General José Figueroa's Career in Mexico, 1792–1832

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GENERAL JOSÉ FIGUEROA is perhaps best known for his Manifesto to the Mexican Republic written in 1835 while he was governor of Alta California. It was published in Monterey in that year—the first book-length imprint to appear in California. Although there is a good deal of information about Figueroa's career in Alta California, remarkably little is known about his life before he went there, and it is with this period of his life that the following study is concerned.

José Secundino Figueroa y Parra, or as he normally signed his name, José Figueroa, was born in 1792 at Jonacatepec in the southeastern border regions of the present state of Morelos. He had a brother Francisco and a sister whose name is not known. Although nothing is known of his parents, they are likely to have been of predominantly Indian origin, for he was short of stature, dark-skinned, and proud of his Indian blood. Since he was entrusted with a number of clerical and accounting jobs in the revolutionary armies, they may have been sufficiently well-off to give their son some education. He joined the forces of José María Morelos, the major revolutionary leader in the south, on December 20, 1811, at the head of a band of some twenty men from a local hacienda and was immediately made a captain. He was nineteen years old and had just married María Francisca Gutiérrez, also of Jonacatepec. She did not see or hear from him again for eleven years of brutally harsh civil war.

For two years the young captain served under the immediate orders of Morelos' second-in-command, Mariano Matamoros, the
famous fighting general who had been the parish priest of Jantetelco a few miles northeast of Jonacatepec. Matamoros had joined Morelos’ forces a week before Figueroa and quickly showed his outstanding abilities as a military leader.² Captain Figueroa took part in the successful attack on Oaxaca in November 1812, serving in the infantry regiment of Our Lady of Carmen. In April 1813 he went with Matamoros on his campaign to the Guatemalan border where they defeated the royalist Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Servando Dambrini, who had planned to retake Oaxaca.³ Meanwhile, on January 1, 1813, Figueroa had been put in charge of the military treasury of Matamoros’ forces, evidence of the confidence his commander had in his reliability and competence. From July 21 to October 2, 1813, Figueroa was one of a pool of officers acting as military secretaries to General Matamoros. His services under Matamoros were rudely cut short when the general was captured at the siege of Valladolid (now Morelia) in December 1813 and shot on February 3, 1814.⁴

For the remainder of 1814 and throughout 1815 Figueroa served under Morelos. In 1813 Morelos had made the small coastal town of Tecpan, some fifty-five miles northwest of Acapulco, the head of a new province roughly corresponding to the modern state of Guerrero.⁵ He thought well enough of Figueroa to appoint him Secretary of the Intendencia of Tecpan on December 3, 1814. It is unlikely that Captain Figueroa was present at the fateful battle of Tesmalaca on November 5, 1815, when Morelos was captured, and he remained at his post of Secretary to the Intendencia after Morelos’ execution on December 22.⁶ Sometime in December 1817 he gave up his work as secretary and took on the duties of treasurer, a position he had first obtained on September 18, 1817, and retained until November 25, 1819. During this period the treasury offices moved about from one small town to another as the fortunes of war directed. Early in 1817 they were in Ajuchitlán in northwest Guerrero, by the end of September they had moved to Cutzamala in southeast Michoacán, then on to Huetamo, Michoacán, and to other places in the area.⁷
Captain Figueroa also took part in the fighting that was going on all around him. In September 1818 he fought under General Vicente Guerrero at the battle of Tamo, a victory over royalist forces under Colonel José Gabriel de Armijo, long one of the major opponents of the insurgents in the south. On September 22, about a week after the battle of Tamo, Figueroa represented Guerrero, who was then comandante general of the province of Tecpan, at a meeting at the Hacienda de la Balsa, near Coahuayutla on the western boundary of the present state of Guerrero. General Guerrero had organized a junta, or committee, here after his recent victory in order to form a government. Disagreement developed among the members, and the document which Figueroa signed as Guerrero's representative was a plan to restore harmony. On November 25, 1819, Guerrero further showed his esteem for Figueroa by making him Colonel of the Carmen Regiment, a new outfit which Figueroa was to recruit. The letter promoting Figueroa mentioned his "honesty, patriotism, knowledge, and the positive services he has rendered the fatherland." According to his service record, the insurgent army also thought well of him for sometime in December 1819 the officers of the forces operating in the western section of the province of Mexico made him comandante general of the region "by acclamation."

