

FLORIDA FALLEN: SPANISH EAST FLORIDA, THE CUBAN NEGRO MILITIA
AND THE FAILURE OF THE BOURBON REFORMS, 1812-1821

by

ALEJANDRO JOSE GOMEZ-DEL-MORAL

(Under the Direction of Thomas L. Whigham)

ABSTRACT

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Spanish Bourbon Crown ordered a series of reforms– the Bourbon Reforms –intended to strengthen Spain’s position both in Iberia and its colonies. Among the institutions reformed was the Cuban Negro Militia, which then served in Spanish East Florida shortly before its annexation by the United States. This study has two aims: first, it explores the underlying causes of Spain’s loss of Florida and, more broadly, the loss of its other New World colonies – the failure of the Bourbon Reforms – through the militia’s eyes. It develops a new model with which to view the limitations of the reforms and the fall of Florida. This study also considers the militia’s tenure in Florida, particularly its desertions, as a microcosm of a larger breakdown in race relations taking place in the Spanish Caribbean, and argues that, far from being criminals, militia deserters had compelling reasons to flee.

INDEX WORDS: Cuban Negro Militia, East Florida, Spanish Florida, Bourbon Reforms, Race, History, Cuba, Spain, Caribbean Africans, Situado, New Spain, New Granada, Peru, Aponte

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DEDICATION

For Kat, the love of my life, and for my mother, to whom I owe it.

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INTRODUCTION

JULIAN ACOSTA AND THE LOSS OF THE FLORIDAS

On 9 July 1819, Julian Acosta faced trial. Acosta, a militiaman in the fourth company of the Battalion of *Pardos* of Havana, stood accused of repeated desertion: on the fifth of that month, he had abandoned his company's post in St. Augustine, the capital of Spanish East Florida.¹ Acosta, the court maintained, had also tried to flee military service on 1 October of the previous year, while still stationed in Cuba. His more recent desertion was undeniable - he had been caught twenty-two miles from the fort only three days before his trial began. Realizing, perhaps, that evasion would avail him little, Acosta offered his motives in lieu of a defense. He complained that he had been "shamed and abused" by a Sergeant Mauricio Gomes, and that he "lacked clothes". As for the earlier desertion charge, Acosta suggested the possibility of a bureaucratic error, and argued that he could not possibly have deserted in Cuba on the alleged date, as he was en route to Pensacola then, and was later a prisoner in American New Orleans.²

The militiaman faced almost certain conviction on both counts. His defense against the charge of previous desertion did not hold: Acosta mentioned two fellow passengers aboard the Pensacola-bound gunboat *María*, Sub-lieutenants José Insunsa and

¹ Several Spanish racial euphemisms pervade this study. In the interests of clarity, they should be defined before proceeding any further. *Pardos* like Julian Acosta were individuals of mixed white and black heritage, or mulattos. A *moreno* was a free individual of exclusively African descent. Finally, a *casta* was any individual of even partial non-white heritage, including both of the above categories as well as *mestizos*, mixed Amerindian-Europeans.

² Testimony for Trial of Julian Acosta, Records of Court-Martials, 1785-1821, section 64, microfilm reel 120, East Florida Papers (hereafter cited as EFP), P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fl. (hereafter cited as PKY).

Pedro Catalád. One officer, Catalád, placed the trip's departure on 26 November 1817, nearly a year before Acosta's attempt. More damning still, Insunsa testified that only one *pardo* (mulatto) soldier, named Lorenzo Peñalver, had been with them and that it was to Galveston Bay, not New Orleans, that he and his fellow prisoners had been taken.³

But incredibly, the militiaman was not convicted; in fact, it appears no verdict was ever pronounced. During Acosta's trial, East Florida Governor José Coppinger ordered that "he who is in this record be set free to continue in service, given the lack of people able to execute such service at this post..."⁴ Prior to his desertion, Acosta had been nothing more than a common soldier. He was effectively pardoned, then, because St. Augustine lacked enough troops to guard it.

This manpower shortage has been documented, but historians have not analyzed or even quantified it in any great detail. Acosta's desertion and the many others like it in Spanish East Florida have similarly been little studied by scholars. And most of all, Acosta's unit – the Cuban Negro Militia – has been virtually ignored by the historical community.⁵ In an article titled "Guarniciones y Población Militar en Florida Oriental (1700-1820)," historian Juan Marchena Fernández situates East Florida's garrison within the colony's general population, describing the national origins of its soldiers, the regulations that ordered their daily lives, and most importantly, sketching out the fluctuations that occurred in the garrison's size.⁶ The picture he paints, however, is rough at best, and includes no detail on the Cuban militia. Similarly, Herbert S. Klein's "The

³ Trial of Julian Acosta, Records of Courts-Martial, 1785-1821, section 64, reel 120, EFP, PKY.

⁴ Trial of Julian Acosta, Records of Courts-Martial, 1785-1821, section 64, reel 120, EFP, PKY.

⁵ Readers may wonder why I have chosen this phrase as my primary term for the Cuban militia. A convenient and accurate shorthand, I have borrowed it from the East Florida Papers collection's card catalog entries at the University of Florida's P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History.

⁶ Juan Marchena Fernández, "Guarniciones y Población Militar en Florida Oriental (1700-1820)," *Revista de Indias* (1981): 91-142.

Coloured Militia of Cuba” (1966), provides a general outline of the 300 year history of the Cuban Negro Militia, the motives behind its foundation and the duties and possibilities it offered its members, but, at 10 pages in length, offers no detail or depth of analysis.⁷ And this is one of only two articles devoted to the militia: the other, published in 2004 by David Sartorius, only takes up the history of the militia after 1854, by which point the unit’s role and service culture had changed.⁸ Historian Matt Childs has recently produced a monograph on the Aponte Rebellion of 1812, in which militiamen were centrally involved and which is described in detail in Chapter Five of this study.⁹ Finally, the black militia appears in passing in a number of other studies, chiefly Allan Kuethe’s *Cuba, 1753-1815*.¹⁰ Otherwise, though, the Cuban troop’s history remains unexplored, as do its tenure in East Florida and the many desertions it experienced during that time. The present study is consequently the first treatment of substantial length that focuses on the Cuban Negro Militia and is the only existing study of the militia detachment that served in East Florida between 1812 and 1821.

But why study the Cuban Negro Militia at all? A cynic might suggest that the unit has been little studied because it is of little historical importance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Through its analysis of the Cuban militia’s service in East Florida, the present study advances our current understanding of the reasons for the colony’s loss. Since Governor José Coppinger surrendered St. Augustine to representatives of the United States government on 10 July 1821, historians of Florida have attempted to

⁷ Herbert S. Klein, “The Coloured Militia of Cuba,” *Caribbean Studies* 6 (1966): 17-27.

⁸ David Sartorius, “My Vassals: Free-Colored Militias in Cuba and the Ends of Spanish Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5:2, (Winter, 2004).

⁹ Matt Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Allan Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815: Crown, Military and Society*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); see also Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

determine the underlying causes of the turnover.¹¹ These scholars, particularly L. David Norris, Herbert Fuller, Pablo Tornero Tinajero, Paul Hoffman and Rembert Patrick, have arrived at two competing theories for the loss, a tacit consensus of sorts.¹² One theory focuses on the power of money: Tornero and Norris both argue that the 1821 handover was principally the consequence of the St. Augustine government's financial troubles. Tornero, for example, maintains that the colony, deeply in debt by the early nineteenth century, was forced by these debts into an economically dependent relationship with its northern neighbor, a conclusion that Paul Hoffman also supports. The other theory, chiefly espoused by Rembert Patrick, lays the blame for East Florida's loss on the Spanish colony's inability to defend itself:

“[General Andrew] Jackson's activities in Florida did much to convince Spain of the difficulties inherent in keeping a colony which bordered on so unfriendly a country as the United States...Spain knew well that the United States could take Florida, and when President Monroe appeased Spanish honor...the way was open for negotiation”.¹³

Finally, there exists a third approach that combines these two theories. Herbert Fuller proposes first that the Florida annexation was contracted to settle debts that President James Monroe's government claimed Spain owed to the United States. He then argues that ultimately, military might was the deciding factor for, “nothing of the kind would have been conceived or attempted if Spain had been able to defend by force her unquestionable rights”.¹⁴

¹¹ L. David Norris, “José Coppinger in East Florida, 1816-1821: A Man, A Province, and a Spanish Colonial Failure” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1981), 359, 4.

¹² Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Relaciones de Dependencia entre Florida y Estados Unidos (1783-1820)*, (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1979); Paul Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002); Rembert Patrick and Allen Morris, *Florida Under Five Flags*, 4th ed. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967); Herbert B. Fuller, *The Purchase of Florida: Its History and Diplomacy* (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1906).

¹³ Patrick and Morris, *Florida Under Five Flags*, 28-29.

¹⁴ Fuller, 327.

Initially, militia records – in fact, Acosta’s trial record – corroborate Patrick’s theory. In the effective pardon he issued Acosta, Governor Coppinger cited a troop shortage in East Florida, though he did not use this term; this shortage can only have hindered the colony’s attempts to defend itself against attacks like General Andrew Jackson’s 1818 seizure of the strongholds of St. Marks and Pensacola. Moreover, Acosta’s crime, which we will assume to have been common, explains shortages like the one that ironically rescued the militia deserter.

Insofar as historians have engaged with the Cuban Negro Militia’s service record in Florida, their conclusions suggest that this assumption is a safe one. From 1813 through 1821, officials including St. Johns River commander Tomás Llorente and East Florida Governor Sebastián Kindelán (1812-1815) criticized the militia in their correspondence, calling its members cowardly and unreliable, and bemoaned the militia’s surfeit of desertions. Meanwhile, citing Llorente and Kindelán – but significantly, not any desertion cases – historians James Robertson Ward and Jane Landers have recently echoed this assessment of the militia.¹⁵

But the state of the East Florida garrison is only the most obvious, superficial factor in the colony’s decline, for Llorente and Kindelán on other occasions lauded their militiamen and expressed total confidence in their abilities, while according to Matt Childs and Herbert Klein, the soldiers of the Cuban Negro Militia served as a model for

¹⁵ Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1999); James Robertson Ward, *Old Hickory’s Town: An Illustrated History of Jacksonville* (Jacksonville: Old Hickory’s Town, Inc., 1985); In *Black Society in Spanish Florida*, Jane Landers seemingly dismisses the Cuban Negro Militia, noting Governor Sebastián Kindelán’s disdain for them as cowardly and undisciplined “convicts”, presenting Georgian outrage as their primary consequence and thereafter narrating Kindelán’s use of the urban, local militia - almost as if arguing for the relevance of the latter over the former. The remainder of her chapter of her chapter bears this out, as the emphasis there is on local black militias, including Jorge Jacobo’s corps and Jorge Biassou’s Black Auxiliaries of Charles IV. Meanwhile, in *Old Hickory’s Town*, James Robertson Ward quotes Tomás Llorente, saying much the same, without offering any form of qualification to the latter’s statements.

black militias in Spain's other colonies, with members routinely achieving officer rank.¹⁶ Clearly, something besides criminality was motivating these soldiers to flee their posts. Once again, Acosta provides the answer: in his trial testimony, the militiaman listed two motives for his desertion, a lack of clothes and verbal abuse by a superior. A brief survey of the correspondence exchanged between the East Florida governor and his army commanders during this period reveals that Cuban Negro Militia deserters did not flee capriciously, but rather due to myriad grievances like Acosta's, including a high incidence of hospitalization, a pronounced lack of food, uniforms and pay, and clear indication from their superiors that theirs was a losing battle for a province that Spain was soon going to give up anyway. These shortages, then, as well as their symptom must also be numbered among the dysfunctions that precipitated the loss of Spanish Florida.

As must the causes of these shortages. If desertions like Acosta's were ultimately responsible for the loss of East Florida and if these desertions were in turn the result of hardships inherent to Florida service, then the question is, why did soldiers in Florida have it so hard? Here, Tornero and Norris hit the mark – the problem was mostly one of money. In his 1981 doctoral dissertation, Norris maintains that the colonial government in St. Augustine constantly operated on the verge of bankruptcy during the last decades of Spanish rule. In fact, in the end, Norris states, Coppinger himself donated 3,000 pesos of his own money to keep his government afloat.¹⁷ Records from the St. Augustine Royal Treasury confirm Norris' argument, describing a sudden, severe crash in the colony's finances in 1811, during which the treasury's monthly overhead dropped by an entire

¹⁶ Childs, 82-83 and Klein, 17-27.

¹⁷ Norris.

order of magnitude. Apparently, Tornero and Norris were right; East Florida's troubles can ultimately be reduced to economics.

Except that even a colony as small as East Florida was not that uncomplicated. Yes, the poor state of the East Florida garrison was largely due to a lack of pay and supplies rooted in a money shortage. However, the converse relationship was also true: as Herbert Fuller argues, the United States was able to act as high-handedly as it did with respect to East Florida because the colony was essentially defenseless. And one of these abuses, an 1812 invasion and rebellion that U.S. troops initially backed, disrupted the normal rhythm of agriculture and commerce in East Florida, exacerbating what had already become a serious economic problem and in turn contributing to still further military troubles in the future. Also, as desertions caused the Florida garrison to dwindle, so too did the size of the *situado*, the vital subsidy that St. Augustine used to pay its military and other expenses.¹⁸ While the part that colonial finances played was an important one, widespread poor governing also damaged the colony. In particular, as we will see, a policy of lenience toward deserters throughout the early nineteenth century fostered further flight from military service. And finally, circumstances in the colonies on which East Florida depended – chiefly New Spain and Cuba – need to be considered; the Cuban Negro Militia was, after all, a Cuban rather than Floridian unit.

This study also addresses the real possibility that the Cuban Negro Militia detachment in East Florida has been shortchanged historically. To this point, we have treated the commonness of Julian Acosta's crime as a commonplace; this is, however, based on an existing consensus that historians and contemporaries have reached with little recourse to evidence. No historian to date has actually tallied the militia unit's

¹⁸ See footnote 267.

desertions and as this crime was not uncommon in the early nineteenth-century Spanish colonial military, the existing image of the Cuban militia as flighty – Kindelán’s legacy – remains largely unproven.¹⁹ Again, Llorente and Kindelán periodically praised the militia, drawing into question whether its soldiers were really the ne’er-do-wells these two officials otherwise considered them. And the militiamen appear to have fled for understandable reasons rather than laziness or a basic unwillingness to serve in what was, ultimately, a volunteer corps. As we will see, a number did not even intend to remain absent, but instead used short-term desertion as a way of communicating their desperate situations to their superiors. Given these revelations, these men may not have been unreliable; they may simply have been coping with impossible service conditions, potentially bad enough that some might consider their acts justified.

And there is an even larger issue at stake here. For much of its history, the Cuban Negro Militia existed as the primary avenue for the social and material advancement of the Afro-Cuban, who otherwise occupied the lowest level of the Spanish colonial social class system, which was primarily defined by racial categories. An enterprising Cuban militiaman, according to Herbert Klein, could aspire to officer’s rank and more. Historians Allan Kuethe, Lyle McAlister and Ben Vinson III, meanwhile, have similarly described the black militias of New Granada and New Spain as loopholes in a society that otherwise offered blacks little. The case of East Florida, however, raises doubts about whether militia enlistment was by the early nineteenth century still the bargain enlistees had once believe it to be, whether in Florida, Cuba or anywhere else in the Spanish Caribbean. In light of the challenges that militia soldiers faced, and the desertion with which Llorente and Kindelán claim they responded, the militia may very well have

¹⁹ See Chapter Two.

instead been for them a devil's bargain. And this, if so, in turn calls into question whether social mobility was at this time a reasonable possibility at all in the Spanish Caribbean.

Finally, through its consideration of the militia's service in East Florida, this work examines in microcosm several of the principal reasons behind Spain's loss of its Caribbean colonies and the failure of the Spanish Crown's great attempt to preserve its overseas possessions, the Bourbon Reforms. East Florida's troubles were not unique: though a small colony with a maximum population of only 3,000, East Florida was part of a larger economic and administrative network that included the Viceroyalty of New Spain as well as Cuba, a network whose constituent colonies ultimately drew on the same shared pool of military, monetary and natural resources. For example, the provinces of East and West Florida were financially dependent on an annual *situado*, a monetary subsidy sent from New Spain, and both colonies, though led by royal governors, also fell under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Cuba. Consequently, the problems that were responsible for the loss of East Florida – flaws in the new colonial order established by the Bourbon Reforms – can also be discovered at work in Spain's other Caribbean possessions. In East Florida, thanks to a smaller population, bureaucracy, budget and military, the individual crises are simply easier to spot and analyze.

A focus on the Cuban militia is central to this analysis because all of Spanish East Florida's major dysfunctions – and some of the most debilitating in Spain's other Caribbean colonies – were present in or affected the militia directly, did so with particular severity and can thus be more easily tracked. As hinted earlier, for example, desertion and consequent manpower shortages were rife in East Florida, and, as we will see, were most prevalent in the three companies of black Cuban militia. Supply and pay

shortages, another challenge that St. Augustine administrators faced (described in greater detail below), were also felt most acutely by East Florida's Afro-Cuban soldiers, and with some of the clearest consequences – namely, desertions like Acosta's. Also, significantly, direct comparisons drawn between the Cuban militia and the similarly dysfunctional black militia and white regular army units raised in Spain's other colonies during the late Bourbon era reveal the shared difficulties that all of these provinces faced while trying to establish and retain their garrisons.

As an evaluation of the Bourbon Reforms and their shortcomings, this study joins a larger debate centered on the question of the Reforms' role in the decline of Spanish hegemony in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Latin America. As described below, in Chapter One, the Bourbon Reforms were intended to streamline Spain's colonial administration and military, revitalizing the kingdom's presence in its colonies. Over the last 50 years, however, a number of scholars have argued that the Crown's actions instead contributed to or even directly caused the loss of Spain's empire.

The opening salvo came from Lyle N. McAlister's *The 'Fuero Militar' in New Spain* (1957). McAlister argues that the Bourbon monarchy's loss of its premier colony resulted largely from the introduction of the *fuero militar* during the era of the Bourbon Reforms. According to him, as the eighteenth century progressed, the *fuero*, a legal privilege that allowed soldiers to request trial by court-martial in limited cases, began to be abused by its holders, who now applied it in all instances. From this practice evolved a form of militarism that undermined Spanish hegemony in New Spain: no longer answerable to ordinary royal courts, the *fuero*'s abusers began to see themselves as a

distinct class that existed above royal authority, a significant factor in the deterioration of Spanish rule in New Spain.²⁰

Allan Kuethe, a student of McAlister's, disagrees. McAlister maintains that the lure of the *fuero's* privileges caused a fusion of New Spain's creole aristocracy and the military, creating the militaristic class described above. In *Military Reform and Society in New Granada* (1978), Kuethe argues that no such fusion took place in most of that colony, and that those creole/military hybridizations that did occur only indicate that McAlister may have ignored similar regional variations in New Spain.²¹ More significantly, Kuethe also finds that rebellion flourished most in those areas where these unions never took place, suggesting that the Bourbons' military reforms contributed to rather than undermined colonial stability. Kuethe goes even further in *Cuba, 1753-1815: Crown, Military and Society* (1986). Here, Kuethe maintains that the Bourbon Reforms were directly responsible for Cuba's continued loyalty to the Spanish Crown even as its neighbors rebelled. Cuba's elite, Kuethe reasons, remained loyal to Madrid because the military honors and trade concessions that they received under the Bourbon Reforms made this worth their while. In other words, Cuba remained faithful, according to Kuethe, because the Bourbon Reforms kept the colony's patrician class happy.²²

Christon Archer's *The Army in Bourbon Mexico* (1977) also challenges the validity of McAlister's assertions, this time in New Spain itself. According to Archer, McAlister's destabilizing praetorian tradition simply never materialized. The Mexican military, he argues, did not dabble in politics until very late in the Bourbon era. Neither

²⁰ Lyle N. McAlister, *The "Fuero Militar" in New Spain, 1764-1800*, (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1957).

²¹ Allan Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773-1808*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978).

²² Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*.

was it possible for the military to rise to dominance, for competitors within the royal bureaucracy and the colony's mercantile and mining sectors quickly checked any such ambitions. Most of all, Archer maintains that New Spain's creoles quickly lost interest in the military as the *fuero's* limited privileges were overshadowed by the duties and risks that militia service entailed. Like Kuethe, Archer absolves the Bourbon Reforms of any substantive blame for Spain's losses; the real culprits, he states, were the minor officials who implemented the reforms ineffectually and the ideological exports of the American and French Revolutions, which introduced a new rhetoric of republicanism and independence to the viceroyalty.²³

In McAlister's defense, Ben Vinson III challenges the previous two authors' view of the late Bourbon period as a time of unambiguous military renewal in *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (2001). For New Spain's free-colored (black) militia, he argues, this was instead a period of decline, during which militia enlistments decreased sharply and the militia's traditional privileges were repeatedly questioned by colonial authorities. By contrast, the black Mexican militia had been a large, flourishing and effective troop prior to the advent of the Bourbon Reforms, despite claims by Archer and Kuethe that pre-Reform militias were unorganized forces that existed mostly on paper.²⁴ Matt Childs' text on the Aponte Rebellion, meanwhile, supports Vinson's gloomy assessment, blaming the rebellion on the Reforms' erosion of the relatively stable traditional order of racial castes. The result, Childs argues, was the

²³ Christon Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977).

²⁴ Vinson III.

polarization of Cuban society into increasingly hostile black and white halves, leading directly to Aponte's uprising.²⁵

This study's findings wholly favor neither side. On the one hand, it supports McAlister, Vinson and Childs – the Bourbon Reforms were flawed. The plight of the Cuban militia in East Florida reveals that colonial finances were not well administered and that despite Christon Archer's claims this misadministration was not exclusively or even primarily the province of minor officials. By 1812, East Florida was heavily in debt, much of it to the United States, largely because the Viceroy of New Spain had other uses for Florida's *situado*. This study also supports Ben Vinson in his assertion that the traditional view of the Bourbon Reform period as a time of military resurgence is bankrupt. The material hardships that the Cuban Negro Militia's soldiers (and white regulars too) endured on a daily basis once they reached East Florida and the dereliction of duty with which many of them responded are hardly consonant with a supposedly increasingly effective military.

On the other hand, like Kuethe's work on New Granada, the Cuban militia's story suggests that generalization and the placing of too much blame on the Bourbon Reforms is also problematic. The loss of East Florida, and by extension, the loss of Spain's other colonies, was the result not only of the Reforms' shortcomings, but of a series of unexpected and overwhelming events that took place outside of colonial administrators' control. The invasion of Spain by Emperor Bonaparte's armies and both military and economic pressures from the increasingly annexationist United States were just two of these phenomena. This is a position similar to Christon Archer's, and in this respect his may be the most accurate published account yet.

²⁵ Childs.

However, all of these authors have remained too regional in their scope. As stated earlier, none of Spain's colonies existed in a vacuum; the example of East Florida, a colony militarily dependent on Cuba and financially dependent on New Spain, suggests that to properly understand the loss of any of the aforementioned colonies we must first look to the circumstances that befell Spain's other possessions at that time. While, for example, mismanagement and financial catastrophe are identified here as the base causes for the decline of East Florida, the former problem originated not in St. Augustine but in Madrid, with the many indulgences that the King issued to deserters. Florida's economic fortunes, meanwhile, hinged primarily on events in New Spain. And in point of fact, from 1810 on, New Spain was in the midst of a civil war and could hardly spare funds for a *situado* – thus, one underlying cause for Florida's financial problem.

The structure of this study is somewhat like the peeling of an onion (though onions, unlike this work, do not have cores). Chapter One provides the historical basis necessary for the inquiry to follow: the general history of Spanish East Florida, the Cuban Negro Militia and the Spanish colonial administration, with particular attention paid to the structure of the colonial military and the contents of the Bourbon Reforms. Following this introduction, Chapter Two examines the outer layer of the problem represented by the Cuban Negro Militia, its desertions. This chapter's first mission is to establish the commonness of desertions in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Spanish garrisons. Drawing upon the black militia's monthly inspection records, it then attempts to compile the hard data that James Ward and Jane Landers lack – a quantitative analysis of desertions from the Cuban militia detachment in East Florida. Finally, it considers these figures alongside desertions from white units in the East Florida garrison as well as

black and white units posted elsewhere in the Caribbean and attempts to answer this question: was the militia actually exceptional in its levels of flight?

Chapter Three delves deeper into the dysfunctions that undermined Spanish rule in East Florida. This Chapter explores the poor service conditions that may have motivated the militia's desertions and, again, the question of whether these privations were present in Spain's other Caribbean colonies. It also establishes an evidentiary link between these conditions and desertions, basing this link in causal statements that appear in correspondence between garrison commanders and the East Florida Governor. In Chapter Four, this study goes still another layer deeper, to the two core reasons for East Florida's logistical shortfalls and the Cuban militia's many desertions: first, a catastrophic financial crunch that took place in Spanish Florida between 1811 and 1821 (precisely when the Cuban militia served in Florida), and second, a culture of tolerance created by over-lenient officials that only encouraged further desertion. In this effort, this chapter also creates a financial history for the colony's treasury from 1806 through 1821, drawing on the treasury's remarkably detailed and complete collection of balance records for this period. And as before, it situates East Florida within the context of a broader economic decline in late Bourbon Spanish America, arguably one of the principal causes of Florida's own financial crisis.

And lastly, this study's concluding chapter summarizes and ties together the many arguments presented in the previous sections. Chapter Five presents a condensed narrative of the chain of events that led to the loss of East Florida and explains the reasons for the Cuban Negro Militia's poor conduct on the peninsula. In particular, it emphasizes the collapse of the Cuban militia as an avenue for social advancement and

discusses the larger breakdown of the traditional racial order in Cuba, of which the 1812 Aponte Rebellion was the apex, as well as the resulting grievances that East Florida's black Cuban militiamen likely brought with them in 1812 and 1813. This chapter ends by reviewing those dysfunctional elements that this case study reveals as common to the Spanish Caribbean as a whole – in other words, flaws in the Bourbon Reforms – and summarizes this work's implications for the historiography of the Reforms. At the same time, it also admits that colonies like New Spain and New Granada were too large to be exactly analogous to East Florida, and thus, while this explanation for the loss of Florida may be complete or nearly so, the problems presented here were only some of those faced by the colony's larger siblings.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Before embarking on our study of the Cuban Negro Militia and the Bourbon Reforms in East Florida, it behooves us to map out the historical backdrop against which the events we will consider played out. Firstly, it is hardly possible to discuss the Bourbon Reforms or evaluate them without defining the content and trajectory of those measures. Similarly, the Cuban militia's conduct in East Florida can hardly be evaluated responsibly without some discussion of its past and especially of the expectations and grievances that its soldiers may have brought with them. And, finally, the actual history of Spain's tenure in the Floridas merits discussion, as the Cuban militia's place within this history is the subject of this work, and, as we will see, the story of East Florida's Cuban militia detachment is inextricably linked to the tale of the Spanish colony's decline. Florida's three companies of Afro-Cuban soldiers would hardly have been shipped to St. Augustine in the first place had the Patriot War not erupted in 1812. And, equally, Gregor McGregor's invasion in 1817 significantly changed the character of the militia's service, stripping the Spanish of two of the militia's most common postings.

A History of Spanish Florida

With the exception of a brief 'golden age' (1672-1704), virtually all of Florida's history before its annexation by the United States was one of constant struggle between the great European powers (and, after 1783, the United States) for possession of what was

by all accounts a strategically key colony. The history of colonial Florida began on Easter, 1513, when *Adelantado* Juan Ponce de León, sighted an isle off the Florida coast sailing in search of the fabled island of Bimini,. Upon making landfall six days later, on 2 April, Ponce de León named his discovery in honor of the Easter festival of *Pascua Florida* (Easter of Flowers), claimed it for Spain and began an unsuccessful search for his twin objectives – gold and the mythical Fountain of Youth.²⁶ Subsequent voyages by Pánfilo de Narváez, Hernando de Soto and Father Luis Cancer de Barbastro (famously embraced by an Indian, taken back to the native’s camp, and then “clubbed...into eternity”) were similar failures; the Spanish Crown, however, was unconcerned by this inability to make good on Ponce de León’s claim.²⁷ By the mid-sixteenth century, however, authorities realized that Florida could not only serve Spain as a base from which to protect the shipping routes that its treasure fleets followed along the *Carrera de las Indias*, but, alarmingly, that the peninsula could also potentially be used as a military base by other European nations, making Florida a threat to the very shipments the Spanish hoped it would protect.²⁸

Thus entered armed conflict into the history of colonial Florida: after two more failed colonization attempts by the Spanish in 1559 and 1561, in 1562 a party of 200 French Huguenots led by Jean Ribaut landed near the mouth of the St. John’s River. After erecting a column declaring French ownership of the newly-discovered land, Ribaut sailed up the coast and founded Port Royal, “from which French vessels could prey on richly laden Spanish merchantmen”. Two years later, Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France, founded Fort Caroline on the banks of the St. Johns, which Ribaut had named the

²⁶ Norris, 4.

²⁷ Patrick and Morris, 1-3.

²⁸ Norris, 5.

River of May. Phillip II's response was swift: in 1565, the Spanish King dispatched a war party led by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, which landed in late August at the site of present-day St. Augustine and immediately founded the future colonial capital. By the end of the summer, Avilés' forces had wiped out the French presence.²⁹

Menéndez de Avilés had succeeded in purging the French from *La Florida*, but Spanish hegemony in the colony did not remain unchallenged for long and conflict over Spain's possession of Florida continued until the province was ceded to the British in 1763. In the late 1500s, attacks by English and French corsairs on Spain's fleets and coastline settlements increased dramatically, with Francis Drake and John Hawkins among the leading aggressors. Most notably, in 1586 Drake sacked and burned St. Augustine following a year of successful piracy against Spanish colonial shipping.³⁰ Eighty years later, another British pirate fleet repeated Drake's act in 1668.³¹ And the British founding of the Carolina colonies – laying claim to territory that the Spanish had considered part of *La Florida* since at least the mid-sixteenth century – as well as the construction of Charles Town in 1670 only provoked the Spanish further.

Following an unsuccessful attempt at negotiation that resulted in an inconclusive coexistence treaty, authorities in Florida attempted to capture and plunder Port Royal (see figure 1.1) in 1686, a plan that backfired and ended with the temporary capture and burning of St. Augustine in 1702 by Carolina Governor James Moore. That Moore was eventually forced to retreat was due to another, defensive military action that the Spanish had previously undertaken: the building of the *Castillo de San Marcos* in 1672. Moore

²⁹ Norris, 6-8.

³⁰ Norris, 8; Robert L. Gold, *Borderland Empires in Transition: The Triple-Nation Transfer of Florida* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 5; Patrick and Morris, 13.

³¹ Gold, 7.

returned the following year, however, attacking the Spaniards' Apalache and Timucua mission villages.³²

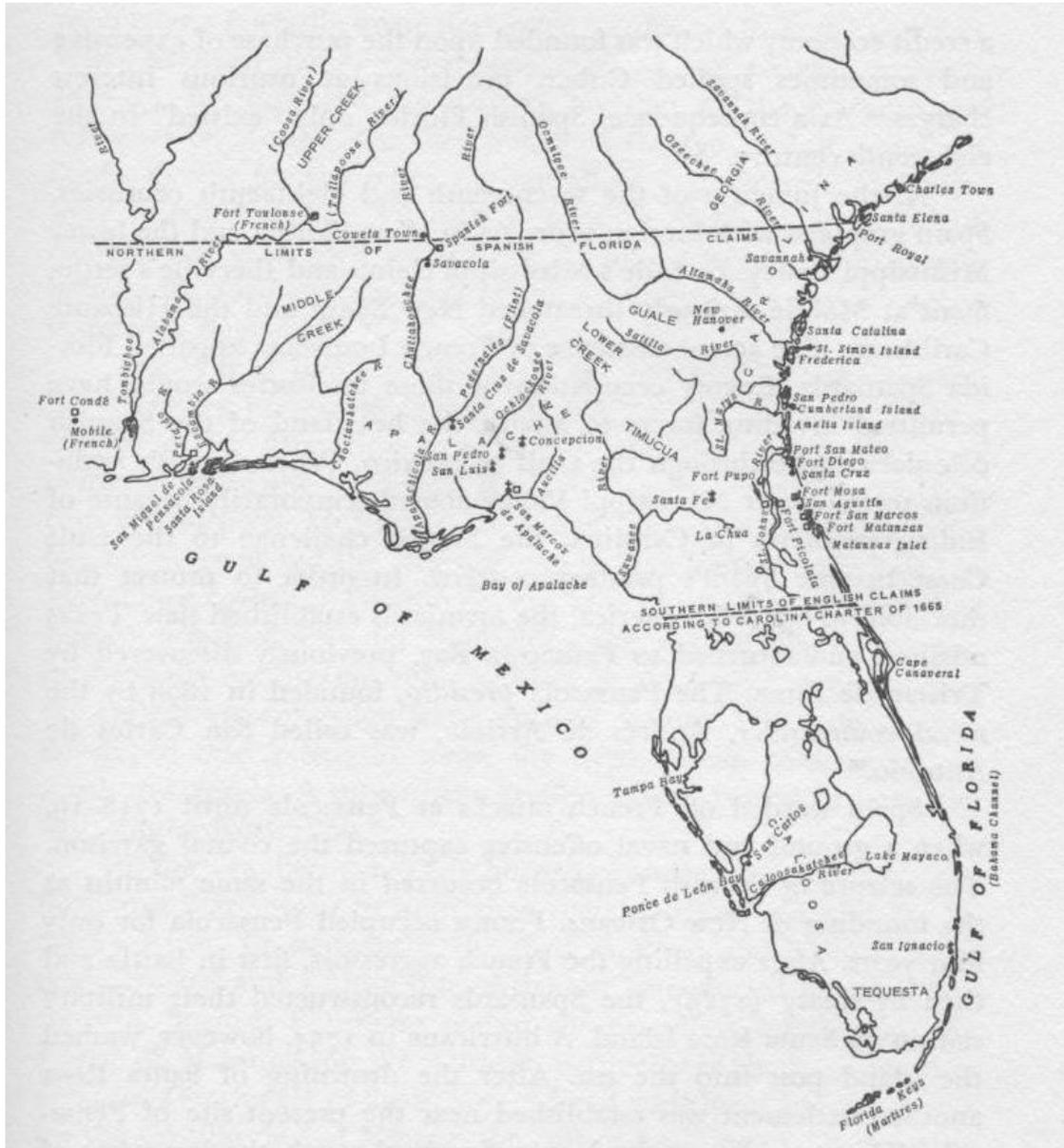


Figure 1.1: Conflicting Claims over Florida³³

³² For the coexistence treaty and subsequent conflicts, see Patrick and Morris, 13, and Gold, 7-8; for the building of the Castillo, see Norris, 13-14 and, in detail, Verne Chatelain, *The Defenses of Spanish Florida 1565 to 1763*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1941); for Moore's later attack, see Gold, 8.

³³ Image taken from Gold, 9.

The tumultuous early eighteenth century, marked by European conflicts including Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1743) and the Seven Years War (1754-1763) brought still more conflict to Spanish Florida, as in 1718-1719, when a combined French ground and naval offensive captured the stronghold of Pensacola, retaken by the Spanish four years later.³⁴ The English, meanwhile, pressed the advantage they had gained with Moore's attack, pushing as far south as the Altamaha River by 1721 (see figure 1.1). A guerilla sortie into Spanish Florida followed five years later. And after founding the colony of Georgia in 1732-1733, General James Oglethorpe fortified Amelia, Cumberland, Fort George and St. Simon Islands, from which he overran Spanish Florida's defenses during the War of Jenkins' Ear, only to be rebuffed, as his ancestors had been, upon reaching the impregnable *Castillo de San Marcos*. Another invasion two years later ended similarly in failure.³⁵

Finally, 1763 brought these conflicts to a temporary conclusion. As the Seven Years' War (or in North America, the French and Indian War) stretched into 1761, Spain joined in as an ally of the French. The war did not go well for the Spanish: British forces quickly captured Havana, a key military and economic city that the Spanish felt they could not afford to lose permanently. Consequently, when the English offered Spain a choice at the 1762-1763 peace talks in Paris – surrender either Florida or Puerto Rico in exchange for Havana's return – King Charles III chose to surrender *La Florida*.³⁶

The British King ruled in East and West Florida for the next twenty years. Over the course of these two decades, British authorities set about molding the two Floridas into typical British colonies. The provinces' governments were reformed: both territories

³⁴ Gold, 10.

