Ronald L. Ives

Historical Summary

"José Velásquez: Saga of a Borderland Soldier"

Kino and the Baja California  
  
His Beginnings, 12 Year Advocacy for Return and Provision

Although there were sporadic attempts to colonize Baja California from the time of Hernán Cortés (1533), none accomplished much of lasting importance until the time of the Kino-Atondo expedition of 1683-1685. This expedition, with Admiral Don Isidro Atondo y Antillón as military commander and Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J. (see n. 14) as chief missionary, was organized to make a lasting settlement on the peninsula. [39] It almost succeeded. Father Kino was appointed "juez eclesiastico vicario" as representative of the Bishop of Durango whose jurisdiction was a bit uncertain, and also royal cosmographer as a representative of the king whose jurisdiction was clear. Sailing from Chacala, Sinaloa, on January 17, 1683, the expedition arrived in two <28> ships in the harbor of La Paz, Baja California on April l, several stops having been made en route.   
  
 The site chosen for the settlement was in a palm grove with a well of good water nearby; it is now occupied by the modern city of La Paz. Formal possession of the country was taken on April 5 by Admiral Atondo, acting in the name of King Carlos II. Immediately thereafter, Father Kino, assisted by his companion Father Goñi, took spiritual possession of California in the name of Bishop Juan Garbabito of Guadalajara. Formalities concluded, a church and fort were begun; fields were plowed and planted; and the "Capitana" was careened to prepare for a voyage to the Río Yaqui for more supplies. The environs of La Paz were explored during this time, and the fathers began to learn the local Indian language. Initially, the outlook for the La Paz colony seemed promising.   
  
 By June trouble with Indians began to break out. There were two local tribes, the Guaicuras and Coras, who were not on the best of terms. In attempting to deal equally with both, the missionaries gained the confidence of neither. The soldiers, likewise, had their difficulties. Although willing to accept presents, the Guaicuras tended to be belligerent and intractable and were not overly impressed by the lethality of firearms - despite several adequate demonstrations. Then Zavala, the drummer boy, disappeared in the company of some Guaicuras: the Coras reported that he had been killed by them. [40] Shortly after, while the colony was still worried about the disappearance of Zavala, a Guaicura shot a dart at a soldier. Although it did little harm, the offending Indian was placed in the stocks and later confined in bilboes (leg-irons) on the ship. The Guaicuras protested loudly and vehemently. Early in July, a party of Guaicuras came into the settlement, making signs of peace. Fearing that this was either an attack on the colony, or an attempt to rescue their <29> imprisoned tribesman, Atondo ordered them fed. While they were eating, a cannon was fired into their midst, killing three and wounding others, who (most understandably) fled the scene. With "public relations" at a nadir, military morale low, and the supply ships long overdue, the La Paz colony was in a bad way.   
  
 On July 15, 1683, the eighty-three colonists boarded the "Almiranta" and sailed across the Gulf of California to San Lucas on Agiabampo Bay, Sonora, where they arrived six days later. The La Paz colonization attempt was definitely a failure.   
  
 Neither Atondo nor Kino were ready to give up the idea of colonizing California despite the dismal failure of the La Paz attempt. Two hot and damp months were spent at San Lucas while equipment was gathered and repaired. Supplies were collected from Atondo's capital of San Felipe, Sinaloa, and from the Jesuit missions of both Sonora and Sinaloa. During this time, Blas de Guzmán, captain of the Capitana, sailed into San Lucas with a long, sad tale of misfortunes at sea, due in large part to contrary winds and high seas. However, he also told of a certain Río Grande where he had gone ashore and found the Indians friendly. After many conferences and discussions, this became the objective of the second colonization attempt.   
  