During 1820 Colonel Figueroa continued in charge of the insurgent forces in this area under the overall command of General Guerrero. Then, early in 1821, a new move by Colonel Agustín de Iturbide, the long-time scourge of the insurgents, led to dramatic changes. On January 10 Iturbide wrote to Guerrero suggesting that he surrender to the Spanish government which, he pointed out, with the recent reestablishment of the Constitution of 1812, was now under liberal control. Iturbide added that Guerrero might send a person whom he trusted, to whom Iturbide could explain his views more fully. One of the four men he mentioned was Colonel Figueroa. Iturbide's letter reached Guerrero on January 20 and Guerrero immediately drafted a reply refusing to consider any move not aimed at independence. He voiced his distrust of Spain
and exhorted Iturbide to join with him in promoting independence. If Iturbide agreed to these ideas he would be happy to serve under him. According to the contemporary historian, Lucas Alamán, who did not like Guerrero, his famous letter was written by Figueroa. Whether or not this is so, the letter had far-reaching consequences. Guerrero sent Figueroa with full powers to confer with Iturbide, who had already secretly decided for independence. Out of the conferences came Iturbide’s pledge to unite with Guerrero and Guerrero’s agreement to serve under Iturbide. The negotiations took place on February 18, 1821. On February 24 Iturbide proclaimed the celebrated Plan of Iguala which finally brought the long-drawn-out war for independence to a successful close. Although Figueroa’s part in these important negotiations is not well-known, it is undoubtedly one of the high points of his career and was responsible for his high standing with the new government of Mexico under Emperor Iturbide.¹⁰

Colonel Figueroa remained on active duty with the army which now besieged Mexico City and entered it in gala parade on September 27, 1821. After a brief and uneasy period, during which Iturbide was president of the Regency awaiting a monarch from Europe, a movement suddenly sprang up in Mexico City on May 19, 1822, proclaiming him emperor. On May 28 Colonel Figueroa wrote Iturbide a flattering letter protesting his loyalty and devotion. Guerrero was now Field Marshal of the Imperial Armies with a Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of Guadalupe and the title of Captain General and Superior Political Chief of the Province of the South. When he examined Figueroa’s service record and certified to its accuracy he wrote, “not only has he fully discharged his duty he has done it exquisitely and in so praiseworthy a fashion as to make him deserve the most distinguished consideration and appreciation to which his merit justly entitles him. Most of his record is personally known to me and the rest is common knowledge.” With a recommendation such as this it is hardly surprising that on July 29, 1822, the Imperial Government made Figueroa a Supernumerary of the Imperial Order of Guadalupe."¹¹
Figueroa seems to have been spending most of his time at Chilapa, the headquarters for Field Marshal Guerrero's command. Apparently he was once more in charge of army finances. His letters to Guerrero reveal the difficulty of providing for a restless army without knowing where to find the money. In August 1822, Guerrero sent in another recommendation of Figueroa. "I am personally committed," wrote Guerrero, "to see to it that he is well taken care of promptly, for besides his own merit he is my friend and I wish to be of service to him." This, along with Guerrero’s frequent absences from Chilapa during the autumn months of 1822, may have contributed to the promotion of Figueroa to the interim position of Comandante General of the South. He was already being considered for a raise in rank, and, on December 8, 1822, the Secretary of War issued orders for his promotion to Brigadier General graduado (one rank less than full brigadier). The promotion was retroactive to November 30. The government duly informed him of his new rank on December 11 and it was announced in the official newspaper on December 31. On December 30, Figueroa wrote Iturbide at length expressing his gratitude for the promotion and also for his appointment as colonel of a new regiment of Chilapa Provincial Dragoons which he was to raise. "May God protect your Majesty’s important life," he concluded, "for as many years as the Empire needs."

The collapse of Iturbide’s empire was closer than perhaps anyone could have realized at the time. Antonio López de Santa Anna, a young officer recently raised in rank by Iturbide to brigadier general, deeply resented having been passed over for the Captaincy General of Veracruz. He correctly suspected that the emperor no longer trusted him. After a meeting with Iturbide at Jalapa he hastily returned to Veracruz and started a revolution against him on December 2, 1822. Although Santa Anna’s own fortunes in the movement against Iturbide suffered a serious reverse later in the month, his Plan of Veracruz fanned smoldering embers of discontent throughout the country.