³⁵ For a general account, see Gold, 11; Norris, 18, contains further detail.

³⁶ Norris, 14.

received royal governors similar to those serving in Britain's Atlantic colonies, and the Crown established elected assemblies in West and East Florida in 1766 and 1781, respectively. The population changed, with the emigration of all but eight of the colonies' previous Spanish inhabitants and their replacement with British colonists, soldiers and officials. This demographic shift was only amplified once the American Revolutionary War broke out and loyalists from Britain's southern colonies began crossing into Florida. Catholicism left as its practitioners did, with the Anglican Church moving in to take its place, albeit half-heartedly and with little support from the Church in England. Most significant, however, was the economic change that the British wrought in *La Florida*: trade with Britain, now on the threshold of its Industrial Revolution, created a lively domestic export economy, with over £22,000 worth of indigo, deerskins, timber, naval stores and oranges exported from East Florida by 1774.³⁷ Among the merchants who established themselves during this boom were future mercantile heavyweights John Forbes, William Panton, William Alexander and John Leslie, the future founders of the powerful Panton, Leslie and Company.³⁸ So powerful did this company become that not only did it survive Spain's return to East Florida, but Samuel Proctor suggests that "in many ways the story of Spain in Florida is also the story of Panton, Leslie".³⁹

But if material and political evolution was one trend prevalent during this period, another was stagnation. The population remained low, as it had been under the Spanish. Despite many attempts to convince British settlers to migrate, offering vast tracts of free

³⁷ Patrick and Morris, 23; also, see export tables in Paul Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 222-223.

³⁸ For more on Panton, Leslie and Company and its founders, see William Coker, "Entrepreneurs in the British and Spanish Floridas, 1775-1821," in *Eighteenth-Century Florida and the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel Proctor (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 15-40; see also J.A. Brown, "Panton, Leslie and Company: Indian Traders of Pensacola and St. Augustine," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 37 (1959), 329.

³⁹ Samuel Proctor, "Research Opportunities in the Spanish Borderlands: East Florida, 1763-1821," *Latin American Research Review* 7 (Summer, 1972), 13.

land and proclaiming the numerous virtues of life in Florida, the colony's British population after two decades remained a paltry 3,000, nearly all settled along the coastline. The colony's infrastructure also remained largely unchanged, with St. Augustine's Church of England housed in the old Catholic Church, the courthouse in a reclaimed Spanish hospital and the former bishop's house now the state house.⁴⁰ In fact, the British were if anything negligent in their custody of what the Spanish had built. Six years after Florida's reacquisition by the Spanish, Mariano de la Rocque, commander of the military *presidio* of St. Augustine, reported "the state of the soldiers' barracks are at this time in a bad state, due to this [repairs] not having been done when proper, and [they] are almost impossible to render usable without extraordinary expense...", while the state house and the military's high command building were in similar state. In fact, repairs to all barracks and the high command, according to de la Rocque's projections, would cost in excess of 50,000 pesos, while expenses that he considered urgent even in peacetime totaled nearly 97,000 pesos!⁴¹ Britain's Native American policy in Florida would also create problems for the Spanish on their return. British East Florida Governor James Grant introduced the practice of Indian diplomacy via the giving of gifts and guaranteed that the British would only settle within a set area, policies that the Spanish could not abandon upon their return for fear of native reprisals, but which added another burden to the colony's coffers and curbed any territorial expansion Spain might have wished to undertake.⁴²

⁴⁰ Norris, 25.

⁴¹ Mariano de la Rocque, Estado General de la Plaza de San Agustín....1789, 1 Dec 1789, section 42, reel 76, EFP, PKY.

⁴² Norris, 27.

Spain's second attempt at success in Florida began on 27 June 1784, with the arrival in St. Augustine of the colony's new governor, Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes. The year before, Spain had regained both East and West Florida as part of the Treaty of Paris, which had ended the American War of Independence. Zéspedes was, naturally enough, eager for his tenure in Florida to be fruitful and as one historian points out, "There existed no obvious reason in 1783 to expect that Spain's control over the Floridas and the Caribbean would not be as permanent as Zéspedes expected".⁴³ But, almost immediately following the new governor's arrival, the perennial problem of territorial conflict reasserted itself.

Legal conflicts quickly arose between departing British authorities and Zéspedes' administration, chiefly over jurisdiction to arrest and prosecute bandits who until then had raided unchecked along the Georgia-Florida border. At least one serious diplomatic clash erupted: in 1787, Georgia Governor George Mathews threatened to invade East Florida, believing that Spanish military assistance to the area's Native Americans had caused the Creek War. Governor Zéspedes was only able to resolve the matter after delicate negotiations.⁴⁴ Even in these early years of renewed Spanish rule, St. Augustine also weathered a number of violent internal uprisings, including William Augustus Bowles' raids on the Panton Company. Arriving in 1785 with the intent of ending Panton and Leslie's trade monopoly in Florida, Bowles reacted to his initial failure by coordinating attacks against the company's trading stores, following this with many other plots that he pursued throughout Zéspedes' tenure as governor.⁴⁵

⁴³ Norris, 87-88.

⁴⁴ Norris, 93.

⁴⁵ Norris, 92.

The next two decades, overseen by Governors Juan de Quesada (1790-1796) and Enrique White (1796-1811) were surprisingly quiet ones for Florida, which served as a spectator to the upheavals gripping its mother country. Following the execution of Louis XVI, Spain declared war against Revolutionary France on 25 March 1793, a war it fought until the summer of 1795. Nine years later, Spain entered a second war – the Napoleonic War – with the collapse of the Peace of Amiens, and in 1808, Spain declared war against France (previously its ally) after French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s troops, who at the time were in transit through Spain by invitation, instead occupied their host.

As the first decade of the nineteenth century came to a close, Florida’s relatively peaceful status quo was shattered due to the United States’ increasingly evident territorial ambitions. In 1810, an American uprising in Baton Rouge touched off a three-year diplomatic and military struggle that culminated in West Florida’s annexation by the United States in 1813.⁴⁶ In 1811, war came to East Florida as well: mounting tensions with Great Britain provided the United States with a pretext to annex the colony, to which the U.S. Congress responded by issuing a secret resolution that authorized the potential acquisition.⁴⁷ President James Madison appointed two commissioners charged with enforcing this resolution, one of whom – former-Governor Mathews – recruited a rebel

⁴⁶ Hoffman, 261; Rembert Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border 1810-1815*, (Athens: University of Georgia, 1954), 32-39; see also Fuller, 146-181.

⁴⁷ Rufus Kay Wyllys, “The East Florida Revolution of 1812-1814” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 9, no. 4, (Nov, 1929), 419-424; This resolution, quoted on page 420, declared that, “the United States....cannot without serious inquietude, see any part of the said territory pass into the hands of any foreign power [meaning Britain.... a due regard to their own safety compels them to provide....for the temporary occupation of the said territory....subject to future negotiation”]; the final clause of this resolution is suggestive of an underlying annexationist motivation.

army of self-styled “Patriots” and successfully provoked a rebellion along the Georgia-Florida frontier shortly thereafter, which has since been referred to as the ‘Patriot War’.⁴⁸

The Patriot War began in mid-March 1812, and lasted almost exactly two years. At first, the fighting went badly for the Spanish: Mathews’ “Patriots” captured the Fernandina battery on Amelia Island bloodlessly and, emboldened by this easy victory, moved on St. Augustine and besieged the capital on the twenty-fifth. By the end of the summer, however, the momentum had shifted back to the Spanish side, aided chiefly by the United States’ declaration of war against Great Britain on 12 June, and the republic’s consequent withdrawal of support for the Patriot cause. Fighting dragged on for 23 more months, during which the Patriots, now led by a man named Buckner Harris, gradually retreated into the Alachua region of Florida’s interior. After Harris was killed in an ambush in early May 1814, the movement dissolved, and the Patriot War ended.

This proved to be the last lengthy conflict Spain fought in East Florida. For most of the next five years, conflict in the colony consisted of bandit raids and punitive military expeditions along the northern border. The one notorious exception came in June 1817, when Admiral Gregor McGregor and a small force of American citizens captured Amelia Island. McGregor held Fernandina for very little time – United States troops occupied the island in December – but Spain never recovered it or Fort San Nicolás, Tomás Llorente’s command on the St. Johns River, which the Spanish had abandoned in their retreat. Two years later, Spain finally chose to rid itself of its troublesome colony. Following much secret negotiation, the Adams-Onís Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C. on 22 February 1819, which ceded East and West Florida as well as Oregon to the

⁴⁸ Wyllys; see also Patrick, Chapters 3-4, and James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish Florida*, (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2003), 56-58.

United States. After two more years of lame-duck administration on the peninsula, Governor Coppinger formally surrendered Florida on 10 July 1821.⁴⁹

The Cuban Negro Militia and East Florida

The Cuban Negro Militia entered this story on 18 June 1812, when two 90-soldier companies from Havana's Battalion of *Morenos*, the Spanish term for free-born blacks, disembarked in St. Augustine. They were joined by a third 90-man company from the Havana Battalion of *Pardos* ten months later. These soldiers arrived as reinforcements: alarmed by the disastrous trajectory that the Patriot War had taken, Governor Kindelán requested additional soldiers from Havana immediately after taking up his new command earlier that month.⁵⁰ The 270 militiamen he received were seasoned soldiers in a troop with a 200 year tradition of exemplary service, but were not necessarily motivated by altruism or patriotism. They were opportunists, men who had enlisted seeking better lives for themselves.

Cuba's black militia had been founded more than 200 years before, in 1586. Like its counterparts in the Spanish colonies of New Spain, New Granada, Louisiana, and, for that matter, Florida, the Cuban militia was founded to protect the coastal regions of its colony from foreign invasion. Cuba was a particularly enticing prize to Great Britain, France and other participants in Caribbean-European trade, as the island's geographic

⁴⁹ See footnote 11.

⁵⁰ Wyllys, 424, 426; it is important to note that Kindelán requested and received reinforcements from Havana because the Cuban Governor and Captain-General was his superior. Because of both Floridian colonies' and Spanish Louisiana's low populations, all three of these territories were made part of a larger Captain-Generalcy of Cuba, Florida and Louisiana as of the Floridas' 1783 reacquisition. East and West Florida had their own governors – Kindelán was one – but these ultimately reported to and received their primary military, financial and administrative support from Havana. See Duvon C. Corbitt, "The Administrative System in the Floridas, 1781-1821," *Tequesta* 1 no. 2, (Aug., 1942), 41-62.

position allowed it to exert control over trade in the region, rendering it a veritable “gateway to the Caribbean”.⁵¹

While at first, blacks were simply members of a general militia, by the seventeenth century they had their own company, the *Compañía de Pardos Libres*. Like many of the other black militias formed in the Spanish colonies, by the end of the eighteenth century this militia company was organized as a professional military body rather than a voluntary civilian corps – in the 1760s, they were termed a ‘disciplined’ rather than an ‘urban’ militia. Its soldiers were entitled to uniforms, drilled regularly, were often employed on guard duty and were subject to severe military discipline. And after the British capture of Havana in 1762 and Spain’s subsequent surrender of East and West Florida, this movement toward professionalism only increased.⁵²

These soldiers also saw military action often and not always in Cuba. In 1767, for example, General O’Reilly led a force that included 160 volunteer black militiamen to take Louisiana from the French, while up into the early nineteenth century, militiamen regularly found themselves posted to Mexico. The career of militia battalion commander Antonio de Flores is particularly illustrative: during his three decades of duty, Flores fought against three ships (one British, two French), fought pirates and participated in an expedition to West Florida during which he was captured by the French.⁵³

The militia was also an increasingly popular option during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In exchange for service, it offered the young Afro-Cuban military social status. There was little that could have been more enticing to him: as stated earlier, the social class system in the Spanish colonies was defined primarily by race and offered

⁵¹ Herbert S. Klein, *The Coloured Militia of Cuba*,” 17.

⁵² Klein, 18-19; for a parallel case, see Landers, 202-203.

⁵³ Klein, 19-20.

those of African descent only limited prospects for social class mobility. Some *castas* could pass for *criollos*, colonially-born whites. *Mestizos* often passed as could light-skinned *pardos* who were free of stereotypically African features. And enslaved Africans and Cuban-born blacks could win manumission with far greater ease than their North American counterparts, achieving at least the status of freemen. But this is as far as Cuba's social mobility extended for *castas*: dark-skinned and African-looking *pardos* and *morenos* – even those born free – were consigned to second-class status. Nevertheless, a parallel, occupationally-defined caste system also existed, in which the military occupied one of the highest levels. In particular, soldiers enjoyed the *fuero militar*, a corporate privilege that guaranteed them trial in courts-martial, which tended to be more lenient than civilian proceedings, and saved black soldiers from often-bigoted civil judges.⁵⁴

And the benefits could be more dramatic still. Antonio de Flores began his life simply as Antonio Flores, an artisan who in 1708 enlisted in the Cuban militia as a common soldier. As mentioned earlier, Flores became battalion commander after thirty years of service. With this position came the trappings of aristocracy – the addition of the honorific 'de' to Flores' name - and, though originally a laborer, Flores was able to send his son to university and demand the latter's exemption from any color-related professional discrimination. Given the Cuban Negro Militia's unusually large officer population, ambitious enlistees could reasonably aspire to such careers.⁵⁵ And while Flores served for three decades, so lengthy a commitment was not required to accrue

⁵⁴ Landers, 202-203; Klein, 18; Allan J. Kuethe, "The Status of the Free Pardo in the Disciplined Militia of New Granada," *Journal of Negro History* 56, no. 2, (Apr, 1971), 105-110; for *fuero militar*, see McAlister.

⁵⁵ Klein, 19, 25-26; Klein reveals that, according to the 1770 census in Cuba, "for the three bataillons [sic] and 16 companies that existed in Cuba in that year, there were something like 130 colored officers, a not inconsiderable number when it is remembered that there were only 15,000 free colored males in the total population".

some benefits: all members of the Cuban Negro Militia enjoyed the *fuero* and military social status at enlistment.⁵⁶

Cuba's black militia consequently increased dramatically in size during the 1600s and especially the 1700s. The militia's total enlistment rose from a mere 400 soldiers in 1586 to a total in 1770 of 3,000 men, a considerable fraction of the 11,667 soldiers in Cuba at the time. Granted, this was in part due to a government-mandated expansion of the black militia that was particularly acute during the 1760s. Following Havana's capture, Inspector General Alejandro O'Reilly reorganized and expanded the black militia into three full battalions of *pardos* and *morenos*, each 800 men strong, as part of a general buildup of Cuba's militia forces. However, a volunteer force requires volunteers, and it was the lure of the *fuero militar* combined with the Spanish government's long tradition of protecting black militiamen's social status and calling for their fair treatment that convinced many black Cubans to enlist.⁵⁷ The hazardous duty their enlistments sometimes demanded were to these soldiers simply the price they paid in return for their privileges.

Again, then, the reinforcements that Governor Sebastián Kindelán received in June 1812 came to East Florida to fight, but not out of any great love for king or country. For the black Cuban militiamen, their deployment to Florida was just another tour of duty, part of a larger body of service they rendered in exchange for their immediate livelihoods and a richer, but also tangible material reward in the future. This tacit contract, however, hinged on the colonial government's ability to uphold its obligations: enlistees expected good conditions, the promised perks of their new status – especially

⁵⁶ In 1812, militiaman José Davan was promised no more than 4-5 months' duty in Florida; José Davan to José Coppinger, Jan. 19, 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Klein, 27.

⁵⁷ Landers, 203; Kuethe, "Status of the Free Pardo," 106-107, 109-110.

the uniforms that marked them as special – and a likelihood of surviving to collect the benefits of long service. Were the realities of garrison life East Florida to betray these promises, the consequences to the unit’s morale and continued good conduct could be severe.

The Bourbon Reforms in Spanish America

O’Reilly’s expansion of the Cuban militia in the 1760s was only one part of a much broader series of reforms that the Spanish Crown introduced in Iberia from the 1710s on and in its American colonies between the middle of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. These transformations took place in reaction to Spain’s recent poor fortunes on the battlefield: a century before, Spain had been one of the continent’s superpowers, possessor of vast lands in the newly discovered Americas and the riches they produced. And Spain’s army had been one of the most feared in Europe. But over the course of the sixteenth century, the Iberian military failed to modernize, relying instead on the tried-and-true tactics of the so-called *Camino Español* or Spanish Path, while its rivals overhauled their armies, eager to unseat Spain from its position of military supremacy.⁵⁸

Spain’s first defeat came in 1643, at Rocroi in Northern France, a defeat that Philip IV of Spain’s chief minister Don Luis de Haro referred to as, “something which can never be called to mind without great sorrow”.⁵⁹ And the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), which began following the death of the childless King Charles II of Spain,

⁵⁸ Juan Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados en el Ejército de America*, (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1983), 41-42; Gary Michael Miller, “Status and Loyalty in Colonial Spanish America: A Social History of Regular Army officers in Venezuela, 1750-1810” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1985), 10.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Parker, “Why Did the Dutch Revolt Last Eighty Years?” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th Ser., Vol. 26 (1976), 67; for a classic account of Rocroi, see also James Breck Perkins, “The Great Condé,” *The English Historical Review* 3. no. 1. (July, 1888), 483-484.

ended for the Iberian kingdom in defeat. The victorious powers allowed Charles' controversial successor, Philip V, who was also Duke of Anjou and the second son of the French Dauphin, to retain his throne. Philip knew that if he was to similarly retain his empire and preserve what remained of his kingdom's power, it was incumbent upon him to modernize the kingdom's military.⁶⁰

What ensued was a century-long series of broad administrative and especially military changes of which O'Reilly's reorganization was part, collectively known as the Bourbon Reforms. The purpose of these reforms was to rationalize and centralize the Spanish government and armed forces in order to reestablish Spain as a power within Europe, and, later, consolidate the kingdom's hold over its colonies. In the military sphere, Spain followed the example set by Philip's grandfather, Louis XIV: the Spanish *tercio*, a form of infantry corps, was replaced by the more modern regiment as the army's basic troop formation; the rank of *Maestre de Campo*, commander of a *tercio*, was exchanged for that of Colonel, and the musket, harquebus and pike were traded for the more accurate rifle and the bayonet.⁶¹ "Not only were ordinances of French influence passed", historian Juan Marchena Fernández points out, "but [these were even] written in a Frenchified Castilian".⁶²

After their initial implementation in Spain, these reforms trickled gradually to the Americas during the first half of the eighteenth century, chiefly in the form of shipments of reformed peninsular troops to threatened colonial strongholds. Responding to British naval attacks on Venezuelan fortifications during the late 1730s and early 1740s, for example, Philip V deployed 300 soldiers from the peninsular Victoria Regiment to

⁶⁰ Miller, 11.

⁶¹ Miller, 11-12; Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 43.

⁶² Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 43.

Caracas Province in 1740. These were followed in 1749-1750 by two 600-man formations, also drawn from the peninsular army.⁶³

The Bourbon Reforms truly reached the Americas – that is, were applied to the colonies' own armies – following a military disaster, much as took place in Spain after 1714. Spain entered the Seven Years War in January 1762 as an ally of France and thus, as an enemy of Great Britain. The war quickly began going badly for the Spanish, culminating in the Caribbean theater with the British occupation of Havana only eight months into the conflict. Heads rolled, metaphorically speaking: former Cuban Governor Juan de Prado was tried and convicted of misconduct by court-martial, as were the several other officials who had been responsible for Havana's defense. Charles III, meanwhile, dispatched Cuba's new Governor, the Conde de Ricla, and Field Marshal O'Reilly with instructions to reform the Cuban garrison and in particular to introduce the disciplined militia system there.⁶⁴

This O'Reilly promptly did. The Field Marshal cut the wages of Cuba's regular army troops to save the colonial coffers money, he proposed the abolishment of the Fixed Regiment of Havana and its replacement with peninsular regiments to be rotated into and out of Cuba every few years, which he believed would boost morale, and he issued several recommendations designed to reconcile Cuba's forces with the realities of combat on the island.⁶⁵ And, most significant for this study, O'Reilly drew up a document titled *Reglamento para las milicias de infantería y caballería de la Isla de Cuba* (Regulation

⁶³ Miller, 14-16.

⁶⁴ Allan Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 20-22.

⁶⁵ O'Reilly, for example, determined that traditional cavalry were of little use in Cuba's forested and uneven countryside and consequently reduced the island's regular dragoons to one squadron. To replace the cut cavalry, the Field Marshal imported two light infantry companies of Catalan mountaineers (Cuba already possessed one such company), which were precisely suited to Cuba's hilly topography; Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 36-37.

for the infantry and cavalry militias of the island of Cuba) in 1764, approved in final form by the Crown in 1769, which ordered the militia reorganization mentioned above.⁶⁶

As stated earlier, the 1769 *Reglamento* restructured Cuba's black militia into three battalions of 800 men each. Two of these were *pardo* battalions, with one assigned to the capital and the other to the island's eastern marches, while the third was a Havana-based troop of *morenos*. All three units were made up of nine companies, including one company of grenadiers, whose officers and men were generally the most senior and reliable of the battalions' soldiers. It was from these companies that the three *moreno* and *pardo* units sent to East Florida were drawn.⁶⁷

The *Reglamento* similarly established a number of white militia units. Havana received two volunteer white infantry battalions, each also 800 men strong and composed of nine companies. The capital was additionally now defended by a volunteer cavalry regiment of 650 men in 13 companies, which when added to the island colony's remaining squadron of regular dragoons boosted it to regimental strength. Matanzas raised a regiment of 450 volunteer militia dragoons and, finally, Bayamo, Puerto del Príncipe (Puerto Príncipe, modern-day Camagüey) and Cuatro-Villas all received white infantry militia battalions.⁶⁸

Besides restructuring Cuba's militia forces, O'Reilly's order also set officers' and soldiers' pay, regulated the militia's internal governance and the policing of miscreants, established expected standards of discipline and penalties for crimes like desertion, and

⁶⁶ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 34-35, 45.

⁶⁷ *Reglamento para las milicias de infantería y caballería de la Isla de Cuba*. Aprobado por S.M. en real cédula de 19 de enero de 1769. (Havana: Impresa del gobierno y capitanía general por S.M., 1849), Chapter I, Article 1, and Table 5; Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 38.

⁶⁸ *Reglamento para las milicias*, Chapter I, Article 1; the entirely artificial region 'Cuatro Villas' was a creation of O'Reilly's: because the south-central Cuban cities of Trinidad, Sancti Spíritus, Santa Clara and San Juan de los Remedios were too small to support individual militias, the Field Marshal had them raise a shared, 'four-city' militia battalion. Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 40.

perhaps most significant, officially granted the *fuero militar* to all Cuban militiamen. Militia soldiers, for example, could not be pressed into state service, nor could be required to billet troops in their homes. Arrested soldiers were similarly exempt from paying prison fees as part of their *fuero*. And any militia soldier or officer discharged due to wounds received, as well as any officer who completed 20 years of service were entitled to an invalid's pension and enjoyment of the *fuero* for life, even after retirement.⁶⁹

In the economic realm, meanwhile, the Conde de Riela was similarly active. For example, to bankroll the new army units that O'Reilly established as well as Cuba's myriad other expenses, the Cuban Governor successfully petitioned the King's Chamber of Ministers to reform the Cuban *alcabala*, a form of sales tax, increasing the levy from an infrequently enforced two percent to four percent, with a pair of additional excises on certain types of alcohol. Riela and the Chamber of Ministers also successfully opened Havana to trade with Spain's other American ports and with ports on the Iberian Peninsula itself, destroying a commercial monopoly traditionally enjoyed by the city of Cádiz.⁷⁰ Interestingly, this came about through a fairly revolutionary innovation in Cuba's administration – rather than unilaterally making these decisions, Riela brokered an agreement with the Cuban *criollo* patriciate, with whom he met in informal conclave, who agreed to pay higher taxes in exchange for expanded trade privileges.⁷¹

Cuba was only a test case; from the island, the Bourbon Reforms spread to Spain's other territories in the viceroyalties of New Spain, New Granada and Peru. In

⁶⁹ *Reglamento para las milicias*, Chapter IV, Articles 1, 7, 16 and 17.

⁷⁰ Allan Kuethe and G. Douglas Inglis, "Absolutism and Enlightened Reform: Charles III, the Establishment of the Alcabala, and Commercial Reorganization in Cuba," *Past and Present* 109 (Nov, 1985), 128, 131-136.

⁷¹ Kuethe and Inglis, 130-131.

1771, for example, Field Marshal O'Reilly exported the disciplined militia system to New Granada, ordering a census of all able-bodied men in the perennially beleaguered coastal provinces of Cartagena and Panama, a first step toward the establishment of a local militia force. By mid-1773, both areas had new or expanded fixed regiments of regular troops, and orders had come from Madrid for the creation of disciplined militias.⁷² Under Viceroy Manuel de Guirior (1772-1776), militia units were established throughout the province.⁷³ Before 1771, New Granada's militia had consisted of myriad ragtag and ill-equipped companies dispersed throughout the viceroyalty, some of which drilled separately and only when the soldiers' landlords had no work for them. The militia raised in San Benito Abad in 1736, for example, had only 125 rifles for its 1,421 men. Now, by contrast, the Neogranadian militia was organized into regiments, and those located in the viceroyalty's coastal cities were better supplied than before by the merchants and financiers who officered them.

But this improvement was limited: though ostensibly also revamped, the militia in the countryside was in practice run as previously. Starved for arms and uniforms, to say nothing of military discipline, they accomplished little, militarily speaking, except for "the dust raised in the plazas after Sunday Mass when a sort of sad parody of a military parade took place".⁷⁴ And as Allan Kuethe points out, O'Reilly's and Guirior's efforts came late – nearly a decade after the British occupation of Havana.⁷⁵

⁷² Allan Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773-1808*, 13.

⁷³ See footnote 250.

⁷⁴ Juan Marchena Fernández, "The Social World of the Military in Peru and New Granada," in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, ed. John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe and Anthony McFarlane, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 61-62.

⁷⁵ Allan J. Kuethe, 'The Early Reforms of Charles III in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, 1759-1776' in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, ed. John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe and Anthony McFarlane, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 29.

Peru's experience with militia reform, by contrast, was considerably more positive. Militia reform began in the southern viceroyalty as early as 1763, when Viceroy Manuel de Amat, ordered by Madrid to defend his colony by all means necessary, chose to completely reform the extant militia system. Amat named elites from Lima, Cuzco and Peru's other regions to officerships in newly-created, empty regiments, commanding these new officers to then find the men to fill their units. As the majority of the newly-appointed commanders were rural patricians, they drew the bulk of their common soldiers from among the many peasants and native Indians who worked the landlords' holdings, provoking the additional welcome consequence of reinforcing existing social divisions. This was common in Cuzco, in the Tarma Area and the Central Sierra and in Arequipa; the sole exceptions were Peru's northern region, whose militia drew most of its men from Indians living in native villages, and Lima, whose militia's ranks were filled by both enlisted peasants and discharged former peninsular army soldiers.⁷⁶ The prevalence and importance of the large militia that resulted is testified to by the difference between the number of regular troops stationed in Peru and in New Granada: Peru had only 1,681 regular army soldiers, stationed almost exclusively in Lima, which contrasts sharply with New Granada's 3,476 militiamen, spread out between Cartagena, Santa Marta, Panama, Santa Fe, Popayán, Quito and Guayaquil.⁷⁷ While the Neogranadian militia served as a kind of coastal reserve and the sizeable regular army garrison shouldered the defense burden in cities like Cartagena and Guayaquil, in Cuzco and Lima, the militia was primarily responsible for the viceroyalty's defense.

⁷⁶ Marchena Fernández, "The Social World of the Military in Peru and New Granada", in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, ed. John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe and Anthony McFarlane, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 72-73, 75.

⁷⁷ Marchena Fernández, "The Social World of the Military," see Table 2.

Meanwhile, in the economic realm, all three viceroalties also reformed, chiefly through the introduction of *comercio libre* – the Conde de Ricla’s free trade concessions – to nearly all of Spain’s New World ports in 1778, and in the last bastions of Venezuela and Veracruz in 1789. In addition, Archbishop-Viceroy Antonio Caballero y Góngora of New Granada (1782-1788) led an attempt in the early 1780s to rationalize his colony’s silver mining industry, chiefly by replacing the royal mines’ existing process of extraction by amalgamation, which he believed wasted mercury, with the more efficient smelting method. Caballero y Góngora’s efforts were ultimately derailed, but not due to any conservatism in Madrid. Rather, the ill-timed discovery in 1786 of a new process of amalgamation by the Austrian Baron von Born compelled the Crown to order a halt until von Born’s process had been explored as a possible alternative.⁷⁸ And in Louisiana, Cuba and New Spain, to name only a few colonies, the Crown implemented the Intendant system of colonial financial administration, which established an official titled *intendente de ejército*, usually the colonial governor’s equal in rank (and which post was in fact occupied in New Spain by the viceroy himself, under the title of *superintendente*), who was charged with the collection and disbursement of royal funds.⁷⁹

Conclusions

A product of the Bourbon Reforms, the Cuban Negro Militia arrived in St. Augustine on 18 June 1812 to perform the task it had been founded to fulfill, a labor true to the spirit of the reforms that Philip V first devised in 1814. The 180 black militiamen

⁷⁸ Jacques A. Barbier, “Commercial Reform and *Comercio Neutral* in Cartagena de Indias, 1788-1808,” in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, ed. John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe and Anthony McFarlane, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 96-97; Sandra Montgomery Keelan, “The Bourbon Mining Reform in New Granada,” in *Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru*, ed. John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe and Anthony McFarlane, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 41-43, 48.

⁷⁹Corbitt, 47-54.

(later joined by another 90) came to East Florida to preserve the empire over which Philip and his ancestors had reigned, and which Philip's descendant, Ferdinand VII, now ruled. From mid-March 1812 Spanish Florida had been under siege: on the fifteenth of that month, a force composed primarily of disaffected East Floridian settlers of American origin, styling themselves 'Patriots,' had swept across the Georgia-Florida border, illegally supported by troops and ship-borne artillery of the U.S. Army and Navy. The Patriot War – as it is now known – had gone catastrophically for the Spanish in its first three months and, alarmed by the downward turn Florida's military fortunes had taken, newly-arrived Governor Sebastián Kindelán hurriedly requested reinforcements from Florida's parent colony, Cuba. What he received were three companies of black militiamen.

Such conflict was nothing new in Florida, nor in any of Spain's other possessions – indeed, the Bourbon monarchy's own peninsular forces had once been the military terror of Europe and were still frequent players in Europe's ongoing games of armed chess. The Bourbon Reforms had begun with a European war, and more than that, a war that nearly unseated the King himself. In the wake of the War of Spanish Succession, the defeated but still sovereign Philip V realized that his outdated armies and bureaucracy had to change if he was to continue on the Spanish throne and if that throne was to continue to hold sway over its vast empire. The content of the reforms reflected this origin: myriad measures implemented throughout the eighteenth century streamlined and expanded the Spanish peninsular and colonial armies, while the colonies' economies and bureaucracies were rationalized, again with the primary intent of avoiding vulnerabilities that could lead to future takeovers. In Florida, meanwhile, armed conflict dated to the

peninsula's first years of white colonization: in 1565, only a few years after Jean Ribaut claimed Florida for the French and established the colony's first permanent white settlements, Spanish forces came and, in what amounted to a bloodbath, wiped out Ribaut's fledgling outposts. Over the next two centuries, Spain, France and Britain fought often over possession of the strategically located province; even the famous privateer Sir Francis Drake joined the fray, sacking and burning St. Augustine.

Nor was it unusual to use black militia, especially the Cuban militia, to fight these wars. Afro-Cubans had served in the island's militia force since its founding in 1586, had fought in *moreno* and *pardo* units since the early seventeenth century and most recently had participated in the reconquest of West Florida during the 1770s. Cuba's black militiamen were seasoned soldiers, particularly experienced at repelling the corsairs ubiquitous to the colony's rich coast, and only grew larger and more professional under the military reforms that Field Marshal Alejandro O'Reilly implemented in Cuba during the 1760s. Notably, the militiamen fought by choice: they were not conscripted, but were enticed into enlisting by the promise of the *fuero militar* and the possibility of real (if limited) upward social mobility, some of it instant.

However, this time something went awry, for on a balmy day in early July 1821, Governor José Coppinger became East Florida's last governor, as he surrendered his office to officials of the United States government. And, purportedly, desertion was rampant within the ranks of the dependable and utterly loyal militia that Havana had sent Governor Kindelán in 1812. Did the Bourbon Reforms fail? And is there any truth to the rumor of black militia desertion?

CHAPTER 2

DESERTION: EAST FLORIDA'S PERNICIOUS TREND

Only three days after arriving at his new command of Fort San Nicolás on the St. Johns River, Captain Tomás Llorente wrote Governor Sebastián Kindelán, reporting that,

“From my arrival here, the *morenos* of this plaza have not ceased in making sorties and searches along this side of the river, and also along the river in the canoe....to pursue the thieves who pass at night to this side of the river to steal, as evinced by the theft of two horses belonging to the dragoons of this post and another belonging to Don Justo [López]....which were passed to the mainland”.⁸⁰

This was on 12 August 1813. Captain Llorente was satisfied, and perhaps even pleased with his Cuban militiamen. And why not? We have already observed the militia's distinguished past service.⁸¹ And yet, only a few pages latter in this same missive, Llorente informed the governor that four of his *morenos* had fled.⁸²

Similarly, on the tenth – two days earlier – Llorente had penned a letter to Kindelán informing his superior that Fernandina Commander Francisco Ribera had sent 40 *pardo* militiamen that had been detached to the Amelia Island garrison back to San Nicolás. Among Ribera's reasons, as reported by Captain Llorente, was that Governor

⁸⁰ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 12 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

⁸¹ See Matt Childs; in particular, note that José Antonio Aponte's grandfather, a black militiaman, received a high military honor from the Spanish King himself. Jack D.L. Holmes, *Honor and Fidelity: The Louisiana Infantry Regiment and the Louisiana Militia Companies, 1766-1821*, (Birmingham, Al.: n.p., 1965); for a different interpretation, stressing the militia's contribution as a home guard during the war in Louisiana and Florida, see Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 78-112.

⁸² Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 12 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

Kindelán “did not like having colored troops at this post”.⁸³ Kindelán’s response to Llorente was a blunt and unequivocal affirmation of his and his administration’s trust in the militiamen:

“Other political views, and not those held by the soldiers of the *pardo* battalion have made them return from Amelia [Island]; you will make them [the *pardos* soldiers] understand that this government has as much faith in them as in the rest of the troops that garrison this province”.

And, perhaps to prove his point, Kindelán immediately followed this statement by ordering Llorente to provide additional troops to Lieutenant Ramon Castillo, San Nicolás’ previous commander, who was to lead a raid across the St. Johns. This addition was specifically to include 10 *morenos*, presumably from San Nicolás’ own detachment, and one officer and 10 soldiers from the *pardos*, very possibly drawn from the spurned Fernandina group. But three months earlier, in May, Kindelán received word from Justo López of the simultaneous desertion of five *pardo* militiamen.⁸⁴ And only one month earlier, on 17 July, Kindelán ordered Lieutenant López to investigate the motives behind these desertions, a troop loss the governor termed ‘scandalous’.⁸⁵

Reading these statements, it seems as if Kindelán, López and Llorente referred to two separate troops – one reliable, the other dependable only in its criminality. We have reason to believe in the former interpretation, given the black militia’s illustrious history. But the evidence for the latter version of the militia is also compelling: numerous letters between East Florida’s various commanders document the militia’s delinquents. And, as we will see, we have more broadly a history of desertion among Spain’s colonial troops as a whole. Determining what truth may be found in the second image of the Cuban

⁸³ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 10 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

⁸⁴ Justo López to Governor of Florida, 18 May 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

⁸⁵ Governor of Florida to Justo López, 17 July 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

Negro Militia, and where desertion in Florida and desertion by the militia fit into this broader context will consequently be this chapter's mission.