 When all equipment and supplies were readied, the expedition, again in two ships, set sail from San Lucas on September 29, 1683. With the usual fickle winds of the Gulf of California in the fall of the year, it took until October 5 to reach the mouth of the Río Grande. Many unwanted detours from the straight-line course of about 125 nautical miles had been required by the winds. Landing on 'October 6, formal possession of the land was taken with civil and religious ceremonies. Being the feast-day of San Bruno, that saint's name was applied to the area. Consequently, the Río Grande of Guzmán's original report became and remains today the Arroyo de San Bruno. Good water was found about a league up the arroyo; friendly contacts were immediately made with local Indians. Soon a mission and fort were constructed on a low mesa northeast of the arroyo about two miles inland from the river's mouth. The ruins are still visible. While this work was in progress, the missionaries preached to the Indians, and the Capitana was readied for a voyage to Yaqui to get supplies, which included "eighteen pack mules and two dozen wrought-iron mule shoes, with their nails and a thousand nails extra." That voyage of about ninety nautical miles each way was quick and successful. <30>  
  
 By December 1 of 1683, the San Bruno settlement was firmly established, and extensive exploration of the surrounding lands began. Several journeys were made up and down the coastal plain, reaching south to the area later known as Loreto. In these explorations, the plain of Londó inland from San Bruno was found, and near a good water hole crops were planted there. The site called San Isidro, later became the site of San Juan Londó, an important visita of Loreto. The facade of the ruined mission building still stood in 1968. Initially, the high mountain barrier of the Sierra La Giganta prevented travel to the west. Eventually passes were discovered and soldiers and missionaries crossed the range with much labor. They reached the great plateau to the west - a relatively flat, slightly dissected area considerably larger than the state of Rhode Island. More than 1,000 feet above sea level, this plateau has a number of shallow (temporary) lakes on the surface. These were full in 1684 as plainly stated in Father Kino's descriptions. With strenuous and extensive field work, aided by Indian friends. Father Kino eventually found a pass by which a mounted expedition could cross the Sierra de la Giganta. He learned of a river on the far west side that flowed west to the South Sea (Pacific Ocean). Soon, Kino and Atondo made plans for an' expedition to that area.   
  
 The summer of 1684 was spent in preaching to the Indians, tending crops that didn't grow very well, improving the fort and. church at San Bruno, constructing fortifications and guard quarters at San Isidro, and gathering supplies and equipment for the planned trip to the shore of the South Sea. The supply ships were late, as usual, and fear of starvation at San Bruno was growing very real. Late in the summer, the Almiranta (officially known as the San José) returned to San Bruno, bringing badly needed supplies and twenty additional men, who were ill-trained and poorly equipped. On board was Father Juan Bautista Copart, S.J., a Belgian missionary who had served in the Tarahumara. On August 15, shorty after the arrival of the Almiranta, Father Kino made his final vows before Father Copart. [41]  
  
 After discharging its cargo, the Almiranta was dispatched to Yaqui for more supplies. It made four round-trip voyages in rapid succession, bringing to San Bruno supplies, horses, mules, shoe iron, and the myriad other items needed to keep the isolated colony going. The Almiranta was <31> badly in need of repairs after these voyages, so it was sent to Matanchel, a former seaport about three miles east of modern San Blas. Nayarit. On the return to the mainland it carried numerous reports for the viceroy and Father Copart as a passenger. While the ship was being refitted at Matanchel, Captain Guzmán went overland to Guadalajara to get more supplies and some much wanted pearl-divers. Alonso de Zavallos, President of the Audiencia of Guadalajara, furnished the supplies promptly, but had some difficulty finding pearl-divers. Four were eventually located, and in describing them Zavallos wrote "they will set forth within two or three days, for I have kept them in jail in this city in order that they might not flee: they will be escorted to Matanchel under careful guard and custody ... " By March 28, 1685, the ship had returned to San Bruno and brought the much needed supplies together with the apparently unwilling pearl-divers.   
  
 While the shipyard at Matanchel was busy with repair work, the colony at San Bruno was also busy. Some of the personnel were at San Isidro where they were trying to raise food crops in poorly watered fields. Many others were away on the long-planned expedition to the coast of the South Sea. Still others were busy with the "house-keeping" tasks at the San Bruno fort and settlement.   
  