A few days after Figueroa wrote to an aide of Iturbide’s assuring
him that he had his part of the country under control and that it would remain at peace so long as his forces were intact, he found himself faced by one of the most difficult situations of his career. On January 5, 1823, Vicente Guerrero, Figueroa's benefactor and friend, turned against Iturbide, secretly left Mexico City in company with Nicolás Bravo, and headed for Chilapa with seventy cavalrymen from the 11th cavalry regiment. According to evidence later presented in Mexico City, Guerrero was counting on adding Figueroa's troops to his revolutionary forces. According to his own account of the affair, as soon as Figueroa learned of Guerrero's flight, he guessed that Guerrero would make for Chilapa and foresaw the predicament he would soon be in between his duty to Iturbide's government and the long claims of friendship and gratitude he owed to Guerrero. According to a report Figueroa made justifying his actions to the Iturbide government after the crisis was over, the dilemma did not take the acute form he had envisaged. As the rebels drew closer to Chilapa, Figueroa's powers had steadily deteriorated. He could do nothing, in other words, when confronted with the overwhelming popularity of Guerrero and Bravo, the old heroes of the war for independence in the south. When Guerrero and Bravo suddenly rode into Chilapa with their cavalry on the night of January 12, confident in the good will of Figueroa, he could do no more than try to keep the peace in the town. While Figueroa cooperated with his old friends when he could not avoid it, he "struggled internally with his ideas," as he put it, wondering how he could extricate himself from an impossible position. Again events spared him some of the agonies of making a decision. Iturbide had immediately sent General José Gabriel de Armijo with a force to catch Guerrero and Bravo. On January 22, with Armijo's men rapidly bearing down on them, Guerrero and Bravo left Chilapa taking with them its entire garrison, supplies, armament, and even printing press and established themselves on the nearby height of Almolonga. Figueroa than slipped out of Chilapa after dark with his family. He had escaped, but as he later said "my spirit is not tranquil nor will it be in many days, for my honor has suffered." The resulting action was disas-
trous for Guerrero and Bravo. Guerrero was shot through the lungs and carried away by his men who fled from the battle believing him to be dead. Bravo was forced back with the fleeing army.

After this unfortunate affair was safely over, Iturbide instructed General Armijo to inform him confidentially what he thought about Figueroa's activities while Guerrero and Bravo were in Chilapa. Armijo replied that at first he had thought that Figueroa was in league with the rebels, but that very reliable information made him change his mind and "almost prove the good faith" that Figueroa had preserved with Iturbide. He added, however, that the local parish priest had told him candidly that Figueroa was a republican at heart even though his political opinions appeared to belie it. Iturbide decided to accept Armijo's view of Figueroa's loyalty. He informed Figueroa that he had not changed his opinion of him and that he believed his recent actions had been prudent in view of the circumstances.\(^{15}\)

Local successes such as the victory at Chilapa could not stem the mounting tide of republicanism throughout the country. Iturbide's empire began to slip rapidly from his grasp. By the middle of March 1823 Iturbide realized that the game was up and signed his abdication. On April 8 Congress denied that he had ever been legitimately raised to the throne. Therefore they did not accept his abdication, but exiled him to Italy with a 25,000 peso annual allowance. He left Mexico for Europe on May 11. A three-man Supreme Executive Power appointed by Congress and composed of Nicolás Bravo, Guadalupe Victoria, and Pedro Celestino Negrete took over the government on March 31, 1823, but was replaced by substitutes when they were unable to attend to their duties. One of the substitutes was Vicente Guerrero who took his place on July 2, 1823.

The cordial relationship between Guerrero and Figueroa continued without any appearance of strain following the incidents in the south. Possibly the opinion of the parish priest at Chilapa that Figueroa was a secret republican now had its value with the new government. At first Figueroa seems to have been in difficulties. The new regiment of Chilapa Provincial Dragoons, of which
he was colonel, was done away with before it had been formed and he was left without a command. In June he wrote asking for a post, and on July 5, three days after Guerrero was appointed a member of the Supreme Executive Power, that body gave orders that Figueroa’s former ranks of Colonel and Brigadier General be restored to him. Two days later he was appointed comandante militar of the city of Cuernavaca, then part of the province of Mexico and now capital of the state of Morelos.¹⁶