Desertion in the Spanish Colonies and Beyond

Decades before the Cuban militia's arrival in East Florida, and throughout the period of the Bourbon Reforms, desertion and abandonment of post were common crimes in garrisons throughout the Spanish Caribbean. For evidence of the existence and even the prevalence of desertion in Cuba, we need only look to the document that founded the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century incarnation of the Cuban militia. As mentioned in Chapter One, Field Marshal Alejandro O'Reilly drafted a regulation in 1764 (promulgated in final form in 1769) that codified his reforms to the militia, the *Reglamento para las milicias de infantería y caballería de la Isla de Cuba*. Chapter II, Article 3 of O'Reilly's *Reglamento* gives testimony to the Spanish military's awareness (and thus, the existence) of the phenomenon of desertion:

“All militia officers, sergeants, corporals and soldiers must demonstrate their zeal and love of the Service by pursuing deserters: to this important task they will give particular care in the knowledge that they cannot do greater service, and that whatever tolerance and even act of omission will be [considered] a grave crime”.⁸⁶

And in Chapter V, Article 5 we may observe that authorities had even devised a special punishment for those caught - two years of hard labor.⁸⁷ Moreover, the forceful wording of the first clause – the task of capturing deserters is referred to therein as one of the greatest services a soldier can perform – suggests that desertion was sufficiently widespread for authorities to consider it an ongoing problem. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that one of the 1769 regulation's purposes was to *reform* the

⁸⁶ *Reglamento para las milicias*, Chapter II, Article 3.

⁸⁷ *Reglamento para las milicias*, Chapter V, Article 5.

Cuban military, and that it demonstrably addressed both newly-developed structural concerns (ie, the size of a expanded militia battalion) and also what appear to have been preexisting problems (such as the practice of charging a scribe's fee when writing or transmitting a note between officials).⁸⁸ Desertion was clearly on Field Marshal O'Reilly's mind, especially given that the militia had fled in the face of the enemy only two years before, during the British invasion of Havana.⁸⁹

Desertion was also common in Spain's most powerful Caribbean colony, the viceroyalty of New Spain.⁹⁰ In the urban centers of Valladolid, Puebla and Mexico City, Ben Vinson III maintains, officials in the free-colored militia often forewent the formal *sorteo* method of recruitment, a passive lottery system that compelled all eligible *castas* to enroll en masse and then selected enlistees from this pool. Instead, militia recruiters conducted routine 'active levy' enlistments, in which conscripts were sought out individually, which were intended to serve as a "patchwork remedy for small losses sustained by casual desertions and deaths". Thereby, he argues, authorities were for the

⁸⁸ Chapter II, Article 1 of O'Reilly's *Reglamento* states, "By no title or pretext will payment, secretary's fee or any right whatsoever be demanded for the expediting of officers' dispatches, nor naming of sergeants: these will be given and registered *free of charge*. The Sergeant Majors [a rank similar to the modern Major] and Colonels will be responsible for [the enforcement of] this [regulation], if it has not already been reported to the Inspector; and if he should not remedy what failure should occur in its observance, they will notify the Captain-General..."; *Reglamento para las milicias*, Chapter II, Article 1.

⁸⁹ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 20; Kuethe writes, "In an important early action, Prado [the Cuban Captain-General] dispatched a corps of volunteer lancers from the countryside in the company of several military infantry detachments and the Dragoons of Edimbourg to obstruct the British advance from Cojimar to Guanabacoa. The maneuver failed completely when, upon hearing the unfamiliar sound of gunfire, the militia panicked and fled, leaving the veteran dragoons so badly outnumbered that they were forced to withdraw."

⁹⁰ While New Spain was located on the North American mainland, and thus was not a Caribbean colony in the same sense as Cuba, Santo Domingo or Puerto Rico, we refer to it here as Caribbean for the purposes of simplicity. This shorthand is a safe one: aside from its long and significant coastline on the Caribbean Sea, New Spain was tied to Spain's Caribbean colonies through the *situados* it sent to Havana, through Veracruz's place in the defense structure of the Spanish Caribbean, and through the Caribbean commerce in which it participated, including its place in the *Carrera de las Indias*, the route taken by the Spanish treasure fleets that passed through the Caribbean. For more on Veracruz, New Spain and the Spanish Caribbean, see Christon I. Archer, "The Defense of Veracruz, 1780-1810," *The Americas* 27, no. 4 (Apr, 1971), 426-449, especially 431; for a look at the hierarchical relationship between the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Captain-Generalcy of Cuba, see Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 94-97.

most part able to keep troop loss a minor affair over which they had some measure of control. Significantly, though, they held these levies frequently, “from month to month,” indicating that the problem of ‘casual desertions’, though perhaps minor, occurred regularly.⁹¹

Christon Archer, however, tells a far grimmer story, particularly regarding the province of Veracruz. The first battalion of the Regiment of the Crown, a regular army unit stationed at the time in Perote and Veracruz, lost 233 men to desertion in 1800. By comparison, the battalion only had 218 dead that year, and only recaptured 82 of their deserters. In 1801, the first battalion – now stationed at Jalapa - suffered only 29 casualties, but a staggering 350 desertions. And the Regiment of New Spain, stationed at Veracruz from 1800-1802, lost 656 deserters during that period. To place these figures in proper perspective, in 1799 the Regiments of the Crown and New Spain each had a total enlistment of 1,350 men; between the two regiments, they suffered a loss of 1,558 soldiers due to flight from service, well more than a regiment’s worth, of which they only recovered about a third. Desertion, as Archer states, “had become an alarming problem among the remaining troops [who had not died of yellow fever]”, to which officials including Colonel Rafael Vasco of the Infantry Regiment of Mexico, Sub-Inspector General Pedro Gorostiza and even the Conde de Revillagigedo, Viceroy of New Spain, attempted (and failed) to find solutions.⁹² In fact, at least one Mexican deserter even found his way into East Florida.⁹³

⁹¹ Vinson III, 92.

⁹² Christon Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 46, 269-271; with the transfer of the Regiment of Mexico to Mexico City as its new garrison, Colonel Vasco attempted a permanent solution to the desertion problem by mandating that first-time deserters be deported to Cuba to complete their enlistments there. On paper, the plan was a good one, with benefits to all parties, including the deserters. In practice, it was a spectacular failure, as the viceroyalty lost one quarter of its army annually through deportation. Faced with this catastrophe, Gorostiza and Revillagigedo suspended the deportations, and petitioned the Crown for a

Vinson additionally describes a phenomenon that occurred frequently in New Spain, and that is sufficiently similar to desertion to merit mention here – draft evasion. The informal ‘active levy’ method introduced above relied on *pardos* and *morenos* to self-identify and muster; officials had no lists or census data as they did during *sorteos*, but instead employed the threat of a light jail sentence for absentees to enforce compliance. But because officials had no lists against which to check for draft-dodgers, *castas*, individuals of mixed or non-white parentage, were often able to avoid mustering. When militia recruiters were able to identify and enlist absconded but eligible recruits *in absentia*, they still faced the challenge of actually finding them. And even when these active levies and the *sorteo* forced the enlistment of *casta* recruits, and when officials were able to locate these unlucky individuals, New Spain’s *pardos* and *morenos* could still resist through the convoluted legal channels of Spanish racial law and custom. Illness was a legitimate basis on which to protest enlistment and, armed with the proper release forms, free blacks were able to secure exemption. A number of professions were exempt as well, including master artisans, teachers, and workers in important industries like tobacco production. And sometimes even the recruit’s racial status could be called into question, as occurred in Puebla: in 1763, the colored militia’s *sargento mayor* attempted to conscript members of the Aguilar family. Incensed, they testified to their whiteness and, having convinced the court that they were at least *castizos* – of Spanish and Indian

change in policy. See also McAlister; Margaret Woodward, “The Spanish Army and the Loss of America, 1810-1824”, *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 4 (Nov, 1968), 587-588.

⁹³ On 18 July 1812, José Erazo, a soldier from the Regiment of Puebla who had been detached to Mobile and had subsequently deserted, penned a request (in Florida) to Governor Kindelán to join the Florida Artillery Detachment and receive a pardon under a recently issued royal amnesty toward deserters; José Erazo to Governor of Florida, 18 July 1812, section 2, reel 12, EFP, PKY. For Erazo’s subsequent transport to Havana, see Governor to Juan José de Estrada, 21 July and 28 July 1812, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY and Sebastián Kindelán to Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, 28 July 1812, section 2, reel 1, EFP, PKY.

blood, but not African – were exempted.⁹⁴ Avoiding their legal obligation to serve in the militia, evading recruits may also be considered to have practiced a form of desertion, albeit during their recruitment rather than after having entered royal service. What is certain is that desertion was widespread and a serious concern in New Spain.

The service record for Grenadier Captain and brevet Lieutenant-Colonel José Arata of Santo Domingo's militia indicates that flight from military service was also a problem in that colony. According to his *hoja de servicio*, Arata was posted on 7 June 1786 to Puerto Principe (modern-day Port-au-Prince) in Saint-Domingue, France's colony on Hispaniola. Here, he spent eleven months furthering the interests of his colony and Spain, and was particularly charged with the recuperation of fugitive deserters.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, a 1791 accord between the Netherlands and Spain reveals that many soldiers deserted from the Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Coro and New Granada to nearby Dutch possessions including Curaçao and Surinam.⁹⁶

Even those forces stationed in metropolitan Spain had to contend with this problem. "Desertions," historian Margaret Woodward states, "were so well-known in Spain that they entered the literature of the period".⁹⁷ Provisions for the punishment of deserters from peninsular regiments likewise entered Spanish military law: on 18 March 1773 the Crown passed an *Orden Circular a todos los Reinos* that punished first-time deserters from the peninsular army by transferring them to the Indies, where they were to serve out the rest of their enlistments. That same year, the Crown also ordered that first-

⁹⁴ Ben Vinson III, 93-95.

⁹⁵ Hoja de Servicio for Grenadier Captain and brevet Lieutenant Colonel José Arata, legajo 7290 C. I folio 3, SD, AGI, in Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Milicias de Santo Domingo, 1786-1821*, (Santo Domingo, R.D.: Editora del Caribe, 1978), 13-14.

⁹⁶ N. Andrew and N. Clevon, "The Convention Between Spain and Holland Regulating the Return of Deserters and Fugitive Slaves in their American Colonies," *Journal of Negro History* 14, no. 3 (July, 1929), 342.

⁹⁷ Woodward, 590.

time deserters serve out their remaining time in the Regiments of Oran and Ceuta. And, in testimony to the pervasiveness of such flight in Iberia, the outpouring of troops that resulted from this second regulation was so severe that the edict was quickly suspended.⁹⁸

But the story of Field Marshal Pablo Morillo's 1814 expedition to New Granada is perhaps even more eloquent testimony to Spain's struggles with its deserting soldiers. In 1814, newly-returned King Ferdinand VII dispatched Morillo to Costa Firme (an area roughly corresponding to modern-day Colombia and Venezuela) with a 10,000-man army at his command. Morillo's ships lay in Cádiz harbor for two months due to foul weather, during which time the soldiers were closely monitored to prevent any desertions. Nevertheless, some soldiers successfully fled. But so fearful was Morillo of losing his men that he kept secret their destination, where "the war was fought without quarter and with savage ferocity," told them they were headed for Buenos Aires, and only revealed the truth mid-crossing.⁹⁹ And once they arrived, soldiers began deserting, as Morillo phrased it in 1816, "in flocks", with an entire battalion eventually deserting in 1819.¹⁰⁰

Finally – and most germane to the Cuban Negro Militia's experience – soldiers from the U.S. Army garrison stationed on the Georgia-Florida border commonly fled military service by crossing into East Florida throughout the Second Spanish Period. Georgian desertion into Florida began well within a decade of Spain's return, for by 16 June 1790, Spanish and U.S. authorities were contemplating an exchange of deserters, an agreement again debated the following year.¹⁰¹ In the intervening years before the arrival

⁹⁸ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 297; Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 271

⁹⁹ Woodward, 589.

¹⁰⁰ Woodward, 590-591.

¹⁰¹ Richard Lang to Governor of Florida, 16 June 1790, section 32, reel 46, EFP, PKY; Captain Henry Burbeck to Captain Sebastián Creagh, 1791, section 32, reel 46, EFP, PKY; Sebastián Creagh to Governor of Florida, 22 August 1791, section 32, reel 47, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Sebastián Creagh, 24 August 1791, section 32, reel 47, EFP, PKY.

of the Cuban Militia (1790 - July, 1812), deserters from the United States continued appearing routinely in correspondence between officials in East Florida. On 17 September 1799, for example, Grenadier Captain Gines de Oliba of the Third Battalion of Cuba wrote Governor Enrique White reporting his transfer of four American deserters to St. Augustine, whose arrival the governor acknowledged two days later. Earlier, in 1797, the Spanish garrison caught U.S. troops on Spanish soil and arrested one sergeant – these soldiers had crossed the border in pursuit of deserters. And with the onset of the Patriot War and the arrival of the Cuban militia, U.S. soldiers continued deserting into Florida. On 27 September 1813, for instance, Captain Llorente wrote Governor Kindelán notifying him that three U.S. gunboat deserters, on whom he had taken pity and fed, were being transferred to the latter's post – that is, to St. Augustine.¹⁰² To offer another example, Rafael José Morell, commander of Fort Matanzas as of July 1818, wrote Governor Coppinger that same month to report the transfer to Matanzas of two American soldiers who had deserted from the U.S. forces that occupied San Marcos (presumably St. Marks, or San Marcos de Apalache).

Desertion in the Cuban Negro Militia

Was the Cuban Negro Militia detachment in East Florida also part of this disreputable but all-too-common tradition? Unfortunately for Florida's Cuban militiamen, the answer to this question is yes. And more still, the militia's rate of desertion, as we will see, was at times just as striking and, with regard to the Florida garrison, just as debilitating as what Christon Archer has observed in colonial Veracruz.

Early each month, every military commander in East Florida conducted an inspection of his men, recording each soldier's name, hospitalizations, imprisonments,

¹⁰² Tomás Llorente to Sebastián Kindelán, 27 September 1813, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

postings, promotions and transfers, the total company strength, and, of course, desertions.¹⁰³ For the three Cuban Negro Militia companies in East Florida, we consult the inspection lists for 1812 and 1814 - July 1821; we can also reconstruct the militia's 1813 desertions by consulting the many letters exchanged between the various commanders who led Cuban *pardo* and *moreno* troops.¹⁰⁴ Examination of these lists and letters reveals that, from slow beginnings during the Patriot War, desertion among the Cuban militia quickly accelerated until, in 1818, East Florida's *pardos* company lost more than half its men, while the first and second companies of *morenos* lost well more than one third and nearly one fifth of their complement, respectively. To borrow Morillo's phrasing, these soldiers deserted "in flocks".

This mass exodus did not begin immediately. No desertions are recorded between the June arrival of the two *moreno* companies in St. Augustine and the end of the year. But the Cuban militia's honeymoon period was short. Letters exchanged between commanders on the St. Johns and St. Mary's Rivers reveal that in May 1813, the black militia companies – now three, with the arrival of the *pardos* in April – began losing soldiers. From 1813 through the final month of the war, 16 desertions took place, or about one for every month.¹⁰⁵ 1813 saw 13 of these, while three soldiers deserted during the first four months of 1814.

¹⁰³ In Cuban militia's case – and here, I exclude the term 'negro' intentionally, as the pertinent clause applied to both the island's white and black militia troops – these monthly reviews were mandated by Field Marshal O'Reilly's *Reglamento*, specifically Chapter II, Article 33.

¹⁰⁴ Particularly rich is the correspondence between Governors Kindelá and Coppinger, and Lieutenant Justo López and Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel.) Tomás Llorente, contained in section 32, reels 60-63 of the East Florida Papers. For an example, see the introductory text at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Of course, the militia's 1813-1814 losses did not actually come at a rate of one per month; the majority of them came in clusters, a pattern that became increasingly common as the decade progressed. In fact, no single member of the Cuban Negro Militia can claim the dubious honor of having been the first to abscond from service in East Florida. The first *five* militiamen to desert, surprisingly, were the five whose flight Governor Kindelán considered scandalous: Pablo Hordoñez, Diego del Cristo, Antonio Estremes, Pablo

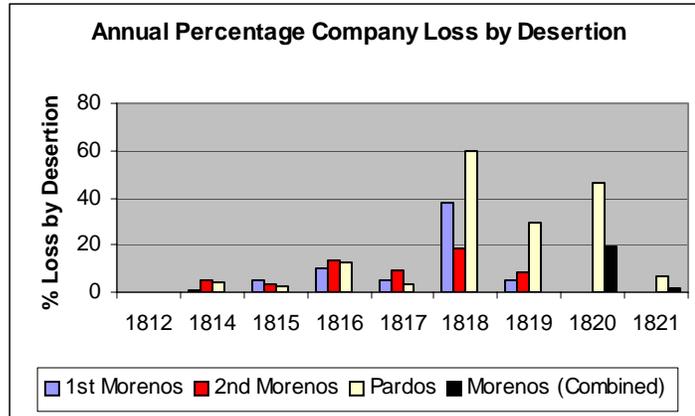


Figure 2.1: Average Percentage of Desertions by Company (1813 excepted)¹⁰⁶

Nor did the end of the Patriot War bring about any abatement in desertions, though frequency of flight remained low for the meantime. The remainder of 1814 brought six additional desertions, for a yearly total of nine, and a drop in company strength of one percent for the first *morenos* company, and just over four percent for both the *pardos* and the second *morenos* (see figure 2.1).¹⁰⁷ Desertions were just slightly fewer in 1815 – eight instances – but remained close to wartime levels. This year, the first *morenos* company lost about five percent of its strength in desertions, a rise from the previous year, while the other two companies experienced lower desertion rates of approximately two percent. April 1815 also saw a spike in desertions, with four in that month. Why this spike? One possibility: all of these men were at posts outside of St.

Villa Escusa and Juan Quiroga. Taking this into account, Governor Kindelán’s reaction may be interpreted as outrage at the audacity these soldiers displayed by fleeing, rather than exasperation in the face of a long-suffered, ongoing problem. For an example of such clustering, see Monthly Inspection List for Second Company of *Morenos* of Havana, 9 March 1816, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹⁰⁶ Data drawn from Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia 1812-1821, section 20, reels 35 and 36, EFP, PKY; in both histograms presented here, there is a fourth category called “*Morenos* (Combined). As of March 1820, the first and second companies of *morenos* were inspected together, with no note made of company membership (if such was even still preserved). I have chosen, for simplicity’s sake, to treat this new formation separately, and to include January and February 1820 in it. Also, the method used to compute these percentages is: (Sum of year’s desertions/Average company size) x 100. As such, this is an annual rather than average or monthly percentage. For the first instance of the *morenos* (combined) category, see Monthly Inspection List for Company of *Morenos* of Havana, Mar 1820, section 30, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

¹⁰⁷ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia, 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

Augustine, in areas where they were likely to see action: two deserted from Fernandina, the first part of East Florida overrun during the initial 1811 Patriot invasion; one from the *Ynmutable*, one of the several gunboats that patrolled the St. John's River, on whose shores rebel collaborators still lived and fomented unrest; and one from a *reducto*, a redoubt.¹⁰⁸ In other words, this momentary increase may have been fueled by continued rebel activity and consequent fatigue or disillusionment in those areas.

As 1815 passed into 1816, desertions became an increasingly serious problem for East Florida's Cuban militia commanders. From this point until 1820, Cuban militia desertion rates rose sharply, showing a particularly abrupt increase between 1818 and 1820. The first company of *morenos* lost ten percent of its men to desertion. It was an even bigger problem for the *pardos* and second *morenos* company: over 12 and 13 percent deserted from these companies. More than one man in ten fled from the militia detachment during their fourth year in Florida.¹⁰⁹ Among these deserters were four newly-arrived militiamen: Francisco and Ramon Piloto, Francisco Gonzalez, Crispin Cruz and José Garcia, who fled Fort San Nicolás on 22 April 1816, unarmed and with nothing but the uniforms they wore.¹¹⁰ Also among the deserters this year were José Delgado and Juan Garcia of the *pardos*, and Casimiro Penaranda of the second company of *morenos*. These three were all serving on gunboats in pursuit of a *partida* – a party of bandits – and had followed their quarry up to Fernandina. While so near to the United

¹⁰⁸ Monthly Inspection Lists for First Company of *Morenos* of Havana, 6 Apr 1815, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹⁰⁹ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia, 1816, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹¹⁰ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 25 Apr 1816, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

States, they made good their escape – on the night of 22 October, they paddled a small canoe across the St. Mary’s River.¹¹¹

1817 brought a welcome but brief dip in this growth. The first company of *morenos*’ rate of desertion dropped by half to about five percent, or one desertion per twenty men, the second company experienced a nine percent desertion rate, down from 13 percent the year before, and the *pardos*, luckiest of all, dropped from 12 percent desertions in 1816 to three percent in this year, a rate more characteristic of the Patriot War years than the latter half of the decade.¹¹² Why the difference? It certainly was not success on the battlefield. The garrison’s military fortunes were no better in 1817; in fact, they were considerably worse. June 1817 brought Sir Gregor McGregor’s invasion of East Florida, and the loss of Fernandina. And during the invasion, Fort San Nicolás was also permanently abandoned.¹¹³ More likely, 1817 resembled 1814 in desertions because it also resembled that year in terms of military action. The Cuban militia’s morale, I contend, improved once the militiamen were given something to do and a sense that their presence in East Florida mattered.

But by the following year, the desertion problem was not only back, but worse than ever before – this was the peak period of Cuban Negro Militia desertion in East Florida. In 1817, the first and second companies of *morenos* faced desertion rates of five and nine percent; the following year these rates increased to an alarming 37 and 18 percent. More than one in three first company soldiers serving in 1818 deserted, and in September, 13 deserted at once. And these figures pale in comparison with the

¹¹¹ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 25 Oct 1816, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

¹¹² Monthly Inspection Lists for the First Company of *Morenos* of Havana, 1817, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹¹³ For an account of McGregor’s invasion, see Hoffman, 274-275; Cusick, 304.

hemorrhage of personnel the company of *pardos* experienced during this year: *pardos* desertions rose from an unremarkable three percent loss to 59 percent, or nearly two desertions for every three men. This was not only the highest rate of desertion to date; it remained unequalled throughout the remainder of the militia's time in East Florida.¹¹⁴

For the remainder of Spain's (and the Cuban militia's) tenure in East Florida, it becomes much harder to make general statements about desertions. For the company of *pardos*, flight from military service remained a serious problem. In 1819, losses from desertion amounted to a much lower but still quite high 29 percent, increasing again in 1820 to 46 percent, nearly half the company. Only in 1821 did this trend finally abate; during the final months of Spanish rule in Florida, the *pardos* lost a mere six percent of company strength to desertion, with just over one man in twenty deserting. The *morenos* companies, on the other hand, experienced an immediate return to the low desertion rates of the Patriot War era. The first company lost a mere four percent to desertion in 1819, while eight percent of the second *morenos* company deserted. In 1820, the *morenos* companies (now inspected as a single unit) lost a considerably greater number - 19 percent - but in 1821, as in the *pardos*' case, the close of Spanish rule brought with it a low desertion rate, the lowest since 1814, at just over one percent. Symptomatically, *morenos* soldier José Calzada deserted in June 1821 only to return two days later, likely fearful of being left behind as the militia shipped out, and of the possibility of subsequent enslavement by the incoming Americans.¹¹⁵

To place these figures in a broader context, over the course of almost exactly nine years, three companies of soldiers, at an original combined strength of 270 (90 men per

¹¹⁴ Monthly Inspection List for Company of *Pardos* of Havana, 1818, section 20, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

¹¹⁵ Monthly Inspection List for Company of *Pardos* of Havana, 1818, section 20, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

company), had 180 instances of desertion.¹¹⁶ Recall that the Regiment of the Crown in New Spain had a total enlistment of 1,350, as did the Regiment of New Spain, and that, together, both regiments experienced 1,558 desertions. This is a desertion rate of approximately 57.7 percent. By contrast, during their time in East Florida, 66.7 percent of the three companies of the Cuban Negro Militia detachment deserted. The Cuban militia's desertions may have been an order of magnitude smaller than the Mexican regiments', but proportionately, their impact was larger. To wit: had New Spain's regiments experienced such a level of desertion, they would have had not 1,558 desertions, but 1,798. Within the ranks of East Florida's militia detachment, something was clearly the matter.

Desertion among the White Regulars

That something, though, was not exclusively a failing of the black militia. To the contrary: despite the formidable size of the preceding figures, the Cuban Negro Militia was alone neither in its desertion nor even necessarily in the scope of this dereliction of duty. While there exist only a few documented cases, desertions did occur within at least two of the three elite (and much smaller) military detachments in East Florida. In a letter dated 14 October 1814, for example, Joaquín Navarro, commander of East Florida's gunboats, wrote Governor Kindelán concerning the debts incurred by artillery deserter José Fernández. According to Navarro, artilleryman Fernández had "by his desertion....contracted several debts from orders that were placed [for/by him]". Fernández had left behind several articles of clothing, however, which Navarro intended to pass along to the deserter's creditors in repayment, if the governor permitted it.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia, 1812-1821, section 20, reels 35 and 36, EFP, PKY.

¹¹⁷ Joaquín Navarro to Governor of Florida, 10 October 1814, section 40, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

Little more than a year before, on 21 September 1813, Tomás Llorente wrote Governor Kindelán to report the absence of another member of the artillery detachment, reserve artilleryman José Otero, who had deserted earlier that same night.¹¹⁸ Three other cases of desertion from the artillery detachment are also documented – the cases of Marcos Manusi, Pablo Biera and José Claro de Flores.¹¹⁹ And although four cases between 1783 and 1821 are few, it is important to keep in mind that the artillery commander generally only led 20-30 soldiers, making the loss of even one man significant.¹²⁰

The dragoons, perforce an elite corps due to the cost of their horses' maintenance, unsurprisingly also produced few deserters, but did have some. *Dragón* José Martínez, accused a deserter, was apprehended by two San Nicolás soldiers, including Florida militiaman Guillermo Enrique Hendricks (Isaac Hendrick, in some documents) in early December 1801, who escorted him to St. Augustine, where he was to await trial by military council (*consejo de Guerra*). From dragoon commander Benito de Pangua's 16 December missive discussing Martínez's case, we discover that his crime was doubly serious: not only did he desert, but he abandoned his post as he fled.¹²¹ Almost seventeen years later, on 1 June 1818, dragoon Juan Portela also fled service.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 21 September 1813, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

¹¹⁹ Determined using the online Index to the East Florida Papers, Online Index to the East Florida Papers. P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida. [online].<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/digital/collections/EFP/index.htm>. Accessed 13 February 2007. Individual citations are: Governor of Florida to Ygnacio Salens, 2 March 1816, section 38, reel 72, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Ygnacio Salens, 3 December 1818, section 38, reel 72, EFP, PKY; and Governor of Florida to Ygnacio Salens, 26 January 1813, section 38, reel 72, EFP, PKY.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Monthly Inspection List, Artillery Detachment, 8 February 1798, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; and Marchena Fernández, "Guarniciones y Población Militar en Florida Oriental (1700-1820)," 103. In October 1797 and January 1798, Captain Juan de los Remedios lost two men to illness – Bernardo Garcia was shipped back to Havana to recover there and José Latorre died in St. Augustine's royal hospital. This alone represented an 8 percent loss.

¹²¹ Governor of Florida to Benito de Pangua, 15 December 1814, section 35, reel 67, EFP, PKY; Benito de Pangua to Governor of Florida, 16 December 1814, section 35, reel 67, EFP, PKY; the distinction between desertion and abandonment of post may seem a fine one, but it was not. Anselmo Gamboa, for example (see footnote 345), left his guard station to look in on a party, fully intending to return afterwards. José

The bulk of East Florida’s white desertions came from the ranks of the Third Battalion of Cuba. The Third Battalion was the centerpiece of the East Florida garrison from its arrival as the replacement for the Irish-born Hibernia Regiment, which was recalled from Florida in 1789, through its own disbanding in 1815. It was also, as Sherry Johnson puts it, “[composed of] the dregs of Spanish and Cuban society and included deserters, vagrants, thieves, and criminals”.¹²³ As one might expect, given this description, many of these soldiers deserted over the quarter century their unit spent in East Florida. According to Juan Marchena Fernández, who has tallied the size of the Third Battalion at four points in the Second Spanish Period, its decline progressed thusly:

Table 2.1: Third Battalion of Cuba Troop Size¹²⁴

Year	Battalion Size	Year	Battalion Size
1790	371 men	1790	371 men
1800	253	1800	253
1810	256	1810	256
1814	187	1814	187

This represents a roughly 49.6 percent drop in size between 1790 and 1814; over the course of its tenure in East Florida, the Third Battalion lost nearly half of its men.

Estevan Protomartir was among those who deserted, as were Prudencio Sosa, Wencislado Romero and Antonio Ada Martínez, all soldiers of the third and fourth

Maldonado, on the other hand (see footnote 136), was clearly guilty of a far more permanent sort of flight. For differentiation even between different severities of desertion, keyed to time spent away from post, see the case of Juan de Castro and footnote 135.

¹²² We know of Portela’s desertion both through the inspection that Alferéz and brevet Lieutenant Juan Percheman of the Dragoons conducted of his detachment on 2 July 1818, which noted Portela as missing since the night before, and from a letter from Governor Coppinger to Percheman, dated 22 June 1819, in which the governor addressed Percheman’s request that the deserted dragoon’s wages be remitted to Percheman’s troop despite his long absence. Monthly Inspection List for Dragoon Detachment, 2 July 1818, section 20, reel 36, EFP, PKY; José Coppinger to Juan Percheman, 22 June 1819, section 35, reel 69, EFP, PKY.

¹²³ Sherry Johnson, “The Spanish St. Augustine Community, 1784-1795: A Reevaluation,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (July, 1989), 39.

¹²⁴ Marchena Fernández, “Guarniciones y Población Militar en Florida Oriental,” 104; optimum size for this battalion was 378 men; see Marchena Fernández, “Guarniciones y Población Militar en Florida Oriental,” 103.

companies of the Third Battalion. On 21 April 1814, Captain Llorente wrote Governor Kindelán from San Nicolás to report that these soldiers had gone missing the night of the sixteenth and, having stolen a canoe, had crossed the St. Johns River:

“On the night of the sixteenth, the following soldiers were missing from the muster: Estevan Protomartir, Prudencio Sosa, and from the gunboat Zelosa Wencislado Romero and Antonio Ada Martínez, who were still missing the following morning; I therefore dispatched a party under Corporal Vila to track them...when it arrived at the plantation of M. Ploma, the party was told that they [the deserters] had taken their canoe and passed to the other side [of the river]...”.

This same letter also documented second company soldier José Canas’ desertion the next night. The following November, Kindelán received another such report from Llorente, informing him that José Palma of the Third Battalion and serving aboard the gunboat Zelosa, along with a *pardo* militiaman from the Ynmutable, had fled his post on the sixteenth. Less than half a year later, in March 1815, the Zelosa lost still more Third Battalion soldiers from its crew, this time José Paz, José María Acosta and José Almeida, who fled on the afternoon of the twenty-second, and stealing a canoe from a widow named Enrique, crossed the St. Johns, as Protomartir and his co-conspirators had the year before. And these are all within roughly one year of each other – many more cases may be found in the decades predating the Cuban Negro Militia’s arrival. In August and September 1799, for example, seven Third Battalion soldiers deserted, including a corporal in the prestigious grenadier company.¹²⁵ In fact, cases survive of soldiers having deserted from the Third Battalion’s predecessors. As early as July 1786, and well before the arrival of the Third Battalion of Cuba, Garrison Commander Domingo Molina wrote Governor Zéspedes requesting the transfer to St. Augustine of a Sergeant Delgado and

¹²⁵ Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 9 August and 7 September 1799, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; for other examples of earlier desertions from the Third Battalion, please see the next and last subsection of this chapter.

one other soldier, both stationed on the St. Johns River, in order to take statements from them relating to the trial of soldier Antonio Amara of the King's Regiment, a deserter both from Havana and St. Augustine.¹²⁶

However, we should note that Marchena Fernández's 49.6 percent drop is not necessarily or even likely exactly equal to the Third Battalion's total rate of desertion. We know that the Cuban militia's overall desertion count and rate – 180 men, for a total of – based on a simple tally of all desertions that took place from among its ranks, including desertions that ended with the fugitives willingly returning and attempts that ended in the deserters' capture. Because both of these possible outcomes could and did also occur when white soldiers deserted, the true percentage of the Third Battalion that deserted could be considerably higher than the 49.6 percent figure, which only counts desertion-related losses that were not recouped, and also fails to include repeated offenses. On the other hand, Marchena Fernández himself admits that his numbers represent absolute losses, with no distinctions drawn between decreases caused by death, discharges from the military or flight from service, meaning that the Third Battalion's actual number of desertions could also be considerably lower.¹²⁷

Supporting a low desertion estimate, between January 1797 and the beginning of 1800, one of Marchena Fernández's benchmark years, the size of the Third Battalion decreased from 359 men to 301, with only 24 desertions.¹²⁸ Clearly, other forces were at work: soldiers José Vega and José Chavarria of the first and second companies were

¹²⁶ Domingo Molina to Governor of Florida, 3 July 1786, section 35, reel 66, EFP, PKY.

¹²⁷ Marchena Fernández, "Guarniciones y Población Militar," 105; note that by licensure, what is meant is 'licenciamiento', the granting of a 'licencia' or discharge from the Spanish military.

¹²⁸ Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 7 January 1797 and 9 January 1800, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; these troop counts specifically do not include members of the *Plana Mayor* or Command Staff, nor do they include officers of the ranks of Sub-lieutenant or above, who were considered by the Spanish military to be supernumeraries.

shipped to Cuba in late 1798 to recover from persistent health problems that they could not overcome while still in East Florida. In May of that same year, fourth company soldier Antonio Ruiz and Corporal Second Class José Caravallo of the same company were both discharged as *inútiles* – men pronounced unfit to serve, generally because of age or broken health. Many men died, including Francisco Suarez of Lieutenant Estevan Menocal's second company and Luis Morales of Captain Manuel de Castilla's third company. And many too were consigned to the prison at the *Castillo de San Marcos*, like Drummer José Hernandez of the second company, imprisoned on 16 April 1799.

Conversely, desertion figures for 1813-1814 suggest a high estimate. In January 1813, the Third Battalion's active enlistment stood at 205 sergeants, corporals and private soldiers. Two years later, in December 1814, this number had decreased to 154, a drop of 51. Many of these permanent losses were, as in the previous case, due to causes other than desertion. In February 1813, the Third Battalion recorded no desertions, but did lose 14 men for other reasons, more than one quarter of the battalion's total loss over this period. These men included second company soldier Juan Gomez, who died in the royal hospital on 28 January, Sergeants José Rodríguez, José Soysa and Juan Martos, who retired, and Christobal Brabo, who was one of the nine soldiers discharged this month as invalids.¹²⁹ Nor was this the only month in which losses were posted for such reasons. On 8 August 1813, second company soldier Antonio Hernandez died, while drummer Bartolomé Garrido received a discharge on 1 July 1814.¹³⁰

At the same time, the Third Battalion experienced 42 desertions over these two years, indicating that a number of these years' desertions are not accounted for by the

¹²⁹ Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, February 1813, section 20, reel 34, EFP, PKY.

