

Revolutionary War Soldier

Bernardo de Gálvez

Spanish Governor of Louisiana

Born 23 July 1746 - Macharaviaya, Spain
Died 30 November 1786 - Mexico City, Mexico

Bernardo de Gálvez

PATRIOT

by Joy Cardinal, John Edwards Chapter, NSDAR

Bernardo de Gálvez was born in 1746 in Macharaviaya, near Malaga, Spain. His parents, Matias de Gálvez and Josepha de Madrid, both came from illustrious families.

Bernardo began his military career as a volunteer in 1762 - sixteen years of age. He took part in the war in Portugal and earned the rank of Infantry Lieutenant. King Carlos III assigned him to *New Spain* (Mexico) in 1765. He accompanied his uncle, Inspector-General of New Spain, Jose de Gálvez (one of the Crown's closest advisors who took Bernardo as his protégée). In Mexico, Bernardo de Gálvez, served as Captain of the Permanent Infantry Regiment of the Crown and Commander of the interior and frontier Provinces. He fought the fierce Apache Indians in the northern region of the frontier they called Nueva Vizcaya. He was wounded during these dangerous encounters.

Gálvez returned to Spain with his uncle in 1772. In need of more formal military training, he received a leave of absence to enroll in the French Cantabrian Regiment. In 1775 he became Captain of the Infantry Regiment of Seville during the landing and action on the Shore of Algeria. He was wounded but did not retreat until his mission was complete. The commander-in-chief of the operation was General Alejandro O'Reilly, former governor and military commander of Louisiana. O'Reilly recommended him to the Crown. He was granted the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and assigned to the Military Academy at Avila.

In July 1776 King Carlos III found it necessary to provide for the defense and development of the Province of Louisiana and needed someone in his complete trust. Bernardo de Gálvez was named Colonel in command of the regular Louisiana Regiment. No sooner had he arrived in New Orleans, he was appointed Acting Governor of Spanish Louisiana and relieved Governor Luis de Unzaga on January 1, 1777. He was thirty years of age. The province extended from the Gulf of Mexico to the upper Missouri and from West Florida to Texas. Between 1776-1783, this young commander made important contributions to the American Revolution and these achievements were the highlights of his career.

He faced an awesome amount of problems and responsibilities. His uncle, Jose de Gálvez, sent him detailed instructions, outlining the areas of his mission: His duty was to inspect the frontier outposts, strengthen their defenses against the British and gather intelligence on British activities nearby. He had to acquire charts of the Mississippi River and Gulf coast. The militia must be expanded and disciplined. Also he must develop the population of the province and gather census data and welcome foreigners (if they were Catholic and would take the oath of allegiance to Spain). The desire was that Louisiana would become a buffer zone between Britain's American dominions and Spain's Mexican provinces, rich in silver. Gálvez was to encourage good relations with the Indians, extinguish illicit commerce and promote legitimate trade. Tobacco production and agriculture had to be encouraged and he was to provide care that the slaves and free colored population were kept under control.

Bernardo de Gálvez proved himself capable of the challenge. He earned the respect and loyalty of the predominant French population. Spain was officially neutral during the early years of the Revolutionary War but in May 1779 Spain officially declared war with Britain. Gálvez provided money, supplies and arms to American colonists in the west. Gálvez had notable campaigns from 1779-1781. In September 1779, with an assortment of Louisiana settlers, he captured Fort Bute at Manchac. At the Fort of Baton Rouge, he had an amazing two-hour victory and the only Revolutionary War engagement in the Mississippi Valley. Terms included the surrender of Fort Panmure in Natchez and Spanish troops occupied that area in October.