There is little information about Figueroa’s activities in his new post. He seems to have taken some part in the work of the cabildo, or city council, of Cuernavaca and also to have been a prominent officer in General Guerrero’s army division. When the new Constituent Congress of the state of Mexico met for the first time on March 2, 1824, in Mexico City, Figueroa appeared as a deputy from Cuernavaca and was at once elected one of the two secretaries of the Congress. At its second session Dr. Francisco Guerra, President of the Congress, appointed him a member of the committee on police and petitions and of the committee on militias.¹⁷ Figueroa was elected Vice-President of the Congress for the month of June 1824 and President for August, although he had been in ill health since June. It was under his presidency that the Constituent Congress completed work on a provisional organic law for the state of Mexico, which he signed on August 9, 1824. It may have been at approximately this time that General Figueroa presented to the Commission on the Development of the Californias an ambitious colonization scheme for Alta California. He proposed to found new towns for Christians from the mouth of the Colorado River (including the old mining camp of Arizona which was to give its name to the American state) to approximately Great Salt Lake in present day Utah. He proposed the same for the northern coastal region of Alta California from San Francisco Bay to the vicinity of Point St. George near modern Crescent City. He also had in mind persuading the pagan Indians by peaceful means to recognize the authority of the Mexican government and become part of Mexican society. Funds for this extensive project were to be provided by Figueroa’s fellow empresario John Hale. Unfortu-
nately Hale went bankrupt and fled to Europe so that Figueroa was forced to give up his plans. Early in September Figueroa asked the congress of the state of Mexico to give him a month’s leave of absence so that he could recover his health; it is possible that his colonizing dreams evaporated at about the same time. He may have taken some time off in September, although he was back in Congress on October 19, when he was appointed to a committee to consider what the state should do about the proposal in the national congress to declare Mexico City the federal capital.\textsuperscript{18}

While Figueroa was busily engaged with his congressional duties, the new government of President Guadalupe Victoria, who had taken office on October 10, 1824, appointed him in December Comandante General Inspector of the recently formed State of Occidente (Sonora and Sinaloa) with a salary of four thousand pesos. He probably went over to the offices of the Secretary of War on December 29 to receive his instructions. These included orders to mount an expedition against the wild Indians of the north, build more presidios, or forts, for defense against Indian attack, inspect personally the gold, silver, and copper mines in the state, and open up communication overland between Sonora and Alta California.\textsuperscript{19} The available evidence does not reveal why General Figueroa should have been selected for this particular post but his known competence, his friendship with General Gue­rrero, and perhaps his recent offer to colonize Alta California may have combined to bring him to the attention of his superiors.\textsuperscript{20}

The exact date of General Figueroa’s departure from Mexico City is not known, but it was probably late January or early February 1825. He reached Guadalajara on February 23 and left the following day for Rosario, Sinaloa, where he arrived on March 17. He continued on to Mazatlán and left there on April 9 for Arizpe, Sonora, by way of Culiacán. Such a journey crosses some of the most rugged and awe-inspiringly beautiful country in Mexico, and it is not surprising that it took him months to reach his destination. A Mexico City newspaper reported on June 13, 1825, that he had arrived at his post. There he faced not only the hostility of the former military commander and self-proclaimed governor,
Colonel Mariano de Urrea, but also the danger of a major uprising of Indians living along the Yaqui River. Furthermore it became apparent that he had left unfinished business close to Mexico City.\textsuperscript{21}

An official in the ministry of war wrote to General Guerrero on August 20 asking him on behalf of President Victoria if he would "please provide information as to the present condition of the wife of Brigadier General José Figueroa and whether it is certain that she is totally lacking in resources." Guerrero replied the same day saying that Figueroa's wife was "in a condition of the greatest misery and that it is also true that she is completely lacking in the means of subsistence."\textsuperscript{22} Behind this interchange lay a letter that María Francisca Gutiérrez, Figueroa's wife, who could not sign her own name, had had sent to President Victoria. According to her letter she had married Figueroa in 1811 before he went off to the wars, and although she had written him during the years that followed she had never heard from him, nor had he sent her any money. She had to work as a maid servant in order to live. She finally caught up with him while he was in Chilapa in 1822 and briefly lived with him. She had a son by him. He soon tired of her, and, after giving her some clothes and about two hundred pesos, he left her. Later he assigned her a monthly allowance of forty pesos. She received only one installment at this rate, then it went down to thirty pesos a month and down further to twenty pesos and finally during the last month, she had received nothing and did not believe he had given her anything. To make things worse, she knew that General Figueroa had been living with other women, one of them a woman with a bad reputation, with a family, with whom he had had an alliance while comandante in Cuernavaca, and whom he had openly installed in his own home while he was living in Mexico City. He had taken this woman and her family with him to Sonora. His wife went on to say that she wrote him constantly asking for help but received only threats for an answer. She was afraid he might try to do away with her. She knew that General Figueroa had a salary of four thousand pesos a year. Could President Victoria have a sum kept out of this and given to her
so that she and her small son, not quite two years old, could manage to live in Jonacatepec? She had had to sell what few trinkets she had for thirty pesos in order to come to Mexico City, which she had never visited before. She had absolutely no money to return to Jonacatepec, she knew no one in Mexico City, and she had brought with her Figueroa's old father, to whom the General gave the meager sum of twelve pesos a month. Could the president let her have something with which to return home? She had nothing, she said, not even enough for a meal. After duly checking on her story, President Victoria gave orders that she be given thirty pesos a month out of General Figueroa's salary until her husband decided how much she was to get on a permanent basis. He may also have helped her return home.\(^{23}\)