¹³⁰ Monthly Inspection Lists for Third Battalion of Cuba, September 1813 and 7 July 1814, section 20, reels 34 and 35, EFP, PKY.

troop loss figure above – 42 and 16 add up to 57, not 51. Soldier Juan Otoñez’s desertion was one of those not counted: Otoñez deserted for the first time in Spring 1813; after presenting himself at Fernandina on 9 October 1813, he fled service again on 23 October.¹³¹ And similarly, on 4 June 1814, three Third Battalion soldiers deserted, one of whom - Juan Almeda of the third company - was apprehended shortly thereafter. A drop of two soldiers is recorded, for only two men were actually lost, but the third desertion, though not reflected in the troop’s size, nevertheless took place.¹³²

Barring a full examination of the Third Battalion’s inspections for 1790-1815, a considerable task beyond the scope of this study, we thus must eschew any direct, quantitative comparison of desertions within the Third Battalion of Cuba and the Cuban Negro Militia. This is not a significant loss, however: for our purposes, it suffices to note that the Third Battalion experienced extensive desertion from within its ranks, with as many (and perhaps even more) as 42 men deserting in a single two-year period, or approximately one in four of the soldiers serving in January 1813. So again, if something was the matter with the Cuban militia, so too was there a serious problem brewing within the ranks of its white companion in the garrison.

Destinations

One question remains, though: where did these deserters go? Writing about colonial Brazil’s *Caçadores do Mato*, Mariana L.R. Dantas maintains that slaves fled most often when they had a destination to which they could flee.¹³³ In Brazil, and specifically in Minas Gerais, Dantas’ focus, these were *quilombos*, maroon settlements in

¹³¹ Monthly Inspection Lists for Third Battalion of Cuba, February and March 1813, section 20, reel 34, EFP, PKY.

¹³² Monthly Inspection Lists for Third Battalion of Cuba, June 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹³³ Mariana L.R. Dantas, “‘For the Benefit of the Common Good’: Regiments of *Caçadores do Mato* in Minas Gerais, Brazil,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5:2, (Winter, 2004).

the densely forested interior, which were the principal targets of attacks carried out by the *Caçadores do Mato*. East Florida's deserters – both black and white – similarly had destinations in mind when they fled (though Brazil's *quilombos* were absent in Second Spanish Period East Florida), with Georgia one of the nearest and most attractive possibilities available.

The obvious option for white soldiers was flight across the St. Mary's River into the state of Georgia and the United States. One advantage to this course was that it was an easy route to take – by all accounts, the St. Mary's was a relatively open border, despite Spanish attempts to patrol it. Writing on 1 June 1811, Lieutenant Justo López of the Third Battalion of Cuba and commander of the garrison at Fernandina, complained to Interim Governor Juan José de Estrada:

“Sir: various individuals who are not vassals of His Catholic Majesty have entered this Province, in the St. Mary's River basin, felling timber in royal territory in contravention [of Royal Laws], and although they have been order to desist and exit the Province via public notices, [they] have continued felling timber in violation of the Government orders I have promulgated”.¹³⁴

Perhaps unsurprisingly, white deserters exploited this shortfall in security and streamed across the Georgia-Florida border. On 5 June 1811, for example, Interim Governor Estrada wrote Corporal Pedro Lefebre, recently appointed commander of the Buenavista fort, warning him that Juan de Castro, a soldier from Third Battalion had deserted and was presumed to be heading in Lefebre's direction. Lefebre was ordered to mobilize the local population and local judge Don Guillermo Craig. But Castro was able to get through this dragnet, for when we next hear of him, on 8 July, he was in St. Mary's, Georgia, just across the border from Amelia Island and the Fernandina battery:

¹³⁴ Justo López to Interim Governor of Florida, 1 June 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

“The first company soldier Juan de Castro, who has deserted from this plaza, and may be found in St. Mary’s, Georgia, has asked me to inform you that he repents having deserted, and if Your Honor sees fit to lay aside the penalty he has earned, he will gladly return to his [battalion’s] flags”.¹³⁵

Unfortunately for Castro, Estrada responded that it was not within his purview to set Castro’s punishment, but that Castro could serve his four months’ prison sentence in his unit. Because he was not completely exonerated, Juan de Castro elected not to return.

Similarly, soldier Juan Otoñez presented himself on 10 October 1813 at Fernandina, having not only successfully fled to the United States, but having crossed the border again in the opposite direction – the act that Spanish authorities on the St. Mary’s, wary of timber-thieves, were supposedly on guard against. His story ended more happily: Otoñez received a pardon under a recently promulgated royal decree of amnesty toward deserters, his reason for returning. And, lest we think this a phenomenon unique to the period of the Napoleonic or Patriot Wars, earlier cases also abound, like that of José Maldonado

On 25 January 1804, Third Battalion soldier José Maldonado returned to Fernandina from an unlikely part of the United States: “Deserter José Maldonado of the Third Battalion of the Infantry Regiment of Cuba, who says he comes from Rodeisland [Rhode Island], has presented himself to me on the 25th of this month to take advantage of the recent royal amnesty”.¹³⁶ Apparently, Maldonado had escaped either on a ship or by crossing the Georgia-Florida border, and had made his way to New England. And the following month, Third Battalion soldiers Ramon Freyna and Miguel Cubelo, both serving in Fernandina prior to their desertion, also returned across the St. Mary’s,

¹³⁵ Interim Governor of Florida to Pedro Lefebre, 5 June 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY; Justo López to Interim Governor of Florida, 8 July 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

¹³⁶ Fernando de la Puente to Governor of Florida, 27 January 1804, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY.

“seeking to [re]unite with their flags, being repentant of the crime they committed ...[having been]...truant in the United States of America”.¹³⁷

What is surprising, however, is that a number of deserters from the Cuban Negro Militia also fled into the southern United States. Black militiamen who crossed the St. Mary’s into the southern United States ran the risk of capture and enslavement, and on at least two occasions fell afoul of this fate. On 1 June 1816, Pedro Pascacio Arango, a deserter from the Cuban Negro Militia detachment in East Florida, wrote Governor José Coppinger claiming that he had been captured by rebels, and sold into slavery in the United States. Now the slave of a Mareiable Copar of King Street, Charleston, Arango asked Coppinger to have documents sent from Havana proving his identity and free status.¹³⁸ Similarly, on 8 May 1820 Governor Coppinger sent Antonio Argote Villalobos, the Spanish Consul in Charleston, the *filiación* – the service record – of Rufino Petro, a deserter from the *pardo* company who had been enslaved. Petro could return from Charleston and would receive royal amnesty.¹³⁹ And on 4 October 1820, Tomás de Salazar, the militia’s latest commander, sent the *filiación* of *moreno* deserter Juan Manuel Pacheco to Savannah, where Pacheco had been jailed, in the hope that the sole motive of his incarceration had been “ignorance of his condition and provenance”.¹⁴⁰

A closer and potentially safer option that was also available to deserting Cuban Negro Militia soldiers, though not necessarily to their white compatriots, was flight to East Florida’s Native American communities. Florida’s Seminole communities were willing to accept refugees of African ancestry: by Spain’s return to Florida in 1784, a

¹³⁷ Fernando de la Puente to Governor of Florida, 3 February 1804, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY.

¹³⁸ Pedro Pascacio Arango to Governor of Florida, 1 June 1816, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

¹³⁹ Governor of Florida to Antonio Argote Villalobos, 8 May 1820, section 26, reel 41, EFP, PKY.

¹⁴⁰ Tomás de Salazar to Governor of Florida, 4 October 1820, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

tradition of friendly ties between Florida's blacks and the newly-arrived Seminoles was well-established. According to Jane Landers, from the 1770s on, "many runaway slaves found refuge among the Seminoles..." with whom they maintained relationships reminiscent of feudal lord-vassal tributary bonds, and also sometimes intermarried.¹⁴¹ In fact, according to Landers, the emergence of these "village Negroes" was in great part responsible for the Seminoles' late eighteenth-century switch from hostility toward the Spanish to alliance with them.¹⁴² Of course, given this relationship, the possibility existed that the Spaniards' Indian allies would turn over deserters they received, especially white ones, to garrison authorities.¹⁴³ Still, the Seminoles remained a plausible destination for Cuban Negro Militia deserters, for in a 15 August 1813 letter to Governor Kindelán, Captain Tomás Llorente wrote:

"The *morenos* who fled from this post with their arms were: Corporal Cipio Faccio, Manuel Rival, Juan Antonio, son of Aysik, and John Ebran; the direction they took was the *camino de Florida*, judging from the tracks found by the party that I sent in pursuit immediately after noticing their absence. The hard rain, however, erased the tracks...the party thinks that they [the deserters] likely went to the Indians..."¹⁴⁴

This is reminiscent of desertion patterns in New Spain, where, Christon Archer states, "the geography...permitted men to disappear into isolated regions or frontier zones where they were seldom apprehended", in 1788, when the search party that Colonel Rafael Vasco sent in pursuit of fourteen deserted recent recruits from Valladolid. The

¹⁴¹ Landers, 68; for a brief account of the Creek invasion of Florida and a detailed account of the racial intermixture of see Wilton Marion Krogman, "The Racial Composition of the Seminole Indians of Florida and Oklahoma," *The Journal of Negro History* 19, no. 4 (Oct, 1934), 412-430.

¹⁴² Landers, 68.

¹⁴³ Gabriel Menocal to Governor of Florida, 2 November 1803, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY; here, Menocal expressed the possibility that the Indians would turn absconded soldier Santiago Prieto, a white soldier, over to Spanish authorities.

¹⁴⁴ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 15 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

pursuit squad's attempts were foiled, and the deserters were saved by the wild countryside.¹⁴⁵

One final possibility for both white and black deserters was to desert and then turn themselves in immediately or shortly thereafter. Historian John Thornton defines *petit marronage* as the slave practice of running away – *marronage*, from which the English term maroon and the Spanish term *cimarrón* are both derived – and then returning.¹⁴⁶ *Petit marronage*, Thornton tells us, was a means by which the slave could voice his displeasure and remind his master of his worth in money and labor. Pedro Quiroga, for example, who according to Thornton was “master founder at the royal copper mines of Cocorote in Venezuela”, ran away continually, though never with the intention of staying away permanently. Often, in fact, he returned of his own accord. And often too he was rewarded as a result of these escapades, rather than punished, to which Thornton points as evidence of some form of negotiation. *Petit marronage* could also come in the form of slave running from one master to another, presumably more pleasant, owner.¹⁴⁷

Both of these behaviors may be found in records of the Cuban Negro Militia's desertions. On 16 July 1813, Manuel de Castilla wrote Governor Sebastián Kindelán to inform him that militiamen Francisco Zerpa and Lazaro del Castillo had fled San Nicolás and rejoined their company in St. Augustine, having become unwilling to serve under Lieutenant Andrés Ayala, who, Castilla reported, “threatens them and mistreats them constantly with ill-advised rigor”.¹⁴⁸ Simply by replacing the label ‘master’ with ‘commanding officer’, we have here a clear instance of the latter form of *petit*

¹⁴⁵ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 268-269.

¹⁴⁶ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 274-276.

¹⁴⁷ Thornton, 277-278.

¹⁴⁸ Manuel de Castilla to Governor of Florida, 16 July 1813, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

marronage. Crossing a much larger expanse of territory, Domingo Obiedo and Andrés Dobles, both Cuban *pardo* militiamen, also appear to have deserted in order to exchange masters. In May 1819, the pair presented themselves to Negro militia commander Pablo Rosete, who did not know whether to incorporate them into his troop: they had deserted on the sixteenth of the previous month, but from West Florida, specifically from the fort of Apalache.¹⁴⁹ The desertion of Francisco Zerpa and Lazaro del Castillo, meanwhile, also served the pair in the former sense of *petit marronage* as well. By deserting directly to authorities in St. Augustine, and citing Lieutenant Ayala's mistreatment as their motive, Zerpa and Castillo used the episode to give voice to a grievance. And, tellingly, their technique was effective – Governor Kindelán was sufficiently swayed by this complaint that he ordered Lieutenant Justo López to conduct an investigation into Ayala's conduct.

Conclusions

Even in comparison with other desertion-prone units in the Spanish Caribbean, most notably the Regiment of New Spain and the Regiment of the Crown stationed in early nineteenth-century New Spain, the Cuban Negro Militia had a widespread, serious desertion problem. Together, these two Mexican regiments lost slightly more than half their men over the course of a four year period, but East Florida's black Cuban militia lost more than two-thirds of its complement over its nine years of service, much of this loss coming in the space of a few years. Some of this can be attributed to the times, to the nature of the Spanish military during the final decline of Spain's empire in the New World – flight was common, we have seen, not only among East Florida's black troops

¹⁴⁹ Pablo Rosete to Governor of Florida, May 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

and in New Spain, but also in Santo Domingo, in Cuba, and within East Florida's white garrison. And Cuban militia desertion was part of this broader trend.

But several phenomena suggest that there was more to the militia's troubles than the general decline of the Spanish military: desertion was also rampant among U.S. troops along the Georgia-Florida border, suggesting that some specific aspect of service in Florida was conducive to poor morale and desertion. And the white garrison of regulars, albeit famous for its criminality, also experienced a prodigious rate of desertion. Most of all, the elite artillery and dragoon detachments, presumably above common soldiers' crimes like desertion, had to contend with flight from their ranks as well. It is incumbent upon us, then, to determine why East Florida's soldiers and militiamen deserted. Some of these motives may have been common to the Spanish Caribbean military as a whole, and may provide explanations for the broader trend of which Cuban Negro Militia desertion was a part; with others may lay an explanation for the Cuban militia's high rate of flight. It is to these motives that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

DISEASE AND WANT IN SPANISH EAST FLORIDA

*“Having carefully examined the motives that may be causing the continual desertion of the pardos of the company of Havana at this post, all I have been able to find is that the principal one is: that these individuals lament the nakedness they endure, [while] barefoot, without any tobacco, soap or thread, for they have been on active duty for three months and have been incessantly at work, without having had help nor recourse whatsoever, except for four reales that were given to them at their departure from the plaza [of St. Augustine]”.*¹⁵⁰

In response to Governor Kindelán’s 17 July 1813 missive in which the governor ordered him to investigate the ‘scandalous’ rash of black militia desertions occurring on the St. Johns River, Lieutenant Justo López wrote Kindelán on 19 July with the above explanation. His soldiers fled, he maintained, not due to dissatisfaction with military service in general; not because they lacked a sense of purpose to their service, nor even because of mistreatment by superiors, of which Francisco Zerpa and Lazaro del Castillo complained in the previous chapter. They fled because the conditions under which they were serving were simply unendurable.

By then, López was probably used to commanding cold, hungry soldiers. Two years before, at Fernandina, the Lieutenant had complained to Interim Governor Juan José de Estrada that, “the barracks at this post are in an entirely uninhabitable state,

¹⁵⁰ Justo López to Governor of Florida, 19 July 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY; Lieutenant López’s original words are instructive – the Spanish is blunt and betrays a sense of desperation, as evinced by the officer’s hyperbole. I have consequently included the original prose, transcribed exactly: “Habiendo examinado con todo cuidado los motivos que pueden ocasionar la continua desercion de los *pardos* de la compa de la Havana que se hallan en este Puesto; solo he podido adquirir que el mas principal es: el que estos individuos se lamentan de la desnudez que padezen [sic], descalzos, enteramente, y sin tabaco, Jabon, ni hilo, pues haze tres meses que se hallan en bibo e inzesante servicio y travajo, sin haver tenido ausilio ni recurso de nada, escepto cuatro rrs [reales] que les dieron a la salida de esa plaza [St. Augustine].”

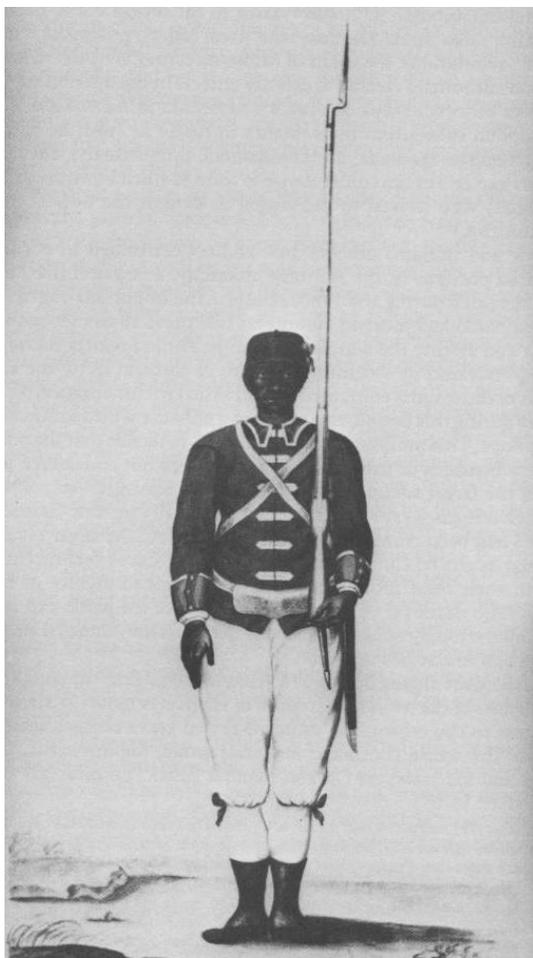


Figure 3.1: Militiaman, *Moreno* Infantry Battalion of Havana¹⁵¹



Figure 3.2: Volunteer in White Infantry Regiment of Havana¹⁵²

insofar as the troops can no longer shelter themselves therein”.¹⁵³ Both in this previous instance and again in 1813, López and his men received responses that offered them little comfort: in 1811, Engineer Commander Manuel de Hita acknowledged the validity of López’s assessment, but suggested that, because Fernandina was soon to be completely rebuilt, the project ought to wait until then to save on costs. And, because existing construction in Fernandina had been suspended by the governor since 10 June, the wait

¹⁵¹ Image taken from Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 124

¹⁵² Image taken from Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 39

¹⁵³ Justo López to Governor of Florida, 24 June 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

promised to be a long one.¹⁵⁴ In 1813, meanwhile, Governor Kindelán's only response to the Lieutenant's observation was his promise that when the necessary supplies or funds became available, the ailing soldiers' needs would quickly be met.¹⁵⁵

Captain Llorente offered a similar but unsolicited explanation for the four *morenos* desertions he reported on 12 August 1813, and which we encountered at the beginning of Chapter 2:

“Four *morenos* have fled from this plaza, their motive being that after I inspected them yesterday for their departure to Amelia [Island], I observed discontent among them...[because]...they were naked and lacked even a little tobacco to suck on; after I offered them a little of this and a little *Aguardiente* [rum], and also offered to help out the families they have here, they appeared better disposed and content to my reckoning...”¹⁵⁶

Llorente also observed that his soldiers could not work in his post's barracks or battery due to their extreme level of disrepair, and noted that this was particularly unfortunate as “this troop...[was]...all stuck in a lagoon that with its humidity...[would]...cause everyone to sicken, only more so because of the strong daily rainstorms”.

Judging from these accounts, the service conditions in the East Florida garrison were terrible. If so, then we need look no further for the reason behind the province's many desertions: soldiers fled their posts because the conditions they lived in were sufficiently terrible that flight was preferable. Or, as mentioned at the close of the previous chapter, they fled in an attempt to show their superiors that their level of provisioning was unacceptable. Here too we may find the causes behind the desertions that troubled Spain's other garrisons in the Caribbean. As we will see, they experienced many of these same problems. However, several questions remain: first, is this theory

¹⁵⁴ Justo López to Governor of Florida, 19 August 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

¹⁵⁵ Governor of Florida to Justo López, 26 July 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

¹⁵⁶ See footnote 82.

valid, even in the case of East Florida? And second, if so, what exactly made service in East Florida so unpleasant? From the examples above, we know that soldiers could fall ill, and that they sometimes had to do without. But were these soldiers' only complaints, and were they sufficiently severe to have motivated all of this flight from service?

Disease

Once again, the answer to this question must be yes, at least concerning disease. The threat of contagion was endemic, and not just in East Florida – one of the greatest dangers inherent to service in the Spanish Caribbean as a whole was the possibility of catching one of a host of tropical diseases native to the area. Juan Marchena Fernández has sampled the inspection lists for a number of garrisons throughout the eighteenth century and recorded their levels of illness:, with telling results: in 1742, 45 out of the 471 soldiers in the Fixed Regiment of Santo Domingo were sick, or 9.55 percent of the complement. Callao's Fixed Regiment, with an enlistment of 687 men, reported 59 of them ill in 1750. 30 percent of the 630-soldier Fixed Regiment of Cartagena was sick, with 189 men indisposed. And the Regiment of the Queen, stationed in Panama in 1768, listed 418 sick soldiers out of a total muster of 1,068 soldiers, more than a third of the troop.¹⁵⁷

Later in the century, Spain's largest Caribbean possession, the viceroyalty of New Spain, faced just such losses. We have already observed the high levels of desertion that the Regiment of the Crown and the Regiment of New Spain experienced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – disease, Christon Archer maintains, was the primary motive behind these desertions. Colonial Veracruz, according to Archer, was both “the disease capital as well as the most important permanent garrison guarding the

¹⁵⁷ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 210.

entry to the viceroyalty”.¹⁵⁸ Epidemics of *vómito negro* – yellow fever – were common in the port city, and the *Hospital Real de San Carlos*, Veracruz’s military hospital and the only one in New Spain, often overflowed with patients, sometimes treating 500 to 600 soldiers in a facility built for 350. In the Regiment of the Crown alone, 853 men died between 1797 and 1800. Together, the Regiment of the Crown and the Regiment of New Spain lost 875 soldiers in one year, 1799. “Confronted with the obvious reality of these grim statistics”, Archer proclaims, “the survivors...saw desertion as their sole salvation”.¹⁵⁹

Yellow fever was less pervasive outside of Veracruz, but these other regions had their own health problems to contend with. In 1768, Puebla was plagued by smallpox measles and whooping cough, compounded with a drought that delayed the harvest and adversely affected the city’s already poor nutrition. While those hit hardest were children rather than militia-aged men, disease was one of the motives behind the city’s low militia numbers.¹⁶⁰

The medical facilities in other Mexican cantonments were such that soldiers rightly associated them with terminal illness, and were justifiably fearful of emerging sicker than when they entered. Francisco Hidalgo, physician for the Infantry of Tres Villas, pronounced all of the drugs in the pharmacy of the hospital at Jalapa to be unusable and actually harmful to patients. In this same vein, when ordered to investigate the hospitals, Colonel Pedro Garibay refused to inspect the facilities personally, because his “delicate stomach would not permit it”.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 264.

¹⁵⁹ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 264-265, 267.

¹⁶⁰ Vinson III, 89.

¹⁶¹ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 263.

This shortfall in medical care, aside from the natural virulence of the diseases in question, was a second reason for the pervasiveness of contagion among the Spanish colonial garrisons, and is indicative of the scope of this health crisis. The doctor in eighteenth century Spanish America, Marchena Fernández states, was “an individual wrapped in an aura of legend and mysticism, making it difficult sometimes to establish the boundary between the doctor and the medicine-man...”.¹⁶² Military surgeons, who like modern surgeons specialized in healing through operations on the body, were by contrast considerably more competent. Even so, the cures employed by doctors, surgeons and, most troubling, by religious orders that often cared for the sick could actually harm patients. In the *Hospital Real de San Carlos*, for example, the two surgery rooms available handled all incoming cases, “which meant that the utensils, equipment, and even the walls were impregnated with the mercury used in the treatment of venereal disease”.¹⁶³ Almártaga, a ferrous oxide compound, Sulfur, shredded deer antlers, unshelled sour almonds, crude oil, red coral and lizard manure were all commonly prescribed treatments.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, in Veracruz’s *Hospital de San Carlos*, the nursing staff was not dedicated to the treatment of the sick (convicts were often pressed into hospital service), food was often prepared in the room used to store old and dirty containers, the individual who passed for a pharmacist operated on contract and was paid little, and conditions were still worse for those patients who were placed in private homes due to lack of space in the hospital.¹⁶⁵ It is hardly surprising that soldiers were unwilling

¹⁶² Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 226.

¹⁶³ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 265.

¹⁶⁴ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 228.

¹⁶⁵ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 265.

to report themselves sick, suggesting too that the true number of ill soldiers was higher – perhaps even considerably higher – than surviving figures indicate.

And East Florida was no exception to this trend: the first reported case of sick military personnel during the Second Spanish Period came very early, in February 1786, when sick soldier Juan Fernández was sent from Amelia Island back to the provincial capital, and from there to Cuba.¹⁶⁶ Disease abounded, even in these first years of renewed Spanish hegemony: in 1789, artillerymen José Kraus and Antonio Carpio were so ill they required shipment back to Havana, while in 1791, according to Dr. Thomas Stirling, based in Fernandina, not only was Sergeant Fernando Medina extremely weak, but none of the Third Battalion's Amelia Island detachment was able to serve.¹⁶⁷

By 1800, hospitalization and illness were common features of service among the garrison. On average, between January 1797 and January 1800, 11 Third Battalion soldiers were unable to serve for health reasons each month, or about one man out of every twenty. Luis Bote of the fourth company, for example, died in the royal hospital at St. Augustine on 7 January 1799, while fellow fourth company soldier Juan Martínez succumbed on 6 January 1797. In December 1798, first company soldier José Vega and second company soldier José Chavarria both left for Havana to reestablish their health.¹⁶⁸ And even earlier, in October 1794, Pablo Mestre certified 11 men as *inútil*: grenadier Corporal Juan Campi was listed as “tired, sick and short-sighted”, first company soldier Agustin Guerrero was also tired, and additionally suffered from a chest ailment, and third

¹⁶⁶ Manuel de los Reyes to Governor of Florida, 28 February 1786, section 32, reel 45, EFP, PKY.

¹⁶⁷ Pedro Salcedo to Governor of Florida, 5 June 1789, section 37, reel 71, EFP, PKY; Sebastián Creagh to Governor of Florida, 15 September 1791, Section 32, reel 47, EFP, PKY.

¹⁶⁸ Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 7 January 1799, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 6 January 1797, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; and Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 7 December 1798, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY.

company soldier Luis Yzabiera bore “incurable gashes on his legs” and was asthmatic. Most striking, however, are the several men whose principal symptom was “coughing up spurts of blood”.¹⁶⁹ Twenty years later, Pablo Mestre discharged soldier Luis Conesa over this same symptom.¹⁷⁰

Nor, as Conesa’s discharge might suggest, had this changed much by the Cuban Negro Militia’s arrival in East Florida. Twelve men were sick in 1810, with five alone from Captain Benito de Pangua’s second company. In January 1813, the Third Battalion had four men in the hospital, one sick and recuperating at home, and one convalescing. Notably, grenadier Captain Manuel Martínez, the senior company commander in the battalion, was also at home sick. And though earlier, in 1811, the Third Battalion had months in which only two companies produced as few as three sick soldiers, by 1814, soldiers in the Third Battalion and even artillerymen and dragoons were once again regularly falling ill. On 21 June 1814, Governor Kindelán wrote Ygnacio Salens to request that a replacement be sent for Artilleryman Antonio José Fernández, posted at San Nicolás, who was returning to St. Augustine via the gunboat *Barbarita* because he was sick.¹⁷¹ That December, Captain Llorente wrote Kindelán to report that his dragoon Sergeant had fallen ill with “aches all over his body and fever”, and to request that the ailing cavalryman be transferred to St. Augustine and that his replacement be dispatched to the St. Johns. Llorente had already written Kindelán two months before, suggesting that an artillery reliever who the governor had dispatched stand in not for Artillery Corporal José Sandoval, who had just recovered from his illness, but instead for an

¹⁶⁹ List of certified inútiles discharged from Third Battalion of Cuba, 21 October 1794, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

¹⁷⁰ Certification of Illness for Luis Conesa by Surgeon Pablo Mestre, 22 June 1814, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

¹⁷¹ Governor of Florida to Ygnacio Salens, 21 June 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

artillery soldier surnamed Alvarado, also ill.¹⁷² And that September, the rash of fevers on the St. Johns River was so severe that Llorente – frantic – wrote Kindelán on 16 September to request reinforcements:

“the cold fevers are declaring themselves at this post, for today I have fifteen sick men, of which one Cuban [of the Third Battalion] and four *pardos* can walk and the rest cannot. I send them by land to avoid any delay, because the sick men are enduring much and the *Barbarita* always stops first at Fernandina and takes its time getting there, while by land it takes two arduous days. I recommend to Your Honor that relievers be sent off, as every day I have losses; I myself feel feverish today, but have not had more than chills and shortness of breath...”.¹⁷³

Despite the supposed inborn resistance of Africans to tropical diseases, the Cuban militia found itself in similar straits.¹⁷⁴ Within half a year of their arrival, five men from the *morenos* companies were already sick, the first three of these within two months of their arrival. This was not merely a seasoning period, during which soldiers caught diseases, acquired immunities, and served healthfully thereafter; contagion remained a problem for the duration of the Patriot War, and afflicted soldiers who had already served months and years in Florida.¹⁷⁵ By the end of the war, 17 men had missed inspection due to illness or hospitalization (or both), including two officers, Lieutenant José María Acosta and Sub-lieutenant Ignacio Pastor. One of these, Francisco de Castro, had died.¹⁷⁶

High levels of illness continued immediately following the close of the Patriot War. During the second half of 1814, the second of *morenos* had at least one ill or

¹⁷² Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 9 October 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

¹⁷³ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 16 September 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

¹⁷⁴ For a recent – but somewhat problematic – treatise on the immunological and biological particularities of West Africans, see Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984); for an older but more reputable discussion of African resistance to disease, see Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, “Of Agues and Fevers: Malaria in the Early Chesapeake,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 33, No. 1, (Jan., 1976), 31-60.

¹⁷⁵ For more on ‘seasoning’ and several revealing examples, see Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman.

¹⁷⁶ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, 1812-1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

hospitalized member for five out of the remaining eight months, while the first of *morenos* had an average of more than three men sick every month.¹⁷⁷ But the *pardos* were hit hardest of all, with an impressive 11 sick, hospitalized or convalescing soldiers in November, out of a total strength of 90. More than a tenth of the company was unable to serve due to health, including the company's commanding officer, Captain Cisneros. We, incidentally, can be certain of at least three of these individuals' ill health: Cisneros was accompanied by fellow officer Gregorio Contreras and a convalescent soldier, Domingo Chavarria.¹⁷⁸

Throughout the rest of the decade, disease remained a constant presence among the Cuban Negro Militia. 1815 was in some ways kinder to the militia. Where during 1814 as many as 11 men were sick at once, this year's largest single contingent of sick soldiers consisted of only three first company soldiers, ill in May, June, and July. However, militiamen continued to grow ill. On average, the sickest of the militia companies, the first *morenos*, still had more than one sick soldier per month, while the healthiest, the *pardos*, had more than one hospitalization per two months.¹⁷⁹

The following year, the Cuban militia's health resumed its previous downward trajectory. In 1816, soldiers grew ill with almost double the frequency of the previous year. The first company had an average of two soldiers sick per month, while both the

¹⁷⁷ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, Apr 1814 – Dec 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY; five men fell ill in July and August, six during September and October, three in November, and two in December, for an average of 3.375 men ill per month.

¹⁷⁸ Monthly Inspection Lists for Company of *Pardos*, 7 Nov 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY; despite the example of Lieutenant Ygualada (see below), we may consider Cisneros' illness above suspicion. Cisneros was an officer of long service in East Florida and commander of the Cuban militia detachment. Ygualada, by contrast, had yet to render any service in Florida outside of his tenure as court scribe. It is also telling that while Ygualada's claims immediately raised suspicion, no investigation was called into Cisneros' condition. We will, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, also assume that Contreras was genuinely ill, and Chavarria's convalescent status suggests that he suffered from a genuine malady from which he recovered during a discernible period of convalescence.

¹⁷⁹ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, 1815, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

second company and the *pardos* had between 1.5 and 2 soldiers sick per month. Also, large numbers of simultaneously sick militiamen can once again be found: in August 1816, seven first company soldiers missed inspection due to ill health; that same month ten second company men and eight *pardos* missed inspection for the same reason.¹⁸⁰

And finally, the last years of Spanish Florida brought lower, but steady levels of contagion. Between 1817 and 1821, hospitalized soldiers were between one and three percent of their three companies' combined enlistment. In terms of sick soldiers per month, each of the militia companies averaged between one and two sick men per month, though in practice the *pardos* and *morenos* had months of perfect health followed by clusters of two to four simultaneous hospitalizations. We no longer find any epidemics of ten or more cases in a single company; still, even now soldiers continued to fall ill, surely a demoralizing trend.¹⁸¹

The causes of these hospitalizations are harder to determine exactly.¹⁸² One possibility is that the soldiers were not sick at all. Malingering was one of several avenues by which disaffected soldiers and militiamen could escape service in Florida, and became a documented, widespread problem for the East Florida garrison's commanders. Feigned illness became sufficiently widespread that in 1820 Governor José Coppinger wrote Negro Militia Commander Pedro Claro, requesting a second medical

¹⁸⁰ Monthly Inspection Lists, for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, 1816, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹⁸¹ Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, 1817-1821, section 20, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

¹⁸² For one thing, there are few references (especially by name) to specific diseases in any records for East Florida, these tending rather to describe symptoms. Moreover, as Darrett and Anita Rutman caution, "Any entry into the medical life of the past must be undertaken cautiously"; Rutman and Rutman, 31-32. Rutman and Rutman point out the ease with which the modern historian can misinterpret past symptoms, considering typical, for example, symptoms that were unique because aggravated by processes such as bleeding. Notably, where typicality is stated here, this is drawn directly from contemporary accounts, or based on continual verbatim repetition of a patently stock diagnoses; ie, "the coughing up of spurts of blood".

examination of all Cuban Negro Militia personnel declared ‘inútil’ – unfit for service – prior to their transportation back to Cuba.¹⁸³

Even officers could be suspect, under the right conditions. Witness the story of Lieutenant Francisco Ygualada: from 30 June 1818 through 24 December 1818, Lieutenant Ygualada of the Light Battalion of Tarragona served as court scribe in the court-martial of former Fernandina Commander Francisco Morales, on trial for his surrender of Fernandina during Gregor McGregor’s invasion in 1817. On 13 January 1819, Captain Ribera informed Lieutenant Ygualada, who had been attached to his battalion, that he was to commence guard duty the following day. But only a few hours later, Ygualada claimed to have become so sick that he would not be able to serve. Ribera – suspicious – ordered Lieutenant José Valverde and Master Surgeon Pablo Mestre to inspect (*reconocer*) Ygualada, who refused, exclaiming, “If officers from Cuba are accustomed to letting themselves be inspected, those from Tarragona are not”. Incensed not only at the Lieutenant’s refusal but also at the tacit insult to Cuban officers, Ribera complained to the governor:

“it seems to me that the aforementioned Ygualada only tries to insult the corps and those officers (from Cuba) who do hardly anything except render exact service and offer the highest level of obedience and subordination to their superiors; they should not have these things thrown in their faces,”

and asked that Ygualada be ordered to submit to examination.¹⁸⁴

What followed was a back-and-forth exchange of letters debating military law and Ribera’s right to force Ygualada’s evaluation. Ultimately, the governor decided that Ygualada was truly sick, afflicted with what Surgeon Mestre diagnosed as “arthritic pains

¹⁸³ José Coppinger to Pedro Claro, Feb. 26, 1820, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

¹⁸⁴ Francisco Ribera to Governor of Florida, 13 January 1819, section 35, reel 69, EFP, PKY.

caused by a syphilitic affliction, having suffered before a virulent gonorrhoea”, and had him transferred back to Cuba for curative mineral baths. Despite this favorable outcome, the veracity of Ygualada’s claims remains open to question, as from 15 January on, Captain Ribera penned a series of letters that revealed increasingly compelling evidence against Ygualada. Among this proof was a wager the Lieutenant made of “one ounce against half”, betting that he would successfully avoid service in St. Augustine.¹⁸⁵ Ygualada’s case, meanwhile, also provides a second example of malingering within the officers’ ranks, as in his 15 January letter, Captain Ribera made reference to the recent case of Cuban Infantry Regiment Lieutenant Ramon Castellanos, whose superior ordered him to be sent from Havana to the regiment’s detachment at St. Augustine. Castellanos, Ribera recounted, at first petitioned against this transfer, and when this produced no results, he claimed to be ill. A medical evaluation and recuperative stay in the royal hospital was ordered for Castellanos, justifying, Ribera claimed, his own actions toward Ygualada.¹⁸⁶

Malingering aside, soldiers could also be hospitalized for wounds received, rather than illnesses contracted. Third Battalion soldier Luis Conesa, whose *inútil* certification we have already encountered, began coughing up blood after a wall fell on him, presumably during a construction project.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, we can safely conclude that many – perhaps most – hospitalized or infirm soldiers were genuinely sick, suffering from a brace of highly infectious diseases demonstrably present within the East Florida

¹⁸⁵ On 15 January, Ribera reported a rumor that Ygualada had had “the weakness and lack of respect [for the service] to bet one ounce to a half [presumably gold] that he would not do any service in this plaza”. Ribera wrote Governor Coppinger on 18 January to inform him that he had seen Ygualada in a café late at night. He added additional reports of Ygualada’s nocturnal excursions in his 29 January letter. Francisco Ribera to Governor of Florida, 15 January, 18 January and 29 January 1819, section 35, reel 69, EFP, PKY.

