for departure. The mission padres donated dried beans and the soldiers of the presidio gave large quantities of salt. On the morning of September 25, Malaspina went to the mission and to the presidio to express his sincere appreciation for their hospitality. At 9 a.m., the *Descubierta* and the *Atrevida* left the embarcadero, the former setting a course for the port of San Blas, the latter for Acapulco. After a brief stop at San Blas, Malaspina joined Bustamante at Acapulco, and the expedition soon left Mexico for a long voyage



Alejandro Malaspina

*Rear Admiral Alejandro Malaspina
1754-1810*

across the Pacific.

In the Mariana Islands the expedition's scientists achieved unusual botanical success. Manila was the next destination and there the expedition suffered the loss by death of its great naturalist, Antonio Pineda. However, he had already recorded all the results of his extensive research, which was thus saved for posterity and is now preserved in Madrid. From Manila Malaspina charted a course to New Zealand and Australia and then back across the Pacific to the Peruvian port of Callao and down around South America again, reaching Spain after an epic five-year expedition.

In the following year of 1795 Malaspina was called to Madrid and asked to give all details regarding his scientific voyage. At first his superiors must have been greatly pleased with Malaspina as he was promoted to brigadier de la Marina (rear admiral). He asked official permission to publish his papers, but by then he had apparently fallen out of official favor because of his political comments concerning the rumored relationship between Queen Maria Luisa and the omnipotent Manuel Godoy. In 1796, Malaspina had to stand trial, along with Padre Gil of the Espiritua Santo Church of Seville, regarding the publication of the expedition's papers. Malaspina was judged guilty, forbidden to publish the papers, jailed at the Guardia de Corps Garrison in Madrid, and finally sentenced to ten years in prison at the San Anton Castle at La Coruna in Galicia.

Malaspina's oldest brother was Azzo Jacinto, born at Mulazzo in 1746. He had a brilliant military career and served Felipe, Duke de Parma, and then went to Tuscany and served the Grand Duke Pedro, ally of the French against the Austrians. Azzo Jacinto was captured by the Austrians, imprisoned on the island of Gorgona off Leghorn, and died at sea in 1800 while trying to escape.

In 1802, Alejandro Malaspina was offered the opportunity to have his sentence commuted provided that he leave Spain. He accepted and the following year he departed Spain for the final time at Cadiz, on board a Spanish merchant ship commanded by Santiago Manteca. Their destination was Genova, Italy, near to his native village, where he arrived after a brief stop at Palma de Mallorca. He died at the village of Pontremoli, close to his place of birth, on April 9, 1810, forgotten by his adopted country to which he had contributed so much. He was survived by his second-oldest brother, Luigi, born in 1753. He died in 1817, last Marquis de Mulazzo.

Finally Alejandro Malaspina's epic expedition papers were published in 1885 by Novo y Colson, *Viaje politico-cientifico del mundo por las corbetas Descubierta y Atrevida al mando de los capitanes de navio D. Alexandro Malaspina y D. Jose Bustamante y Guerra, dese 1789 & 1794*. In addition, the Malaspina trial was published by Marcos Jimenez in 1881, as *Una causa de estado*.

(Editor's note: We are always happy to publish articles sent to us from Madrid by Eric Beeman, the Californian researching the Spanish archives there. He also sent us the Malaspina portrait.)



Keeping Old Family Pictures and Papers Safely

Most of us have at least a few old family mementos that we're trying to take very good care of. Unfortunately, these heirlooms can be literally destroyed by the best of intentions. For instance, plastic "protective" pages are ruinous—and so is contact with almost any other modern-day material.

We are fortunate then that next month the Society of California Archivists will be meeting in our central coast area. They will hold a one-day workshop of special interest whether you have personal family material or documents for an organization that you're responsible for preserving. The date is Friday, October 27. The place is Salinas City Hall, at 200 Lincoln (near the John Steinbeck Library). The fee for the workshop is only \$5. Arrangements are also being made for those who would like to have a no-host luncheon at the Steinbeck House. For reservations or further information, you can call Patricia Fowler at 758-9230 or write to her care of the Sea Otter Book Store, 212 Main Street, Salinas.

...and Speaking of Old Family Papers...

The editors hope there are some more members who will share some of your family material on old California—particularly, of course, old Monterey County areas. Informal reminiscences, chatty old letters, family photographs taken in the area ... all are wonderful for making history come truly alive.



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