Whether General Figueroa mended his ways toward his estranged wife is not known, but it is clear that his own life in Sonora was hard and dangerous. His first problem was Colonel Mariano de Urrea, a Sonoran veteran of many Indian wars, who, after coming out in favor of a federal republic, had taken over as self-appointed governor of Sonora. When asked by Congress to give up his post, he refused. In August 1824 he was off fighting the Opata Indians who had risen in rebellion. Figueroa seems to have tried without success to get in touch with him on his way north, but on September 12, with the installation of the Constituent Congress for the new state of Occidente, Urrea gave up his civilian office of governor. He refused to surrender his military command, however, and was seized as a rebel in June 1825. In a printed statement, dated July 10, 1825, General Figueroa charged Urrea with trying to promote a rebellion among the Opatas against the new regime in Occidente. He informed the people of the state that he was sending Colonel Urrea to Mexico City.\(^{24}\)

General Figueroa set out in October as instructed at the head of some four hundred men to investigate personally gold mines reported to be in the mountains close to the Colorado and Gila rivers in the present states of California and Arizona, and also to try to find an overland route from Sonora to Alta California. He was apparently at the confluence of the Gila and Colorado near modern
Yuma when he was overtaken by messengers bearing news of a Yaqui Indian revolt along the lower reaches of the river of the same name just south of Guaymas. The Mayo Indians who lived along the Mayo River, close to the Yaqui, later revolted also. Reasons given for the revolts vary, but they seem to have resulted from disillusion over their failure to receive any of the new privileges that they expected following independence from Spain, new intrusions of settlers upon their lands, and resentment at the enforced payment of taxes newly levied on them as citizens equal with the whites. Figueroa hastened back. By the middle of December he was at Pitic (modern Hermosillo) and by January 1826 the trouble seemed to be simmering down. Figueroa visited some of the Indian pueblos, and by mid-February he was back at his headquarters at Arizpe. In fact, the revolt had hardly begun.

An unusually able Indian, whose name and even identity are still a matter of disagreement among the authorities, now arose to lead the Yaquis and Mayos. This man was Juan Ignacio Jusacamea, sometimes known as Juan Banderas or Juan de la Bandera because of his use of a flag taken from a church, which he said had belonged to Montezuma. Some writers, including Edward H. Spicer in his *Cycles of Conquest* appear to follow Ignacio Zúñiga's *Rápida ojeada al estado de Sonora* in which Jusacamea is described as a rival of Juan de la Bandera, but several modern Mexican historians regard Jusacamea and Juan de la Bandera as the same person. General Figueroa, who had good reason to be fully aware of the identity of his dangerous opponent and who met him personally after he had surrendered, mentions him in a letter from Potam dated April 14, 1827, as “Juan Ignacio Juzacanea (sic) alias de Bandera.” Under the influence of Bandera the Yaqui and Mayo rebels proposed to set up an independent Indian state. Some Opatas and Pimas joined Bandera and by August 1826 the forces of the state of Occidente confronted a dangerous Indian uprising.