¹⁸⁶ Francisco Ribera to Governor of Florida, 15 January 1819, section 35, reel 69, EFP, PKY.

¹⁸⁷ See footnote 170.

garrison. After all, soldiers could hardly malingering successfully if their complaints were not plausible. If Governor Coppinger's letter to Pedro Claro requested second medical examinations of *inútiles*, this was because such examinations were necessary to distinguish malingerers from the many patients who were legitimately sick.

Of the diseases these men encountered, Malaria was one of the most common. Writing in 1775, British traveler Bernard Romans described 'intermittents' – meaning intermittent fevers, of which malaria is one – which occurred most frequently near bodies of stagnant water, such as indigo works or rice fields. Such bodies of stagnant water were ideal breeding places for Floridian mosquitoes, including fourteen members of genus *anopheles* (malaria mosquitoes), especially *anopheles quadrimaculatus*, the dominant vector for malaria in the Eastern United States.¹⁸⁸ Treatment of these intermittent fevers, according to Roman, ideally included an infusion of Jesuit's bark, the quinine-rich bark of the cinchona tree, which was also the traditional remedy for malaria. And, while Jesuit's bark was often used to treat other types of fever as well – Romans himself recommended it for yellow fever – the symptoms Romans described match those we associate with malaria, including headache, vomiting, swelling of the *praecordium*, skin eruptions, diarrhea, jaundice and pallor.¹⁸⁹

The first medical cases among the Cuban Negro Militia likely involved malaria. Francisco de Castro, Francisco de la Luz, and Dionicio Palomino were reported sick at their company's 8 August 1812 inspection, and again in October, but not at the inspection

¹⁸⁸ For Floridian anopheles varieties see Mosquito Information Website, Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, University of Florida [online], <http://mosquito.ifas.ufl.edu/>, accessed 3 March 2007; for quadrimaculatus prominence see Global distribution (Robinson Projection) of dominant or potentially important malaria vectors, Center for Disease Control [online], <http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/biology/mosquito/map.htm>, accessed 3 March 2007.

¹⁸⁹ Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla: University of Florida Press, 1962); for location of fevers, see Romans, 230-231; for description of symptoms, see Romans, 234-239; for description of malaria symptoms, see Rutman and Rutman, 33-34.

on 5 September. They must have fallen ill at some point in late June, July or very early in August, and improved in late August or early September, only to fall ill again later that month. This pattern suggests Romans' intermittent fever, as does the time frame, which is consistent with Romans' description of intermittents as summertime afflictions, and with annual malaria incidence patterns in the early Chesapeake. In Castro's case, we can even conjecture as to what type of intermittent – or what type of malaria – he contracted: Castro died little more than a week after being reported sick in October, suggesting the more lethal *plasmodium falciparum* strain of malaria, and the date of the illness and race of the patient also recommend it.¹⁹⁰

Lorenzo Fleta, a soldier in the first company of *morenos*, may also have contracted *falciparum*. Fleta arrived on 27 August 1814; by his company's inspection on 5 September, he was in the hospital. Five days later, he was dead. Of course, Fleta may have died from wounds, but as in Castro's case, the time frame here corresponds with *falciparum* season.¹⁹¹ Wounding was less likely the cause of the eight hospitalizations reported in the *pardos'* 6 October 1817 inspection – by this point, Gregor McGregor invasion had failed, and the Cuban Negro Militia was largely posted to St. Augustine and the Fortress of Matanzas, both safe posts. And this spike, like Castro's case, also occurs during *falciparum*'s preferred time of year.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Soldier de Castro died on 18 October 1812, the month's inspection having occurred on the seventh. There are four varieties of malaria that infect humans, of which two, *plasmodium vivax* and the more lethal *plasmodium falciparum*, are far more common. According to Darrett and Anita Rutman, *falciparum* cases in the early Chesapeake peaked during the month of October. Rutman and Rutman also point out that black men were genetically resistant to *vivax* infection, due to the prevalent sickle-cell blood trait, but that they remained unprotected against *falciparum*.

¹⁹¹ Monthly Inspection List for First Company of *Morenos*, 5 September 1814 and October 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

¹⁹² Monthly Inspection List for Company of *Pardos*, 6 October 1817, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY; for posting details, see Monthly Inspection Lists for Cuban Negro Militia detachment, July 1817 – July 1821,

Malaria was almost certainly also common among East Florida's white soldiers. Unlike their black counterparts, Florida's *criollo* and *peninsular* servicemen had no protection against either form of malaria, *vivax* or *falciparum*. And given that many of these soldiers served alongside their black counterparts and endured similar conditions, especially exposure to the same mosquitoes, the assessment above is a safe one. Also, like Francisco de Castro's initial group of sick militiamen as well as Lorenzo Fleta, the fifteen sick soldiers that Captain Llorente reported in September 1814 fell ill during the malarial high season, and, moreover, Llorente's description of the soldiers' weakness and fevers is compatible with a diagnosis of malaria, but not the other prevalent fever in this area, yellow fever.¹⁹³ Finally, we do have at least one confirmed malaria case within the Third Battalion. In August 1814, Captain Llorente transferred Sub-lieutenant Juan Francisco Aguilar, who was sick with malaria, from Fort San Nicolás to St. Augustine.¹⁹⁴

Yellow fever, *angina suffocativa*, leprosy, pleurisy, dropsy (edema), so-called 'hemorrhoidal flux' – probably dysentery – and gonorrhoea are all diseases that also afflicted or may have afflicted the East Florida garrison. Yellow fever was present in Spanish East Florida, but was not as extensive a problem as malaria. On the one hand, it is documented by name in Romans' travel account, along with a detailed description of its onset, symptoms, and duration. And some of these symptoms – most notably, the

section 20, reels 35-36, EFP, PKY,; recall that Fort San Nicolás was abandoned during Gregor McGregor's invasion of East Florida.

¹⁹³ See footnote 173; Llorente specifically describes the fevers at San Nicolás as "cold fevers", presumably fevers accompanied by chills. This suggests that these fevers were malarial, as such fevers are usually preceded by chills and followed by sweats, symptoms generally absent in yellow fever patients. Moreover, yellow fever is characterized by the vomiting of blood, which Llorente does not mention. Judging from its prevalence in Pablo Mestre's diagnoses, Llorente would have noted the symptom, had it appeared. We can safely conclude, then, that the disease in question was malaria. For yellow fever symptoms, see Aristides Agramonte, "The Scourge of Yellow Fever: Its Past and Present," *Scientific Monthly* 31, no. 6 (Dec, 1930), 526.

¹⁹⁴ Tomás Llorente to Governor, 23 August 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY; Aguilar's case is particularly satisfying, as he contracted malaria in the St. Johns River area, where Romans maintained that intermittent fevers were common. See Romans, 238.

vomiting of blood – appeared regularly. They match, for example, the symptoms displayed by Juan Bautista Meza, who was diagnosed with gonorrhoea and shipped to Cuba in 1820, while in June 1816, *moreno* Antonio del Rey was reported to have vomited blood.¹⁹⁵ We have in addition the Third Battalion soldiers that Pablo Mestre certified as *inútil* in 1814 based on their coughing up of spurts of blood; they too may have suffered from yellow fever. Recall too that the disease was a major concern in Veracruz. And more broadly, yellow fever was common throughout the Caribbean, as Antonio de Alcedo’s *Diccionario Geográfico de las Indias Occidentales* states: “the strangeness of this climate produces terrible diseases like the *vómito negro*, which is more common among countrymen and sea-folk, few of whom escape it...”.¹⁹⁶ Finally, also indicative of the degree to which this virus was a threat to Spanish Florida, its entry from the United States into the province was a recurrent and serious worry during the two decades prior to the Cuban Negro Militia’s arrival in Florida. Local authorities expressed concern over the possibility of epidemics on five different occasions between 1793 and 1809. At the same time, there is no evidence that any such epidemics materialized in Florida (though they were believed by local authorities to be raging within the United States), and while Meza and Antonio del Rey may indeed have contracted the *vómito preto* or *vómito negro* (two of its Spanish names), St. Augustine, one of the militia’s primary postings throughout its

¹⁹⁵ For Meza’s case, see Pedro Claro to Governor, 6 March 1816, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Romans, 234-238; while Meza’s diagnosis of gonorrhoea is taken at face value here, this disease does not adequately explain his symptoms. Although gonorrhoea can affect the oropharynx, such infection produces no symptoms. At the same time, Meza’s symptoms do match those listed for yellow fever in Romans; for del Rey’s case, see Pablo Rosete to Governor, June 1816, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

¹⁹⁶ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 213.

time in Florida was declared free of yellow fever only a few years before its arrival, during the 1809 scare.¹⁹⁷

Angina suffocativa we do not have a record for among the garrison, but it merits mention as Romans included it in his account. Equally, pleurisy never appears in what few individual records of disease we have, but as one of the few wintertime diseases Romans mentioned, it too merits mention. Certainly, pleurisy's presence would help account for the twelve instances of hospitalization or illness that occurred between January and April 1814, though, given the still-considerable hostilities going on at this time (recall, the Patriot War did not end till May 1814), we cannot dismiss wounding in battle as a potential explanation.

Cases of dropsy/edema and 'hemorrhoidal flux' also fail to appear by name in any accounts of disease among the garrison, though there are at least two mentions of dysentery, which this flux may have been, and at least one instance of a disorder involving recurrent diarrhea. Dropsy, according to Romans, occurred "most frequently....after an obstinate intermitting fever, where the use of the bark has been too long delayed"; this renders it entirely possible that dropsy was a common condition, having established malaria's frequency, but gives no definitive indication. Little more can be concluded. Romans was more explicit regarding the hemorrhoidal flux, which he described as being "very frequent here [in Florida]". This disease sounds very much like a form of dysentery: when it lapsed into a "habitual flux", according to Romans, the

¹⁹⁷ Carlos Howard to Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, 22 October 1793, section 32, reel 49, EFP, PKY; Quesada to Howard, 30 October 1793, section 32, reel 49, EFP, PKY; Governor to Pedro Moreno, 2 July 1802, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY; Governor to Onofre Gutierrez, 2 July 1802, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY; Gutierrez to Enrique White, 2 August 1802, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Juan Escobar, 28 June 1804, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Juan Escobar, 2 July 1804, section 32, microfilm reel 57, EFP, PKY; and Justo López to Enrique White, 17 September 1808, 24 September 1809 and 1 October 1809, section 32, reel 57, EFP, PKY.

patient fell into a pattern of frequent defecation, with accompanying dehydration (suggesting diarrhea), emaciation, and eventual death, which conclusion Romans considered nearly certain.¹⁹⁸ If this was dysentery, at least two references to it survive in the records for the Second Spanish Period: the disorder is cited by name in 1792, in a letter from Third Battalion officer Pedro Marrot to Governor Quesada, and again on 6 March 1814, in Tomás Llorente's report to Governor Kindelán of a dysentery epidemic at Fort San Nicolás.¹⁹⁹ Also, while not formally diagnosed as dysentery (or anything else, for that matter), the ailment listed on Third Battalion soldier Manuel Albares' medical discharge may have also been Romans' hemorrhoidal flux. Among Albares' symptoms, Surgeon Mestre listed that he "has suffered frequently from diarrhea over six years here", and observed that Albares had been hospitalized regularly because of this condition, which tended to flare up whenever he did any strenuous duty.²⁰⁰

Of the presence of the final two diseases on the above list, leprosy and gonorrhea, we can be certain. On 9 February 1818, Miguel Castellanos, a soldier with the *pardos* was denied hospitalization in St. Augustine due to a lack of beds in the Royal Hospital, but more importantly because he had contracted leprosy, a highly infectious disease. This was not necessarily the leprosy with which biblical scholars are no doubt familiar; Bernard Romans himself expresses uncertainty over this.²⁰¹ However, the disease – by Romans' own account, an infectious one – had symptoms that are suggestive of the ancient disease, with its attendant loss of extremities and ulcerated sores.²⁰² Gonorrhea,

¹⁹⁸ Romans, 251.

¹⁹⁹ Pedro Marrot to Governor of Florida, 14 November 1792, section 43, reel 76, EFP, PKY; Tomás Llorente to Sebastián Kindelán, 6 March 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²⁰⁰ Certification as *Inútil* for Manuel Albares, 22 June 1814, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

²⁰¹ Governor to Tomás Llorente (draft), 10 February 1818, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

²⁰² Romans, 257; Romans described this leprosy thusly: "...first...the loss of beard and hair from the eyebrows, swelling of the lobes of the ears, the face begins to shine and brown protuberances appear thereon,

meanwhile, is mentioned by name in Juan Bautista Meza's case, and again in the case of Lieutenant Ygualada, the suspected malingerer we encountered earlier in this chapter. In this, East Florida once again resembled other provinces in the Spanish Caribbean, for as stated earlier, Christon Archer tells us that every surface in the two surgery rooms of the *Hospital de San Carlos* in Veracruz was soaked in the mercury used to treat the hospital's venereal disease cases.

Material Conditions among the Cuban Negro Militia

However, López and Llorente's complaints touched on more than hazards to their soldiers' health. Severe shortages of even the most basic staples of military service were similarly widespread and served as another powerful incentive for the Cuban militia's soldiers to desert. Almost immediately following their disembarkation in St. Augustine on 18 June 1812, Florida's Cuban militiamen were forced to do without: pay was scarce, rations were often delayed or cut, shoddily constructed weapons were either already broken when issued or soon rusted and molded into uselessness, and rarely-replaced uniforms were reduced to little more than rags from overuse, leaving the Cubans – used to the tropical climate of their home island – shivering in the cold rains of North Florida's winters and unprotected in the summers from the peninsula's ubiquitous malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

The Cuban militiamen first encountered the supply shortfall that was to hound them on 19 October 1812, four months after their arrival. José María Guerra, commander of the second company of *morenos*, requested a number of mess items

the lips and nose swell to a monstrous size, the fingers and toes will in the end drop off, and the body becomes at last so ulcerated as to make the poor incurable patient really a miserable object of pity..."; also, according to Juan Marchena Fernández, Antonio de Alcedo also makes mention of *lepra*, which he blames on the hot Caribbean climate. See Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 213-214.

necessary for the proper integration of his company into the garrison, including a drinking-tin, a pail for water, and most significantly, a pot capable of cooking for eighty men – nine items in total. The most important item requested – the pot - took nearly five months and two letters from Cuban Negro Militia commander Manuel de Castilla to acquire... presumably. Whether Castilla ever acquired the pot remains a mystery, as no extant document confirms its receipt. Castilla's success can only be surmised based on his subsequent silence concerning the matter. In the meantime, the company had to borrow a pot that belonged to a grenadier company, and may only have acquired one of their own because Castilla pointed out that the local warehouse contained an unused pot that was claimed by the artillery.²⁰³ Less than a year later, Captain Llorente wrote Governor Kindelán asking him to “have mercy on them [his black troops at San Nicolás], sending them a little *aguardiente* and tobacco, as they perform an immense duty, as the most competent [soldiers] in the province”, and also requested more munitions, as the constant rains had spoiled much of their store. Kindelán's response was very much in the style of those at the beginning of this chapter: he told Llorente that the militiamen would just have to “conform to the miseries and necessities offered...by the present epoch”, and promised that as soon as funds and supplies arrived – according to him, they were expected to arrive any day – Llorente's men would be looked after. Also, rather than sending munitions, the governor simply admonished Llorente to be more careful with those he had.²⁰⁴ That same month, Llorente was again in need, this time for supplies and tools with which to construct the battery at San Nicolás. Neither request was filled until

²⁰³ Inventory written by José María Guerra, 19 October 1812, section 39, reel 75, PKY; Manuel de Castilla to Governor of Florida, 31 October 1812 and 9 March 1812, section 39, reel 75, PKY.

²⁰⁴ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 19 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Tomás Llorente, 20 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

19 November, when the *Barbarita*, the ship on which Llorente's supplies ought to originally have traveled, finally arrived at Fort San Nicolás.²⁰⁵

Arms and pay shortages appeared with similar speed. On 24 November 1812, the Cuban Negro Militia commander put in a request for funds with which to grant soldiers an *aumento de rancho* (a form of pay raise).²⁰⁶ Funds even at this early date were sufficiently tight that officers paid Cuban Negro Militia expenses out of their own pockets, or borrowed: in early 1813, civilian Pedro Rodríguez de Cala wrote the Governor requesting reimbursement for over two thousand pesos he spent supporting the militia. In mid-December 1812, for example, Rodríguez de Cala had paid fifty pesos to armorer Benito Reynal, who had repaired rifles for the first company of *morenos*. And Cala did not receive the money immediately; rather, he had to write the Governor again in March, with no response on record. We can only assume that Cala was eventually refunded by his subsequent silence.²⁰⁷ Similarly, in 1818, Captain Pablo Rosete complained bitterly of having ruined his credit financing his soldiers' payroll and meeting sundry Cuban Negro Militia expenses:

"I have given up my own security against the payment of several *libramientos* [credit notes] that I previously issued in my own name, which covered the needs of the two companies of the Battalion of *Morenos* of Havana who are posted here under my care. [This I did] because the Royal Treasury here will not remit the rations and supplies they [Rosete's militiamen] need monthly, [a habit] confirmed by Pensacola, which receives its [rations and supplies] by thirds. The capital's [treasury] does not pay the body [of troops] even when the justifying inspections are presented due to the lack of such-and-such [a] requirement.

²⁰⁵ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 19 November 1813, Section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY; for an additional example, see Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 2 January 1814, Section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY; more examples of supply shortages can be found in the letters between Kindelán and Llorente, especially around this time. Llorente's supply request of 2 January 1814, filled more than a month later, is just one of these.

²⁰⁶ Statement by Manuel de Castilla, 10 December 1812, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

²⁰⁷ Pedro Rodríguez de Cala to Governor of Florida, 4 February 1813 and 24 March 1813, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

The result of this backlog is that those vendors who support the troops here, after a single instance of late repayment, lose faith as I have witnessed and do not offer their aid again, causing me to lose credit...”.²⁰⁸

And in August 1819, Rosete informed the governor that the *gratificación de mesa*, a privilege extended to arriving officers, could not only be offered due to lack of money.²⁰⁹

Cuban Negro Militia commanders had even greater problems securing serviceable weapons for their militiamen. Only four months after Benito Reynal repaired the *morenos*' rifles, Manuel de Castilla wrote Governor Kindelán requesting the replacement of “unusable arms” that had been issued to the newly arrived *pardos* company. On their arrival, Castilla had ordered two subordinates to retrieve rifles for them from the garrison's armory. All had been in bad condition, and Reynal, called in to examine them, had found fifty to be useless. In 1817, both Rosete and Llorente again requested rifle maintenance, repairs that, if they happened at all, were either inefficient or ineffective: one year later, Rosete again wrote the governor, this time complaining of problems in repairing his soldiers' weapons. It comes as no surprise, then, that a great deal of care was taken to ensure the shipment of the Cuban Negro Militia's arms back to Havana in 1821, with three letters to this effect exchanged between Tomás Salazar, the Cuban Negro Militia garrison's final commander, and Governor Coppinger; too much time and money had been spent on those rifles to simply leave them behind.²¹⁰ While we have no documents that establish a direct relationship between shoddy weapons and desertion levels, the poor condition of their tools must have discouraged the professional soldiers

²⁰⁸ Pablo Rosete to Governor of Florida, 9 March 1818, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

²⁰⁹ Pablo Rosete to Governor, 25 August 1819, section 39, reel 75, PKY.

²¹⁰ For Reynal's payment, see footnote 207; Manuel de Castilla to Governor, 7 April 1813, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Pablo Rosete to Governor, 1 July 1817, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Tomás Llorente to Governor, 12 July 1817, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY;

that made up the Cuban Negro Militia companies, especially given the high quality of arms and uniforms they were used to receiving in Cuba.

A lack of proper clothing, Julian Acosta's complaint, also proved an acute problem throughout the Cuban Negro Militia's time in Florida, and was a direct cause of desertion, as López and Llorente both stated in the summer of 1813 and at the beginning of this chapter.²¹¹ As per earlier, Cuban militiamen were accustomed to being well and regularly uniformed – this was part of their status as soldiers in a 'disciplined' militia. In Florida, however, their commanders had to plead for new uniforms and especially for shoes only a year after the militia's arrival. On June 1813, Lieutenant Justo López put in a request for clothes and shoes, while on 25 August, Captain Llorente, perhaps frustrated, took it upon himself to dispatch a *moreno* soldier to the capital with orders to bring back material with which to make shoes, as "most [of his soldiers] were barefoot".²¹²

And the uniform shortages only continued. Sometimes troops were able to get uniforms, as in June 1815, when four San Nicolás-based militiamen received authorization for travel to Fernandina, where they were to be outfitted.²¹³ But this was not always the case. In December 1814, Llorente wrote the Governor complaining of the "misery" his gunboat personnel (including some militiamen) experienced due to the weather and a lack of proper clothing. No response from the governor survives. If the next shipment of clothes and rations – sent the following July – was Kindelán's answer, this did Llorente little good, as a mail boat accident resulted in a total loss, either

²¹¹ See the beginning of Chapter Three, notes xyz, xyz and xyz.

²¹² Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 25 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

²¹³ Governor of Florida to Tomás Llorente, 27 June 1815, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

perpetuating an already irksome shortage or creating a new one.²¹⁴ Llorente, López and their men were understandably growing impatient.

Finally, Florida's Cuban militiamen had to contend with still more frequent food shortages. Between 1813 and 1819, Captain Llorente alone issued eleven ration-related complaints. On 24 September 1814, for example, Llorente wrote Governor Kindelán to report that his troops had not had their meat ration for several days, and that because of this, they had not been able to prepare their daily communal meals, "for with rice, water and salt, you [the governor] may consider how they would turn out, more so when the rice is of poor quality". And on 12 September, when Llorente's men had meat, they had lacked the salt ration they needed to preserve it.²¹⁵

Captain Rosete's St. Augustine militiamen also felt the pinch, and went on half bread rations, half rations, poor quality rations, were owed back rations, or ate salt meat instead of fresh nine times between 1813 and 1819. Rosete's troop first experienced ration cuts in 1816 – rather late – when Governor Coppinger ordered Rosete's troops to go on half bread rations until further notice. 1817 passed without any such decree, but 1818 and 1819 were bad years. In February 1818, Coppinger ordered both Llorente's Cuban Negro Militia troops (no longer at San Nicolás) and Rosete's St. Augustine militia to go on half rations. Five months later, Rosete's men again went on half rations, and then in late December were issued salt meat. Early 1819 was no better: on 23 January Coppinger placed Rosete's Cuban Negro Militia on half rations again, apparently

²¹⁴ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 29 December 1814, section 32, reel 62, PKY; one can sympathize with the gunboats' soldiers, as the average low between 1961-1990 in Jacksonville, Florida – where Fort San Nicolás was located – was 40.5 degrees Fahrenheit, which must have felt even colder out on the St. John's; Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 17 June 1815, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²¹⁵ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 24 September and 12 September 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

frustrating Captain Rosete into requesting his men's back rations only ten days later. The last stroke of ill fortune came on 9 November, when the Governor, citing a lack of funds and supplies placed Rosete's Cuban Negro Militia on half rations a final time. But this last cut appears to have been the most severe yet, as nine days later Rosete wrote the Governor complaining that his men were receiving even less than what was ordered.²¹⁶

Luckily for the militia, while ration cuts were frequent, they were also addressed more efficiently than other shortages, at least at San Nicolás. Llorente showed initiative in acquiring meat for his troops when none was otherwise forthcoming: in November 1813, he wrote Governor Kindelán requesting clearance to secure meat locally for use at San Nicolás, and that same month wrote again reporting his efforts to purchase meat for his troops. When necessary, private citizens could also supply San Nicolás, as white planter Jorge Fleming did on one occasion.²¹⁷ And official channels were also more responsive. On 12 November and 18 November 1813, Captain Llorente complained to the Governor about the "miserable state of San Nicolás", citing a lack of meat rations and munitions, and by 26 November the Governor had responded, approving Llorente's efforts to acquire meat for his troops, and on the thirtieth had ordered meat rations to be delivered to San Nicolás.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ For ½ bread rations: Governor of Florida to Pablo Rosete, 28 March 1816, and 23 January 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; for half rations: Governor to Tomás Llorente, 26 February 1818, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Governor to Pablo Rosete, 26 February 1818, 29 July 1818, and 9 November 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; for objections to ration cuts: Governor to Pablo Rosete, 3 February 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY; Pablo Rosete to Governor, 18 November 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

²¹⁷ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 17 November 1813 and 6 October 1813, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²¹⁸ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 12 November 1813 and 18 November 1813, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY; Governor of Florida to Tomás Llorente, 26 November 1813 and 30 November 1813, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

In fact, Llorente's 12 November letter provides what may be the best single description of what the realities of service were for the Cuban Negro Militia in East Florida:

Amid the conflict in which I find myself at this post, I am obligated to manifest to Your Honor my situation: my troop is extremely tired, with 20 days of continuous vigilance, as I predicted what was to happen. Various [soldiers are] rather sick, my armory grows thin, lacking enough munitions to resist [even] two more attacks. The gunboat *Havanera* [has] only two shots of its caliber, lacks a crew complement, and thus, is another burden for the troop. [We also lack] a doctor who can cure these poor men, and the inhumanity that is seeing them die for lack of any aid...it has been six days that they have not consumed anything other than meat and water, unable to find anything else and lacking anything with which to buy [what they might find]. This means that if these bastards do not retire, the time will come when there is not a single soldier who can stand duty, and they will sicken. The fresh meat, I believe, is about to run out, because the rebels are on this side [of the river] unchallenged, and in sum everything is extremely scarce.

Llorente's men were exhausted, overused, sick and growing sicker, had no doctor, had already run out of every type of ration except meat and water, and were about to run out of fresh meat as well. And even if they were still willing to fight, they were also about to use the last of their ammunition. Is it any wonder some of these men chose to desert what must have seemed a hopeless cause?

Material Conditions and the White Garrison

Lest we ascribe these shortages to an institutionalized lack of faith in the Cuban militia's ability, perhaps tied to the sort of bigotry Ribera displayed in August 1813, we should note that these conditions were not unique to the militia. The garrison's white troops – or at least the Third Battalion of Cuba, and after 1815, the remnants thereof – were just as hard hit, as were black and white soldiers throughout the Spanish Caribbean. Like the black Cuban militia detachment in East Florida, the soldiers of the Third

Battalion of Cuba, the East Florida detachments of dragoons and artillery, and regiments throughout Spain's colonies were frequently forced to do without pay, clothes and arms as the Spanish Bourbons' hegemony in the New World drew to a close. Nor were the colony's physical defenses even exempt from this privation. By Spain's departure, these, like the soldiers' morale, were crumbling.

Perhaps the least popular shortage among East Florida's white soldiers was a chronic lack of pay. Pay shortage was already a long-standing problem by the Cuban militia's arrival: as early as 1790, Governor Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada complained to don Luis de las Casas that troops were discontented due to lack of pay.²¹⁹ In June 1792, Quesada communicated to the Conde de Revillagigedo, then-viceroy of New Spain, that he feared "unpleasant consequences" might result from the fact that his soldiers had not received any pay.²²⁰ The following year, Quesada restated his concerns with considerably more alarm. In another letter to Revillagigedo, the governor described how troops in East Florida were at the point of mutiny from the pay shortage they had endured:

"With much sorrow I find myself obligated to inform Your Excellency that the fears I manifested in my missive of 20 July last concerning the bad consequences that could be expected from the delay in pay experienced by the detachment from the Third Battalion of Cuba that garrisons this post [have come to pass]: the night of the twelfth present, at around 7:30, I was informed by the sergeant guarding the bivouac beside the church that 11 soldiers of this battalion had sequestered themselves there. As the Royal House in which I live is close by, and anxious to know the motive of this attempt [at rebellion], I summoned their commander to inquire [it] of him, and he told me that he had understood from the barricaded soldiers that it was because they had not been paid their wages. I had Don Bartolomé Morales, Commander of the Battalion immediately informed and coming to my memory what took place in Panama with the three companies of the Battalion of the Queen and the rest of that post's garrison, which Your Excellency witnessed in Seville with the Companies of Cordova in Havana and [in] Cuba with the Lisbon Troop..."

²¹⁹ Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada to Luis de las Casas, 2 Nov 1790, section 2, reel 8, EFP, PKY.

²²⁰ Governor of Florida to Conde de Revillagigedo, 20 July 1792, section 21, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

Fortunately, Governor Quesada was able to diffuse the situation by informing the rebels that, while their identities were presently unknown to him, they would surely be identified (and, presumably, punished) upon their commander's arrival. With much cajoling, the soldiers agreed to return to barracks, provided they were not molested.²²¹ Notably, this letter also demonstrates that this near-mutiny was not unique, and neither was its motive: the incident involving the Battalion (elsewhere referred to as the Regiment) of the Queen in Panama consisted of two troop uprisings that took place in 1766 and 1767, both seeking increases in pay and punctuality in its delivery.²²²

Nor was Florida's urban militia (as opposed to the disciplined black militia that arrived in 1812) spared in May 1795: extraordinary military costs and limited funds prevented the delivery of pay to an already money-starved troop. Available funds were so scarce that during the previous month Governor Quesada had ordered Colonel Carlos Howard to reduce the militia's size.²²³ In 1796, the Third Battalion of Cuba, the core of the colony's garrison, was once again restive due to pay shortages, and was troublesome enough that Colonel Bartolomé Morales devoted a lengthy eight pages to his report to the governor.²²⁴ Finally, in February 1810, the Third Battalion's men were once again on edge because unpaid, and now were in addition jealous of the artillery company's men – and in unhappy soldiers, jealousy could turn deadly – who had received their pay.²²⁵

But if the state of soldiers' pay was bad before the militia landed, conditions were considerably worse after its arrival. Writing in February 1813, Governor Kindelán

²²¹ Governor to Conde de Revillagigedo, 14 Mar 1793, section 21, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

²²² Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 367-368.

²²³ Gonzalo Zamorano to Governor, 23 May 1795, section 15, reel 26, EFP, PKY; and Governor to Carlos Howard, 18 April 1795, section 32, reel 51, EFP, PKY.

²²⁴ Bartolomé Morales to Governor, 18 July 1796, section 35, reel 67, EFP, PKY.

²²⁵ Juan José de Estrada to Governor, 23 Feb 1810, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY.

provided Cuban Captain-General Juan Ruiz de Apodaca with a list of 23 individuals who had deserted, according to Kindelán, partly due to unpaid wages. In May 1814, Kindelán produced another list of deserters – these dating from as far back as 1 January 1814 – and added that the Cuban Negro Militia had been largely ignored by its subinspectors in Havana.²²⁶

Most eloquent of all was Kindelán's third and last letter to Apodaca regarding pay shortfalls, dated 16 August 1814. Clearly alarmed, the Governor described the discontent that lack of pay and supplies had bred within the garrison and administration as "massive", and proposed a solution that betrays the desperation he felt: Kindelán requested that a small schooner be sent directly from Cuba for use in maintaining better communication between the two posts, and that the schooner be sent "full of supplies". Leaving no mistake as to how serious he was about this last request, he repeated it – the schooner was to be full of supplies.²²⁷

Military pay was similarly scarce in New Spain. In fact, New Spain's free-colored militia was, in one way, in precisely the same situation as the Cuban Negro Militia detachment in East Florida, for from the 1760s on, the Mexican militia's salary scale was based on the Cuban model. In 1777, only officers, first sergeants and drummers received pay when not deployed on active duty, just over thirty men in a 500-man battalion. When deployed, privates, corporals and second sergeants received a pittance of six pesos monthly, one tenth of what a militia subinspector earned, and roughly equivalent to a

²²⁶ Sebastián Kindelán to Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, 22 Feb. 1813 and 13 May 1814, section 2, reel 12, EFP, PKY.

²²⁷ Sebastián Kindelán to Juan Ruiz de Apodaca, 16 August 1814, section 2, reel 12, EFP, PKY.

common laborer's wages.²²⁸ Officers could supplement their income – also low – with salaries earned in civilian jobs, and often this combination produced a total income considerably higher than was otherwise the norm. However, because they were only paid when deployed and thus in no position to procure supplemental civilian work, common soldiers had to make due with pay that was, as Ben Vinson describes it, “on par with the earnings of the urban underclass”.²²⁹ At least, like their Cuban counterparts, the majority of New Spain's black militiamen were not required to pay for their uniforms and arms out of their salaries, as the *Nuevos Impuestos*, a series of special taxes, funded these.²³⁰ But at the same time, this illustrates just how bad Florida's militiamen had it: in prosperous New Spain, these taxes raised 797,042 pesos between 1767 and 1787, with 81,089 pesos left unused.²³¹ By contrast, as we have seen, East Florida was consistently in arrears.

New Spain's regular troops lacked even this small mercy. Military budgets simply did not allocate enough money to cover soldiers' pay, housing and uniforms, and consequently, it became common practice for soldiers to take advantage of any situation by which they could earn additional money, often to finance drinking or a planned desertion attempt. Regular army soldiers tended to sell their civilian clothing immediately following enlistment, as did militiamen upon deployment, presumably because they no longer needed them. Soldiers also commonly sold new uniforms and shoes, either their

²²⁸ Vinson III, 79-81; this is only slightly lower than the figure that Juan Marchena Fernández cites as average pay for soldiers serving in America, between seven and nine pesos monthly. See Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 323.

²²⁹ Vinson III, 81.

²³⁰ Such deduction were common among the garrisons in colonial Spanish America; deductions could and did include debits for uniforms, for rations, for the funding of the Royal Hospital and in New Spain, toward the military pension plan, the death benefit allowance fund and medical and travel insurance. These last deductions were particularly onerous to New Spain's militiamen, as they were not entitled to all of these plans' benefits. See Juan Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 323; Ben Vinson III, 80.

²³¹ Vinson III, 82.

own or those belonging to dead, deserted or imprisoned comrades.²³² Dissatisfaction was unsurprisingly rife: in 1746 and 1760, soldiers in Campeche mutinied over delays in the delivery of their pay, while in 1787, a group of soldiers in that same city refused to swear allegiance to their flags until they received the money they were owed.²³³

Finally, a brief examination of the other pay-related mutinies that took place in colonial Spanish America during the eighteenth century reveals that this was a problem common to the Indies as a whole. As early as 1710, in Chile, the entire *Tercio* of Arauco refused to render any further service until its men received their delayed pay. 16 years later, two recently arrived companies of Spanish infantry revolted in Cartagena, partly because they did not receive the pay they had earned during their Atlantic crossing. In 1741, Santo Domingo's Fixed Battalion armed and barricaded itself inside the city's cathedral, refusing to emerge until they were paid the *four years* of back wages they were owed. Cartagena witnessed another revolt over delayed wages in 1745, while in 1748, Panama's Fixed Battalion mimicked Santo Domingo's, this time over only two years' delayed pay. And between 1761 and 1765, Cuba endured three rebellions, all over insufficient or owed pay.²³⁴ Still more examples exist, but these should be sufficient to prove the point – soldiers throughout Spain's empire were not paid enough.

