

*How did the many victories of General Bernadrdo de Gálvez impact our lives, with particular emphasis on the Battle of Pensacola?*

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## **1. The Cry For Help**

As the fire of the American Revolution was burning, Americans needed every advantage they could muster against the British Empire. In April 1777, George Morgan, the commander at Pittburgh's Fort Pitt, sent a ship down the Mississippi River to New Orleans in order to offer trade in exchange for military aid to the governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez.<sup>1</sup> However, Gálvez did not desire to get involved with foreign rebellions, yet the Continental Army received boats filled with weapons and ammunition. This was due to the longstanding rivalry between England and Spain in which Gálvez hoped to exploit and undermine the British as much as possible. The strength of the American Continental Army was no match for the might of the British Empire but the Americans were able to secure allies not from sympathy for their cause but for the sheer hatred against the British Royal Empire. The cry for help to not only Spain but also to France and the Netherlands allowed the Americans to secure crucial supplies that led them to the gates of victory and government freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Trickey, Erick, *The Little-Remembered Ally Who Helped America Win the Revolution*, (Smithsonian Magazine, 13 January 2017).

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## **2. Early Life Military Career of Bernardo de Gálvez**

On July 23, 1746 Gálvez was born to a humble family in the small village of Macharaviaya in Southern Spain<sup>2</sup>. Gálvez was influenced by the military careers of his father and uncles who served as a general stationed in Central America and a royal minister, respectively.<sup>3</sup> The military career of Gálvez started when he was 16 as he entered the Spanish Royal Army just as the Seven Years' War began. Gálvez's experience in the Seven Years' War was soon followed by his appointment as volunteer Captain of Lope de Cuellar in the campaigns against the Apaches in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Bernardo secured his first military victory after crossing the Pecos River and attacking an Apache Village.<sup>5</sup> The bravery of Gálvez became famous amongst the men of the Apache campaign yet it was not enough to save him from being wounded multiple times. Even though it was his first encounter with an enemy Gálvez was able to internalize the analysis of the Apache warriors. He coveted their swift attack methods that were based on detailed reconnaissance that gave them the confidence that they would be able to deliver an effective attack.<sup>6</sup> The field experience he gained from his first campaign not only gave Gálvez respect but gave him crucial military knowledge that would aid him in future engagements, especially the Battle of Pensacola. Gálvez's respected military career allowed him to be appointed as the governor of Louisiana on September 19, 1776.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Saravia, Gonzalo, *Bernardo de Galvez Spanish Hero of the American Revolution*, (The University of North Carolina Press 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Erick, *The Little-Remembered Ally Who Helped America Win the Revolution*.

<sup>4</sup> Gonzalo, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalo 44.

<sup>6</sup> Gonzalo 59.

<sup>7</sup> Gonzalo 60.

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### **3. The Battle of Pensacola**

Gálvez made his military experience known as he led multiple campaigns along the Gulf Coast in order to conquer all controlled land along the Gulf Coast. The victories at Baton Rouge, and Mobile struck fear into the British forces at the only occupied city along the Gulf Coast: Pensacola. The campaigns allowed Gálvez to ship weapons and ammunition, via the Mississippi and St. Louis Rivers to the Continental Army. These supplies provided the needed aid for the Army, yet the biggest aid came with weakening the British forces by making them fight on multiple fronts. The British generals were forced to decide which colonies they desired to defend because they were unable to fully defend against both the Spanish and Continental Army. The principal fortification of Pensacola was Fort George, which is located in front of the now First Baptist Church. British General John Campbell was in command of Pensacola and he requested reinforcements because he knew the importance of Pensacola's deep water ports. Gálvez's initial invasion force of sixty four ships and 4,000 men was thwarted by a hurricane but was quickly replaced by an invasion force of 1,300 men.<sup>8</sup> On March 9, 1781 Gálvez's forces landed on Santa Rosa Island. After the island was secured the fleet moved into Pensacola Bay and Gálvez made sure that proper precautions were taken in order to avoid civilian casualties. Gálvez was now reinforced with over 2,000 men and was ready to march on the British fort but their advancement was slowed due to the harsh and swampy terrain.<sup>9</sup> Gálvez ordered the construction of batteries in order to force the British into submission. On the morning of May 8, 1781 the fierce shelling had caused the munitions magazine to explode in Fort George, which forced General John Campbell

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<sup>8</sup> Parks, Virginia, *Siege! Spain and Britain: Battle of Pensacola March 9 - May 8, 1781*, (Pensacola Historical Society 1981) p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Parks 61.

*How did the many victories of General Bernadrdo de Gálvez impact our lives, with particular emphasis on the Battle of Pensacola?*

to surrender his forces at Pensacola.<sup>10</sup> Gálvez had finally seized all territory along the Gulf Coast for Spain. Gálvez allowed the British forces to peacefully leave West Florida and even told British civilians that they were welcome to stay as long as they swore allegiance to the Spanish king.<sup>11</sup> Gálvez divided the British forces so much that just five months after his victory the Continental Army forced General Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown, allowing American independence.

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<sup>10</sup> Parks 63.

<sup>11</sup> Parks 64.

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### **3. The Lasting Impact of the Battle of Pensacola**

Even though no Americans were involved in the Battle of Pensacola, it still had a major impact on the result of the Revolutionary War. Without Gálvez diverging attention away from the Continental Army the results of the war could have been much different. After Gálvez secured Pensacola, he along with his military force had no desire to stay and sailed back to Havana or Louisiana. Many American citizens moved to West and East Florida. Some residents are even able to trace their ancestors back to Gálvez's invasion as they were some of the original citizens of Pensacola. The conquest of power in Pensacola is an example of the rich history of perseverance that defines the city. The city of Pensacola indulges in their history as it is known as the "City of Five Flags." The history of Pensacola is far from forgotten as many monuments have been erected such as the statue of Gálvez on Palafox street along with the historical site of Fort George. Pensacola serves as an example of the importance of embracing history because it allows us to learn about the trials that have occurred in order for us to live our lives today.

## Bibliography

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