

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **En Route To Old Monterey**

The flag of Argentina flew over the Presidio of Monterey in Alta California for five days. On the sixth day, Captain Hypolite de Bouchard ordered the little settlement plundered and burned. That was in 1818.

The date Nov. 22, 1962, —144 years ago — was the anniversary of that historic event, when the Presidio and most of the settlement were reduced to blackened ruin.

J. William MacLennan of Carmel has sent to us an article dealing with this uncalled-for disaster for use in the Diary. Much of the material has been taken from "Neptuna," published in Paris, the author drawing on material not available in California. Robert Doolittle, a subscriber, knowing of Mr. MacLennan's interest in Bouchard, loaned him his copy and the translation was begun. We are using here the part dealing with Monterey.

Bouchard was born near Villefranche, France, had served as cabin-boy at the siege of Malta, and later was engaged in the disastrous affair in San Domingo. In 1810, he entered the service of the rebel government at Buenos Aires as a privateer, preying on Spanish commerce in the Pacific. In July 1817, he set out in command of the frigate Argentina on a voyage around the world, still in search for Spanish shipping, that was to take him to Alta California.

That passage was a hazardous one; his crew suffered from scurvy and 40 men were buried off Java. Shortly afterward, however, while becalmed in Maccassar Straits, the Argentina was overtaken by a band of Malayan pirates. They were about to board the Argentina when her guns roared out. The frigate's superior firepower quickly crippled the junks and so terrified the pirates that they gave up the fight. Bouchard took 20 of the ablest-bodied pirates on board his ship to replace the 40 men he had just lost.

Bouchard arrived at Honolulu on Aug 17, 1818. There he recovered from Kamehameha, king of the Sandwich Islands; the corvette, Santa Rosa, sometimes known as Cacabuso. Her crew had mutinied and sold the ship to Kamehameha for two pipes of rum and 80 hundred-weight of sandalwood. After refitting the Santa Rosa, rounding up the mutineers, recruiting more men and in

addition, 30 Hawaiian women, he set sail on Oct. 25 for Alta California, planning to overthrow the Spanish government in that province, and pick up what loot he could.

Setting a northeast course, three weeks later he visited Pegleg Kusof, commander of Fort Ross, the Russian outpost on Bodega Bay, to learn what he could of the political situation in Alta California and to purchase fresh provisions. Beef and wheat were scarce at the fort and provisions were chiefly fish, venison, and bear meat. Heading southward, three- days later, on the evening of Nov. 22, he entered Monterey Bay.

The plan was to send the Santa Rosa to reconnoiter any fortified works and make a landing from her during the night. However, at 5 o'clock as they were entering the bay a dead calm descended, and a strong outward current caused the ships to drift apart. The Argentina had to anchor 2 miles offshore. The Santa Rosa, after considerable maneuvering in a gathering fog, succeeded in entering the harbor and anchored off an unidentified headland seen dimly through the mist. During the night a landing party was silently and safely transferred from the frigate to the Santa Rosa, a long and tedious process as the men were weak.

When the fog lifted in the morning, Bouchard was dismayed to discover that the Santa Rosa had anchored below the headland on which stood a redoubt containing two batteries of 18 cannon. It was no longer a question of landing troops. The Santa Rosa raised the flag of Argentina and opened fire. This brought a deadly response, salvo after salvo. At the end of 15 minutes the corvette, riddled with shot unable to maneuver and her deck covered with dead and wounded, had to haul down her flag.