Meanwhile, as Kindelán's demand in 1814 suggests, Florida's white soldiers, like their Cuban fellows, also endured a constant shortage of supplies. Lack of rations had been a recurring problem and a cause of poor morale since at least 1794, with six letters written specifically on this subject between 14 October of that year and August 1811, and

²³² Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 260-261.

²³³ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 366-368.

²³⁴ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 365-367; in addition, recall that the Regiment of the Queen in Panama rebelled twice in the late 1760s.

231 on the general subject of rations, with specific topics including reductions, damage to bread rations, as well as ration deliveries. One of these, dated 13 April 1805 and penned by the Marqués de Someruelos himself, made explicit the link between lack of funds, ration shortages and garrison discontent:

“This disgust is caused not only by their [the soldiers’] prohibition from personal work [outside work undertaken to earn extra money], to which they resort to sustain their families, but also by their not having been given food [*haveres*] which have not been obtained due to the scarcity of capital in the Royal Coffers”.²³⁵

But, though grim, the situation was still manageable. In October 1794, Carlos Howard informed Governor Quesada that his troops had been placed on reduced rations and lacked candles and oil as well, but also had a solution. St. Augustine was to advance San Vizente (his post) its rations in anticipation of the storm season (thus also heading off the possibility of another, storm-induced shortage), and Howard would substitute rice for bread in his soldiers’ diets.²³⁶

Ration shortages became both more frequent and more consistently problematic as the Patriot War drew closer. As stated above, the 17 years between October 1794 and August 1811 produced 231 references to and complaints about rations; by contrast, the period between August 1811 and annexation yielded almost as many in nearly half the time, 196 references in ten years. And, naturally, this record does not voice the grievances of those soldiers who did not require or perhaps were too disgusted to request that their commanders complain on their behalf and instead resorted to other means of airing their frustration. Two of Governor Kindelán’s aforementioned letters to Captain-General Apodaca, which we will recall included both a list of deserters and the motives

²³⁵ Marqués de Someruelos to Anonymous, 13 April 1805, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

²³⁶ Carlos Howard to Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, 14 October 1794, section 32, reel 51, EFP, PKY.

the governor suspected them to have had, also included ration shortages among these motives, as well as a lack of pay.²³⁷ Ration shortages were sufficiently bad that on 30 November 1814, while East Florida's garrison still had to contend with bandits along the Georgia-Florida border, gunboat officer Joaquín Navarro notified Governor Kindelán that a lack of rations prevented him from dispatching gunboat patrols.²³⁸

Amid these logistical woes, commanders also struggled to adequately uniform the Third Battalion. On 20 October 1814, Lieutenant Justo López wrote Governor Kindelán stating that

“since the seventeenth of March 1812, this body [the Third Battalion], which took up arms to defend the Province from the insurrection of the rebels supported by troops and ships from the United States, and which is still constantly on duty without relief...has not been given any other clothes but the blanket those in St. Augustine have received and a winter cloak”.²³⁹

López went on to state that the soldiers were “naked” and consequently gave no outward indication of their status other than the arms they bore, and then proceeded to list other Third Battalion items that were in service even longer: the Battalions supply of straps had been supplied at the body's forming in 1789; the drummers' sabers were last replaced in September 1793, and the battalion's colors were first used in April 1789. Meanwhile, in June 1814, Manuel de Castilla complained to Governor Kindelán about his troops' lack of shoes and uniforms. And, most telling of all, in March 1819, former Fernandina commander Francisco Ribera was unable to field many soldiers at the funeral honors held in memory of the Spanish Queen's death because they lacked the uniforms necessary.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ See footnote 226.

²³⁸ Joaquín Navarro to Governor, 30 Nov. 1814, section 40, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

²³⁹ Justo López to Governor of Florida, 20 October 1814, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

²⁴⁰ Manuel de Castilla to Governor, 17 June 1814, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY.

With the Patriot War looming, arms too grew scarce. While before Governor Mathews' incitement of the 1812 rebellion, the garrison's supply of arms had been a concern for the colony's military and administrative officials. But from as early as 1806 this concern had centered around questions such as how to prevent deserters from taking their weapons with them into the United States and the retrieval of arms that had already crossed the St. Mary's.²⁴¹ In a letter dated 5 August 1811, we find the first evidence of an urgent need for new arms: here, then-commander of Fernandina Colonel Justo López wrote Interim Governor Estrada requesting weapons in order to quash the border unrest that Mathews' agitating had fomented. Ten months later, and two days after the beginning of the Patriot War, Estrada himself sent a request to the Captain-General requesting not only arms, but food and troops with which to respond to the Patriots' advance. Apparently his need was dire, for only nine days later, on 26 March, he sent still another letter, this time requesting troops, an *Auditor de Guerra*, an engineer, more troops *and arms*.²⁴²

Weapons shortages were a constant problem from this point onward. In May 1812, Estrada again repeated his request to Someruelos, requesting funds for fortifications and food as well.²⁴³ By 1813, Fernandina also needed more guns: on 20 August, Phelipe R. Yonge wrote Governor Kindelán citing a lack of arms in the beleaguered settlement. Notably, he lists this as one cause of the town's defenders' poor morale. Fortunately, spare arms belonging to the Third Battalion were found, sent and

²⁴¹ Fernando de la Puente to Governor, 19 Dec 1806, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY; James Seagrove to Enrique White, 12 Jan 1807, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY; Fernando de la Puente to Governor, 28 Mar 1807, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY; Manuel Romero to Enrique White, 24 Aug 1810, section 32, reel 60, EFP, PKY.

²⁴² Justo López to Juan José de Estrada, 5 Aug 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY; Juan José de Estrada to Marques de Someruelos, 17 Mar and 26 Mar 1812, section 2, reel 17, EFP, PKY.

²⁴³ Juan José de Estrada to Marques de Someruelos, 19 May 1812, section 2, reel 12, EFP, PKY.

were on Amelia Island, as well as San Nicolás and on the St. Johns River gunboats, by 13 January 1814.²⁴⁴

But the arms shortages were far from over, for on 14 April 1814, Colonel Llorente wrote the governor citing a need for replacement weapons.²⁴⁵ Estrada's weapons had quickly become damaged after arriving at San Nicolás.²⁴⁶ Moreover, examining a record of the Third Battalion's weapons stockpile, we find that while the Third Battalion had more than enough for its soldiers, these were all in bad shape, including those sent on to San Nicolás and Fernandina. Most had been issued in 1793, over twenty years before, and many dated from even earlier, the battalion's formation in 1789. The troop was also missing a large number of pieces, an absence that had existed as far back as 1806 and had since grown considerably more serious. In 1806, the Third Battalion's five companies had 376 muskets and bayonets between them. Altogether, though, they needed another eight of each for a full complement, with the first company missing one weapon, three missing from the second company's store, and two each missing from the third and fourth companies' arms. Only the grenadiers were still fully stocked. By October 1814, well after Estrada's weapons left for Fernandina and the St. Johns River, this deficit had grown much larger. Now, the Third Battalion had only 339 guns, with 13 first company weapons missing, 12 of the second company's, eight from the third, and another 12 missing from the fourth company's stock, a jump in deficit from eight weapons to 45.²⁴⁷ Because of this, even the arrival of badly-needed additional personnel – as in 1815, when a detachment of Cuban militia was sent to San Nicolás – proved a pyrrhic blessing, for in

²⁴⁴ Felipe R. Yonge to Governor, 20 Aug 1813, section 34, reel 64, EFP, PKY; Juan José de Estrada to Governor, 13 Jan 1814, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY.

²⁴⁵ Tomás Llorente to Governor, 14 April 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²⁴⁶ Tomás Llorente to Governor, 1 July 1814, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²⁴⁷ Notice of Arms had by this Battalion..., 20 Oct 1814, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

June 1815, Colonel Llorente now found himself in need of arms for his new soldiers.²⁴⁸

And as late as the summer of 1817, just before the crucial loss of Fernandina and San Nicolás, arms shortfalls were still being reported.²⁴⁹

Once again, these shortages are also symptomatic of a larger problem – neither the Cuban Negro Militia, nor the Third Battalion, nor even the East Florida garrison as a whole was alone in its inability to clothe and arms its soldiers. Upon his arrival at Cartagena in 1779, New Granada Viceroy Manuel Flores, who had come to take command of the city during Spain’s war with the English, found its militia “badly under strength, without uniforms, and poorly trained”.²⁵⁰ His predecessor, Manuel de Guirior, had only been able to ensure the proper outfitting of Guayaquil’s newly established but also small and poorly funded garrison by offering officerships to those who could uniform their companies, a practice prohibited by the Cuban *Reglamento*.²⁵¹ In New Spain, soldiers’ uniforms were quickly reduced to rags due to a combination of their poor quality and constant wearing. And because authorities expected them to last six years or more, these uniforms were then inadequately patched rather than replaced. Sergeants also routinely issued recruits broken weapons with blown-out barrels and then charged them for repairs, driving the new soldiers deeply into debt.²⁵² The Cuban disciplined militia, interestingly, was the notable exception to this trend: there, support from levies on imports of flour, vinegar, wine and *aguardiente* as well as sugar exports ensured that the disciplined militia was well-stocked.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Tomás Llorente to Governor, 18 June 1815, section 32, reel 62, EFP, PKY.

²⁴⁹ Juan Percheman to Governor, 28 July 1917, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY.

²⁵⁰ Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 23.

²⁵¹ Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 58.

²⁵² Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 260-261.

²⁵³ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 135.

Finally, beyond the men of the garrison, even the colony's fortifications suffered neglect. On 23 April 1814, Governor Kindelán chastised authorities at Fernandina for failing to cooperate in the reconstruction of the town's fortifications.²⁵⁴ These defensive works and others were in need of repair because previously, no funds had been available for this purpose. In March 1804, for example, Fernandina commander Fernando de la Puente wrote Governor Enrique White, saying that corsairs could sail into and up the St. Johns River, whose mouth Fernandina ostensibly defended, as easily as they did the open seas. The governor rejected this request on 9 April, not because he felt de la Puente's recommendations inappropriate, but due to a lack of funds.²⁵⁵ Similarly, in November 1807, Governor White wrote the Marqués de Someruelos – Apodaca's predecessor – quoting a letter from the commander of East Florida military engineer detachment, in which this officer complained of the need to stop defense works, again because of insufficient funds.²⁵⁶

And money shortages still curtailed defensive building long after the end of the Patriot War. On the first of March 1818, Governor Coppinger penned a letter to Francisco Cortázar, commander of East Florida's military engineers since 1816, ordering the garrison's engineers to cease further work on East Florida's fortifications due to a lack of funds.²⁵⁷ And more than a year later, in October 1819 – well after the Adams-Onís Treaty had already been signed – Coppinger wrote Captain-General Cienfuegos, again citing a

²⁵⁴ Governor to Tadeo de Arribas, 14 Apr and 23 Apr 1814, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY.

²⁵⁵ Fernando de la Puente to Governor, 28 Mar 1804, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY; Governor to Fernando de la Puente, 9 Apr 1804, section 33, reel 63, EFP, PKY.

²⁵⁶ Governor to Marques de Someruelos, 3 Nov 1807, section 2, reel 11, EFP, PKY.

²⁵⁷ Governor of Florida to Francisco Cortázar, 1 March 1818, section 38, reel 74, EFP, PKY; for Cortázar's appointment, see Governor José Coppinger to Francisco Cortázar, 27 December 1816, section 38, reel 74, EFP, PKY.

need to improve Florida's (specifically, St. Augustine's) defenses and a lack of funds with which to do it.²⁵⁸

Conclusions

López and Llorente were not exaggerating - conditions in East Florida were at least as bad as what the two officers described in 1813, and often worse. From its first year in the province, East Florida's Cuban Negro Militia detachment lacked uniforms, endured bad or insufficient rations that were cut far too often, served without proper barracks in which to sleep, and even wanted for arms, the basic tools of its soldiers' trade. And the militiamen often endured these conditions while owed months or even years of undelivered pay. With them at San Nicolás, St. Augustine and Fernandina were the white soldiers of the Third Battalion of Cuba, the core of the colony's garrison; they too suffered these many privations. In fact, the East Florida treasury actually went into debt in an attempt to support its soldiers, owing local creditors more than 300,000 pesos in 1813, while commanders, unable to give soldiers government-supplied food, tobacco and alcohol, vainly tried to appease their men by surrendering part of their personal stores.²⁵⁹

In addition to these already considerable hardships, East Florida's soldiers also faced very real health risks, simply by virtue of serving in a malaria and yellow fever hot zone. A steady percentage of the militia and Third Battalion were hospitalized every month, and many soldiers died in St. Augustine's royal hospital, including militiamen Francisco de Castro, Lorenzo Fleta, José Antonio Olivera and militia Sub-lieutenant Nicolás Valdez, and Third Battalion troopers Luis Bote and José Sancho. More still were

²⁵⁸ Governor to José Cienfuegos, 15 Oct 1819, section 2, reel 14, EFP, PKY.

²⁵⁹ Governor to Francisco Xavier Venegas, 17 July 1811, section 21, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

proclaimed 'useless' and given medical discharges, or sent to Havana on medical leave, in all cases leaving the garrison with ever fewer men.

East Florida's desertions now make sense, as does the declining state of the garrison. Logistical problems led to declining morale, undermined the garrison's cohesion and combat effectiveness – it is hard to fight without guns – and prevented the upkeep of Florida's forts. However, the example of the Cuban militia and the Third Battalion of Cuba also tells a bigger and far more troubling story. Everything that the Cuban Negro Militia and Third Battalion endured in Spanish Florida was and had been happening in garrisons throughout Spain's colonies. Soldiers in Cartagena, Campeche, Chile and Havana revolted throughout the eighteenth century over years of pay owed to them, while desperate soldiers in Mexico City and Veracruz pawned off their uniforms for some *aguardiente*. The Bourbon Reforms had come to Spanish America in the 1760s to save the Crown's possessions, creating new, streamlined and more effective institutions that could prevent another embarrassment like the loss of Havana in 1762; clearly though, something more serious was amiss in the administration of Florida and the Caribbean colonies.

CHAPTER 4

THE FAILURE OF THE BOURBON REFORMS

On 11 June 1811, Interim Governor Juan José de Estrada penned a letter to Justo López, ordering the Lieutenant to encourage voluntary donations from East Florida residents toward the financing of Spain's wars. The governor wrote:

“The motherland finds itself at the present time very much in need of aid to continue waging war against the tyrant of Europe who has afflicted her for more than three years [Napoleon Bonaparte]. In this vein, I hope that Your Honor, as a good servant of the King, will inspire in your residents all the enthusiasm and confidence that you all ought to have for the Just Cause that defends our motherland, and exhort them as good sons to give every day new evidence of their support for her by saving her with donations from each as is possible for them, in order to sustain the immense expenditures of such a costly fight. Make them understand that, on the one hand, everyone who contributes to such a beneficial end will be deemed worthy of greater recognition and attended to as befits them, and that those who refrain from so natural a service the government will not consider as [potential] recipients of any grace they may petition for”.²⁶⁰

This is a remarkable document. On the one hand, Governor Estrada offered his people a bribe; those who swelled the royal coffers could expect royal concessions in return. But there was an iron fist inside this velvet glove: those who shirked what Estrada termed a “natural service” could expect nothing in the future from their government. Some might call this extortion. Either way, one thing is clear – Estrada was desperate.

And with good reason. Almost exactly one year before, Viceroy Don Pedro Catani of New Spain received a letter and several enclosed Royal Treasury documents from the Governor of East Florida. In his letter, the governor explained that he sent these to Catani,

²⁶⁰ Governor of Florida to Justo López, 11 June 1811, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

“That they may impress upon you our extremely urgent need, toward the alleviation of which you will please arrange for the remittance of a swift and abundant aid package, if Your Excellency desires that this Province be conserved for the King and Monarchy, as there have already been warning signs of mutiny among the troop and rebellion among the civil servants”.²⁶¹

East Florida’s financial straits were dire, even in – as we will see this was – a ‘boom’ time of relative prosperity. And once again, the governor’s tone was both emphatic and alarmed. This could perhaps be ascribed to a natural tendency in Estrada toward the dramatic, except that Estrada was not the author. His predecessor, Governor Enrique White, was still in power.²⁶²

Just as they were starved for money, so too were East Florida’s administrators in need of soldiers. In December 1814, for example, the Cuban Negro Militia detachment and the Third Battalion of Cuba mustered 403 soldiers and militia officers between them. Including the Third Battalion’s 18 officers and command staff, technically supernumeraries not included in troop counts, raises this number to 422, and again to 448 when we add the colony’s 6 dragoons and 20 artillerymen. By comparison, at its largest, East Florida’s garrison in 1740 numbered 996 men; more than double its later size. In witness, at Fort San Nicolás, as Captain Llorente bemoaned the state of his post’s barracks in August 1813, he also complained to Governor Kindelán about his order to send troops to Fernandina, arguing that San Nicolás simply did not have enough troops to comply:

“The dismemberment that Your Honor inflicts upon me in yours – to reinforce another post that has other aids besides mine – is too much, for

²⁶¹ Governor of Florida to Viceroy of New Spain, 10 July 1810, section 21, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

²⁶² White, we should note, was by this date very experienced as Governor of East Florida, as he had ascended to the office in June 1796. His nearly 15-year reign was not only the longest the colony experienced during the Second Spanish Period, but among the longest in all of East Florida’s colonial history.

having in San Nicolás 119 men, and with the losses expected, [you] tell me that I am supposed to help Amelia [Island] with 71; which is to say be left with 38 men for such a large encampment and to closely guard the food warehouses. Because of this departure this [troop] is left so diminutive that there is not anyone to cover it [the camp]...”.²⁶³

Here may be what went wrong in East Florida. In at least several cases we have already observed, most notably Julian Acosta’s, deserters were acquitted or given only the non-punishment of reincorporation into the ranks because of this manpower shortage. And though Florida’s military commanders could arguably hardly do otherwise – they needed the men, after all – it is not difficult to imagine the effect that institutionalized lenience toward desertion and other malfeasance may have had on the frequency with which those behaviors occurred. East Florida’s soldiers may have deserted not only because their service conditions were terrible, but because they little reason not to.

Florida’s financial troubles are still another potential piece to this puzzle. The conditions under which the province’s soldiers served were clearly terrible, even unbearable. Naturally, not all of these hardships could be solved with money – while uniforms could help repel malaria and yellow fever mosquitoes, and money could buy quinine bark, Florida was still a hotbed for highly infectious diseases that contemporary medical science could barely combat. But much of what the garrison’s soldiers endured, including uniform, arms, ration and especially pay shortages could have been prevented given a larger colonial budget. East Florida’s lack of funds to allocate to military spending was thus, by this argument, the direct cause of the colony’s poor military service conditions, was responsible for the many desertions that were motivated by these privations and was consequently an important factor in the collapse of Spanish hegemony in the colony.

²⁶³ Tomás Llorente to Governor of Florida, 12 August 1813, section 32, reel 61, EFP, PKY.

These conclusions are not *faits accomplis*, however; both contain significant gaps that need to be addressed. That lenience toward desertion encouraged further desertion makes sense theoretically, but did it actually foster flight? And if so, is there evidence that this was common? Most satisfying of all would be records of this policy having been codified in colonial Spanish military legislation, making it truly institutionalized. By contrast, the case for a causal relationship between East Florida's bankruptcy and garrison shortages is much stronger – numerous requests and responses in the previous chapter, many penned by Cuban Captain-General Someruelos, support it. Nevertheless, the actual extent of the treasury's deficit and thus its impact on the East Florida garrison remains to be seen. It is to this analysis we now turn.

Declining Finances in East Florida

Simply put, the scope and severity of East Florida's financial collapse – for it was a collapse – cannot be overstated, and had a decided impact not just on military spending and garrison desertions, but on the destiny of the entire colony. East Florida's financial troubles began early, almost immediately after the reimposition of Spanish rule. As early as January 1785, Governor Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes received a complaint over lack of government funds, and by March of that same year, Zéspedes wrote the Conde de Gálvez, then Captain-General of Cuba and soon to be Viceroy of New Spain, complaining of money shortages that had forced him to withdraw troops detached to San Nicolás.²⁶⁴ These money troubles were bearable nuisances, however. There was still sufficient money, for example, for the colonial government to make deposits into a fund for building parish churches in 1790, to pay military, government, ecclesiastical and even

²⁶⁴ Letter from Arturo O'Neill to Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, 2 Jan. 1785, section 29, reel 43, EFP, PKY; Letter from Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes to Conde de Gálvez, 2 Mar. 1785, section 7, reel 16, EFP, PKY.

schoolteachers' salaries in 1799, to donate to the poor in that same year, and even to buy a "large cross" – valued at 38 pesos, far outstripping the average monthly salary of 7-9 pesos that a common soldier received - for the St. Augustine comestibles warehouse in 1795.²⁶⁵

By Spain's final decade in Florida, however, this relative prosperity (and this term is used advisedly) had come to an end: the St. Augustine Royal Treasury's balance sheets for this period reveal that following the military crises of 1810-1814, East Florida's finances took a sharp downturn, equally evident under several measures. First, the amount of liquid funds available in the St. Augustine treasury at the end of each month decreased by a full order of magnitude; although there was some fluctuation, especially in 1817, the pool of funds upon which the East Florida government could readily draw was simply not what it had once been.²⁶⁶ Also, after 1800, the size of the yearly *situado* that St. Augustine received from New Spain through Havana began to decrease rapidly, according to Lúgia María Bermúdez, in response to the ever-decreasing size of the colony's garrison, whose salaries and expenses it paid. But in the meantime, East Florida's population actually grew, stretching the *situado* to its limits and forcing authorities to resort to inadequate and ultimately troublesome loans.²⁶⁷

Militarily, this translated into fewer deposits into and ever-larger withdrawals from the *depósito de subvención de la guerra*, the colony's "fund for the subvention of

²⁶⁵ *Arcas formadas en el mes de...*, 31 Jul. 1790, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; *Estado mensual del Presidio de San Agustín de la Florida Oriental correspondiente al mes de...*, 31 Dec. 1799, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; *Estado mensual...*, 31 August 1795, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; for the monthly salary of a common soldier, see footnote 228.

²⁶⁶ At the end of June 1810, the treasury had a surplus of 35,964 pesos, 6.5 reales, while at the end of January 1812, it had only 3,182 pesos, 2 reales left over; *Estado mensual...*, 30 June 1810 and 31 Jan 1812, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁶⁷ Lúgia María Bermúdez, "The Situado: A Study in the Dynamics of East Florida's Economy, During the Second Spanish Period, 1785-1820," (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1989), 40-41.

war”. These funds were then as a rule deposited into an account labeled “Situación” (situation), the fund that usually contained New Spain’s contribution to Floridian finances.²⁶⁸ It also meant fewer salary payments for the garrison, less money that could be spent on supplies and rations, and similarly decreased expenditures on maintenance of fortifications. And more generally, financial instability led to decreased (and eventual cessation of) government saving, leaving authorities with less money to fall back on during future crises. Thus, for the garrison in particular, and for the colony of East Florida as a whole, this constituted a financial “crunch”, which is what we will term it here.

Before we engage in this analysis, a few words deserve to be said about the methods to be employed, beginning with the documents used. Spanning the period 1790-1821, there are three types of records for the years we will look at, 1806-1821. These three sets of documents are balance sheets of one or more pages in length. We will only examine two here, titled *Arcas formadas en el mes de...con asistencia del Señor Gobernador [sic] de ella*, and *Estado mensual de Caja del Presidio de San Agustín de la Florida Oriental correspondiente al Mes de...*²⁶⁹ These are one-page monthly account sheets; the former is less detailed than the latter, but as we will see contains one additional –and important – piece of information. Between 1817 and 1821, the royal treasury also kept yearly balance sheets structurally similar to *Estado mensual* records, which we will not consult due to the redundancy of its data.

²⁶⁸ Bermúdez, 39.

²⁶⁹ See Figures 1 and 2; also, note the missing level of detail in the *Arcas* record’s account of debits, and its inclusion of a final discount absent from the *Estado* sheet but significant to the treasury’s final liquid holdings – this is what necessitated the use of both types of documents.

The methods used to compute the statistics employed here also deserve explanation. Our first data series, which compares the liquid funds available in the St. Augustine treasury at the beginning and end of each month from 1806 through the turnover, takes its numbers directly from the *Arcas* and *Estado mensual* documents described above.²⁷⁰ Beginning monthly balances correspond to entries marked “Existing funds at end of last...,” pre-discount ending balances come from sums marked in *Estado mensual* documents as “General Existing Funds” and post-discount balances are drawn from the *Arcas* records’ bottom lines. The only modification has been conversion to base ten when graphing or producing some of the other data series below.

Our second set of values describes a phenomenon from the first analysis – the ‘discount,’ or in Spanish, *descuento*. Discounts, noted exclusively in *Arcas* documents, were sums allocated to special funds from money remaining at month’s end; the *depósito de subvención de guerra* was one of the largest and best-funded of these accounts. This series looks at discounts made from 1806 through August 1818²⁷¹ as percentages of their corresponding months’ pre-discount ending balances. To illustrate, the treasury had 17,646 pesos in liquid funds at the end of June 1808. That month, the royal treasurer set aside 7,832 pesos, 2.5 reales in discount, or 44.385 percent – nearly half. By contrast, June 1814 finds the treasury far thriftier, with a meager discount of 78 pesos, 3 reales, only 3.62 percent of the 2,159 pesos, 3 reales left over at month’s end.²⁷² If the previous measure allows us to ascertain how much money the treasury had available to cover its expenses – and thus to highlight the St. Augustine government’s comparative penury –

²⁷⁰ See Figures 3, 4 and 5; note that y-axis values are smaller in the second two graphs.

²⁷¹ We end with August 1818 because from this date onward, the treasury discontinues the practice of making discounts; see Figure 5 for a graph of this trend from 1806 through the above month.

²⁷² *Arcas formadas...*, 30 June 1808 and 30 June 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

this rule permits comparison of the government's confidence in its financial integrity, as expressed in its willingness to save.

Coffers [Accounts] formed in the month of November of 1792, [recorded] by the temporarily charged [treasurer] of this station, with assistance from its Honorable Governor

Credits:	Reales (rrs)	Marabedíz (mvs)
Existing funds at the end of October of 1792	75,681	19
Income in all the present month...	423,903	4
[Total:]	499,584	23
Idem in deposit belonging to the branch of church construction	31,097	26
Idem belonging to the estate of Don Jesse Fish (José Fisch)...	60,892	17
Idem belonging to...	2,400	0
[Total:]	94,390	9
[Sum Total:]	593,974	32
Debits proper to these accounts in all the present month of November	29,993	32
Existing funds for December	563,931	0
Deduction:		
Be made of 94,390 rrs, 9 mvs that are included in the 593,974 rrs, 32 mvs of existing funds belonging to the branch of deposits, as they correspond to parties of this class incorporated in credits		
	94,390	9
Existing funds for December	469,590	25
In Pesos 58,698	6	25

Figure 4.1: An example of an *Arcas* record, dated November 30, 1792²⁷³

The last of these measures focuses on the *subvención de guerra* fund. Once again drawing numbers directly from *Arcas* and *Estado mensual* documents, we track the level of money set aside in the *subvención de guerra* fund with emphasis on contributions to and withdrawals from it.²⁷⁴ On the one hand, variations serve as an index of the Florida government's expectations – war savings are hardly a priority when peace is the forecast. More importantly, though, this also gives us an idea of how much Florida could afford to

²⁷³ *Arcas Formadas...*, 30 November 1792, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; translation mine, boldface added, notes excluded for purposes of brevity.

²⁷⁴ See Figure 7 for a general graph of the *subvención* fund's state from 1808-1821.

spend on its defenses or rather how dire the financial straits were in which the colony's military increasingly found itself.

Monthly state of the royal coffers of the station of St. Augustine, Florida, corresponding to the month of August of 1817		
Existing funds at the end of last July	4,678 pesos	4.5 rrs
To deposit for subvention of war	157 pesos	7 rrs
[Total:]	4,836 pesos	3.5 rrs
Credits:		
To branch of circumstances	6,099 pesos	1 rrs
To importation deposits	199 pesos	4.5 rrs
To idem for subvention of war	19 pesos	7.5 rrs
To idem of bar	18 pesos	0 rrs
[Total:]	6,336 pesos	5 rrs
[Sum Total:]	11,173 pesos	0.5 rrs
Debits:		
To military expenses	84 pesos	0 rrs
To expenses of the Plaza	6,223 pesos	7 rrs
To employees' salaries	127 pesos	1 rrs
To transfer to circumstance	157 pesos	7 rrs
To fortification expenses	1,415 pesos	0.5 rrs
To clerical expenses	60 pesos	0 rrs
General Existing Funds	3,105 pesos	1 rrs

Figure 4.2: An example of an *Estado Mensual* record, dated 31 August, 1817²⁷⁵

Our choice of years to be studied also deserves a brief explanation. We begin our core analysis in 1806, as commencing in 1790 – the first year for which records exist – would make this study unnecessarily long.²⁷⁶ 1806 was specifically chosen because Spain was at war by this time (allied since 1804 with Napoleon against Great Britain), allowing examination of the colony's finances in wartime, but had not yet unduly suffered economically from this conflict or the yet-to-come Peninsular War (1808-1814), permitting a view of a financially 'healthy' wartime Florida. However, while they are not part of our core analysis, financial data from some earlier years is included, and the

²⁷⁵ *Estado Mensual...*, 31 August 1817, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; translation mine, boldface added.

²⁷⁶ East Florida's economy in 1790 was sufficiently removed both chronologically and financially from the colony's fortunes two and three decades later to warrant this exclusion. Even just the two transcriptions above clearly reflect this difference: existing funds in November 1790 were more than *18 times* August 1817's level.

selection of years deserves some explanation. Figures from 1790 and 1799-1800 have been included to show a prosperous Florida's finances in peacetime, while numbers from 1792-1793 and 1795 give us information from the beginning, end and first year of Florida's previous foray into war, during Spain's participation in the French Revolutionary Wars (January 1793 - July 1795).

Armed with the first of the above measures, we discover that the East Floridian treasury was sickly as early as 1806, but still viable. On the one hand, money was already tighter then than in previous decades. The government entered the year with liquid holdings at 8,116 pesos, 1 real and finished with 6,476 pesos, 3 reales – a loss. By contrast, East Florida's available funds at the end of 1790 stood at a considerably higher 16,842 pesos, enough, for example, to build a new military hospital and renovate the military high command, or restore East Florida's Port of Santa María and the house in which the Catholic Church was temporarily located.²⁷⁷ And even at this early date, the East Florida government was already in debt: in July 1805, Third Battalion commander Josef María de la Torre had written Governor White to request 53,114 pesos owed to the battalion.²⁷⁸

On the other hand, the royal treasurer seems to have had some confidence in Florida's continued financial stability, if not prosperity: by January 1806, the treasury was in possession of a 16 peso, 4 real security from settler Isaac Teasdale, a sum it held in collateral until at least June of that year. In future crises, St. Augustine would liquidate such funds, making this account's continued existence suggestive of calm in the treasury. Also, we should note, 1806 saw the arrival of an unusually large *situado* – 97,501 pesos,

²⁷⁷ *Resumen general de Cargos y Datas... 1790*, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; Maríano de la Rocque. *Estado General de la Plaza de San Agustín... 1789*, 1 Dec. 1789, section 42, reel 76, EFP, PKY, 2-3, 24-25.

²⁷⁸ Josef María de la Torre to Governor of Florida, 8 July 1805, section 35, reel 68, EFP, PKY.

