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## “To Stop Captain Merry”<sup>1</sup>

SPANISH EFFORTS TO INTERCEPT LEWIS AND CLARK

*John L. Kessell*

**A**lthough long a widower and reportedly somewhat slovenly in his dress, the august and learned third president of the United States bespoke confidence. This late fall day in 1802, Thomas Jefferson had invited Spain’s minister to the United States, the marqués de Casa Yrujo (who previously had found Jefferson a cook), to the President’s House at Washington. The two men sparred amiably. Then, with feigned nonchalance, Jefferson asked his guest a question. Would his majesty King Carlos take offense if the United States sent a small caravan of travelers to explore the course of the Missouri River with “no other view than the advancement of the geography?”

Yes, as a matter of fact, he would, replied the marqués. But why on earth, Jefferson wanted to know. The Spaniard did not flinch. He lectured the president about the folly of searching further for the fabled Northwest Passage “sought with so much anxiety by the most famous navigators of all the nations in the last two centuries.” Later, reporting the exchange to Madrid, Casa Yrujo confided, “The President has been all his life a man of letters,

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very speculative and a lover of glory, and it would be possible he might attempt to perpetuate the fame of his administration . . . by discovering . . . the way by which the Americans may some day extend their population and their influence up to the coasts of the South Sea [the Pacific].” Jefferson had not mentioned that he and his private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, anticipating a congressional appropriation, had already calculated the costs of such an expedition.<sup>2</sup>

For at least twenty years, Thomas Jefferson had visualized a route, by divine providence a waterway, across western North America to the Pacific. But European affairs seemed always to intrude. Most recently, in 1801, Napoleon had quietly bullied Spain into ceding Louisiana back to France. The rumors alarmed Jefferson. The United States wanted the vast, unmapped territory to reside in Spain’s relatively weak domain, rather than pass to France, or be wrested away by Great Britain. In the vague hope that the United States might buy at least New Orleans, the president dispatched James Monroe to Paris. He then sent a confidential request to Congress, justifying Captain Lewis’s mission in commercial terms. Jefferson also managed to obtain passports from the British and French ministers, but not from the marqués de Casa Yrujo. To Lewis the president told a half-truth: all three governments had been duly informed of his expedition and “such assurances given them as to it’s objects, as we trust will satisfy them.”<sup>3</sup>

With jarring clairvoyance, Spaniards had anticipated Jefferson. Fully fifteen years earlier, in 1788, the viceroy of New Spain, Manuel Antonio Flores, foresaw Lewis and Clark. The Americans, he believed, already lusted for a port on the Pacific. To make that happen, the United States, in Flores’s words, would “try to sustain it [the port] by crossing the immense land of this continent above our possessions of Texas, New Mexico, and the Californias . . . and, in truth, it [the United States] would obtain the richest trade of Great China and India if it were to succeed in establishing a colony on the west coasts of America.”<sup>4</sup>

When weather, yellow fever, and slave revolts in the Caribbean dashed Napoleon’s dream of restoring French dominion in North America, he offered suddenly to sell not only New Orleans but all of Louisiana, lower and upper, extending north beyond St. Louis and westward from the Mississippi to who knew how far. Jefferson leapt at the chance. Before Lewis departed Washington in midsummer 1803, he knew of the startling deal. The Spanish governor at St. Louis wanted confirmation. Until word arrived from New

Orleans, he advised Lewis and party to remain on the American side of the Mississippi.

In early October 1803, an overly anxious Lewis had written Jefferson about a harebrained plan that must have shaken the president's confidence in his young protégé. Instead of wasting time in camp on the Mississippi, Lewis reckoned he would "make a tour this winter on horseback of some hundred miles through the most interesting portion of the country adjoining my winter establishment; perhaps it may be up the Canceze [Kansas] River and towards Santafee." He only wanted to help. He thought an eye-opening preview of western lands might silence congressional opponents of the expedition. Not until January 1804 did Lewis receive Jefferson's stern veto. "The object of your mission," the president scolded his captain, "is single, the direct water communication from sea to sea formed by the bed of the Missouri & perhaps the Oregon."<sup>5</sup>

The Missouri River, or Big Muddy, twenty-four hundred miles long, courses a greater distance than the Mississippi, into which it flows just above St. Louis. Only partially traced on maps of Jefferson's time, the river emerged out of the blank reaches of the northern Great Plains. Today, one can follow its bold sweep upriver west across Missouri, then northwest to clip Kansas, form the Nebraska-Iowa boundary, cut South Dakota in two, define a quarter of North Dakota, and finally straighten out west again across Montana to the base of the Rocky Mountains, about which Lewis and Clark had not a clue. The American president wished to know what marvels of nature lay along the river's vast drainage and beyond. Spanish claims be damned.

