



# 1860 & 1861 TERRITORIAL QUARTER II

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# Pedro Fages

## Unheralded Explorer of Spanish California

By John W. Robinson

On a cold, windy day in late April 1769, the small packetboat *San Carlos* tacked into San Diego Bay and dropped anchor near the northern shore. Her crew and passengers, after a 110-day voyage from La Paz, Baja California, were wracked by scurvy and only a few were strong enough to row ashore. One of those who did make it to the beach was Lieutenant Pedro Fages, commander of a small detachment of Catalanian Volunteers.

Pedro Fages was destined to serve two tours of duty in California, the first in which he became military commander and the second as governor, covering the better part of twenty-two years. Of equal significance to historians were his many explorations of California's unknown interior, placing him in the same rank as three far better known contemporaries - Gaspar de Portolá, Juan Bautista de Anza, and Francisco Hermenegildo Garcés. Our purpose here is to elevate Pedro Fages to his rightful place among the great pathfinders of Spanish California.

Pedro Fages was born in Guisona, in the Spanish province of Catalonia, in 1730. Nothing is known of his early years, other than the facts that he received some education and was unmarried. He began his life-long military career in 1762 when he was commissioned a sub-lieutenant in the light infantry. Spain had just entered the Seven Years War as an ally of France against England. Fages participated in the ill-fated Spanish campaign in Portugal, in which the Spanish army was routed by a combined British and Portuguese force. Peace was declared in 1763. Fages would probably have remained an obscure army officer in Spain were it not for a call for volunteers to serve in the Americas. José de Gálvez, visitor-general of New Spain, devised a plan to expand and develop the northern frontier and needed soldiers. In May 1767 the *Compañía Franca de Voluntarios de Cataluña* was organized for this purpose. Fages was promoted to lieutenant and made second officer.

The Catalanian Volunteers, one hundred strong, sailed from Cadiz at the end of May 1767, bound for New Spain. Unbeknownst to Fages, he would never see his homeland again. Before him lay an adventurous career in the New World.

The Catalanian Volunteers reached Vera Cruz, on Mexico's east coast, in mid-August. After a brief rest in Mexico City, they were dispatched to Sonora on the northwestern frontier to subdue rebellious natives. Fages' roll in the 1768 Sonoran campaign was brief. In September twenty-five Catalanian Volunteers, with Fages in command, were detached from the Sonoran force and ordered to La Paz in Baja California. They were to become a part of a new plan by Visitor-General Gálvez.

Gálvez and his superiors, Carlos de Croix, Viceroy of New Spain, all the way up to King Charles III, were wary of Russian advances along the Alaskan coast and perceived a threat to Spain's long-held claim to Alta California. Accordingly, Gálvez ordered a four-pronged expedition to occupy the ports of San Diego and Monterey and establish Spanish hegemony.

Two of the expeditionary forces would proceed northward by land, and two by sea, all four meeting in San Diego Bay. From there they would continue north to Monterey Bay.

Fages and seventeen of his Catalanian Volunteers departed La Paz on the packetboat *San Carlos* in January 1769, and after a harrowing sea voyage during which they were blown far off course, anchored in San Diego Bay, as we have seen, on April 30. Another small packet, the *San Antonio*, had arrived several weeks earlier, its crew and passengers also scurvy-ridden. The crewmen of the *San Antonio* - those fit enough to reach the beach - had been unable to locate a source of fresh water; digging in the sand had produced only a few pools of brackish water. Without good water, the expedition would soon be in dire straits. It was Fages, along with Lieutenant Miguel Costansó of the Royal

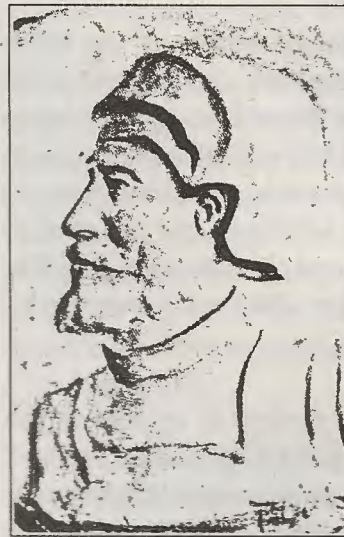
Engineers, who found water the next day, near the mouth of what later became known as the San Diego River. During the ensuing week, Fages and Costansó, with several soldiers strong enough to work, constructed several rudimentary shelters on the beach and moved their sick and dying compatriots from ship to shore. They all anxiously awaited the arrival of the land expedition, long overdue. For two weeks, Spain's precarious toe-hold in Alta California hung in the balance.