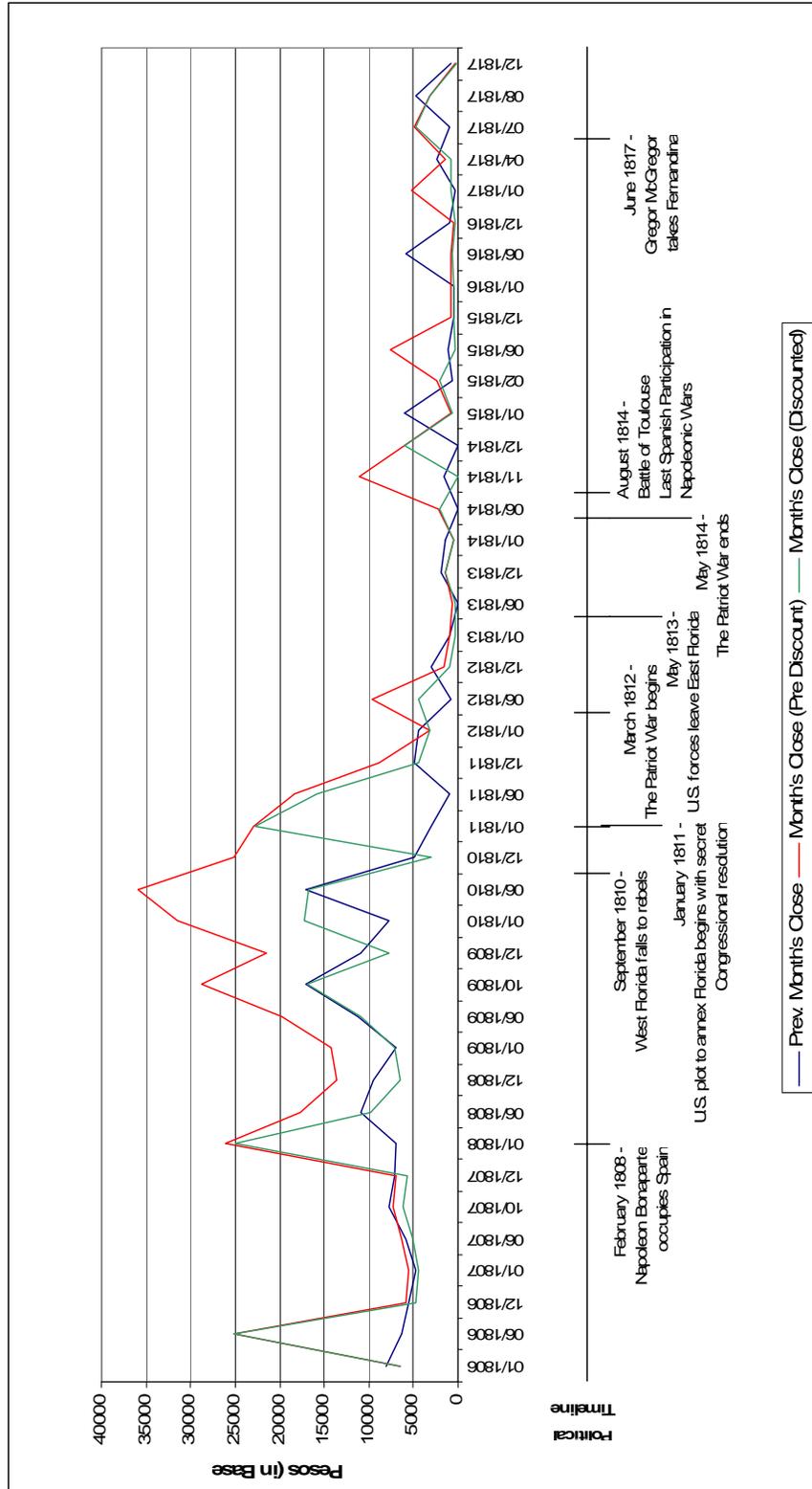


Figure 4.3: Liquid Funds in St. Augustine Treasury, 1806-1817

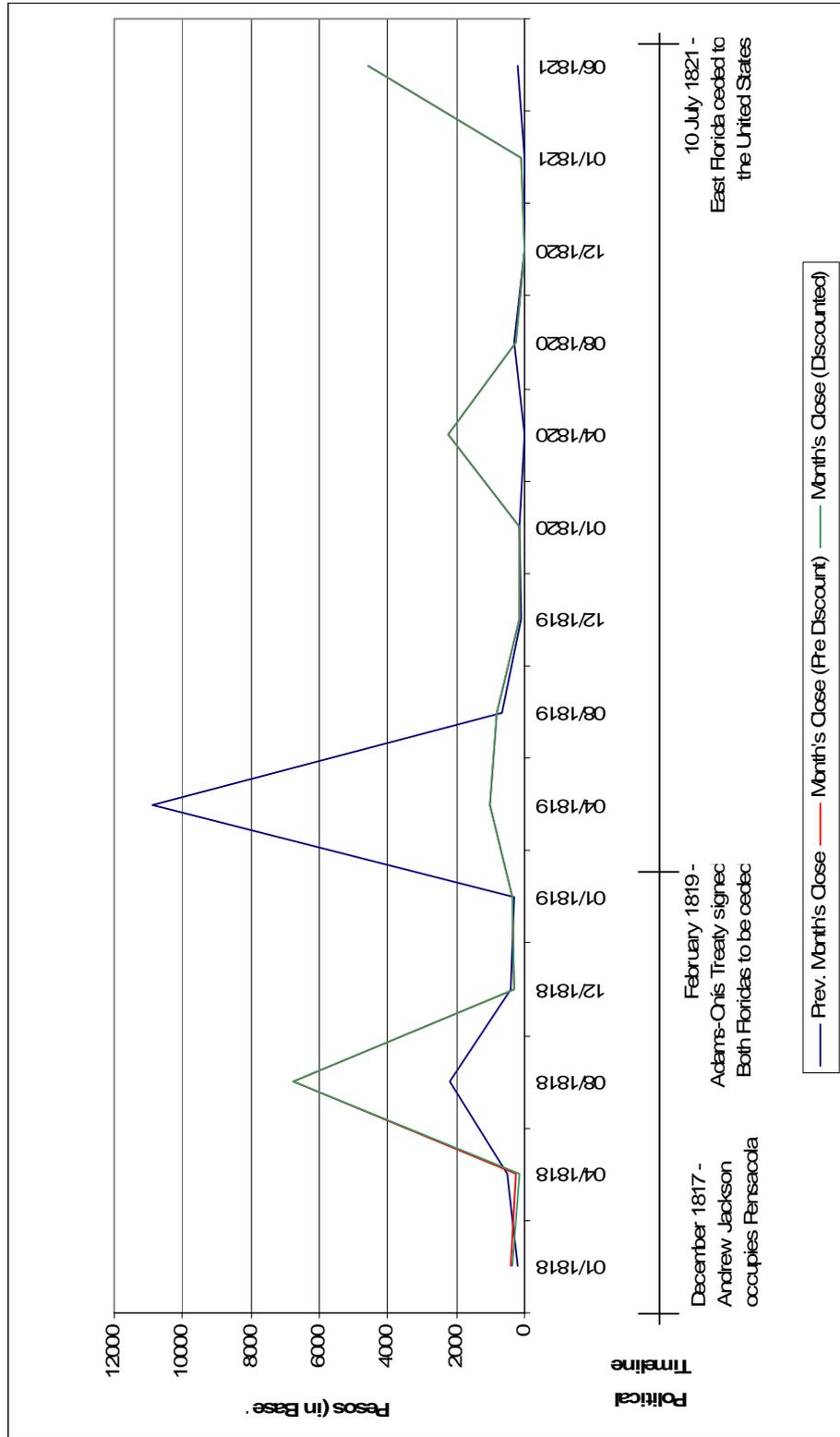


Figure 4.4: Liquid Funds in St. Augustine Treasury, 1818-1821

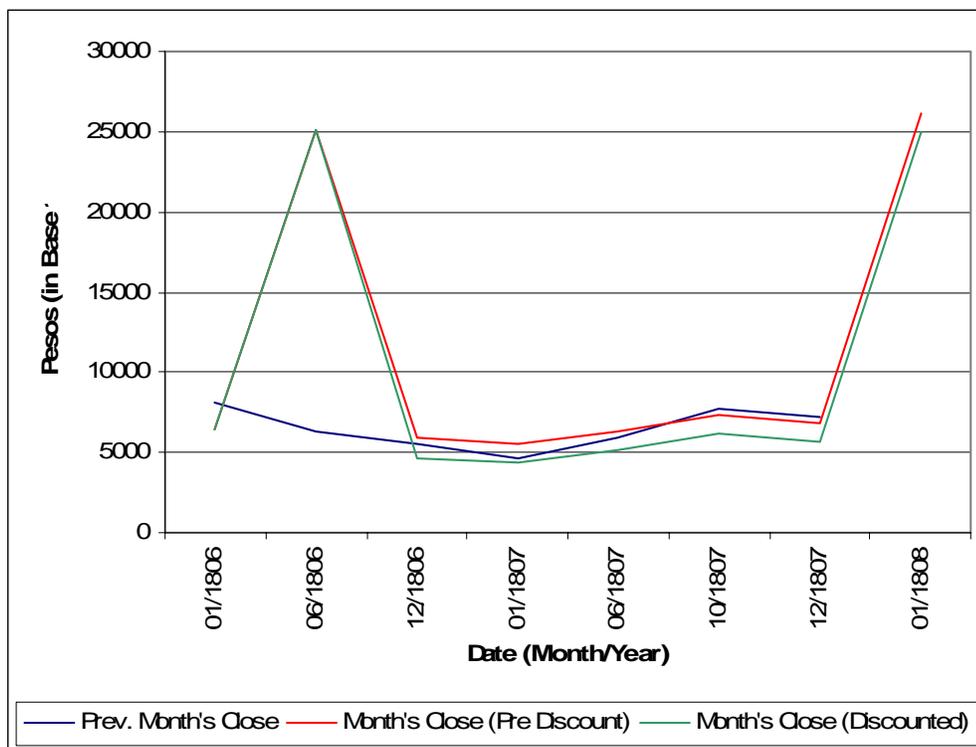


Figure 4.5: Detail of Liquid Funds in St. Augustine Treasury, 1806-1817

enough, for example, to take care of peacetime repairs that Chief Engineer Mariano de la Rocque had recommended in 1789, or perhaps pay back a 22,000 peso loan made to the government in 1799.²⁷⁹

If interim treasurer José Antonio de Yguiniz did harbor such hopes, he saw them validated. Between January 1806 and December 1807, the treasury's monthly beginning and ending balances (both pre- and post-discount) remained stable, hovering for the most part between 6,000 and 8,000 pesos. June briefly interrupted this trend, but only to the colony's benefit: in this month, the treasury brought in a lump sum of 40,000 pesos, about half of which was spent that same month, leaving an ending balance of 25,077

²⁷⁹ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Jan. 1806, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; for the situado's arrival, see Marchena Fernández, "Guarniciones y Población Militar," 115, and Appendix 1 in Bermúdez; for Rocque's recommendation, see previous note; for loan, Governor of Florida to José Pablo Valiente, 9 May 1799, section 14, reel 21, EFP, PKY.

pesos, 7 reales. However, Florida's financial torpor quickly reestablished itself – by the end of November, existing funds were at an unremarkable 5,339 pesos, ½ real, and at 4,690 pesos, 7 reales by year's end (see figure 4.5).²⁸⁰

As mentioned earlier, February 1808 saw the end of more than a decade of peace in Spain, as French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's armies, supposedly guests, turned on their host country's soldiers and quickly occupied most of the Iberian Peninsula. In Florida, the coming of the Peninsular War coincided with and reinforced a marked change occurring in the colony's finances. On 22 December 1807, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson's administration passed the Non-Intercourse Act, causing American transatlantic trade with Britain and France to grind to a halt. Into this commercial void stepped Florida: in 1809, Amelia Island was opened to international trade and, with its large deep-water port that could accommodate large-tonnage ships, became a major depot for goods waiting to be shipped – in violation of Jefferson's embargo – between American and European markets. And every such exchange paid a 15 percent import tax on its arrival and another 6 percent in export taxes at departure.²⁸¹

For the Royal Treasury, the result was that from January 1808 through June 1810, opening monthly balances rose considerably, generally oscillating between 8,000 and 15,000 pesos (see figure 4.3).²⁸² Income and discounting, meanwhile, skyrocketed: from 1808 through late 1810, treasury income rose steadily, until by October 1810, the reported pre-discount balance at month's end was an impressive 35,964 pesos and 6.5 reales, or *five times* the average ending balance two years before. And discounts, as the

²⁸⁰ *Estado mensual...*, 30 Nov 1806, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁸¹ Bermúdez, 44-46.

²⁸² See *Estado mensual...*, January 1810-June 1810, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; recall also that these opening balances did not count amounts allocated to special funds – these were exclusively liquid assets.

far lower monthly beginning balances reported might suggest, topped the 10,000 peso mark by October 1809 and kept climbing for another year until, in December 1810, treasurer Yguiniz allocated 22,182 pesos and 5 reales to special funds, with 16,669 pesos of this money going to military accounts, and 12,841 pesos, 7 reales specifically destined for the *depósito de subvención de guerra*.²⁸³ Notably, discounts remained at over 40 percent of their corresponding ending balances between June 1808 and December 1811 – the longest and highest sustained stretch of saving between 1806 and 1821 (see figure 4.6).

To illustrate the relative size of the above figures, June 1792's ending balance, coming in peacetime and before the conflicts of 1804-1821 leached Florida's financial vitality, was lower by more than 9,000 pesos. The total discount for June 1792 was 12,015 pesos, not quite as much as the later year's *subvención de guerra* discount.²⁸⁴ And June 1792 was by no means a poor month. To the contrary, it was rather typical: November 1792 posted a post-discount ending balance of 58,698 pesos, with another 11,798 pesos discounted. 1808-1810, then, placed St. Augustine on a prosperous footing characteristic of an earlier time in the Second Spanish Period.

Except, of course, that in 1792, Spanish East Florida borrowed no money and had to that point contracted less than 20,000 pesos in loans. In 1808 alone, by contrast, St. Augustine borrowed 70,533 pesos, and borrowed another 56,862 pesos in 1809. And while 1792's *situado* summed a formidable 138,213 pesos, the *situado* in 1808 came to only 63,437 pesos, with a similar delivery the following year. So while we label this

²⁸³ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 October 1809 - 31 December 1810, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁸⁴ *Arcas formadas...*, 30 June 1792, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; more precisely, this month's ending balance was 26,922 pesos, 7 reales and 28 maravedis, and the discount is listed as 96,120 reales and 28 maravedis.

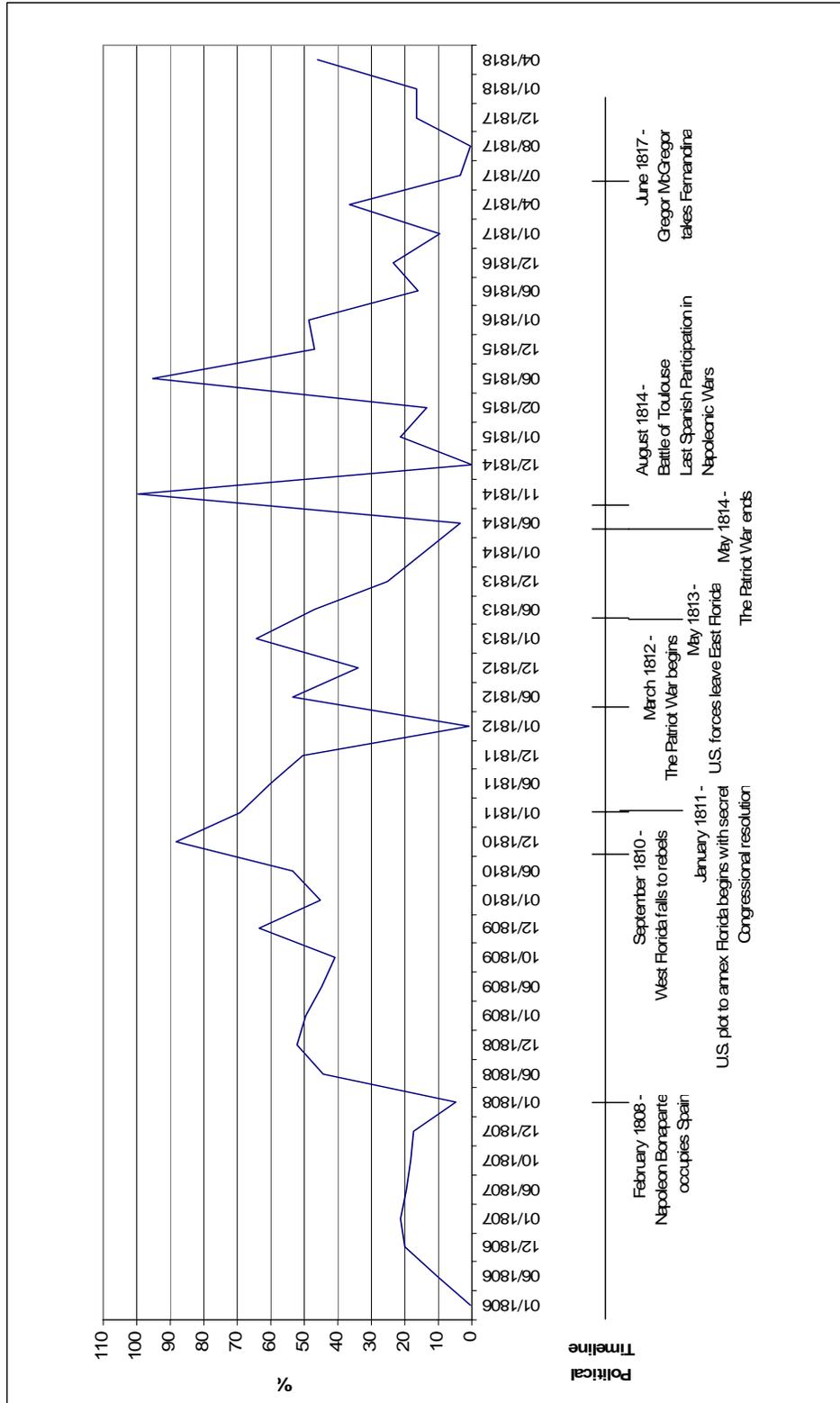


Figure 4.6: Percentage of Liquid Funds Discounted, 1806-1818

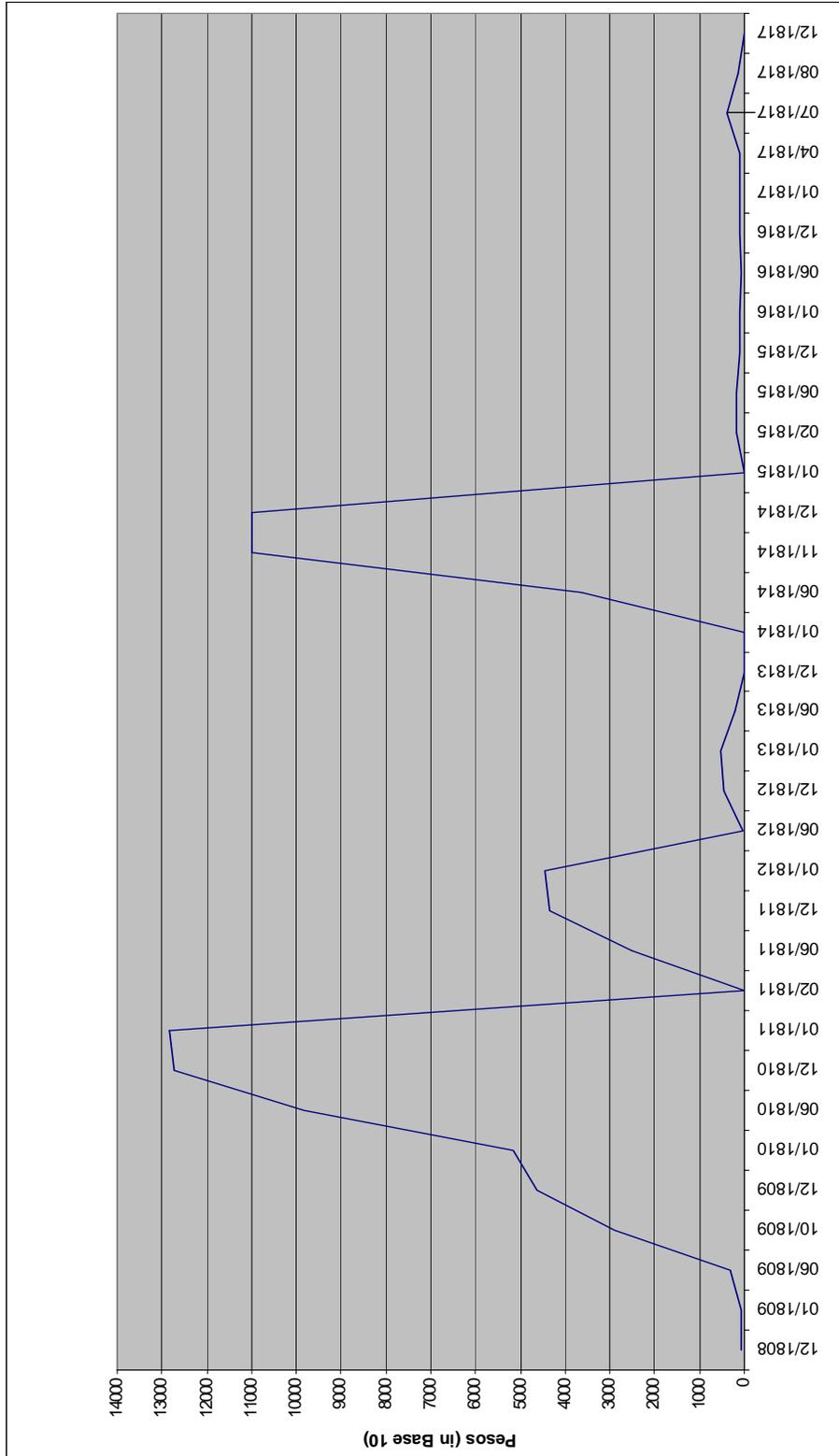


Figure 4.7: Funds in the Depósito de Subvención de Guerra Fund, 1806-1818

prosperity – because for this period, it was – it was actually more akin to a brief respite from crippling penury. Still, East Florida was finally getting something of a financial break, just as economic disaster neared.

Regardless of how much the treasury took in, or how prudent (or miserly) it was with this money, Florida’s financial good fortune was not fated to last. Paying for a seemingly never-ending war took its toll, and December 1810 proved to be the high-water mark for the colony’s finances. Already in decline from the previous June – the beginning balance in December was 4,844 pesos 5 reales, down from 17,025 pesos 2 reales six months before – 1810’s slast month saw a similarly vertiginous drop in pre- and post-discount ending balances, as shown below:

Table 4.1: Treasury Monthly Ending Balances, June and December 1810²⁸⁵

	Pre-Discount	Post-Discount
Jun 1810	35,964 pesos, 6.5 reales	16,726 pesos, 5 reales
Dec 1810	25,166 pesos, 5 reales	2,984 pesos, 0 reales

To the colonial government’s credit, it made a laudable effort to continue saving. December 1810’s hefty allocation of 22,182 pesos to special funds explains the unusually low post-discount balance for that month. As Florida’s economic downturn continued, however, even this small holdover from more prosperous times disappeared: in January 1811, not only did St. Augustine fail to set any money aside for its special funds, but the colonial administration transferred virtually all of its reserved money, including the 12,841 pesos and 7 reales in the *subvención de guerra* account, back into the treasury’s general assets, citing a need to “meet...the demanding urgencies of the station [St.

²⁸⁵ Not coincidentally, revenues from Amelia Island’s import tax also reached their high point in 1810, plunging in 1811 and slowly ebbing away in the years that followed. Note that this description closely fits the trajectory of the East Florida treasury’s monthly beginning and ending balances; this suggests a strong relationship between import tax revenue and the colony’s economic fortunes.

Augustine], for lack of its *situados...*”. Only 88 pesos and 3.5 reales, which had been allocated to the *subvención de guerra* that same month, were spared the transfer.²⁸⁶

Six months later, in June 1811, the situation was slightly better, but about to get much worse. On the one hand, the government was saving again: it had already put away 36,752 pesos 7.5 reales into a deceased personnel’s pension fund, and now managed to divert an additional 2,522 pesos and ½ real toward the war subsidy. On the other hand, decreases in the *situado*, coupled with the enormous pressures of the colony’s many debts once again forced the liquidation of these savings – in this case, the whole contents of the pension fund – just as revenue dropped abruptly (see figures 4.3, 4.6 and 4.7).²⁸⁷

And in 1812, the Patriot War began, disrupting the economy even further.²⁸⁸ Spanish East Florida’s finances continued on their downward trend for another year and a half, drifting gradually from the already low opening balance of 4,378 pesos 1 real in January 1812 to 1,025 pesos 5 reales in the following month, before bottoming out at 33 pesos, 1.5 reales in June 1813. A veteran officer’s salary could be larger than this last

²⁸⁶ *Estado mensual...*, 31 Jan 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; and *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Jan 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁸⁷ *Estado mensual...*, 31 Jan. 1811 30 June 1811 and 31 December 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Jan 1811, 30 June 1811 and 31 December 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; the drop in revenue across all three fronts is clearly shown by the figures below:

Table 4.2: Treasury Balances for Select Months, 1811

	Beginning Balance	Pre-Discount End	Post-Discount End
Jan 1811	2984 pesos 0 reales	22926 pesos, 3.5 reales	22838 pesos, 0 reales
June 1811	942 pesos, 0 reales	18407 pesos, 3 reales	15885 pesos, 2.5 reales
Dec 1811	4845 pesos, 6.5 reales	8822 pesos, 6 reales	4378 pesos, 1 real

²⁸⁸ Besides the effect that the Patriot occupation must have had on East Florida’s commerce and agriculture, especially due to the capture of Amelia Island, the Patriot War was hazardous to the colony’s economy because military expenses rose considerably in response to it, even though the Royal Treasury could not always keep up. In witness, this is when the government liquidated its pension fund, spending some of that money on the Third Battalion of Cuba’s expenses (2354 pesos), on military salaries (2207 pesos) and on the colony’s naval forces (4591 pesos). See Hoffman, 282-283; for military expenses, see *Estado mensual...*, 30 June 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

amount.²⁸⁹ Similarly, ending balances fell by about 80 percent between early 1812 and mid 1813 - from 3,182 pesos to 654 – with a single interruption in June 1812 caused by the surprise entry of more than 4,000 pesos from the estate of Don Santiago Wilson.²⁹⁰ To put this drop in context, in September and October 1800, Third Battalion of Cuba soldier Miguel Zamora cost the treasury slightly over 158 reales, or 39 pesos, to feed, clothe and pay.²⁹¹ What this means is that although the treasury did have 307 pesos set aside in the *depósito de subvención de guerra*, at the end of May 1813 St. Augustine only had sufficient liquid funds to support two soldiers for two months. By contrast, in January of 1794 – also about a year into a war – St. Augustine had possessed 12,748 pesos, with an additional 7,644 pesos set aside.²⁹²

The colony never recovered from this financial implosion. Already, St. Augustine had established an unhealthy pattern of periodically depleting its special funds, especially the *depósito de subvención de guerra*: besides the transfers of January and June 1811, the treasury also liquidated 1,673 pesos 7.5 reales in December 1813.²⁹³ More seriously, from this point on the colony's finances settled into a rhythm in which months with untenably low revenue levels alternated with infrequent but spikes in income that proved as short-lived as they were sudden. The winter of 1813/1814 brought the first of these increases, with December and January posting opening balances of 1,858 pesos 2 reales and 1,445 pesos 6 reales, respectively – a notable increase from June 1813's figure. Again, one likely explanation involves East Florida's military fortunes; by 1813, Patriot forces were

²⁸⁹ Vinson III, 80.

²⁹⁰ *Arcas formadas...*, 30 June 1812, section 17 reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁹¹ Record of expenses for Third Battalion soldier Miguel Zamora, 27 Oct 1800, section 36, reel 70, EFP, PKY.

²⁹² *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Jan. 1794, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁹³ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 December 1813, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; and *Estado mensual...*, 31 December 1813, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY. Also, see Figure 3.

largely confined to the Alachua region (see map 2), from where they no longer posed a serious threat to Spanish hegemony, and the spring of 1814 brought Patriot leader Buckner Harris' death and the movement's dissolution.²⁹⁴ The *transbordo* tax, an excise instituted in 1813 that taxed the time goods spent in ports awaiting shipment, was also partly responsible, producing a quantity of state revenue that Lúgia Bermúdez calls "enormous".²⁹⁵

However, these gains quickly disappeared. In both the above months, the treasury finished with less than it started, and by June 1814 had only 29 pesos in liquid funds available – its lowest opening balance yet.²⁹⁶ And this happened despite the delivery of 1,032 pesos from Veracruz and the conversion of 1,673 pesos and 7.5 reales from special to liquid funds (see figures 4.3, 4.6 and 4.7).²⁹⁷

This up-and-down pattern continued over the five chaotic years between the end of the Patriot War and Florida's legal cession to the United States in 1819. A full description of the province's finances in these years will not be included here for the sake of brevity, but several of the peaks and troughs do merit specific mention. November 1814, only four months after June's fiscal nadir, found the *Real Hacienda* (the royal treasury) with more assets than it had had since the crunch of 1811 or would have again. 10,987 pesos, 4.5 reales was set aside, all of it deposited into the war subsidy fund (see figures 4.3, 4.6 and 4.7).²⁹⁸ But, once again, East Florida's finances were nothing if not volatile: one month later, the *subvención de guerra* account was yet again liquidated,

²⁹⁴ Patrick, 278-279, 281-282.

²⁹⁵ Bermúdez, 45.

²⁹⁶ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec. 1813, 31 Jan 1814 and 30 June 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; *Estado mensual...*, 31 Dec. 1813 and 31 Jan. 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁹⁷ *Arcas formadas...*, 30 June. 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; and *Estado mensual...*, 30 June 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

²⁹⁸ *Arcas formadas...*, 30 Nov 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY

driving that month's total revenue to just over 33,290 pesos; despite this measure, Kindelán's government closed the year with a comparatively small 6,047 pesos and 6 reales in liquid assets and no savings, for a net loss of nearly 5,000 pesos. Similarly, the government in St. Augustine began June 1816 with 5,828 pesos and 1 real in liquid funds, but ended the month with only 829 pesos and 4 reales, with another loss of almost 5,000 pesos.²⁹⁹ In July 1817, lack of the *situado* prompted a final transfer from the *subvención de guerra* fund, in the amount of 396 pesos, ½ real (see figures 4.6 and 4.7). And finally, in August 1818 the government, possibly trying to cut its losses, discontinued all further saving – there are no records of discounts made thereafter. With the exception of one expensive month (April 1819) and another that increased St. Augustine's liquid funds by 2,251 pesos (April 1820), the *Real Hacienda's* liquid account decreased to almost nothing, only picking up slightly in June 1821, just before the colony's transfer (see figure 4.3).³⁰⁰

To place these figures in context, it may be helpful to establish, if only in rudimentary fashion, what it cost to administer the East Florida colony at various points during the Second Spanish Period. And certain expenses (including military salaries) became less urgent when peace ended and war began, and may well have been affected by other variables including, for example, the ruin of the colony's crops in the wake of the Patriot War, examining changes in these expenses will also be instructive.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec. 1814 and 30 June 1815, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; *Estado mensual...*, 31 Dec. 1814 and 30 June 1815, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰⁰ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 July. 1817, 31 Aug 1818, 30 Apr 1819, 30 Apr 1820, 31 Mar 1821, 30 June 1821, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; and *Estado mensual...*, 31 July. 1817, 31 Aug 1818, 30 Apr 1819, 30 Apr 1820, 31 Mar 1821, 30 June 1821, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY

³⁰¹ For an example of changes in the urgency of administrative expenses, see Mariano de la Rocque's letter, note 18; for the ruin of crops during the Patriot War, see Hoffman, 264.

As mentioned earlier, 1799-1800 were years of relative prosperity in East Florida; in October, Governor White's administration spent 43,185 pesos, 3.5 reales. 11,765 pesos' worth of this sum covered the Third Battalion of Cuba's expenses, while another 1,664 paid their salaries. The remaining expenses included purchase of meat and grains, medicine, food for the hospitalized (a separate line in the month's budget), construction materials for the building of the battery at Quesada and other officials' salaries.³⁰² Only three times among the numbers graphed below (see figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5) does the treasury's income match or exceed the monthly figure above, in June 1806, and then twice in 1811.³⁰³

Immediately preceding the 1808 boom, monthly administrative costs were considerably lower. June 1807 saw the treasury spend 7,167 pesos, with military salaries among the expenses now absent. St. Augustine spent more in January 1808 – 10,010 pesos – but nevertheless, the difference in spending is evident.³⁰⁴ Notably, expenses did not increase during the Patriot War; rather, the opposite. In December 1812, St. Augustine spent only 3,080 pesos, 6.5 reales though we should mark that nearly half this sum (1,438 pesos) was devoted to the costs generated by the suddenly relevant Third Battalion. A year later, spending was back up to 9,286 pesos, but the Third Battalion's budget entry had been cut to 600 pesos.³⁰⁵ From the end of the Patriot War through the beginning of 1817, the treasury's expenditures remained at slightly under war levels (an average of 6,937 pesos).³⁰⁶ And, finally, following Gregor McGregor's invasion and the garrison's abandonment of most of its strongholds, monthly expenses fell to an average

³⁰² *Estado mensual...*, 31 Oct. 1799, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰³ *Estado mensual...*, 30 June 1806 31 Jan and 30 June 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰⁴ *Estado mensual...*, 30 June 1807 and 31 Jan 1808, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰⁵ *Estado mensual...*, 31 Dec 1812, 31 Dec 1813, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰⁶ *Estado mensual...*, 31 Mar 1814 – 31 Jan 1817, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

of 4,534 pesos, and most months the treasury spent less than 2,000. Evidently, the St. Augustine government was able to stay afloat financially through 1821; however, with only 236 pesos budgeted to military expenses (not just the Third Battalion) in January 1818, this came at a price.³⁰⁷

Finally, in the hopes of arriving at some fixed quantity that the government was required to pay – regardless of the colony’s financial circumstances - we know that under a 1789 regulation, St. Augustine owed 36,093 pesos yearly in salaries to its non-military personnel, of which 5,000 paid the governor’s salary, another 1,500 covered the East Florida engineer detachment’s commander’s pay, and the same sum again went to the salary of the colony’s *contador*, its highest financial official. In total, the administration was thus liable for 3,007 pesos in monthly salary payments, approximately 667 pesos’ worth remitted to the three officials listed above.³⁰⁸ This too sheds further light on the magnitude of East Florida’s financial decline: while St. Augustine was usually able to bring in enough revenue to cover this expense, after Gregor McGregor’s invasion in June 1817, the treasury consistently showed beginning balances of less than this amount. In fact, the colonial government faced this same situation repeatedly even before the loss of Fernandina, in 1814 and 1815. In other words, if faced with an expensive crisis – like McGregor’s invasion, for example – the capital’s finances lacked enough of a buffer to even guarantee that civilian personnel would be paid.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ *Estado mensual...*, 31 Jan 1818, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³⁰⁸ Pablo Tornero Tinajero, “Sociedad y Población en San Agustín de la Florida (1786)”, *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 35 (1978), 255-258.

³⁰⁹ *Estado mensual...*, 1814-1821, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY; and *Arcas formadas...*, 1814-1821, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

*The Depósito de Subvención de Guerra*³¹⁰

The military's buffer, the *subvención de guerra* fund, similarly disappeared. The *subvención* account first appears on the balance sheets for December 1808, though such funds were provided for by earlier legislation.³¹¹ While its beginnings were small – 56 pesos and 2.5 reales – the establishment of this account coincided with the lowest point of Florida's 1808-1810 boom in government finances. As 1809 wore on, and both balances and discounts grew at an ever more rapid pace, the *subvención* account followed suit: in January 1809, it grew to 71 pesos, six months later it stood at 308 pesos, and by October it had grown to 2,895 pesos. Finally, the *subvención* fund topped off in January 1811 at 12,841 pesos and 7 reales.³¹²

As above, when we consider the events taking place in and around Florida and Europe, this pattern makes sense. Napoleon's occupation of Spain in 1808 convinced Spanish authorities that a military buildup was necessary – in August, Governor Enrique White wrote the Marqués de Someruelos concerning Spain's declaration of war on France and Florida's consequent need for defense funding. And the end of hostilities with England likely freed capital for saving in the *subvención* fund.³¹³

But as we have already seen, events could conspire just as easily against the St. Augustine treasury, and as East Florida's financial situation deteriorated, so too did the contents of the *depósito de subvención de guerra* dwindle.³¹⁴ The 12,841 pesos allocated to the war subsidy fund in December 1810 were liquidated the following month. And

³¹⁰ See figure 7 for a graphical representation of the trends described below.

³¹¹ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec. 1808, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY and *Estado mensual...*, 31 Dec. 1808, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY;

³¹² *Arcas formadas...*, 21 Jan 1809, 31 Oct 1809, 31 Jan 1811, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³¹³ Enrique White to Marqués de Someruelos, 27 August 1808, section 2, reel 11, EFP, PKY;

³¹⁴ For consideration of events leading to the collapse of 1811-1813, see footnote 288.

while the fund made a short-lived recovery six months later, reserving 2,522 pesos in June 1811, 4,340 pesos in December and 4,444 pesos in January 1812, by June 1812 saved war subsidy money had dropped to only 42 pesos.³¹⁵ This coincided with the darkest period of the Patriot War, for in June, St. Augustine was still under siege and Governor Sebastián Kindelán had only just arrived with reinforcements from Cuba's black militia.

The next year and a half saw another bout of short-lived, limited improvement that ended with yet another emptying of the *depósito de subvención de guerra* by December 1813. At year's end 1812, the treasury held 461 pesos 4 reales in deposit, which climbed to 527 pesos 1 real in January and dipped again in June 1813 to 223 pesos, before being liquidated six months later.³¹⁶ We should note that a pattern is forming similar to the one described earlier; and, as per this previous trend, another, final spike in *subvención de guerra* allocation followed in 1814, one coincidental with that year's increased ending balances.³¹⁷ By the end of this upswing in December 1814, the war subsidy fund had swelled to 10,987 pesos 4.5 reales, liquidated that month and replaced with an allocation of 2 pesos 5 reales.³¹⁸ The former figure, like December's ending balance, was the highest of its kind since the crunch of 1811.³¹⁹

³¹⁵ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec 1810, 30 June 1811, 31 Jan 1812 and 30 June 1813, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³¹⁶ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec 1812, 31 Jan, 30 June and 31 Dec 1813, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³¹⁷ This increased saving also explains why, in the midst of this financial growth, monthly opening balances remained low, and sometimes even dropped: these balances, which measure only liquid funds, are equal to their previous months' post-discount ending balances, and were consequently driven down by increased saving motivated by prosperous times.

³¹⁸ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Dec 1814, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³¹⁹ Far from being a coincidence, this parallel results from the liquidation of the subsidy fund this month. Consequently, at month's end the *subvención de guerra*'s nearly 11,000 pesos swelled the treasury's liquid holdings, and thus that month's closing balance.

But while monthly ending balances still experienced some minor rises and drops – rising as much as 913 percent between January and June 1815, or from 746 to 7,557 pesos – *subvención* funds remained at a low but stable level until the war subsidy account was emptied permanently in August 1817. After rising from January 1815's *subvención* of 2 pesos 5 reales to 159 pesos in February, the account's contents hovered between a low of 76 pesos (in June 1816) and a high of 175 pesos (corresponding to June 1815), with the exception of a single spike, small that we may consider it to be finances as usual – in July 1817, the penultimate month of the *subvención* fund's existence, the war subsidy reached 396 pesos, from which it immediately dropped again to 157 pesos in August.³²⁰

This sickliness may be one reason why the *subvención de guerra* was ultimately discontinued; with the colony's finances in the disarray described earlier, it is no surprise (and cannot have come as much of one) to St. Augustine's administrators that they were unable to properly maintain a savings fund. Also, although Spain was still legally in possession of Florida and, according to L. David Norris, Governor José Coppinger was still determined to preserve the colony for his nation, military expenses were much diminished – after 29 June 1817, Gregor McGregor and later the United States held Fernandina, for whose defense St. Augustine was no longer liable.³²¹ But the decisive coffin-nail for this and all other savings funds in the St. Augustine treasury was a letter, dated 9 September 1817, which quoted a royal order requesting East Florida's subsidy fund records in order to enable the payment of a 100 million real (12,500,000 pesos) loan

³²⁰ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 Jan 1815 – 31 August 1817, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

³²¹ Hoffman, 274-275; Norris, 1.

obtained in 1806.³²² With such a hefty loan to help repay, and by now fewer fellow colonies to help shoulder the burden, it is no wonder that future saving was discontinued.