Already in 1804, a spy at New Orleans not only confirmed to Spanish authorities what Jefferson was up to, but also suggested what they should do about it. James Wilkinson, commanding U.S. general in the West, who at the same time collected pay from Spain as secret Agent 13, admonished the Spaniards that "An express ought immediately to be sent to the governor of Santa Fé, and another to the captain-general of Chihuahua [Chihuahua], in order that they may detach a sufficient body of chasseurs [light cavalry] to intercept Captain Lewis and his party, who are on the Missouri River, and force them to retire or take them prisoners."<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Within the mud-built walls of Santa Fe's Palace of the Governors—some two thousand miles west and a little south of the Americans' as yet unloved capital on the Potomac—don Fernando de Chacón, Spain's ailing governor of New

Mexico, pondered his response. The dispatch from Com. Gen. Nemesio Salcedo, dated 3 May 1804, in Chihuahua, enclosed an urgent warning from New Orleans. Spain's agent for the transfer of Louisiana had events backward. He believed, incorrectly, that Jefferson had hastily planned Captain Lewis's trespass only after the U.S. purchase of Louisiana. "This step," he advised, "on the part of the United States at the same time that it took possession of the province of Louisiana; its haste to instruct itself and to explore the course of the Missouri whose origin they claim belongs to them, extending their designs as far as the South Sea [Pacific], forces us necessarily to become active and hasten . . . to cut off the gigantic steps of our neighbors . . . to arrest Captain Merry Weather and his party, which cannot help but pass through the [Native] nations neighboring New Mexico, its presidios or *rancherías*."<sup>77</sup>

Distance and poor judgment favored Lewis. Commandant General Salcedo, an intense, middle-sized man of stern countenance, knew he would be blamed. Salcedo's domain, the thinly inhabited Eastern Internal Provinces, sprawled from the Gulf of Mexico to the Rocky Mountains, four times bigger than present-day Texas. First, he reprimanded the New Orleans agent, who should never have sent his warning cross-country to Chihuahua. Conveying the message through Havana to Vera Cruz by sea and north by courier on the Camino Real would have been faster. Refusing to reshuffle priorities, the commandant general next ordered New Mexico's governor to carry on his military operations against warring Navajos.

As for "Captain Merry," Salcedo wanted Chacón to arrange with Comanche and other Indian allies for a Spanish party to reconnoiter eastward as far as the Missouri's near bank. The Indians would be well compensated for any useful information they provided. If veteran scout Pedro Vial would care to join the enterprise and keep a diary, so much the better. In sum, wrote Salcedo, "Nothing would be more useful than the apprehension of Merry, and even though I realize it is not an easy undertaking, chance might proportion things in such a way that it might be successful."

Now time and chance conspired. Governor Chacón decided on a gambit. He would wait and see what Indians friendly to Spain had to



SIGNATURE OF  
FERNANDO DE  
CHACÓN

say, which took the rest of May and all of June and July 1804. If he learned nothing that way, which evidently he did not, then he would organize a reconnaissance as far as the Missouri. So as not to arouse Lewis's suspicions, the Spanish party would set out under guise of searching for a fabled hill of gold in Comanche country.<sup>9</sup>

A few years earlier, Salcedo's predecessor as commandant general had disapproved of certain footloose, unattached frontiersmen who kept company with Indians, "since," in his words, "this class of wandering men love greatly the opportunity that facilitates their living among the barbarians in order to give free rein to their passions."<sup>10</sup> European morality aside, these were the very men Spain relied on to gather information about or confront Jefferson's Corps of Discovery. For that matter, Lewis and Clark's voyageurs fit the same mold. Pedro Vial, a Frenchman by birth, and thus always suspect in Spanish eyes, knew the Native peoples and trails of middle North America better than any man alive. His junior partner in the search for Merry possessed another valuable if rusty skill. He spoke English. José Jarvet had shed among Indians his Philadelphia Presbyterian upbringing and surname (perhaps Harvey) and boasted at least one Pawnee son.