 The expedition to the South Sea was one of the major explorations in the history of Baja California. Personnel included Admiral Atondo, Father Kino, Dr. Castro (the surgeon), twenty-nine soldiers, two muleteers, and nine Christian Indians from the mainland. A varying number of California Indians accompanied to act as guides. The cavalcade included five horses in metal armor, thirty-two horses with bullhide "cueras" (leather armor), thirty pack mules loaded with provisions, two mules ridden by the arrieros, and twenty-two relay animals.   
  
 Leaving San Isidro on December 15, 1684, the party travelled northwest to the foot of the pass previously discovered by Father Kino. Here, after much labor spent in improving the trail, they climbed westward to the summit of the Sierra La Giganta, reaching the far side near modern Canípole. Travelling southwest, they came to a canyon and descended into it. This was the Arroyo Comondú in which some years later old mission San José de Comondú was founded. Travelling northwest again, with much labor, they came to the main canyon, then called the Cadegomó and now the Arroyo La Purísima. Down this canyon they rode, mostly westward, struggling over loose boulders and through dense growths of reeds. En route they came to an excellent water <32> hole which they called Ojo de Agua. It is still there and bearing the same name and delivering the same dependable flow. Below and to the west of Ojo de Agua, the party entered the country of the Guimes who tried to turn the Spaniards back. The Indians from San Bruno deserted the party at this point in fear. But Father Kino not only eventually pacified the Guimes, he enlisted their help as guides. Struggling through two more leagues in a maze of boulders and reeds, they emerged at a place they named "Noche Buena" because it was Christmas Eve. It was only a short distance upstream from modern San Isidro. Christmas Day was spent in searching out a better trail, but none was found. More struggles on the day after Christmas brought them into more passable country, and that night they camped at a place they called San Estevan. This was near modern La Purísima. On the 27th, while the main expedition rested and the farriers retreaded the pack and saddle animals, Father Kino with two soldiers climbed a nearby peak to survey the terrain ahead. This they called El Sombrerete "because it had the shape of a sombrero." Today it is known as El Pilón. It is a high butte separated from the main Comondú upland by faulting and erosion. From this summit Father Kino hoped to see the Pacific ocean, but his observations were made uncertain by the fog and haze common in the area during the winter season.   
  
 Many of the tired animals were left under guard at San Estevan where the pasture was good and water was plentiful. A smaller party travelled down the canyon to the west by easy stages. eventually coming to the place where the Río Cadegomó joined another river coming in from the northeast. This was named the Río Santiago, now the modern Arroyo San Gregorio. Crossing both rivers, the expedition travelled westward along the north shore of the great embayment at their combined mouths and reached the shore of the Pacific Ocean, which they called the South Sea. This completed the first recorded crossing by Europeans of the peninsula of Baja California. Along the shore, they met some Indians, who were at first timid but eventually accepted gifts. Father Kino especially noted the profusion of shells along the beaches. specifically including the blue abalone, which he later used as biological tracers to demonstrate the possibility of a land passage from California, then thought by many to be an island, to the mainland of Mexico. [42]  
  
 Returning to the bay at the combined mouths of the rivers, Atondo wrote a careful description of the harbor on January 1, 1685. and named it La Bahía de Año Nuevo. [43] Today it is known as the Laguna de San <33> Gregorio. After measuring the latitude of the mouth of the estuary which he found to be twenty-five and a half degrees, Father Kino with the rest of the party began the return journey over the outgoing route. [44] Most of the trip was uneventful, but one of the armored horses fell into the Río Cadegomó and drowned; several other horses succumbed to exhaustion. The explorers reached San Bruno on January 13, 1685. [45]   
  
 Not long after their return, Atondo, who was disappointed at not reaching Magdalena Bay, some distance south of Bahía de Año Nuevo, went on another exploring expedition, accompanied this time by Father Goñi who had become expert in the Edu language, spoken to the south of San Bruno. [46] Journeying south along the east shore of the peninsula, <34> they searched for a pass over the Sierra La Giganta but found none. Although they travelled roughly 100 miles south of San Bruno. they found no way over the mountains and eventually turned back to San Bruno where they arrived on March 6, 1685.   
  