General Figueroa faced Juan de la Bandera and his braves near Pitic in a two-day battle on August 6 and 7 and completely defeated them. Nonetheless, within a short time the Indian leader was in the field again with fresh forces. Figueroa issued a general
call to arms, recruiting citizens to join the militia and the presidio forces against the Indians. Reinforcements were hurried in from Mazatlán, Tepic, Colima, and Chihuahua, and some Opatas and Pimas joined the Mexican forces. But in spite of Figueroa’s efforts little headway was made against the danger and critics in Mexico City began to accuse the general of being too soft-hearted with his Indian foes. Finally, on February 16, 1827, Colonel José Joaquín Calvo was appointed to succeed General Figueroa, although, fortunately for his reputation, Figueroa managed to bring the first phase of the war to a halt before Calvo reached Occidente. 27

Concern in Mexico City over the Yaqui and Mayo war was quickly reflected in the Congress, which decided on November 30, 1826, following considerable debate, to offer generous terms to the rebel Indians, including an amnesty. This was a period, it should be remembered, when Mexicans looked upon their Indian ancestors with interest and sympathy as men who had suffered unjust conquest by the Spaniards. Indians were now regarded by liberal thinkers as equal with the whites, and congressional legislators tended to favor them while they passed increasingly severe laws upon Spaniards living in Mexico. Despite opposition from the men on the spot in Occidente who had suffered from Indian depredations, Figueroa, with fresh reinforcements behind him, showed himself willing to make concessions. His policies were successful. Large numbers of Yaquis surrendered in January 1827 and on April 13 at five in the afternoon in the village of Potam, near the mouth of the Yaqui River, Juan de la Bandera and two hundred of his men came to General Figueroa and handed over their arms, promising never to disobey the government again. Juan de la Bandera went down on his knees before the general in sign of submission, and Figueroa was both convinced of the sincerity of the Indians and moved by compassion at the sight of the starved, ragged warriors and their families. Addressing his troops the following day General Figueroa exhorted them to “treat our unfortunate compatriots with love and consideration . . . let us treat the Yaquis and Mayos as our beloved President has ordered: like friends in peacetime and enemies in war.” In a similar speech to the people
of the state he criticized those who thirsted for human blood and were ready to decree the absolute extermination of the Yaqui. Contemporaries in Mexico City, like Lorenzo de Zavala, recorded sympathetically his inclination to treat the Indians with humanity, but Sonorans who later looked back at the continuing Indian wars considered his policy lenient and thought it was a mistake. 28

The war had been extremely costly in both men and money. In his speech to his men at Potam General Figueroa spoke of three thousand Indian "victims" of the fighting. Juan Miguel Riesgo, a former governor of the state of Occidente, estimated that the war had cost more than 700,000 pesos. It must have been good news indeed, therefore, when President Victoria was able to announce on May 21, 1827, that the war was over. General Figueroa, to the regret of some Sonorans who wrote letters to the Correo de la Federación Mexicana about it, was transferred after the fighting was over to Durango, where he was appointed Comandante General. 29

Details of his career in Durango are lacking, but it was a time of increasingly strong anti-Spanish feeling and in occasional speeches by Figueroa there are some references to Spaniards as "the cowardly slaves of Fernando [VII]," and the "Caribs of Europe." Caustic remarks of this kind may be contrasted with Figueroa's sympathetic treatment of the Yaquis. Meanwhile, state authorities in Occidente were increasingly rent by rival factions, one of them in favor of dividing up into two separate states of Sinaloa and Sonora and one of continuing as one state. Also, criticisms of Colonel Calvo, who had succeeded Figueroa as comandante in Occidente, began to appear in the newspapers. Perhaps hoping that General Figueroa, who was popular in the state, would be able to restore harmony, President Victoria, on April 29, 1828, appointed him once more Comandante General and Inspector of troops there. He left Victoria de Durango for Rosario on May 28, and arrived on June 5, continuing on to Alamos, then the capital of Occidente, by way of Mazatlán. Shortly after his return the authorities showed their pleasure when the state Congress on
September 5 declared him a citizen of the state and renamed the presidio of Altar the Villa de Figueroa (its name today is Altar).  

When Figueroa returned the governor of Occidente was José María Gaxiola who had been provisional governor for five months just before Occidente received its constitution on November 2, 1825. After the first constitutional governor, Lieutenant Colonel Simón Elías González, left office on August 28, 1826, Gaxiola temporarily took his place until he turned the post over to Francisco Iriarte who had been elected constitutional vice-governor. Unfortunately for the stability of the new state government, the legislature was divided between the factions in favor of maintaining Occidente as one state and the apparently larger faction, which wanted to divide it into two states: Sonora and Sinaloa. Vice-Governor Iriarte favored division, whereas Gaxiola worked assiduously to keep Occidente as it was. Iriarte was forced out of office on November 29, 1827, by Gaxiola and the group in the legislature who wanted to preserve Occidente as a single state. Gaxiola had remained in power since that time.  

