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by Donald C. Cutter

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By DONALD C. CUTTER

MODERN NAVAL DOCTRINE takes for granted, particularly in war time or when hostilities are imminent, certain precautions to guard coastal establishments from unauthorized entry. Such devices as signs and countersigns, audio and visual signalling, seem to a modern generation automatic precautions, but ones essentially concerned with the present century. Assistance for gaining access to a harbor, for finding appropriate anchoring ground for ships, and for making known the nationality and peaceful intentions of the inbound vessel are all problems which were likewise faced in the early days of occupation of Spanish California.

Sailing directions possessed by the Spanish Naval Department of San Blas and promulgated to appropriate vessels gave clear instructions for making the harbor at the capital of Alta California. Frequent fogs which shrouded the inhospitable Bay of Monterey made sound signals even more important than visual signals, and vessels making the harbor employed a series of cannon shots to attract attention of the coastal battery of the royal presidio. From the guns of that fortification, in direct response to signals of the incoming vessel, harbor entrance guidance was provided. These exchanges of cannon salutes, fired without the ball, were employed to direct the arriving mariners.

The Spanish round-the-world scientific exploring expedition of Captain Alejandro Malaspina employed these directions in 1791 when making port coming south from Nootka to California. The explorer reported:

The Roadstead of Monterrey . . . offers an agreeable port of arrival for both the Philippine ships that sail to San Blas and Acapulco, and also to those which

PROFESSOR CUTTER of the University of New Mexico is a specialist in the history of the Spanish Southwest. Among his works on Spanish naval history are *Malaspina in California* (1960) and *The California Coast* (1969).

having run the coast are returning to the former department [*i.e.*, San Blas]. But the dense fog which almost always envelops it fills with anxiety the inexperienced pilot that tries to make its anchorage. In order to avoid the dread of this landfall, we will give notice that rarely are cross winds experienced; that north-westerlies are as common as are the fogs, and that the strongest winds that are suffered along this coast are from the south. Therefore whoever desires to anchor at Monterrey should steer toward Point Año Nuevo; and seeing this at a distance of one mile if it is possible, steer SE $\frac{1}{4}$ E [$123\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$] until finding himself a league from Point of Pines, recognized by the many trees of this kind that cover it, and by the several white spots that it has on its steep banks. Then sailing ESE [$112\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$] the building which is called the presidio will be seen to the east, and arriving in 14 fathoms one can let go the anchor. Then it is necessary to take into account the rocks called La Loma and to use a kedge anchor astern, with which one remains in sufficient safety. But after having seen Point Año Nuevo, if one should be in the dark either because fog blocks his view or because the light of day is disappearing, one will steer a course to approach port with little way on, and thinking himself to be at a distance capable of being able to hear the sound of 12 calibre cannon shots, he will fire some from time to time until hearing those that they always have ready for that purpose, and the direction from which they are heard will serve as a guide for making the anchorage.¹

Not only were these signals exchanged, but also the local presidio at times had available small boats to use in guiding vessels both in and out of the harbor when circumstances required. These boats were employed to kedge a vessel out far enough to catch the off-shore breezes, or to assist in hauling vessels in to closer anchoring ground.

Important to the security of the California harbors was the need to have a definite set of recognition signals. The California coast was fully exposed. Recourse to soldiers as lookouts awaiting the appearance of foreign sails along the coast was time consuming and not very effective. The vantage point for spotting a potential invader was frequently so distant from the probable point of attack that precious time would be lost in getting the word passed.

In the decade of the 1790's the exposure of the California coast was more evident than it had been earlier. Spanish tranquility had been broken by the repeated appearance of foreign vessels in the Pacific. Boston men had made their appearance on the coast, the English commissioner in the Nootka Controversy, Captain George Vancouver, R.N., visited the California establishments on three occasions, and other vessels were sighted occasionally making a tentative approach to the little guarded coast. During this same

period the Spanish Navy, with Pacific headquarters at the coastal port of San Blas, today in Nayarit, was exceedingly active in pressing Spanish claims to the Pacific Northwest.² But Spain was not alone in this effort to control the area to the north of modern California — there were the United States, Russian, French, and English pretenders in the form of explorers and fur traders. To keep an eye on Spanish interests and to strengthen the Spanish defensive posture along the coast, the Spanish Navy was kept busy in repeated exploration and in supply of the youthful colonies in Upper California and at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island's verdant west coast.