Lenience and Desertion in East Florida

Dependent as they were on the *situado*, East Florida's administrators were, as L. David Norris argues of Governor Coppinger, only able to do so much.³²³ But some of the blame for the garrison's many desertions and its consequent decomposition does belong squarely on the shoulders of Spanish authorities, both in East Florida and elsewhere. Officials in East Florida – including Coppinger himself – and even the Crown were guilty of having fostered a culture of military service in East Florida that tolerated desertions, pardoning or lightly punishing absconders. In this chapter's introduction, we conjectured that this policy was conceivably a major impetus to recidivist desertion; here we conclude that it was. Numerous examples of such desertion by soldiers who not only fled a second time, but did so only shortly after returning from previous absences, support this conclusion.

Francisco Zerpa, the militiaman who fled from San Nicolas to St. Augustine in 1813 due to mistreatment by Lieutenant Andrés Ayala, can serve as an excellent example of how permissive garrison authorities could be. After his mid-1813 flight and capture, Zerpa could not have been long in the stockade, as by early January 1814 he was on active duty again and posted at Fernandina. The folly of Manuel de Castilla's merciful decision quickly became apparent. On 3 January, Zerpa deserted again. There is no record of his capture or voluntary return (the latter of which, we will see, could mitigate

³²² Alexander Ramirez to Governor of Florida, 9 September 1817, section 14, reel 23, EFP, PKY; the colony's subsidy funds had already disappeared during the previous month after Governor Coppinger's 2 August request for these funds to be used in meeting expenses; see Governor of Florida to Royal Officials, 2 August 1817, section 15, reel 28, EFP, PKY.

³²³ Norris, 1.

or even nullify penalties), but the *pardos*' 5 April 1814 inspection marks him as yet again present and active at Fernandina. Clearly any previous disciplinary action had not succeeded in putting a halt to Zerpa's tendency toward flight, because approximately three months later, Zerpa deserted yet again. At this point, the stiff penalty of ten years hard labor that *desertores reincidentes* – recidivist deserters – were supposed to receive should certainly have been imposed on Zerpa, but it seems he suffered no such fate. There no record of any subsequent imprisonment, and the *pardos*' 10 December 1816 inspection, which notes Zerpa as hospitalized, makes no mention of concomitant imprisonment, a distinct condition that company commanders noted. And Zerpa was still not done deserting, for on 21 December 1817, he fled a *fourth* and final time.³²⁴ Were these additional desertions actively motivated by Castilla's forbearance? This is difficult to say – we have no testimony from Zerpa himself. However, it makes sense to say that Castilla's treatment of Zerpa sent a message to his soldiers that their commander was lenient toward deserters. And we can state with complete certainty that placing Zerpa back in his company's ranks put him in a position from which he could again desert, which he could not have done if incarcerated or sentenced to hard labor.

Other examples abound. Anselmo Gamboa, a soldier in the first company of *morenos*, abandoned his post in St. Augustine, only to be apprehended by Pablo Rosete himself, who found him wrapped in his blanket without rifle or uniform. Despite having been caught red-handed, Gamboa returned to duty shortly after the end of his trial. Was this justice? Perhaps: Gamboa, a young man, claimed that he had only intended to leave

³²⁴ Monthly Inspection Lists for Company of *Pardos*, 3 Feb, 5 Apr and 7 July 1814, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY; Monthly Inspection Lists for Company of *Pardos*, 10 Dec 1816, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY; Monthly Inspection Lists for Company of *Pardos*, 21 Dec 1817, section 20, reel 36, EFP, PKY.

for a short while, in order to observe a nearby party through a window.³²⁵ But once again the garrison's commanders proved willing to let offenses slide, an attitude that cannot have been lost on their soldiery. To cite another example, deserter Juan Otoñez of the Third Battalion, who we encountered in Chapter Two, returned to the garrison in October 1813. Commander Ribera reincorporated Otoñez into the ranks, only to have this lenience backfire, for on 23 October, Ribera was forced to report that soldier Otoñez had successfully deserted again.³²⁶ Had Otoñez been incarcerated, this flight would have at least been more difficult to accomplish; possibly, the punishment might have stripped Otoñez of his penchant for flight.

This perceived laxity in punishment may also have motivated many first-time desertions. Andrés Dobles and Domingo Obiedo's departure from San Marcos in 1819, for example, might not have taken place had the soldiers not expected as warm a welcome, or at least have ended differently, with no end to their absence from service. Similarly, Third Battalion soldier Jose Maldonado, possibly the same deserter who returned from "Rodeisland" in 1804, deserted from Amelia Island on 3 August 1799, and then returned on 7 August expressing regret over having deserted.³²⁷ The likelihood is that Maldonado believed even when he deserted that he might receive some form of clemency, and this can only have made his decision to flee easier. And, if the case of Juan de Castro's desertion is any indication, had Maldonado not harbored this belief he probably would not have been willing to return.

³²⁵ Trial record of Anselmo Gamboa, section 64, reel 120, EFP, PKY.

³²⁶ Monthly Inspection Lists for Third Battalion of Cuba, Oct and Nov 1813, section 20, reel 35, EFP, PKY.

³²⁷ Monthly Inspection List for Third Battalion of Cuba, 9 Aug and 7 Sept 1799, section 20, reel 32, EFP, PKY; note that, if this is the same soldier, upon his second return to service he specifically requesting amnesty.

Maldonado and others like him harbored this certainty in part because the lenience they expected was codified many times during the Second Spanish Period in the form of royal indulgences or amnesties promulgated by an authority far superior to Rosete, Ribera, Llorente or even the Governor of East Florida – the King himself. The Governor could be lenient: recall that it was Governor Coppinger, citing troop shortages, who pardoned Julian Acosta. But King Ferdinand VII opened the door for desertions wide on 8 November 1817. That day, His Majesty issued a royal indulgence that, among other measures, established lessened penalties for deserters. Wanting to attract fugitives back to military service, Ferdinand made generous concessions: deserters were not to be imprisoned – certainly not for the ten years recidivists received previously - but were to serve a variable term of six, seven or eight years, or their remaining term of service, *whichever was less*.³²⁸ This service was to be identical to standard military duty, save for the loss of any chance of promotion or commendation.³²⁹ Nor was this the first or only such indulgence: on 16 January 1789, a Royal *Cédula* granted amnesty to deserters who turned themselves in within three months of its promulgation. On 16 February 1793, the Crown issued another such decree. Three years later, the King issued yet another indulgence, this time in celebration of the contracting of peace with France and the marriage of the *Infantas*, the King’s daughters. On 27 April 1801, the Crown issued another indulgence. In 1805, still another royal amnesty for deserters was declared. In 1815, Governor Kindelán announced the issuance of another royal amnesty, and in 1816,

³²⁸ The King’s motive here – ostensibly a desire to commemorate his wedding and the birth of his daughter – is revealed in a telling passage from this tract: “...desiring to attract them [deserters] to the completion of their duties...”, taken from trial record of Anselmo Gamboa, section 64, reel 120, EFP, PKY.

³²⁹ Royal *Cédula* of 16 Feb 1793, in trial record of Anselmo Gamboa, section 64, reel 120, EFP, PKY.

yet another amnesty was declared to celebrate the return of Ferdinand VII to the throne.³³⁰

It worked. Third Battalion fifer Domingo Calderín returned to the garrison seeking amnesty, as did artillery deserter Marcos Manusi.³³¹ Also, recall that militia soldier Rufino Petro, who had been enslaved in Charleston following his desertion into the United States, was able to return in 1820 and received royal amnesty. The promise of reincorporation even lured back Juan Erazo, who had deserted from the Infantry Regiment of Puebla while stationed in Mobile.³³² Clearly, there was now little incentive for the repentant deserter to stay away. But again, this came at a price: there was now equally little incentive for would-be deserters to refrain from fleeing in the first place. And thus, insofar as officers like Pablo Rosete, East Florida's governors and the Kings of Spain tolerated and thereby fomented desertion, they were all complicit in the decline of the garrison.

Financial Troubles, Lenience and the Spanish Caribbean

As in our discussion of desertion and service conditions, the problems described here were also not unique to East Florida. Despite the reforming efforts of Alejandro O'Reilly and the Conde de Ricla in Cuba and elsewhere, the Bourbon Reforms were for the most part a failure. Many of Spain's colonies in the Caribbean, principally the usually rich viceroyalty of New Spain, encountered serious financial difficulties as the nineteenth century dawned. The pressures were also similar to those in Florida, though each colony's situation was of course particular: mounting debts, insufficient revenue and

³³⁰ Determined using the Online Index to the East Florida Papers, accessed 13 February 2007; as an example, one such cédula is mentioned in Bartolomé Morales to Governor of Florida, 15 February 1802, section 35, reel 67, EFP, PKY.

³³¹ See footnote 119.

³³² See footnote 93.

expensive military campaigns or construction projects all rapidly undermined the integrity of the royal treasuries in New Spain, New Granada and Cuba, to name only a few. And also, again as in East Florida, overly tolerant officials in these colonies were partly responsible for the many desertions and mutinies they weathered. As we will discover, throughout the eighteenth century, soldiers deserted and revolted numerous times, and afterward received punishments so light that they were little more than formalities, or avoided punishment entirely.

Among the Spanish Caribbean colonies' various economic crises, the collapse of royal finances in New Spain stands out as the most dramatic. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, revenues flowing into the royal coffers in Mexico City were higher than ever. In 1761, the viceregal capital's intake was 7,791,071 pesos, and its average income for the 17-year period 1761-1778 was just over 7,369,406 pesos. By contrast, the royal coffers brought in 15,301,551 pesos in 1791, almost 60 million pesos in 1807, and averaged a yearly income of 40,439,528 pesos between 1791 and 1808, another period of 17 years. Between 1791 and 1808, the treasury's annual income grew by 655 percent.³³³ Tax revenues alone, according to historian John TePaske, increased from a yearly influx of about 2 million pesos in the first decade of the eighteenth century to over 14 million by the beginning of the nineteenth century. And these are just revenues collected within the capital – when we add income collected by New Spain's regional treasuries, this number jumps still higher, to over 28 million pesos, for example, in 1809.³³⁴

³³³ John J. TePaske, *La Real Hacienda de Nueva España: La Real Caja de México (1576-1816)*, (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976); corruption was, of course, rife, and so these figures cannot be relied upon to be exact. However, as this work's introduction advises, these accounts do accurately reflect the viceroyalty's general economic trajectory.

³³⁴ John J. TePaske, "The Financial Disintegration of the Royal Government of Mexico during the Epoch of Independence," in *The Independence of Mexico and the Creation of the New Nation*, ed. Jaime E. Rodríguez O, (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1989), 64-65.

These gains were largely illusory, however. Inflation rose along with treasury income. Military expenditures also increased considerably beginning in the 1770s and 1780s, and importantly, not just in New Spain.³³⁵ Before 1740, the viceroyalty exported no more than 2 million pesos per year in *situados* to Spain and other Spanish colonies. Thereafter, as the mother country fought war after expensive war in Europe and the New World, this amount increased considerably: by the last two decades of the eighteenth century, New Spain exported 40 percent of its yearly silver production in *situados*. In the 1770s, the viceroyalty shipped 4.8 million pesos; in the 1780s, New Spain sent 7.8 million, and in the 1790s, it sent a formidable 9 million pesos.³³⁶ For this last decade, John TePaske proposes an even higher figure: in the 1790s, he maintains, Castile alone received an average of 5 million pesos yearly from Mexico. And as for New Spain's own needs, military expenses rose from 600,000 pesos in 1795 to 1.6 million pesos in 1810, and then again to 3 million in 1812. Thereafter, military spending decreased, but not by choice – according to TePaske, Mexican authorities spent less after 1812 because they had simply run out of money.³³⁷

Worst of all, though, as expenses overtook revenues, the viceregal government funded this deficit through ever-larger loans. Between the early 1770s and 1810, New Spain's total debt rose from about 3 million pesos to over 31 million, not including the millions of pesos that the viceroyalty owed in unpaid *situado* money. Interestingly, the province's colonial administration, mirroring its East Floridian counterpart, was able to

³³⁵ TePaske, "Financial Disintegration", 64-66.

³³⁶ Carlos Marichal and Matilde Souto Mantecon, "Silver and Situados: New Spain and the Financing of the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean in the Eighteenth Century," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 4, (Nov, 1994), 590-591.

³³⁷ TePaske, "Financial Disintegration", 71; for a detailed account of Spain and New Spain's struggle to produce a cost-effective but functional defense plan for the viceroyalty, see Christon Archer, "Bourbon Finances and Military Policy in New Spain, 1759-1812," *The Americas* 37, no. 3, (Jan, 1981), 315-350.

briefly reduce this debt by cannibalizing reserve funds, such as money set aside for tithes. The viceregal government, TePaske argues, also “showed surprising ingenuity in devising new taxes”. But despite these efforts, deficits grew worse once New Spain’s independence movements arose – the colony’s debt stood at 37.5 million pesos in 1815 – checked only by the fact that New Spain was finally running out of credit as well as money.³³⁸

New Granada also ran into periodic financial trouble as the eighteenth century drew to a close, though in this case, unlike East Florida’s or New Spain’s, its deficits arose for reasons unconnected to the Mexican *situado*. During the 1760s and 1770s, viceroys including Manuel de Guirior, Manuel Antonio Flores (1776-1781) and especially Archbishop-Viceroy Antonio Caballero y Góngora implemented a series of military reforms that swelled New Granada’s military forces, and drove the viceroynalties expenses skyward. In 1774, for example, Guirior established a disciplined militia in Guayaquil, the same troop whose officerships he sold in order to fund it.³³⁹ Similarly, Caballero y Góngora drafted (and the Crown approved) a proposal that would create an auxiliary regiment of well over 1,000 men. When Viceroy Francisco Gil y Lemos took office on 8 January 1789, he found the colony’s finances in chaos: Caballero y Góngora’s administration had single-handedly increased New Granada’s debt from 900,000 pesos to almost 2 million. Gil y Lemos and his successor, José Manuel de Ezpeleta severely cut back the army’s size, but although this saved the province money, it also depressed

³³⁸ TePaske, “Financial Disintegration”, 66, 70, 72.

³³⁹ Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 52.

revenue collections, which dropped to 3 million pesos yearly, where they remained for the rest of the colonial period.³⁴⁰

Cuba also entered an economic crisis in the late 1700s and early 1800s, chiefly because, like New Spain, the colony bankrolled a series of expensive conflicts that overtaxed its treasury. In peacetime, the Cuban treasury could only cover about 15 percent of the island's expenses, with the rest usually supplied by New Spain's *situado*. Under Alejandro O'Reilly's new regulations, for example, Cuba's regular army cost the colonial government 487,453 pesos per year and the veteran cadres of the militia another 110,121, far outstripping the roughly 162,500 pesos the island took in yearly during the 1750s.³⁴¹ And its brief part in the American War of Independence had already strained Cuba's coffers to their limit. Nevertheless, between 1796 and 1808, Spain and its colonies fought two additional wars against the English, first as allies of the French Directory, and then of Emperor Bonaparte, the costs of which sent the Cuban government deeply into debt. Existing tax revenues were not enough to cover these debts so the Cuban government, echoing its Mexican counterpart, borrowed the huge sums it needed by selling *vales reales*, certificates similar to modern treasury bonds. These notes soon depreciated in value, however, damaging the colony's credit and sending its economy on a downward spiral that left Cuba nearly bankrupt in 1808.³⁴²

Finally, Cuba, New Spain and New Granada, as well as most of Spain's other colonies were also commonly lenient on deserters and mutineers. In testimony, we need only look again to the record of pay revolts in the eighteenth century. Chile's 1710 pay revolt resulted in a full pardon for the rebels and their payment through a special treasury

³⁴⁰ Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 93-94, 158.

³⁴¹ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 51.

³⁴² Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 140-141.

credit. In 1726 Cartagena, another pay revolt ended the same way. Authorities agreed to pay the back wages owed to the soldiers who rebelled in Santo Domingo in 1741, and because every soldier claimed to have been leaders in the revolt, no punishment was meted out. Only two pay revolts resulted in anything less than total victory for the rebels. In 1768, 24 soldiers from the Regiment of Milan rebelled in Havana. They were conceded nothing and condemned to hard labor. And in 1787, in Campeche, the group of soldiers who refused to swear oaths of allegiance to the Spanish flag were incarcerated. Otherwise, these men were completely free to flout military authority.³⁴³

Militia deserters in New Spain, meanwhile, found themselves in a similarly roseate situation. According to Christon Archer, “legislation designed to prevent desertion and general amnesties for deserters who would return to serve out their enlistments were repeated time after time”.³⁴⁴ If they did not wish to return, settled former soldiers could send one or two replacements and thus escape any further obligation. Severity was only reserved for deserters who were caught – they were punished according to the law – and those who aided and abetted them, who if convicted received several steep fines and could be exiled from their towns.³⁴⁵

Conclusions

Evidently, East Florida’s decline, both financial and disciplinary, was very real and remarkably widespread. By 1806, Florida’s economy was already ailing: the Royal Treasury brought in between six and eight thousand pesos per annum in those years, an income level with which Interim Treasurer Yguiniz appears to have been comfortable. But the colony also took out a 12.5 million peso loan that same year. During the next few

³⁴³ Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 365-368.

³⁴⁴ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 268.

³⁴⁵ Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico*, 268-269.

years, 1808-1811, St. Augustine's Royal Treasury rallied, and Florida entered a welcome period of relative prosperity. Monthly revenues rose steadily and remained high, with a surplus of 17,274 pesos at the end of January 1810.³⁴⁶

East Florida, oddly enough, was fortunate to have a neighbor with an active embargo in place. While legal United States shipping languished in Boston, New York and Philadelphia due to the prohibitions of Thomas Jefferson's 1807 Non-Intercourse Act, American and European smugglers exchanged wares on Amelia Island, growing richer themselves and swelling the coffers of the Spanish colonial government that taxed their transactions.

But by 1811, these tax revenues had all but disappeared, and the colony's finances went into a decline that soon became an economic catastrophe. The East Florida Royal Treasury went from having monthly surpluses in the tens of thousands of pesos to monthly deficits at least as high. And the March 1812 invasion of East Florida by an army of self-proclaimed 'Patriots' only served to disrupt the colony's agriculture, to sever its overland supply and trade lines, and thus to further impoverish the shrinking royal coffers. By 1814, the damage was done – while the seven remaining years of Spanish rule in East Florida brought small peaks and troughs in the colonial government's finances, Florida never recovered. Again: the colony's financial problems were more than sufficiently severe and widespread to have been the cause of the East Florida garrison's execrable service conditions, and thus of its many desertions and consequent ineffectiveness.

In this chapter, we have also seen that, despite the seeming inevitability of the garrison's deterioration in the wake of this financial decline, authorities were not without

³⁴⁶ *Arcas formadas...*, 31 January 1810, section 17, reel 30, EFP, PKY.

choices or agency. Faced with the desertions we encountered in Chapter Two, officials like Pablo Rosete and José Coppinger could choose to be punctilious and severe, sending returned deserters to the stockade as military policy demanded, or they could choose to be practical, inviting these soldiers back into the ranks. Starved for men, officers like Rosete and Justo López chose to recycle these deserters time and time again. And while they got the men they needed, this policy also had the disastrous additional effect of encouraging future desertion, by showing potential deserters that their officers were lenient, and convincing them that they could flee when they wished, knowing that little would happen to them if they then chose to return. We have discovered that this lenience was very common, and was a factor in numerous second- and third-time desertions, and that the King himself was party to it through his repeated issuance of royal indulgences pardoning categories of deserters en masse. The amnesty of 1817 even changed the penalties for first-time and recidivist desertions, from sentences of hard labor to resumed military service without the prospect of advancement or commendation, a light and not necessarily threatening fate to the garrison's common soldiers. In short, if Florida's financial decline was partly responsible for the decline of the colony's garrison, the lenience that was almost as a rule shown to malfeasants was also complicit.

And finally, it is once again evident that, while these problems were in some ways particular to East Florida – the colony depended, for example, on the *situado* to a degree that no other colony did – they were not unique. Rather, East Florida's example leads us to instances of the same lenience and the same financial decomposition in the viceroyalty of New Spain, in New Granada, and least surprising, in the territory that supervised Florida and shared in its *situado*, Cuba. As the nineteenth century opened, all three of

these colonies teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, their treasuries grossly over-extended due to the high costs of maintaining Spanish power in the Western Hemisphere. And all were guilty of cultivating a disregard for the military's penal codes and discipline that only hindered them further in this mission. These were not the only failures of the Bourbon Reforms – historian Matt Childs argues that the Cuban *moreno* and *pardo* militia that the Reforms contributed weapons and leadership to a black insurrection that threatened to unsettle the colonial government and Spain from Cuba – but do represent some of the greatest hurdles Spain faced after and in spite of its attempts to reform the administration of its colonies. And the situations in these larger, wealthier colonies were naturally particular and more complex than Florida's, their eventual fates differing as well. New Spain became Mexico; the former viceroyalty of New Granada was part of Simon Bolívar's ambitious Gran Colombia experiment, and Cuba remained under the Spanish flag until 1898, when American annexationism and Cuba's own independence movement finally wrested it from Spanish control. East Florida was unique in its early incorporation into the United States. Still, we now have a full explanation for the loss of East Florida, and have encountered several of the most important failures of the Bourbon Reforms as implemented in Spain's Caribbean possessions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

East Florida was not conquered by the United States; Spain willingly ceded the province because, by 1821, this previously key but now merely expensive bastion was no longer worth the trouble. At first glance, the province's problem was one of defense – commanders like General Andrew Jackson and Admiral Gregor McGregor led many invasions into Spanish Florida that the colony's inadequate garrison was either unable to repel or expelled only after great and expensive effort. Florida's forces were, however, deficient for a reason, which the service records of the Third Battalion of Cuba and especially the Cuban Negro Militia reveal. As East Florida's Second Spanish Period drew to a close, its garrison suffered from a severe manpower shortage caused by endemic desertion. Between the militia's arrival on 18 June 1812 and its return to Cuba in the summer of 1821, its contingent of *moreno* soldiers dropped from 180 men organized into two companies to 72 soldiers in one. St. Augustine's company of *pardo* militiamen, who arrived in 1813, dropped from an initial complement of 90 men to only 20. These losses were extreme, but were followed closely by the Third Battalion's: from an initial enlistment of 378 men, the battalion dropped to only 154 in December 1814. In fact, the Third Battalion's losses were so great that, in 1815, the expensive and moreover dysfunctional unit was disbanded.

Traditionally, many have blamed the soldiers themselves for this widespread dereliction of duty. The Third Battalion, as Sherry Johnson, Allan Kuethe and others have pointed out, contained "a deplorable number of incorrigibles" that Spanish officials had

passed off to the Cuban military at the battalion's formation, and which Cuban authorities had similarly sent on to Florida.³⁴⁷ Governor Kindelán himself, despite his public protestations to the contrary in 1813, privately called his Cuban militiamen vice-laden "convicts", who fled at the first hint of gunfire.³⁴⁸ But correspondence between the governor and his commanders on the St. Johns and St. Mary's rivers indicates that neither the "convicts" of the Cuban militia, nor the Third Battalion's supposedly "bad quality" soldiers deserted simply on a whim; rather, they had grievances that were not being addressed. And moreover, widespread leniency shown to deserters by Florida officials of all ranks, and even by the King of Spain, removed the few consequences that gave potential deserters pause.

East Florida's manpower shortage was just one facet of a much larger logistical deficiency. Soldiers deserted not because of any general distaste for military service – the militia, at least, was voluntary – but because of the unbearable nature of service in *Florida's* garrison, which routinely went without proper uniforms, functional weapons, even the bare minimum of rations, or any pay whatsoever. These shortfalls in turn resulted from another financial shortage. Before 1811, the colony's finances had already been precarious. Beginning in this year, and in large part due to the economic disruptions of the Patriot invasion, the St. Augustine treasury underwent a financial collapse that was nothing short of a catastrophe. As early as the 1780s, Florida's colonial administration had been hard-pressed to meet its soldiers' needs; now, this was impossible. Its defenses compromised, it was only a matter of time before Florida was taken forcibly, most likely by the United States, to whom Spanish East Florida had become economically dependent

³⁴⁷ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1751-1815*, 129.

³⁴⁸ Landers, 222.

in its final years.³⁴⁹ Nor was the loss of the peninsula much to be regretted by this point – East Florida had never produced financial surpluses, but had instead historically been a drain on both Old and New Spain’s treasuries. Expediency, then, if nothing else, dictated Spain’s withdrawal.

Beyond explaining the loss of Florida or even its companions in the Spanish Caribbean, the story of Spanish East Florida’s decline, and specifically the Cuban Negro Militia’s tale, has an even larger lesson to offer. As mentioned in Chapter One, *castas* in Spanish America had traditionally been a fortunate lot, at least by comparison with their North American counterparts. For slaves, manumission was common, while the trades and the colonies’ many *moreno* and *pardo* militias offered free blacks – including the formerly enslaved – a ready path to social advancement. Membership in the militia gave black men access to the *fuero militar*, which placed them at the highest level of an occupationally-defined social hierarchy that existed parallel to the main, largely racially-based order. And more tangibly, on Sundays, these soldiers were entitled to don bright uniforms – symbols of their elevated status – and march in parade carrying their muskets, arms that other, ordinary members of their race were prohibited.

Suddenly, the uniform and weapons shortages that the militia encountered only months after their arrival take on a new meaning. Deprived of these prized items, especially the basic tools of their trade – their arms – the militiamen likely felt few regrets as they fled: after all, without proper weapons with which to fight, what could be expected of them? The ever-present threat of an ignominious death by malaria or yellow fever must have been similarly upsetting – of what good was the promise of battalion

³⁴⁹ For a discussion of Florida’s growing financial dependence on the United States in the early eighteenth century, see Tornero Tinajero, *Relaciones de Dependencia*.

commander Antonio de Flores' status to soldiers destined to die long before they could earn or enjoy his accolades?

This constituted what was effectively a new clause on the unofficial contract these men had made with Spanish colonial authorities and with the Crown when they enlisted. Traditionally, this agreement had consisted of a simple trade: in exchange for years of service – such as the three decades Antonio de Flores served – these men received the immediate benefit of military social status, uniforms attesting to their new rank, the right to carry weapons, and, when on active duty, pay. Over the long term, enlistees could enjoy benefits like Flores'. Service, while naturally dangerous, followed certain controlled parameters too: the militia had last fought a major engagement abroad in 1767, as part of General O'Reilly's attempt to take Louisiana. Since then, their duties had consisted of defending the Cuban coast against raiders, and, as mentioned earlier, occasional service – always brief – in New Spain and the Yucatan peninsula.³⁵⁰ A Cuban Negro militiaman could reasonably expect to live long enough to collect on the benefits of lengthy service.

But the old system of social mobility through the militia was broken. East Florida changed the balance of this trade, making the old bargain one no longer worthwhile for these militiamen: if lucky, a Cuban Negro Militia soldier could look forward to unwanted hardship while serving far longer than expected as part of a garrison that was not likely to go home soon; if unlucky, he might fall afoul of a bullet or one of Florida's many lethal diseases and not live to enjoy the privileges for which he enlisted.³⁵¹ The Cuban Negro Militia had grown disillusioned. And in the meantime, yet another motive for desertion

³⁵⁰ Klein, 19-20.

³⁵¹ Falling victim, for example, to a rash of dysentery that spread through Fort San Nicolás in 1814; see footnote 199.

emerged – impatience. Militiaman José Davan’s 19 January 1819 letter to Governor Cienfuegos, the Captain-General of Cuba, testifies eloquently to this: Davan, who claimed to have enlisted “without any other motive than being moved to give proof of his love of sovereign, and to contribute to the defense of the just cause”, complained that he had served faithfully for six years in East Florida, though he had expected to return home after four to six months. Davan phrased his request as a matter of justice.³⁵² The frustrated militia soldier cannot have been alone in his frustration; what is remarkable is that more men in Davan’s position – to say nothing of Davan himself – did not desert.

And this in turn was part of an even larger breach of faith that extended beyond the confines of East Florida. If Spanish America’s traditional, racialized social hierarchy was relatively rigid and ultimately offered only limited potential for social mobility to even the most distinguished members of the black militias, it still placed free blacks on a superior level to their enslaved kin. Among the consequences of the Bourbon Reforms in Cuba, however, was the dissolution of this society of orders.³⁵³ Allan Kuethe, for example, maintains that the principal reason for Cuba’s continued loyalty during Latin America’s age of independence was the ascension of Cuba’s creoles, ranked below *peninsulares* of Iberian birth in the traditional social hierarchy, to the island’s highest military and civil posts.³⁵⁴ Moreover, this social shift, which already placed black Cubans’ small amount of status in jeopardy, coincided with a move in the island’s agriculture to plantation-based commercial sugar cultivation that encouraged a new

³⁵² José Davan to Captain General of Cuba, 19 January 1819, section 39, reel 75, EFP, PKY.

³⁵³ Childs, 27.

³⁵⁴ Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815*, 146, 165; These new elites, Kuethe argues, were now able to wrest concessions from the Crown, including the right to unrestricted trade in 1793 and guarantees that the King would no reduce military officers’ privileges. Prosperous under continued Spanish rule, Cuba’s elites saw no need to follow Simon Bolívar’s example. For the general ascendance of the Cuban Creole elite, see chapter six of this same work.

division of the population by the easily-identified category of race, and an attendant rapid increase in Cuban slave importation that increased the ratio of enslaved to free blacks on the island ³⁵⁵

All of these developments began to erode the traditional prestige of the Cuban Negro Militia. Slaveowners who had all too recently been witness to the bloody scenes of the Haitian Revolution were wary of continuing to arm Cuba's free black population, many of whom had not been born free, and in 1799 the Havana *consulado* petitioned the King to disband Cuban militia. This move failed, but the militia's prestige was nevertheless damaged. While the *fuero militar* stated that convicted soldiers were to serve their sentences in military prisons, in 1807 black military convicts were instead put to work on public projects, often laboring beside slaves.³⁵⁶ And, because the colony's ever-increasing influx of human chattel exceeded its ability to house them, black militiamen also endured the crowning insult of having to share their barracks with slaves.³⁵⁷

In early 1812, matters finally came to a head. On 15 January 1812, the first of a series of revolts in which both free and enslaved blacks participated erupted in Puerto Príncipe. In mid-March 1812, these revolts reached Havana, where they were personally led by José Antonio Aponte, a former militia captain who authorities judged the leader and chief organizer of the island-wide rebellion. The Aponte Rebellion, as it has come to be called, was defeated, and at least 329 individuals were imprisoned or executed, including Aponte himself on 9 April 1812.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Childs, 27; see also chapter one of this work, and 48-50; in 1774, Cuba was home to 44,333 slaves, making up 26 percent of the population. Another 30,847 blacks, or 18 percent of the population, were free. By contrast, in 1817, 225,131 Cuban blacks, or 35 percent of the population, were enslaved, while only 24 percent of Cuba's population, 154,047 individuals, was free.

³⁵⁶ Childs, 91-92.

³⁵⁷ Childs, 92.

³⁵⁸ Childs, 1, 141-144, 189-190; for a full description of the rebellion, see chapter four of this work.

When 180 *moreno* militiamen arrived in St. Augustine only two months later, this is the legacy they brought with them. Some of these militiamen may have had to share barracks space with slaves employed in and near Havana. Others may have known Aponte personally, or witnessed his execution. And most had almost certainly been required at some point to present the certificate of freedom all of Cuba's free blacks were required to carry. They cannot but have been already bitter.

Finally, and most significantly, the North American colony's decline also says much about the state of the Spanish Caribbean during the era of the Bourbon Reforms and about the Bourbon Reforms themselves. As in East Florida, desertion was a problem common in New Spain, in Santo Domingo and in Cuba. Veracruz was hit particularly hard by New Spain's serious desertion problem, with an entire regiment's worth of soldiers fleeing between 1799 and 1804. Floridian deserters and their counterparts elsewhere also shared many of the same motives, these in turn indicative of the principal shortages that military establishments throughout the Spanish Caribbean faced: soldiers in Veracruz feared yellow fever most of all, just as Floridians feared malaria; in 1760s Guayaquil, militiamen were commanded by officers commissioned only because they were willing to clothe their men, while throughout New Spain seldom-replaced uniforms quickly turned into rags in the unforgiving heat. As for their pay, nothing better states the widespread outrage that unpaid soldiers throughout the Caribbean felt than a simple record of their revolts: Chile in 1710, Cartagena in 1726, Santo Domingo in 1741, Cartagena again in 1745, Campeche in 1746, Panama in 1748, Rio San Juan in 1749, Santo Domingo again in 1757, Campeche again in 1760, Portobelo in 1763, Havana in 1761 and 1765, Santiago de Cuba in 1765 as well, Panama again in 1766 and 1767,

Havana yet again in 1768, Concepción in 1770, and finally, in 1787, an unsuccessful uprising in Campeche.³⁵⁹ And this stands to reason, for debt-ridden, bankrupt colonies could hardly afford to pay their soldiers' salaries.

And debt-ridden they were: Florida's financial decline happened in great part because of similar economic catastrophes in New Spain and Cuba. By the early 1800s, the heavily indebted viceroyalty lacked sufficient funds to send yearly *situados* of the usual amount. As the Second Spanish Period drew to a close, then, Cuba and Florida had to make do with less. This might still have been enough, except that Cuba's finances too were in disarray, and as the *situado* came first through Havana, the Governor and Captain-General of that island chose to take what he needed before sending the scant remainder on to St. Augustine.

The Bourbon Reforms failed, just as McAlister, Vinson and Childs claim. Created to streamline Spain's colonial bureaucracy, these measures loaned their name to a period in which New Spain willfully shirked or could not meet its financial duties; to a period that some – most notably Allan Kuethe – have referred to as a time of military resurgence, but during which countless black soldiers saw themselves cheated out of their rightful status; and an era in which Spain lost nearly all of its overseas possessions in scarcely a decade, an eventuality that the Reforms were specifically enacted to prevent. But again, McAlister and his camp are mistaken in placing the blame for Spain's decline squarely on the Reforms. Ultimately, Florida was lost less because it was poorly managed, but because the United States coveted it. As Christon Archer points out, much of what caused the collapse of the Spanish Empire remained outside the purview of the Crown's reforms and even outside the control of Spanish officials.

³⁵⁹ Marchena Fernández, *Oficiales y Soldados*, 365-368.

And indeed, there are limits to the conclusions this thesis can draw – New Spain and New Granada were both considerably larger territories than East Florida, and both viceroyalties as well as Cuba were wealthier and considerably more complex societies. The reasons behind their successes and ultimate failures exceed the phenomena we have discovered here. But the problems explored here, both within and outside of the Bourbon Reforms, were not small and significantly hindered Spain's efforts to maintain its hold over its Caribbean possessions. As for the decline of Spanish East Florida, this study has succeeded in complicating that question: Florida was not lost not due to any single factor – not even the decline of its finances, which turned on the fortunes of New Spain and Cuba – but due to nasty combination of financial crisis and military vulnerability, each factor feeding the other, and a number of similar crises elsewhere in the Spanish Caribbean. Ultimately, East Florida can be said to have been lost due to a series of unfortunate events.

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