Finally, on May 14, Indian runners brought news to Fages and his small band that soldiers were ap-

Six weeks later, on the final day of June 1769, the *comandante* of this most famous expedition in California history arrived. Captain Gaspar de Portolá of the Royal Regiment of Dragoons and recently appointed governor of California, was accompanied by Father Junipero Serra, Father-President of the Franciscan missionaries in California, twelve soldiers, forty-four Indian neophytes, and a hundred mules.



Early map of San Diego Bay



Gaspar de Portolá



Father Junipero Serra

The expedition spent a busy two weeks in San Diego. Portolá chose a strategic site for a military camp on a bluff overlooking the San Diego River just a cannon-shot from the bay. Serra picked a nearby spot as the original site of Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the first of the eventual twenty-one Franciscan missions in Alta California. On July 16, 1769, the good father celebrated mass and solemnly dedicated the new mission. Meanwhile, preparations were made for the over-

*Continued Page 50*

proaching from the south. Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada and twenty-five Presidial soldiers of the "Royal Company of California" had completed the long journey from Loreto, capital of Baja California, and reached the marshy shores of San Diego Bay. With the land party were Father Juan Crespi, chaplain and diarist, forty Christianized Indians, and several muleteers herding some four hundred animals. The union of land and sea forces was joyous but subdued; Rivera y Moncada's party also suffered from lack of provisions.



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## Pedro Fages From Page 11

land *entrada* north to Monterey. Fages and his Catalonian Volunteers were kept busy gathering wood, hunting wild game to feed the expedition, and keeping a wary eye on the native peoples, many of whom appeared sullen and resentful of the Spanish presence. Father Crespi thought them excellent fishermen and intelligent, but "noisy, bold, covetous, and thievish." Anything of value left unattended by the Spaniards was likely to be stolen. Only a few of them responded favorably to the padres' attempts to Christianize them.

The historic march north commenced on July 14, two days before Father Serra dedicated the mission. In the lead was Sergeant José Francisco de Ortega and his Indian scouts. Next came Governor Portolá; Lieutenant Fages and six Catalonian Volunteers; Lieutenant Miguel Costansó, engineer and cartographer; Fathers Juan Crespi and Francisco Gomez; several leather-jacket soldiers and Indian neophytes. Behind them came the pack train, divided into four sections of twenty-five loaded mules each, with the muleteers and a soldier guard. In the rear traveled Captain Rivera y Moncada and the rest of the Presidial soldiers, and Indians driving the *caballada* - the herd of spare horses and mules. There were seventy-four persons in all traveling with the expedition. Left in San Diego to build the military camp and the mission and care for the sick were Father Serra and two other padres, several soldiers, and a number of Indian workers.

A word should be said about the Presidials of the "Royal Company of California", who served as the expedition's main escort. There were twenty-seven of them, commanded by Captain Rivera y Moncada. Most of them wore a sleeveless or short-sleeved overcoat or jerkin known as a *cuera*, which gave them some protection from Indian arrows. Good *cueras* were made from as many as seven layers of cowhide, bonded together with animal glue. Cheap ones were fashioned from two or three layers of antelope or deer hide. The troops who wore this protective jacket - and most if not all of Captain Rivera y Moncada's Loreto Presidials did - were known as *soldados de cuera*, or "leather jacket soldiers". For additional protection the Presidials had thick bullhide shields, attached to the saddle while traveling, known as *adargas*. Their legs were covered by long leather chaps fastened to the pommel of the

Archivos de Seville



Soldado de Cueva or "Leather Jacket Soldier"

saddle. Their weapons included a long lance, a straight-edged sword with a clamshell-like grip, and a smooth-bore, open lock musket called an *Escopeta de Arzon* or *Escopeta de Armas*. The *escopeta* was carried upright in a deerhide sleeve behind the saddle. The sword was sheathed in a cowhide scabbard and attached to saddle straps. Most Presidials were born in the northern frontier provinces of New Spain and were third or fourth generation descendents of Spanish soldiers. "They are obedient, resolute, agile, and we do not hesitate to say that they are the best troopers in the World", wrote Miguel Costansó. Other observers placed them on a somewhat lower level; they could be ill-disciplined, obnoxious, heavy drinkers, violators of Indian women, and thieves. They were often terribly abused by their officers.