As had been the case earlier, Spain overexpanded its resources both financially and physically in its move northward. There were many expenses and a lack of trained personnel. Dire necessity of defending Spain's colonial empire in North America brought a temporary solution to the first of these problems; but the second, that of lack of naval personnel, was partly solved only by admitting into the pilotage corps of the Naval Department of San Blas several North Americans who were available.

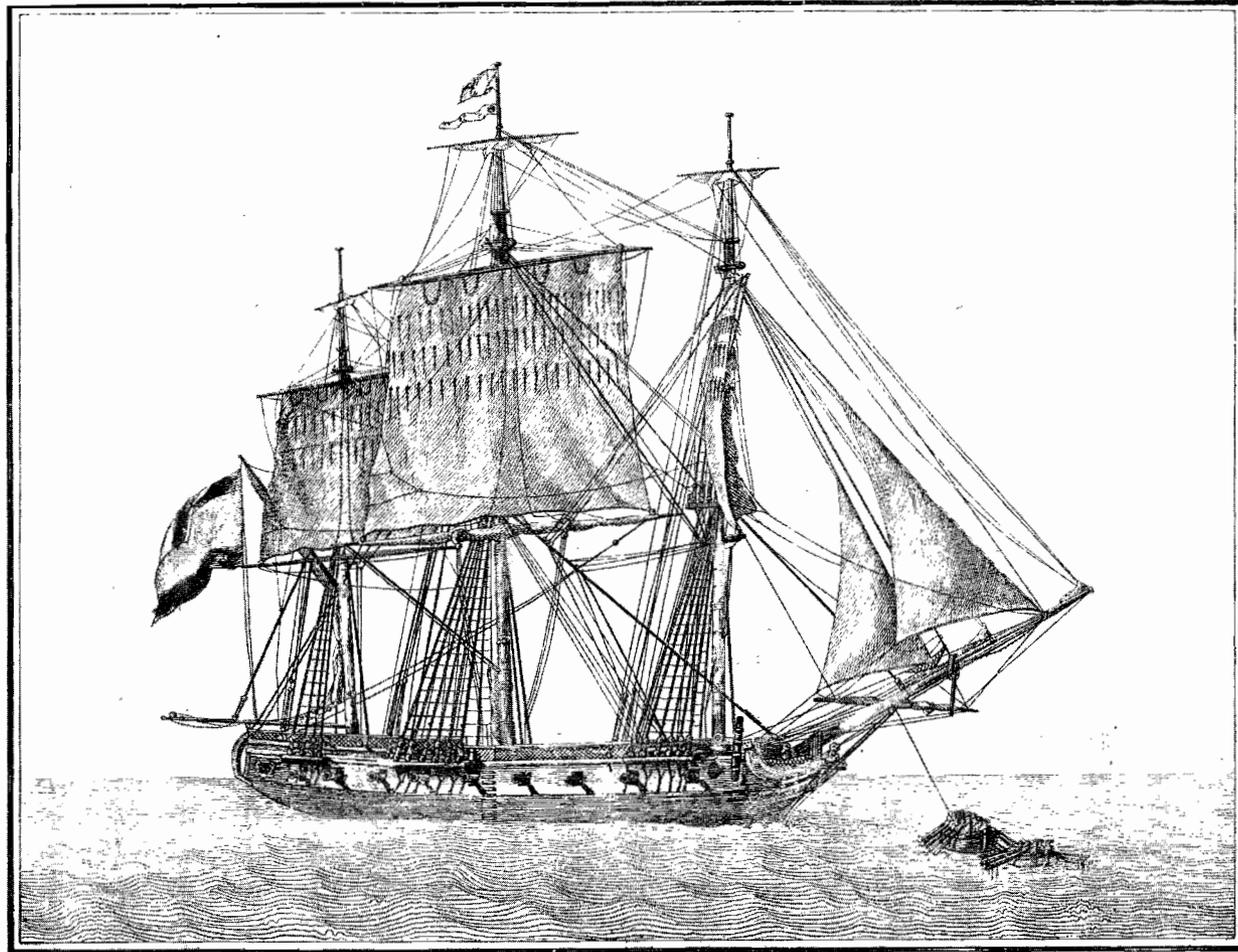
The first of these recruits in entering Spanish service was John Kendrick, Jr., son of the old Revolutionary War privateer and companion of his father during the early exploration of the West Coast made by John, Sr., and his subordinate commander, Robert Gray. The younger Kendrick left his father's vessel, the *Columbia*, on the Northwest Coast to assume duties as interpreter and second pilot aboard the *San Carlos*, a Spanish naval packetboat. In San Blas he later officially joined the Spanish Royal Navy as a pilot. John Kendrick, Jr., subsequently served aboard the Frigate *Princesa* and as *Piloto segundo* was even permitted to command at different times the *Hermosa Americana* and the Frigate *Aránzazu*. Kendrick served Spain well, received high recommendations of his superiors, built up seven years of longevity, and under other circumstances might even have ascended to the regular commissioned officer ranks.³

