

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Monterey Attacked

Capt. Hypolite de Bouchard raised the flag of Argentina over the Presidio at Monterey in 1818, where it flew for five days. On the sixth day, Bouchard ordered the little settlement plundered and burned before he sailed away.

J. William MacLennan of Carmel has sent us a fascinating recount of Bouchard's visit to Monterey and other activities in Alta California in 1818. The story is a translation from the magazine Neptunia published in Paris. It is used with the consent of the magazine and permission of the author to MacLennan, former dean of men at Santa Barbara State College.

During "the battle" between the Santa Rosa, bearing the Argentine flag, and the Spanish on shore, the Santa Rosa was riddled with shot and unable to move. Bouchard was dismayed at what had happened but decided to keep a cool head. He was surprised that the Spaniards made no attempt to board the Santa Rosa, not knowing that the sea-going crafts at Monterey were chiefly dugouts, hardly suitable for boarding warships.

Later in the morning, a light breeze sprang up and the Argentina was able to enter the harbor and anchor in a position from which she could defend the Santa Rosa from further attack.

To play for time, Bouchard sent a messenger to Gov. Sola to ask permission to move the Santa Rosa. Sola replied he could do so only on the payment of a good-sized ransom. Bouchard made no reply, and during the night removed from the Santa Rosa all the able-bodied men. At dawn, he was ready for action and landed 200 men to the west of the redoubt, probably near Point Pinos. After disbursing a small attachment of Spanish dragoons, they advanced to the redoubt. It was deserted.

Gov. Sola had been warned of Bouchard's coming, and when he saw the ships entering Monterey Bay, he sent the women and children and older men to San Antonio Mission. At the same time, he sent for help to the outlying ranches and distant presidios. During the night, he withdrew most of his force to the Salinas River to wait for re-enforcements. Only a few men remained under Sgt. Vallejo to man the guns at the redoubt and get a few shots at the enemy before retiring.

After occupying the redoubt, the Argentinians moved on to the Presidio, firing occasionally as they advanced. When there were no answering shots, they rushed ahead, pushed open the gates and entered. It, too, was deserted except for a Mexican named Molina who was too drunk to get away. The flag of Argentina was again raised and Bouchard made the presidio his headquarters while waiting word from Sola.

Bouchard believed Sola would soon be forced to surrender; nearly all the soldiers in the presidios were Mexicans, revolts were spreading in Mexico. Most of the 3,000 settlers in Alta California were Mexicans, and San Diego, he was assured, was ready to support him. But the little force at Monterey remained loyal; perhaps, partly because the officials and padres, most of whom were Spaniards, had assured them that Bouchard and his men were pirates and would carry off their wives and daughters.

We will continue this true story of Bouchard's visit to Monterey.