Fages led the other military contingent on the expedition, the six Catalonian Volunteers - the only healthy ones left of the twenty-five who arrived in Baja California the previous year. These experienced, blue-coated soldiers from northeastern Spain toted the standard Spanish gooseneck flintlock musket of 1756, carried across the back by slings while traveling. A straight-edged sword was usually attached to the saddle straps, sheathed. On their belt was a bayonet for the musket and a leather pouch for holding cartridges. Like the Presidials, some were highly disciplined, some not, many were brave, a few were cowards. For even minor offenses, they were often harshly punished by their officers.

The expedition moved slowly up the coast, a half-mile to a mile inland as far as today's Oceanside, then just above the beach through present-day Camp

Pendleton Marine base, encountering many Indians who appeared friendly. On July 23, nine days after leaving San Diego, they reached "a very pleasant green valley, full of willows, alders, live oaks, and other trees not known to us", wrote Crespi. "It has a large arroyo, which at the point we crossed it carried a good stream of fresh and good water." They were in San Juan Canyon, not far from today's San Juan Capistrano. Here the expedition turned inland and ascended the broad valley in a northwesterly direction.

They continued northwest, crossing grass-covered hills east of present-day El Toro until they came to the edge of a vast plain that extended westward as far as the eye could see. This was the Los Angeles basin. The expedition marched along the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, where water was plentiful. They camped one night alongside a swiftly-flowing stream which they named *Santiago*, after the apostle and patron saint of Spain. It is still called Santiago Creek, east of present-day Orange.

Next day they stopped early alongside a major creek that flowed from northeast to southwest. No sooner had they pitched camp than they experienced a "horrifying earthquake." The violent tremor was followed by three aftershocks. Crespi named the river *Jesús de los Temblores*, but the soldiers called it the *Santa Ana*. It is the Santa Ana River today.

Portolá and his expedition forded the river and turned more westerly, crossing fertile hills and plains "well covered with good grass", passing through what are now the communities of Fullerton, Brea, La Habra, and Whittier. On July 30 they came to "an arroyo of water which flows among many green marshes, their banks covered with willows and grapes, blackberries, and innumerable Castilian rosebushes loaded with roses." Crespi called the river *San Miguel Arcángel*; it is the San Gabriel River today.

The party forded the river and turned west, and camped that night in today's El Monte, not far from the future site of Mission San Gabriel. On August 2 the expedition continued in a westerly direction, forced to do so by the "high and dark" San Gabriel Mountains to the north, crossed some low hills, and came to "a very spacious valley, well grown with cottonwoods and alders, among which ran a beautiful river from the north-northwest, and then, doubling the point of a steep hill, it went on afterwards to the south." They named it *Porciúncula*. They had reached the Los Angeles River, not very far from today's Union Station.

"This plain where the river runs is very extensive. It has good land for planting all kinds of grain and seeds, and is the most suitable site of all that we have seen for a mission, for it has all the requisites for a large settlement," wrote Crespi. He was right, for the great city of Los Angeles eventually filled the plain on which the expedition camped.

More aftershocks jarred the expedition. Continuing west, through present-day Hollywood and West Los Angeles, they were visited by many friendly Indians bearing gifts of seeds, nuts, and acorns. Fages and some of his soldiers went hunting on the plain for antelope, deer, and wild sheep. While hunting they discovered marshes of bubbling pitch and water, enough pitch to "caulk many ships." These were the La Brea Tar Pits.

Soldiers scouting ahead reached Santa Monica Bay and realized they could travel no farther west, as the mountains beyond plunged directly into the sea. So Portolá turned north and crossed the mountains, probably via Sepulveda Pass, to a great plain they called *Valle de Santa Catalina de Bononia de los Encinos*. Today we know it as the San Fernando Valley. Again they encountered large groups of friendly Indians.

Mountains blocked the west end of the valley, so, following the advise of the Indians, Portolá continued north. Crespi made the following entry in his diary for August 8, 1769; "About half past six in the morning we left the place and traveled through the same valley, approaching the mountains. Following their course about half a league, we ascended by a sharp ridge to a high pass, the ascent and descent of which was painful, the descent being made on foot because of the steepness. Once down we entered a small valley in which there was a village of heathen." The

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## Pedro Fages From Page 51

Portolá party had traversed the San Fernando Valley and crossed San Fernando Pass to the vicinity of present-day Newhall.