The Spanish King, pleased with this success, commissioned Gálvez to attack all British posts within his reach. He set sail for Mobile with an army of two thousand men. He was successful at Fort Charlotte at Mobile in March 1780. He and his men endured serious hardships because of stormy weather. Finally, he launched his siege on Pensacola, March 9, 1781. The British surrendered on May 10. This was Gálvez's greatest military achievement. Much has been written about his brigantine, *Galveztown* and the heroic action, in which he, alone, forced entry into the Bay. The King declared that the ship and motto, *Yo Solo*, I alone, be used on his Seal in his Coat of Arms. On March 28, 1783, Gálvez received the title of Castille, with the designation of Viscount of Gálveztown and Count of Gálvez. The Treaty of Paris was signed in September 1783 and confirmed Gálvez's victories by awarding the Floridas to Spain, including all the territory south of Natchez, east of the Mississippi.

In 1785 Gálvez received a new appointment. He was to succeed his deceased father as Viceroy of New Spain at the age of thirty-nine. Don Matias de Gálvez had served in important positions in Spain and as Governor of the Canary Islands. He served successfully against the British in Central America as Captain General and Governor of the Kingdom of Guatemala and then promoted to Viceroy of New Spain and died in office in 1784.

Bernardo de Gálvez, his wife, Felicie de St. Maxent d'Estrehan (a widow he had married in New Orleans), and three children arrived at Vera Cruz. He spent a few days there, inspecting the garrison, custom house, squadrons of launches and the fortress, San Juan de Ulloa. The royal party arrived in Mexico City on January 17, 1785, "with the greatest pomp and jubilee". Gálvez won popularity and political appeal and Felicie is credited with being a chief factor in this enthusiastic approval. Some remembered his dashing campaigns against the Apaches on the Nueva Vizcaya frontier just fifteen years before. All were mindful of his glory during the war, which had just ended. He began a progressive rule. Frost, crop failures, famine and pestilence plagued the Valley of Mexico. To relieve the suffering, Gálvez contributed the remainder of his father's estate, and borrowed another 100,000 pesos for this purpose. His critics remarked that the viceroy hinted at the idea of Mexican independence and noted that he had discarded the reserve maintained by previous viceroys, and that he associated freely with the native people. His task was to complete the Cathedral, rebuild the palace at Chapultepec and establish a botanical garden. He was a favorite of the king and an idol to all classes in Mexico City. He apparently was at the gateway of even greater success at the age of forty.

He was stricken with fever in the fall of 1786. Everything was done for his recovery; prayers in the cathedral and churches and in nearly every household. His doctors advised he be moved to Tacabuya on October 31. He was too weak and made his will on November 8 and surrendered the government. He died 30 November 1786. The archbishop wrote, "All the kingdom of New Spain is filled with mourning and tears and overwhelmed by the deepest sadness because of the unlooked for death of its most beloved viceroy." Church, state and people came together to make his funeral a tribute to his memory. Gálvez had brought about the completion of the cathedral (which had been suspended for more than a century). The archbishop directed the service and the cathedral chapter spared no expense. His remains were deposited temporarily in the cathedral's most distinguished sepulchre and a year later were transferred to the San Fernando church where they were placed beside his father's.

Honor was lavished upon the infant daughter of Gálvez, born on the eighth day after his funeral. She was christened, baptized and confirmed by the archbishop a week later. She was christened, according to her father's wish, *Maria de Guadalupe, Bernarda, Felipa de Jesus, Isabel, Juana Nepomucena, Felicitas, y Fernanda*. This was "the grandest performance of its kind hitherto witnessed in Mexico."

Descendants of Bernardo de Gálvez, and descendants of the men who served with Gálvez, are eligible for membership in The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

BERNARDO DE GÁLVEZ
1746-1786
Patriot

Patriotic service:

1777 - Bernardo de Gálvez appointed Spanish Governor of Louisiana by King Carlos III

1779 - Spain declared war on Great Britain.

Gálvez provided money, supplies and arms to American colonists in the west.

September 1779 - captured Fort Bute at Manchac and victory at the Fort of Baton Rouge,
the only Revolutionary War engagement in the Mississippi Valley.
(Terms included the surrender of Fort Panmure in Natchez).

March 1780 - Captured Fort Charlotte at Mobile

1781 - Sieged Pensacola and British surrendered on 10 May

SOURCES for proof of Birth and Death:

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