

# GALVEZ, SPAIN AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by Pablo Ricardo de, Quintana

Bernardo de Galvez, Spanish hero of the American revolutionary War



Ah, the American Revolution and all those Europeans that came to America to help out. Their statues are found all over Washington D.C. They have been featured on U.S. stamps. Von Steuben ... Pulaski ... Rochambeau ... de Lafayette ... (The Marquis was even made an honorary U.S. citizen!) What about Bernardo de Galvez? Who is he, you may ask. He was the great Spanish hero of the American Revolution. Where are the statues and stamps honoring him? Good luck trying to find them.

When the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Americans realized they would need money to carry out the war. So they sent Franklin (who spoke fluent Spanish. So did Jefferson.) and Dickinson to France and to Spain to try to negotiate some money from those kings. In Spain, they were quickly stopped before they got to Madrid, where it was explained to them that, because England and Spain were not at war, Spain could not help them overtly. Instead they would funnel this money through, among others, the governor of New Orleans, Bernardo de Galvez. In addition, the King of Spain sent out a "request" to all his subjects in Spain and the Americas (including Father Serra in California and the New Mexicans waiting at El Paso for the *reconquista* to begin) that each person contribute two *dolares* and Indians one *dolar* to the American cause, which was done. Before the war was over, Spain would send over 7 million *dolares* to pay for ammunition, supplies, medicines and uniforms for the Americans. (Yes, that is where the name of our currency came from. The Spanish paid in Turinese *Taleres* which they **pronounced** *dolares*. Since this "was the money being used to finance the war, the U.S. Congress adopted the dollar as its currency.)

Because the English were blockading the Americans, the American supply ships could not get through. It was Galvez who solved that problem. Galvez would meet

the Americans in Cuba, "capture" their ships, escort the ships to New Orleans and set them free to go up the Mississippi River to supply the awaiting Americans. (The Western shore of the Mississippi was Spanish and the Eastern shore English until Galvez changed that.) In the meantime, in 1783, Spain finally declared war on England, citing English attacks on Spanish shipping. Immediately, Spain blockaded Gibraltar, and captured the Bahamas and Jamaica, taking those soldiers away from the colonial war. Lt. Gen. Luis Cordoba captured 70 British ships at Espartel Cape.

Galvez went one better. Singlehandedly, he and his men, attacked and captured English Fort Manchac, Fort Baton Rouge, Fort Pan Mure in Natchez, Fort (and city) Charlotte on Mobile Bay, and Fort Barrancas Coloradas and Fort George in Pensacola (including the city of Pensacola) in the South. He was immediately famous throughout the United States and Europe For this, the king appointed him governor of Florida and Louisiana. Galvez then sent his men up the Mississippi to attack and capture those forts as well. This kept about 14,000 Englishmen from continuing the war. It also prevented the English from attacking the Americans from the South.

Finally, Spain set up a blockade on the American coastline denying passage to the English ships. It is this blockade, which impeded the English from sending reinforcements, and the supplies sent to Rochambeau by Galvez, which forced the victory at Yorktown, ending the war. For this work, Jefferson promised not to claim Florida nor any Spanish lands for its own. In 1819, Spain will cede Florida to the Americans for a mere 5 million dolares. France will take back the Louisiana territory East of the Mississippi and then sell it to the Americans for another 10 million dolares. Galvez will be forgotten, remembered only as the one for whom they named Galveston, Texas. All of this has been well-documented by Bishop David Arias in his book, Spanish Roots of America. I recommend that all Hispanos read it.