On December 20, 1828, shortly after Figueroa took over once more as military commandant of Occidente, the Gaxiola-dominated legislature passed a decree declaring Iriarte unfit to be governor or vice-governor. Opponents of Gaxiola’s faction apparently took the matter up with the general Congress in Mexico City for it decreed on March 9, 1829, that the state of Occidente’s decree of December 20, 1828, was unconstitutional. On May 2, 1829, the legislature of Occidente gave orders that the Federal Congress be informed of the reasons behind the state decree regarding Iriarte and petitioned for the annulment of the decree declaring the Occidente law unconstitutional.  

In the meantime, public opinion in Occidente was becoming aroused; those in favor of restoring Vice-Governor Iriarte to power were assembling armed men at several towns in the state with the intention of doing so by force. General Figueroa once again found himself in a difficult position. As military commander of the state he was in duty bound to support the existing authority of Gov-
ernor Gaxiola; but if he did so he ran the risk of causing a damaging civil conflict at a time when the state faced the possibility of continued armed resistance by Yaqui and Mayo Indians.

On August 29 Figueroa addressed an able statement to the legislature from his headquarters at Ures. After pointing out the dangers of civil war, he said he and his men were ready to lay down their lives in the defense of the state government but that he was convinced public opinion was in favor of restoring Vice-Governor Iriarte to office. He recommended an immediate amnesty for Iriarte and his supporters and the reseating of the Vice-Governor as chief executive of the state.\textsuperscript{35}

General Figueroa's intervention was successful. Two days after his statement was written the situation had completely changed. Governor Gaxiola offered his resignation, which was accepted by the legislature and Vice-Governor José María Almada provisionally took his place.\textsuperscript{36} Ten days later the legislature decreed that Francisco Iriarte could return at once to the governorship and declared that it did not and would not oppose the division of Occidente into two states.\textsuperscript{37} Figueroa next signed an agreement on September 12, 1829, with militia Colonel Leonardo Escalante, who had taken a decided stand for division of the state, by which they pledged themselves to see that Iriarte was effectively restored to power. They further announced that the military could not lend its protection in the future to any movement opposing Iriarte's reinstatement.\textsuperscript{38}

While General Figueroa was endeavoring to deal with internal problems in Occidente, the Republic as a whole was being invaded from Cuba by a Spanish force under General Isidro Barradas. Fortunately, General Santa Anna and General Manuel de Mier y Terán defeated the Spaniards, who capitulated near Tampico on September 11, 1829. General Figueroa's movements after signing his agreement with Escalante are not clear. The Federal government appears to have sent him orders on August 15 to march for Zacatecas with all regular troops and a battalion of civic militia from Sonora and to add to them another battalion of militia
from Durango on his way through that state. By August 22 it was being reported that Figueroa was to command a division in the western states while Vice-President Bustamante headed another division in the east to be situated somewhere between Puebla and Perote. It is possible that the news of the defeat of the Spaniards reached Figueroa while he was en route to Zacatecas.49

During this period far-reaching events were also taking place on the domestic political scene. Vice-President Anastasio Bustamante issued a revolutionary plan against President Guerrero at Jalapa on December 4, 1829. It had almost immediate success. By December 22 his forces occupied Mexico City, and a few days later Guerrero left with fifty horsemen to take refuge in the south. By the end of the year every state except Veracruz had come out in favor of Bustamante. Figueroa’s instinctive reaction to the news of the revolt against his friend and benefactor was probably to do what he could to assist him, but there is no evidence to reveal either what was in his mind or what he did. Vice-President Bustamante took over the executive office on January 1, 1830, and on February 11 he appointed Figueroa supplementary minister of the Supreme Tribunal of War. Figueroa accepted the position two days later, writing from an address in Mexico City. Evidently he had come to terms with the Bustamante government without further ado.40

That the government was not yet sure of itself or of its newly won friends may be seen by its reaction to news supplied to it that Figueroa and nine or ten others who met at a café were plotting against Vice-President Bustamante and intended to restore General Guerrero to office. Early on the morning of March 25, 1830, a government agent disguised as a messenger bearing dispatches from the south asked the wife of Colonel Ignacio Pita, long a fellow officer of Figueroa’s and an admirer of General Guerrero, where General Figueroa lived so that he could deliver letters. The lady told him, whereupon Figueroa was arrested, as were his friends. They were lodged in jail in the former Inquisition building. The rumor was that they were plotting assassination and
robbery, but no evidence of any conspiracy was forthcoming. After about a month in jail most of the alleged conspirators, including Figueroa, were released.41