Trailing north from Santa Fe, Vial, Jarvet, and soldiers from the local garrison, or presidio, added militiamen and Pueblo Indians at Taos until their party numbered fifty-two, almost precisely the size of Lewis's company at the time. It was early August 1804. Ten weeks prior, on 21 May, Lewis, his trusted co-commander Lt. William Clark, and a dozen soldiers, along with assorted hunters, boatmen, and interpreters, had pushed off from St. Charles near the mouth of the Missouri in a custom-built, cumbersome, fifty-five-foot keel boat and two pirogues.

No one worried much about Spaniards. On 3 August, Clark noted in his journal what an interpreter had told him, "that it will take a man 25 Days to go to St. a fee [Santa Fe] pass, the heads of Arkansas, round the Kansas head, across Some mountains from the top of which the City may be Seen." Spaniards had invited Indians from the Missouri to trade with them, and some Frenchmen and a few Pawnees had gone to Santa Fe that summer.<sup>11</sup> Rowing, poling, hauling, and occasionally sailing against the mighty Missouri's five-mile-an-hour current, the Americans had ascended well beyond the entry of the Platte River. They had covered over seven hundred miles.

The New Mexicans moved faster. On land they struck northeast, river hopping from the Purgatoire to the Arkansas to the Río Chato, or Platte. The first week in September, Pawnees feted them at a village in today's

south-central Nebraska, seven hundred miles from Santa Fe. There, Vial conversed with “about twenty Frenchmen” who verified that Americans had taken possession of Louisiana. Traders in American employ, loaded with gifts for the Indians of the upper Missouri, had passed by. Worse, these interlopers were urging chiefs to surrender Spanish peace medals and all other ties with Spain. “I have charged the aforementioned chiefs of the country,” wrote Vial in his diary, “not to give up the medals or patents, telling them they still do not know the Americans but in the future they will.”<sup>12</sup>

Had the Frenchmen’s intelligence been clearer to Vial, he and his men might have spurred north for two days and overtaken the waterborne Captain Lewis. Instead, while Vial addressed Pawnee and Oto principal men gathered in a council house on 15 September 1804, Lewis, perhaps 150 miles away, marveled at the fleetness of the white-tailed jackrabbit, a new species to him, whose leaps he measured the day before at twenty-one feet. A few days later, farther up the Missouri, Clark noted that Indians displayed the “Flags of Spane & the one we gave them yesterday.” Vial, in the name of Governor Chacón, presented the Pawnee head chief a Spanish uniform with long coat and three-cornered hat, but he learned nothing to confirm the presence of Lewis and Clark. To cement further relations with the Pawnees, who had refused American medals and flags, Vial and Jarvet escorted another chief and eleven of his men back to Santa Fe, where all arrived on 5 November. Chacón forthwith presented the Pawnee leader with “gifts of clothing, a horse, rifle, powder, bullets, and a medal bearing the royal bust.”<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in Spain, Jefferson’s emissary James Monroe offended the Spanish court. He proposed as the western boundary of Louisiana the Rio Grande all the way to its source in present-day southern Colorado. If Spanish ministers studied an available, up-to-date 1802 map of North America, they would have recognized that Monroe’s “ambitious and exorbitant” claim would place New Mexico’s capital in American territory. The resulting royal order set off a second probe for Lewis and Clark.

A younger man would take responsibility. In late March 1805, Fernando de Chacón surrendered the governorship of New Mexico to no-nonsense Lt. Col. Joaquín del Real Alencaster. The new governor, attempting to rein in semi-legal intercourse of New Mexicans with surrounding heathen Indians, barely averted a rebellion. At the same time, he planned the next sally “to acquire news and knowledge of the state of Captain Merri’s expedition.”<sup>14</sup>