A second recruit to the Spanish pilotage corps was the later to be well-known figure Joseph Burling O'Cain of Philadelphia and Boston, who would become famous in the sea otter trade and as a result of his dealings with the Russian American Fur Company. At this time he was but a "boy" and was customarily called in typically Hispanic fashion by his middle rather than by his last name; that

is, Burling rather than O'Cain. This ship's boy was recruited on the Pacific Northwest Coast after he "jumped ship." José Tobar, a Spanish naval officer, was later held responsible for this enlistment under circumstances which make it apparent that the officer had entreated the cabin boy to desert. O'Cain, as he was otherwise called, served in the post of *pilotín* or apprentice pilot, one grade lower than Kendrick.⁴ Both however, despite their lowly status, were within the officer rather than the enlisted ranks.

We know little of the service of Burling, but Juan (John) Kendrick served so well in the Nootka campaign that he was recommended by the Nootka Commandant, Lieutenant Ramón Saavedra of the Spanish Royal Navy, in a letter written in August, 1794, to the Viceroy.⁵ But to the upper officialdom it seemed somehow risky to have a Bostonian at the conn of a Spanish vessel. Young Kendrick was relieved of his duty aboard the sloop *Sutil*, the historic vessel which several years earlier had under the command of Dionisio Alcalá-Galiano made the first circumnavigation of Vancouver Island accompanied by the twin vessel, the *Mexicana*. "Juan O'Cain or Bourleing [*sic*]" was relieved of duty and both were sent off to Spain to be separated from Spanish service.⁶

It was the separation of these minor officers, particularly in view of their obvious knowledge of harbor entry doctrine then current, that occasioned a new set of recognition signals. A not unjustified fear in light of subsequent events that these men might return to the California coast, prompted a newly promulgated set of what by modern standards would be considered elementary signals. Another motive for recognition signal change must certainly have been the unsophisticated character of the doctrine established during the founding period. Instructions issued to the commandants of California's only military settlements, San Diego and Monterey, in 1773 indicate an invariable signal. The presidio would fly the royal flag, which at that date was a white flag with a red royal crest superimposed thereupon. This would be answered aboard ship by a white pennant with the king's coat of arms being hoisted to the top of the foremast, this display of the Bourbon pennant serving as guidance to the local commandant. However, this officer was further warned in his instructions that even though the countersign was displayed, he was not to cease being prepared when a vessel entered port until



Spanish corvette of the post-1785 period showing one of the two possible positions of the recognition signal flag and pennant. The national army and navy flag, shown at the gaff, was never actually displayed simultaneously with the signal flags as in the altered engraving, original in the Museo Naval.

after he received a visit from an officer of such a ship who would come ashore in a boat or launch with assurances that the inbound vessel was Spanish. This was a "precaution which ought to be observed so as not to be taken by surprise, since it could happen that if by chance the signal were known by foreigners, they might use it and notable damage would result if the commandant were careless."⁷

The new signals promulgated to replace the violated code were issued by the Commandant of the Naval Department of San Blas, Francisco de Eliza, and were sent to the Marqués de Branciforte for Viceregal approval.⁸ This was accomplished immediately for the set of new signals and appropriate notification of the intended change were sent by the Viceroy to the Governor of California, Lieutenant Colonel Diego de Borica.⁹ The reason ascribed for the change was clearly stated as a desire to prevent Kendrick and O'Cain from being able to supply other nations with information concerning the then existing method for harbor entry.