 Slightly more than two weeks later, the Capitana arrived at the isolated outpost, bringing badly needed supplies and the long hoped for pearl-divers. With its repeated crop failures. the colony was in a bad way. Several soldiers had died of scurvy, and many more were sick. At one roll call, when sixty-nine soldiers should have reported, only fifteen appeared. Thirty-nine were too sick to appear, and four were reported dead. After a long conference, it was decided to abandon San Bruno, at least temporarily. The sick were to be taken to the Yaqui missions for care. Admiral Atondo and Father Goñi were to take some of the able­ bodied men in the "Balandra" to hunt for pearls. Captain Guzman and Father Kino were to sail in the Capitana to look for a better mission site. On May 8, 1685, San Bruno was abandoned. [47]  
  
 In accord with previous plans, the sick were taken to the Yaqui missions on the mainland where most of them recovered. Admiral Atondo and Father Goñi hunted for pearls with little success - the total catch being "two ounces and two drachms." Captain Guzman and Father Kino explored the upper gulf visiting, among other places, Tiburon Island, then and now the home of the Seri people. In September, 1685, the two ships rejoined and sailed for Matanchel; both were badly in need of supplies. Promptly, Father Kino went to Guadalajara to arrange for further missionary efforts in California, and soon Admiral Atondo journeyed inland for the same purpose. Both achieved apparent success. Returning to Matanchel, the principals prepared for further missionary exploration, but suddenly they were diverted by orders from the viceroy, who dispatched them to sea to intercept the Manila galleon and warn it of pirates along the coast.   
  
 Leaving Matanchel on November 29, they intercepted the galleon a day later. Sailing out of sight of land, they convoyed the galleon to Acapulco, successfully evading the pirates, who were ashore raiding coastal settlements for provisions. [48] After this successful rescue, Kino and Atondo went to Mexico City where further plans for California were made. The needed funds were promised and seemed available. Then, troubles began. A revolt was threatening in Nueva Vizcaya which would require funds and soldiers. Spain urgently needed half a million pesos from Mexico to help pay a French indemnity. So the funds for California <35> were no longer available, and the carefully planned enterprise ground to a halt. No more efforts to colonize California were made for more than a decade. Father Kino was assigned to Sonora where he labored effectively, for the rest of his productive life. Admiral Atondo disappears from the field of our interest.   
  
 Although the Kino-Atondo expeditions did not achieve their planned objective - the founding of a permanent settlement in California - the work done by the party was of inestimable value to later workers there. Friendly relations were established with several tribes on the eastern side of Baja California; the vocabularies of the Cochimí language prepared by Father Kino and of the Monqui language prepared by Father Copart were of inestimable value to those who came later to the barren peninsula. The maps prepared by Father Kino and his developing ideas regarding an overland passage from the mainland of Mexico to California influenced geographical thinking and exploration plans for more than three-quarters of a century. [49] Thus, although the expedition might be rated a failure, it actually laid the foundations for later missionary successes and led to the eventual settlement of the California's, both Alta and Baja.   
  
 For slightly more than a decade the California mission field was entirely deserted because no funds or workers were available. The civil authorities had correctly determined that California, as then known, could not produce enough pearls, metals, or agricultural products to pay for its occupation. During this time Father Kino, who had now been assigned to the Pimería Alta, had founded several missions which became relatively prosperous. The surplus products of these missions, according to Father Kino's reasoning, could be used to help the conversion of California. In 1691, by order of the Father Provincial, Ambrosio Oddón, Father Juan María Salvatierra was sent from his mission at Chinipas to make an inspection of Pimería Alta where Father Kino was <36> working. During their travels together Father Kino "sold" Father Salvatierra on the need for reestablishing the California missionary effort, and thenceforth, despite years of apparently fruitless endeavors, both worked toward that end. In late 1696 and early 1697 plans were made for another California expedition to be financed by private gifts, as no funds were available from the royal treasury. Eventually these private gifts became the famous Pious Fund, which apparently started with the donation of one peso, but grew until it became the major support of the California missions.   
  