In mid-August 1805, Joseph Whitehouse with Lewis and Clark in present-day Beaverhead County, Montana, understood Shoshones to say that Span-

iards had a settlement only eight days south, “but that they have very little trade with them.” Yet the men noticed horses with Spanish brands, mules obtained from Spaniards, a Spanish bridle, and “sundry other articles.” The Indians informed Lewis, who had spent the day smoking with them, “that they could pass to the Spaniards by way of the yellowstone river in 10 days.” They were not friends, however, since Spaniards forbade them to have guns or ammunition.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the distance, real or imagined, Commandant General Salcedo’s mistaken geographical notion that the Missouri bent menacingly southward toward New Mexico lent urgency to his instructions. Governor Real Alencaster must make every effort to cement relations with the Pawnees and other Indian nations, inviting their chiefs every year to Santa Fe for gifts and imbuing them with “a horror” of Englishmen and Americans. Thus, reasoned Salcedo, “when Captain Merri’s expedition returns . . . they will intercept it, apprehending its members,” and thereby eliminate the need to station Spanish troops on the Missouri. The Indians should be encouraged, at the very least, to take from the Americans any strong boxes and papers they might be carrying. That vision would have sent shudders down Jefferson’s spine.

Despite Real Alencaster’s detailed instructions, the second Vial-Jarvet party came to sudden grief. About one hundred strong, the New Mexicans had camped on 5 November 1805, near the junction of the Purgatoire and Arkansas rivers in southeastern Colorado. Accompanying them were several foreigners, including trappers Baptiste LaLande and Laurent Durocher and American carpenter James Purcell, whom the governor had dispatched to St. Charles to spy on Americans. Signs were everywhere of numerous unidentified Indians. Vial put the camp on alert.

At midnight on the sixth, the unknown assailants attacked, using firearms, not bows, and yelling in a language no one recognized. They went straight for the New Mexicans’ horses. While the defenders scattered in the dark to recover their animals three different times, the attackers pillaged the encampment, getting away with most of the supplies and gifts. After three hours of fighting, “we rushed them,” wrote Vial, “until they were thrown into the river, shrieking, from which it is thought some harm was done them.” But they came again, on foot and on horseback. Fully dressed in white, red; and blue with cloths tied on their heads, the unrecognized enemy harassed the retreating column for seven or eight miles, before finally

breaking off and disappearing. Back in Santa Fe, Vial recommended a Spanish fort on the Arkansas, and Governor Real Alencaster saw in the aborted mission the evil hand of the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Half a continent to the northwest, on the very day the second Spanish counter-expedition began its retreat from the junction of the Purgatoire and Arkansas—7 November 1805—the fog was burning off over the lower Columbia River. As Lewis and Clark’s men put full strength of their arms and backs into paddling canoes that raced with the river’s current, a distant sight met their eyes. “Great joy . . . we are in *View of the Ocean*,” proclaimed William Clark. No matter that it was really the Columbia estuary; they had spanned the Trans-Mississippi West. Despite the damp and tedious winter that lay before them in camp near present-day Astoria, Oregon, and a return who knew how, they had justified their president’s faith.<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Neither Jefferson nor Real Alencaster knew where Lewis and Clark were. No one in the civilized world did. Spain’s two bootless attempts to gain intelligence about or an encounter with the outbound Americans did not, however, discourage further efforts. To stop Captain Merry would demonstrate to the Indian nations of the Great Plains that Spaniards were capable of policing the territories they claimed. Governor Real Alencaster, through Vial, Jarvet, and others, reminded Indian leaders that Spaniards as allies did not covet their lands, but Americans did. From Mexico City he ordered better quality medals and silver-headed canes, “similar to the medals and walking canes that the Americans have started to give them.” The Kiowas, for example, did not much like the Spanish medals they received. “They want large and better engraved ones. . . . and to regale them I need more and finer things,” the Spanish governor pleaded.<sup>1</sup>

He also asked for more troops, both to impress Spain’s Native allies and to punish hostile bands. Moreover, salaried interpreter-agents should be sent out to live with the Pawnees and other nations of the plains. A Spanish fort on the Arkansas, Pedro Vial’s suggestion, also would help keep the Indians within Spain’s sphere of trade and influence. Finally, Governor Real Alencaster himself stood ready to lead an expedition upon Salcedo’s approval. Unwilling to wait for the commandant general’s reply, Real Alencaster sent Vial and Jarvet out again in April 1806, this time with three hundred men. Most were poor militiamen from La Cañada and Taos, just the sort

who resented the governor's strict rule. Besides, it was time for planting. Not far from home, they mutinied, deserting and streaming back to their villages. Disgusted, Salcedo approved Real Alencaster's discipline of conducting every tenth deserter to Santa Fe for trial.<sup>19</sup>