California's new system was incorporated in an order issued at Tepic on August 10, 1797, by Lieutenant Francisco de Eliza of the Spanish Royal Navy as follows:

Recognition signals that the San Blas
vessels will observe:

Day of the week	Position of flag and pennant	flags	pennants
Monday	atop the mainmast	red	red
Tuesday	atop the mainmast	red	blue
Wednesday	atop the mainmast	blue	blue
Thursday	atop the mainmast	blue	red
Friday	atop the foremast	red	red
Saturday	atop the foremast	blue	red
Sunday	atop the foremast	blue	blue. ¹⁰

Means of employment of these signals were also specified in the order. As soon as the incoming vessel sighted any of the California establishments it was to hoist the flag and the pennant to the appropriate place in accordance with the schedule so that these could be properly recognized. In all cases of recognition signalling the colored

signal flag was to be displayed above rather than below the signal pennant, thereby leaving only one totally inadmissible combination, since a red flag over a blue pennant atop the foremast was never appropriate. The coastal countersignal which acknowledged understanding of the initial signal was the hoisting of the new Spanish national flag which had been adopted in 1785, the typical Spanish red and yellow with a central crest. A single cannon shot was also fired. To this the vessel was to respond by lowering the signal flag and pennant and by hoisting the national flag astern at the gaff.¹¹

Upon receipt of Viceroy Branciforte's orders, Governor Borica sent a certified copy of the document as a confidential order to the commanders of all the California ports so that all would immediately place in execution this doctrine for admitting vessels.¹² Two days later Borica, a careful letter writer and probably the most illustrious of California's early governors, wrote to the Viceroy indicating that the word had been passed throughout his province.¹³

Of the efficiency of the new recognition system or of its employment in actual practice we have no information; but of the causes which brought it into being, *i.e.*, the uses that Kendrick and O'Cain might have at a future time for their specialized knowledge, it is evident that these were well founded. Both John Kendrick, Jr., and his fellow American Joseph B. O'Cain did indeed return to the coast of California on multiple occasions. Both were engaged either in clandestine trade or in poaching operations in California waters. Though Kendrick as a figure has escaped any extended notice, the figure of O'Cain stands out as one of the principal merchants engaged in the sea otter trade and as the first to enter into a "fifty-fifty" profit sharing agreement with the Russians in exploitation of the fur wealth of California's coastal waters. Both had taken advantage of their Spanish experience and training.

NOTES

1. Descripción de la Rada de Monterrey, undated, in *Pacífico América*, tomo II, original in Museo Naval, Ministerio de Marina, Madrid, MS vol. 127. Translation is taken from Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina in California* (San Francisco, 1960), pp. 47-48.
2. The standard study on San Blas is Michael E. Thurman, *The Naval Department of San Blas: New Spain's Bastion for California and Nootka, 1767 to 1798* (Glendale, 1967) More recently Enrique Cárdenas de la Peña has written *San Blas de Nayarit*, (2 vols.; Mexico, 1968).
3. Details on the Kendricks, father and son, are found in John Leo Polich, "John Kendrick and the Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1964).
4. O'Cain has not yet found a biographer but is mentioned frequently in California history textbooks. Adele Ogden, *The California Sea Otter Trade, 1784-1848* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1941), has numerous references to O'Cain.
5. Ramón Saavedra to Viceroy Revilla Gigedo, Nukat, 31 August 1794, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico, Marina, tomo 98.
6. Diego de Borica to Marqués de Branciforte, Monterrey, 11 April 1797, AGN, Marina 98.
7. "Instruccion que debe observar el comandante nombrado para los establecimientos de San Diego y Monte Rey" MS, 17 August 1773, Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Guadalajara, legajo 514.
8. Francisco de Eliza to Viceroy Branciforte, San Blas, 27 February 1798, AGN, Marina 98.
9. Branciforte to Señor Governador de las Californias [Borica], Orizaba, 18 July 1797, AGN, Marina 98.
10. "Señales de Reconocimiento que observarán los Buques de San Blas," Tepic, 10 August 1797, signed by Francisco de Eliza, AGN, Marina 98.
11. *Ibid.* The author is indebted to Captain José Luis Morales, Subdirector of the Museo Naval, Madrid, for detailed explanation of current and historic Spanish flag signalling practices.
12. Borica to Eliza, Monterrey, 9 November 1797, AGN, Marina 98.
13. Borica to Marqués de Branciforte, Monterrey, 11 November 1797, AGN, Marina 98.