 At this time Kino and Salvatierra were joined by Father Juan de Ugarte, S.J., of whom we shall hear much more later. Soon, an agreement was worked out with the viceroy by which, so long as no public funds were spent, the Jesuits could make another attempt to colonize California, even to the extent of hiring their own soldiers (provided the Jesuits met the payroll). This agreement with only very minor changes prevailed throughout the Jesuit occupation of California, and, in general, worked very well. This lasting rapport between the Jesuits and the military may stem, in part, from the early military experience of St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order.   
  
 The viceroy's permission and agreement were dated February 5, 1697. The next day Father Salvatierra started for the west coast. En route he visited Father Juan Bautista Copart to obtain the information which he had collected during the Kino-Atondo expedition of the previous decade and the grammars of the Indian languages he so carefully prepared. While awaiting the arrival of ships, supplies, and Father Kino on the Sinaloa coast, Father Salvatierra made a quick trip inland to Chinipas, where he became involved in a minor Indian uprising. Returning to the west coast, he made contact with the ships, gathered supplies, recruited soldiers, and finally sailed from Yaqui on October 10. Father Kino, however, was not with him. Because of unsettled conditions in Sonora, he was ordered to remain there because his presence was" considered to be worth a thousand soldiers." In his place, another hard working and successful missionary, Father Francisco Maria Piccolo, S.J., was chosen. [50] <37>  
  
 The tiny expedition suffered the customary problems in attempting to cross the Gulf. Adverse winds blew the ships aground and created repeated delays. Finally, however, the miniscule fleet reached the eastern shore of the peninsula and undertook some limited coastal exploration. They visited the ruined site of Kino's mission San Bruno and then decided on going ashore at the Bay of San Dionisio, where they were greeted by Indians who had known Kino and Atondo. On October 19, 1697, they started clearing the mesa; animals and supplies were unloaded and a corral was built. Even an Indian attack was repulsed. Chief Dionisius, who was suffering from an apparent cancer, was instructed and baptized. Work was begun on the mission and camp of Loreto, which would later become the military and mission center of Baja California.   
  
 [Thereafter] California had experienced slow settlement, largely by Jesuit missionaries and the few soldiers who accompanied them. Settlement began in the southern part of the peninsula, now the State of Baja California Sur, and very slowly over the next three quarters of a century crept northward into what is now the State of California. Missionary activities in the arid and sterile peninsula of Baja California were constantly inhibited by lack of missionaries and soldiers, insufficient funds, shortages of all sorts of supplies and manufactured goods, and very serious transportation difficulties inherent to the use of sailing ships in an area of undependable or contrary winds. These conditions led Father Johann Jakob Baegert, S.J., of mission San Luis Gonzaga to comment that California ·"of all the countries of the globe is one of the poorest. "[36]   
  
 Because of the aridity and sterility of the peninsula of Baja California, the missions there were never economically self-sufficient and help from "outside" was needed during the entire mission period. Each mission had a garden which produced some fruit and vegetables, and a few also produced grain in good years. The area of the garden was determined by the amount of level land near the mission; the output of the garden was limited by the amount of irrigation water available. At some of the missions there was considerable crop" shrinkage" because of the "'taking ways" of the natives, who apparently learned what was good to eat rather rapidly, but assimilated the commandments much more slowly. The missions also had herds of livestock - horses, mules, cattle, sheep <26 photo> <27> and goats - which supplied some of the needed meat, leather, and wool. Because of poor forage and native depredations these herds were not as productive in Baja California as similar herds were in Sonora. Deficiencies of meat and grain were normally made up by generous donations from the relatively prosperous missions of Sonora. [37] Manufactured goods and comestibles not available from Sonora, such as chocolate, were purchased in Mexico and shipped by land and sea to Baja California. Payment for these goods was usually made through the Pious Fund, although few royal grants assisted in their shipping. [38] Transportation costs of goods purchased in Mexico commonly exceeded the purchase price, and many cargoes destined for the missions were lost at sea or spoiled in transit. In consequence, Baja California prices were more than double those on the mainland.   
  
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