The same day the commandant general wrote from Chihuahua, 18 July 1806, the returning Captain Lewis and a small exploring party rode toward the Marias River beside vast, lumbering herds of buffalo in present-day northern Montana. "The musketoes," Lewis had complained three days earlier, "continue to infest us in such manner that we can scarcely exist . . . my dog even howls with the torture he experiences from them."<sup>20</sup>

Never were mosquitos that bad in Santa Fe. Still, there was enough to complain about, especially through the eyes of a decorated, high-born Spanish career officer. They called this a capital? Most New Mexicans, so far as he could determine, lived in squalor like savages. Yet Salcedo had finally heeded Governor Real Alencaster's petitions, dispatching to Santa Fe in April 1806 Lt. Facundo Melgares and sixty Spanish dragoons. Short and thickly built, the thirty-year-old Melgares swaggered by nature. He had an uncle on the high court of New Spain, and his father-in-law served as the commandant general's adjutant.<sup>21</sup>

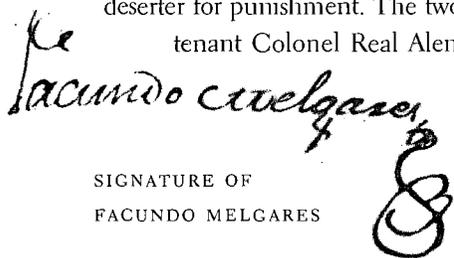
Melgares was present in May when the humiliated Pedro Vial and José Jarvet appeared before the governor to report on their third failed mission. Perhaps it was the Spanish lieutenant who suggested rounding up every tenth

deserter for punishment. The two professional military men, Lieut-

enant Colonel Real Alencaster and Lieutenant Melgares,

conferred earnestly about the next expedition, intending to mount a genuine show of force to awe Spain's Native allies. The two appeared together about town in the governor's carriage.

*Facundo Melgares*



SIGNATURE OF  
FACUNDO MELGARES

Billeting sixty dragoons in Santa Fe, with its population of just over five thousand, surely resulted in social excitement and endless fandangos. Always the bon vivant, Melgares took the lead.

The lieutenant had brought with him a communiqué from Salcedo to Governor Real Alencaster, along with relevant earlier correspondence copied at Chihuahua on 12 April 1806. The American president, unmoved by formal protests from Spain, simply insisted on violating Spanish sovereignty under the guise of scientific exploration. A letter of the previous July from

the Spanish agent in New Orleans to the minister of state in Madrid lamented the unsuccessful efforts to halt the Missouri River exploration “under command of Captain Lewis Merry Whether, who already has made several shipments of plants, rocks, fossils, skins, and other curiosities of natural history, which are at present in possession of the Governor of this territory [Louisiana] to be sent opportunely to the President with another lot of live animals and birds that are to arrive within a few days.”<sup>22</sup>

Of more immediate concern, however, was Jefferson’s Red River probe, organized by William Dunbar and led by surveyor Thomas Freeman and botanist Peter Custis. Entering from the Mississippi in present-day Louisiana, they would travel up the Red, trending northwesterly along today’s boundary between Oklahoma and Texas, cross the latter’s panhandle, and threaten New Mexico. That, Salcedo argued, should not be permitted. Hence, Melgares’s expedition must first cross the plains to the southeast, descend the Red, and with any luck arrest or turn back the Freeman-Custis party before proceeding north to the Arkansas and from there to the Pawnees.

Earlier in 1806, Manuel Godoy, the power behind the throne in Madrid, had reprimanded Salcedo regarding Lewis and Clark. The king wished to know why he had not been kept informed of the expedition’s progress. “Likewise,” wrote Godoy, “His Majesty desires to know how the said expedition has been permitted in territory of his domains, since it is well known that its designs should cause suspicion even though disguised with the appearance of being purely scientific.”<sup>23</sup>

Melgares’s impressive command—105 soldiers, dragoons and presidials; 400 New Mexican militiamen, and 100 Indian allies—would depart Santa Fe on 15 June 1806. Vial and Jarvet, despite their recent disgrace, likely went along as scouts. Lieutenant Melgares petitioned the governor to name Franciscan missionary José Pereyro chaplain, proffering a mule to carry the friar’s religious paraphernalia and provisions.<sup>24</sup>

Toward the end of July, another Spanish force operating out of Nacogdoches in east Texas did intercept and block Freeman and Custis, who had ascended the Red River more than six hundred miles. The long column from New Mexico, evidently pressed hard by Melgares, had already veered north for the Arkansas River.

