REVOLUTIONARY ROGUES: THE SPANISH AMERICAN PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS WHO TRIED TO CONQUER FLORIDA

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Privateers of the Americas:
Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic
BACKGROUND TO OUR STORY

- Spanish American Wars of Independence (1808-1826)
  - Napoleon invades Spain (1808)
  - Juntas formed to govern in king’s name (1808)
  - Juntas begin declaring independence (1811)
  - Fighting Spain and each other
  - Commission privateers

Declaring Independence in Venezuela
MORE BACKGROUND...

- What is a privateer?
  - Privately owned warship (not navy)
  - Commissioned
  - Keep captured prizes (after court proceeding)
  - Only during war, only attack enemies

- What is a pirate?
  - No legal authority
  - Attack all, any time

Privateering commission, 1817
What is a filibuster?
- Private military expedition
- May be authorized (or not)

What is East Florida?
- Florida from the Apalachicola River to the east and south
- Capital at St. Augustine
- Loyal to Spain
- Unimportant except geopolitically
  - Ships from Cuba to Spain
INVASION

- Gregor MacGregor
  - British officer
  - Claims nobility
  - Venezuelan general
  - Filibuster expedition

- The Plan
  - Recruit men, gather supplies
  - Obtain commission
  - Conquer Amelia Island
  - Establish base of operations
    - Privateering
    - Smuggling
    - Resupply
  - Conquer Florida

- The Goal
  - New front in war

Call me Sir General MacGegor!
INVASION

- Why Amelia Island?
  - On U.S. border
  - Good for privateering
  - Good for smuggling
  - Good for base of operations
  - Best of both worlds
    - Close to U.S. ports
    - Outside U.S. law

Amelia Island today
INVASION

- The Plan
  - Recruit men, gather supplies
  - Obtain commission
  - Conquer Amelia Island
    - June 29, 1817
    - 100 men scare away Spanish defenders
    - La Republica de Las Floridas
  - Establish base of operations
    - Privateering
    - Smuggling
    - Resupply
  - Conquer Florida
    - Counter attack coming
    - Abandons Florida

Flag of La Republica de Las Floridas, 1817. Guess whose design?

Amalia, Veni, Vici, Vici/ Libertas Floridarium duce Mac Gregorio
MEXICAN PROVINCE

- New life
  - Remnant defeats Spanish
  - Usurped after 2 days

- Commodore Louis-Michel Aury
  - Privateer
  - Cartagena navy
  - Mexican filibuster
  - Takes charge of Amelia
    - “Chief of the Mexican Republic”

Self portrait?
MEXICAN PROVINCE

- Success where MacGregor failed
  - Privateering
    - Est. $500,000 prize goods
  - Slave trading
    - 600-950 people
  - Official government
    - Constitution drafted

- Loopholes in U.S. law
  - Rowboats
    - “They can smuggle one or two at a time without detection…”
  - Neutrality
    - “I considered it neutral ground, and it was the wish of [the] government not to infringe…”

Gefe de las fuerzas de mar y tierra de las Floridas
U.S. INTERVENTION

- Problem: outside U.S.
  - Offend Spain
    - Treaty negotiations underway
  - Offend Spanish Americans
    - Neutrality
- Monroe chooses invasion
  - Violations of U.S. law
  - Fourth privateering center
  - No respect for AI governments
  - No Transfer Resolution (1811)
- Out with a whimper
  - Army/navy lands
  - Aury leaves
  - U.S. doesn’t give back

JQA: “Break up the marauders.”
Monroe: “OK.”