During 1831 General Figueroa appears to have remained in his position on the Supreme Tribunal of War while living at Calle de Santa Teresa la Antigua no. 3. How he felt about the tragic execution of General Guerrero on February 14, 1831, can only be conjectured. On March 21, 1832, Figueroa asked for a three-week leave from his duties on the Tribunal to attend to personal affairs at Jonacatepec and two other villages. Vice-President Bustamante granted his request on April 3. Two weeks later, on April 17, the government appointed him Inspector and Comandante General of Alta California with a salary of four thousand pesos, and on May 9 Bustamante made him Political Chief or Civil Governor as well, continuing the joint civil-military command in the province, perhaps because of recent disturbances there.42 Whether Bustamante was thinking of keeping Figueroa in a kind of exile in California or whether he was appointing him to the position on his merits is not clear. Perhaps there was a mixture of these motives behind his decision.

It is evident from this relatively brief survey of his career that Figueroa had his faults, but his distinguished record in the Mexican war for independence, his experience in the legislature of the state of Mexico, and his commands in Occidente and Durango made him undoubtedly one of the best prepared and most experienced Mexican officers to become governor of Alta California.
NOTES


4. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Proceso de Matamoros, p. 52.

5. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Edmundo O'Gorman, Historia de las divisiones territoriales de México (Mexico, 1966), pp. 33-34, 212-13.


7. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; “Libro común en que consta el cargo y data de caudales nacionales que entran y salen de estas cajas principales de Tecpan,” Hernández y Dávalos Papers, Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin (cited hereafter as HD).


11. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Mexico City El Noticioso General, July 29, 1822.

12. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Figueroa to Guerrero, Sept. 25, Oct. 21, Nov. 14, 1822, Vicente Guerrero Correspondence, Latin American
Collection, University of Texas, Austin (cited hereafter as GC), García Folders 69, 70; Sota Riva to José Figueroa, Oct. 18, Dec. 7, 1822, HD, 15-5.1872, 15-7.2013.

13. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Mexico City Gaceta del Gobierno Imperial de México, Dec. 31, 1823.


15. Figueroa to Antonio Mier, Dec. 30, 1822, Jan. 17, 1823, Testamentaria Iturbide, MN; Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Mexico, 6 vols. (San Francisco, 1883-88), vol. 4, p. 792; Figueroa to Min. of War, Feb. 3, 1823, José Armijo to Min. of War, Feb. 24, 1823, Anon. to Min. of War, March 2, 1823, expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD.

16. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD.


20. Herbert E. Bolton, Guide to Materials for the History of the United States in the Principal Archives of Mexico (Washington, D.C., 1913 [1965]), p. 338 lists a manuscript in Gobernación, Old Records, dated May 12, 1824, concerning Figueroa’s offer to colonize Alta California. These papers are no longer in the order given in Bolton, and it has not been possible to locate this document.

21. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD; Mexico City Gaceta Diaria de México, June 13, 1825.

22. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD.

23. Ibid.


25. Edward H. Spicer, Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain,


27. Bancroft, vol. 2, p. 641; José Manuel Estrellas to Min. de Relaciones, Feb. 22, 1824, Gobernación, legajo 209, AGN; Carlos María de Bustamante, “Diario,” Zacatecas State Library, Zacatecas, Mexico (cited hereafter as ZAC), Nov. 4, 1826, Feb. 16, 1827. A microfilm copy of this diary is now available in the library of the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City.


32. Decreto del gobierno supremo del estado de Occidente, Alamos, Dec. 20, 1828.


34. Decreto del gobierno supremo del estado de Occidente, Alamos, May 2, 1829.


36. El vice-governador del estado de Occidente a todos sus habitantes, Alamos, Aug. 31, 1829.

37. Ibid., Sept. 10, 1829.

38. Mexico City El Sol, Nov. 18, 1829; Bancroft, vol. 2, p. 646.


40. Expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD.

41. Mexico City El Correo de la Federación Mexicana, Dec. 28, 1827; Mexico City El Atleta, March 25, April 2, 11, 25, 26, 1830; Mexico City El Registro Oficial, March 25, 1830; Mexico City El Sol, March 26, 1830; Juan Suárez y Navarro, Historia de México y del General Santa Anna, 2 vols. (Mexico, 1850-51), vol. 1, p. 200.

42. Calendario de Galván, Mexico, 1831, p. 167; expediente xi/iii/2-257, AD.