If we are to believe the subsequent account of Lt. Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who was taken into Spanish custody the following year, Melgares had faced down a mutiny. Weakened by short rations and exhaustion, someone dared question the Spanish lieutenant. Where was the expedition going?

“To this he haughtily replied, ‘wherever his horse led him.’” Presented a few days later with a petition to return home, allegedly bearing the signatures or marks of two hundred New Mexican militiamen, Melgares exploded. “He halted immediately,” wrote Pike, “and caused his dragoons to erect a gallows; then beat to arms. The troops fell in: he separated the *petitioners* from the others, then took the man who had presented the petition, tied him up, and gave him 50 lashes, and threatened to put to death, on the gallows erected, any man who should dare to grumble. This effectually silenced them.”<sup>25</sup>

Pike liked Lieutenant Melgares, a true royalist, gallant, gracious, and generous to his own kind. As fellow officers, the two dined together in 1807, drank, and admired the comely women of New Mexico and Chihuahua, conversing eagerly in a mix of French and Spanish. Although Melgares’s high style of travel offended Pike’s Protestant sensibilities, the American could not help marveling. The Spanish lieutenant’s “mode of living, was superior to any thing we have an idea of in our army; having eight mules loaded with his common camp equipage, wines, confectionary, &c.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1806, however, before he had met Lieutenant Melgares and become his apologist, Pike had cast the Spaniard’s summer expedition of that year in a somewhat different light. About 1 August, Melgares had ordered more than two hundred of his men to make camp on the Arkansas, evidently because Indians had stolen their reserve horses and mules. The rest, with or without Melgares, kept going, arriving late that month or early in September at the Pawnees’ principal village on the south bank of the Republican River in extreme south-central Nebraska.



At the same time, on the near bank of the Missouri River, three hundred miles to the east, a group of riders was forming. Twenty-seven-year-old Lieutenant Pike commanded the company, his “Dam’d set of Rascels.” A protégé of double-dealing Gen. James Wilkinson,

ZEBULON MONTGOMERY PIKE

*Painting by Charles Wilson Peale  
(Courtesy Independence National  
Historical Park)*

Pike had reconnoitered the upper Mississippi in 1805. Now, Wilkinson had instructed him to convey some Osage and Pawnee Indians home, help make peace between Kansas and Osages, perhaps contact Comanches, and explore the Arkansas and Red rivers—in short, do a bit of spying.<sup>27</sup>

Pike arrived at the same Pawnee village three or four weeks after Melgares's troops had left, reporting to U.S. secretary of war Henry Dearborn and to Wilkinson that the Pawnees displayed both Spanish and American flags. The Spanish commander, Pike told Dearborn, had remained on the Arkansas with the main body of his force. A lesser official, perhaps an ensign, had presented the Pawnees with documents of alliance issued in Santa Fe on 15 June 1806 and signed by Real Alencaster. These, the Indians had shown to Pike. "The chief further informed me, that the officer who commanded said party, was too young to hold councils, &c. . . . but that in the spring his superior would be here, and teach the Indians what was good for them." The Indians, who estimated the Spanish force at three hundred, informed Pike that the Spaniards had mustaches and whiskers, drums, and all the weapons of regular infantry and cavalry. Addressing Wilkinson, Pike presumed that the general would "be struck with some surprize, to perceive that so large a party of Spanish troops have been so lately in our territory."<sup>28</sup>

From the Pawnee village to where the Platte empties into the Missouri is, by the crow's flight, just over 150 miles. Lewis and Clark, anxiously en route home, had passed that place on 9 September 1806, likely while the Pawnees still entertained Melgares's bearded Spaniards. The next day, the returning Corps of Discovery learned from water-bound traders that Lieutenant Pike had set out from St. Louis to explore the Arkansas and Red rivers. Pike later claimed that the Melgares expedition had wanted to press on eastward, but the Pawnees had discouraged them.

As the tired and dispirited force from New Mexico retreated to Santa Fe, Captain Lewis recognized an old army buddy on a boat headed up the Missouri. John McClallen was full of a trading scheme to ascend the Platte, strike overland for Santa Fe, and cash in on the gold and silver he imagined awaited him there. Besides bluster, McClallen also made free with chocolate, whiskey, and news.

He told Lewis that Americans were worried. The president's Corps of Discovery had been gone more than two years. In the words of member John Ordway, "Mr. McLanen informed us that the people in general in the United States were concerned about us as they had heard that we were all killed then again they heard that the Spanyards had us in the mines &c."<sup>29</sup>

Despite the boisterous folks of St. Louis who swarmed the returning heroes, Lewis found time to write to President Jefferson later the same day, 23 September 1806. "It is with pleasure that I announce to you the safe arrival of myself and party at 12 Oclk. today at this place with our papers and baggage." Exhilarated, he poured forth a grand plan to harvest the inexhaustible beaver and otter furs of the upper Missouri and Columbia drainages and ship them from the Columbia's mouth direct to Canton in China. That would cut out the British, who were required by mercantile law to consign their furs first to London then transship them around Africa to China. Spanish objections to an American presence at the mouth of the Columbia seemed not to concern Meriwether Lewis.<sup>30</sup>

In Philadelphia, the *marqués de Casa Yrujo*, still Spain's minister to the United States, cursed news of the Americans' success. He reminded Madrid of his warning three years earlier. Yet, not all was lost. The outrageous trespass of Lewis and Clark on Spanish territory, Casa Yrujo believed, "will not immediately provide this government with any other advantages than the glory of having accomplished it." Spain must defend the mouth of the Columbia and "pluck the fruit from their discoveries," reserving for Spanish interests the precious China trade. Portly King Carlos, whose court never could envision the endless expanse of North America, chided those New World officials who had failed to stop Captain Merry, adding, "and they are ordered anew to do so if, as expected, the United States repeats the exploration."<sup>31</sup>

But the genie was out of the bottle. Thomas Jefferson already visualized an American West stretching to the Pacific.

## Notes

1. Nemesio Salcedo to Joaquín Real Alencaster, Chihuahua, 11 February 1806, Twitchell doc. 1967, Spanish Archives of New Mexico II, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives [hereafter doc. T-number, SANM II]. This document is partially translated in Noel M. Loomis and Abraham P. Nasatir, *Pedro Vial and the Roads to Santa Fe* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 202–3.
2. Casa Yrujo to Pedro Cevallos, Washington, 2 December 1802, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, 2 vols., 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 1:4–6. Jackson acknowledges his use of translations from A[braham]. P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785–1804*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952).

By far the most complete coverage to date of Spain's unsuccessful effort to thwart Lewis and Clark appears in Warren L. Cook's masterful *Flood Tide of Empire*:

*Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543–1819*, Yale Western Americana Series (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), 446–90, wherein he comments, “Closer examination of the extant documentation suggests . . . that the Spanish made repeated efforts of considerable magnitude to intercept Lewis and Clark, and came surprisingly and dangerously close to achieving their objective” (pp. 460–61 n. 72). See also Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 77–78, 344–45.

3. Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis, Washington, 20 June 1803, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 1:61. Irregular spelling and grammar in English quotations have been retained without inserting [sic].
4. Flores quoted in Cook, *Flood Tide*, 130.
5. Lewis to Jefferson, Cincinnati, 3 October 1803, and Jefferson to Lewis, Washington, 16 November 1803, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 1:131, 137.
6. James Wilkinson’s Reflections on Louisiana, New Orleans, March 1804, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 2:686. In a note, Jackson lends cautious credence to Warren L. Cook’s treatment of Spanish efforts to counter Lewis and Clark.
7. Marqués de Casa Calvo to Nemesio Salcedo, New Orleans, 5 March 1804, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 1:185.
8. Salcedo to Fernando de Chacón, Chihuahua, 3 May 1804, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 1:187–88; and Donald Jackson, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike with Letters and Related Documents*, 2 vols., The American Exploration and Travel Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 1:412–13.
9. Chacón to Salcedo, Santa Fe, 16 May 1804, doc. T-1730, SANM II. For the belated search for a Cerro de Oro, see John L. Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown: The Pecos Indians and New Mexico, 1540–1840* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1979), 430–33.
10. Pedro de Nava to the Duke of Alcudia, Chihuahua, 3 November 1795, quoted in Cook, *Flood Tide*, 462 n. 77.
11. Gary Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 13 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983–2001), 2:439. After making the trip from Santa Fe to St. Louis in 1792, Vial reckoned the distance, if unimpeded by Indian hostility, at twenty-five days. Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial*, 390.
12. Vial quoted in Cook, *Flood Tide*, 463. Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial*, 423 n. 4, had not located Vial’s diary of this trip, but Cook subsequently found it in Spain’s Archivo General de Indias (Audiencia de Guadalajara 398).
13. Cook, *Flood Tide*, 464; Moulton, *Journals*, 3:73, 116; and Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 166.
14. Cook, *Flood Tide*, 460, 465–70 (Real Alencaster quotation is on p. 467); Isidoro de Antillón’s 1802 map, “La América Septentrional,” in *Flood Tide*, end pocket; and Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown*, 434–35.

15. Moulton, *Journals*, 5:91, 92; 11:273, 275. Participant John Ordway also recorded the distance as eight days. Moulton, *Journals*, 9:205.
16. Cook, *Flood Tide*, 465–70. Real Alencaster's instructions, Vial's diary, and related correspondence are translated in Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial*, 428–40. Jackson, ed., *Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 2:109–10 n. 2, 377 n. 2, surmises that the attackers may have been a Skidi Pawnee war party, even though Vial had excused Pawnees because they did not battle on horseback.
17. Moulton, *Journals*, 6:33; and Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 310.
18. Real Alencaster quoted in Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial*, 429.
19. Salcedo to Real Alencaster, Chihuahua, 18 July 1806, doc. T-2001, SANM II; Cook, *Flood Tide*, 470–72; and Loomis and Nasatir, *Pedro Vial*, 447. No diary of the aborted mission is known by scholars to exist.
20. Moulton, *Journals*, 8:110; and Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 385.
21. Arthur Gómez, "Royalist in Transition: Facundo Melgares, the Last Spanish Governor of New Mexico, 1818–1822," *New Mexico Historical Review* 68 (October 1993): 372. Eyewitness Thomas James, recalling his visit to Santa Fe in the winter of 1821–1822, derided Governor Melgares and the New Mexico militia: "He was five feet high, nearly as thick as he was long, and as he waddled from one end of the line to the other I thought of Alexander and Hannibal and Caesar, and how their glories would soon be eclipsed by this hero of Santa Fe." See Thomas James, *Three Years among the Indians and Mexicans*, Keystone Western Americana Series (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), 95.
22. Casa Calvo to Pedro Cevallos, New Orleans, 18 July 1805, doc. T-1856, SANM II.
23. Godoy quoted in Cook, *Flood Tide*, 475 n. 106.
24. The governor mentioned a diary and his instructions to Melgares in a letter of transmittal, but neither has been located by scholars. Real Alencaster to Salcedo, Santa Fe, 8 October 1806, doc. T-2022, SANM II; Melgares to Real Alencaster, Santa Fe, 2 June 1806, doc. T-1992, SANM II; and Cook, *Flood Tide*, 475–77. Cook errs in calling the Melgares expedition "the largest Spanish force ever sent onto the Great Plains" (p. 477). That of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado in 1541 was three times as large, and Juan Bautista de Anza's sally onto the plains of present-day eastern Colorado in 1779 counted around eight hundred fighting men.
25. Jackson, ed., *Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, 2:58.
26. *Ibid.*, 1:406–7.
27. *Ibid.*, 1:viii–x.
28. Pike to Wilkinson, Pawnee Republic, 2 October 1806, and Pike to Dearborn, Pawnee Republic, 1 October 1806, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 2:148–53. Later, after Pike and Melgares had become friends, the American reported in his expanded journal that the Spanish lieutenant led his troops all the way to the Pawnee village, held councils, and presented the Indians "with the flags, medals, &c. which were destined for them" (vol. 1, p. 325). Pike also convinced himself that the Melgares expedition was looking for him. The evidence suggests, however, that Spaniards in Santa Fe had no information about Pike until well after

- Melgares had returned to Santa Fe about 1 October 1806. See Cook, *Flood Tide*, 480–83.
29. Moulton, *Journals*, 9:361; and Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 402–3.
  30. Lewis to Jefferson, St. Louis, 23 September 1806, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Jackson, 1:319–20; and Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 406–9.
  31. Casa Yrujo and King Carlos quoted in Cook, *Flood Tide*, 483–84.