The expedition once again turned west and followed the valley of the Santa Clara River to the sea near present-day Ventura. They were now in the populous land of the Chumash Indians, the most materially wealthy of the California native people. Continuing northwesterly along the coast, they passed village after village of these well-stocked people. Near Rincon Point - halfway between Ventura and Santa Barbara - Chumash fishermen, disembarking from their large planked canoes, gave the Spaniards bonita and perch "in such quantities that we could have loaded the entire pack train if we had had any means of preparing and salting them." Next day they passed a village where canoes were being built; the soldiers named it La Carpinteria, The Place of Carpenters. It is Carpinteria today.

The expedition continued west along the coast, passing a large village of some 500 souls in what is now Santa Barbara, with the steep rampart of the Santa Inez Mountains crowding them on the north. They camped one night at a place the soldiers called *La Gaviota* because they had shot a seagull there. On August 27 they rounded *Punta de la Concepción* and headed north again along the rocky coastline. Bears became numerous on the Santa Maria Plain and farther on near Morro Bay. The soldiers went hunting and killed two of the beasts. *Oso Flaco* Lake (Lake of the Lean Bear), near the present-day community of Guadalupe, and *Los Osos* (The Bears), near the south shore of Morro Bay, named by the soldiers, are names still in use to-

day.

North of Morro Bay the coastline became narrower and more broken. Beyond Ragged Point, the *Sierra de Santa Lucia* plunged to the sea and blocked further coastal travel. The expedition struggled eastward across the southern reaches of the Santa Lucias - the most tedious and difficult part of the entire *entrada* - to the Nacimiento River and on into the upper end of the Salinas Valley, which they followed northward for six days.

They reached the mouth of the Salinas River on October 1, 1769. They were at Monterey Bay but did not recognize it. Their confusion was caused by Sebastian Vizcaino's faulty description of the bay, into which he had sailed in 1602. Vizcaino had called it a harbor rather than what it actually was - an open, twenty mile-wide bay. Portolá believed the bay they wanted was farther north, and Fages concurred.

Resuming the northward march, they passed by groves of giant redwood trees, which they called *palo colorado*. From Half Moon Bay, several days later, they could see the *Islas Farallones* and *Punta Reyes*, places already charted on Spanish maps. They now realized that they had somehow passed Monterey. Portolá decided to send Sergeant Ortega on to Point Reyes and what the Spanish then called *Bahia de San Francisco*, now Drakes Bay, where Gálvez had ordered a third presidio to be built. Ortega returned a few days later with the news that the way to Point Reyes was blocked by a great arm of the sea that broke the coastline. Meantime, several soldiers hunting in the hills east of Half Moon Bay returned with stunning information: "They said that toward the north they had seen an immense arm of the sea, or an estuary, which penetrated into the land as far as the eye could reach, extending to the southeast; that they had seen some beautiful plains well adorned with trees, and that the smokes which they saw in all directions left no doubt that the country was thickly populated with heathen villages," wrote Crespi. The soldiers had discovered San Francisco Bay.

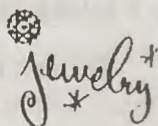
Realizing it would be difficult to get around the great estuary, the expedition turned back south. Again they failed to recognize Monterey Bay, although they did identify *Punta de los Pinos*, the Point of Pines, which was on Spanish maritime charts. They commenced their return trip to San Diego on November 28, 1769, and reached the southern port on January 24, 1770. Their return route, slightly more direct than the jour-



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Discovery of San Francisco Bay, 1769

ney north, became known as *El Camino Real*, The King's Highway. With a few variations here and there, it was the main Spanish land route in California for a half century to come.

The journey north had taken four months. The return was accomplished in two and a half months. Father Serra listened to their story and was disappointed in their failure to find Monterey Bay. He compared it with going to Rome without seeing the Pope.

The outlook for Spain's hold on Alta California appeared bleak. Supplies were woefully short in San Diego; for two months the colony subsisted on fish, sea birds, and food the Indians would trade for soldiers' clothing. More men succumbed to disease. The Indians had rejected overtures by Father Serra and had raided the camp.

Fages found that eight more Catalonian Volunteers had died, bringing the death toll of this elite group to thirteen. Only twelve of the original twenty-five who

left Sonora with Fages now survived. Fages petitioned the Viceroy for twelve replacement soldiers to bring his command up to strength.

In February 1770 Portolá sent Captain Rivera y Moncada and forty men back to Baja California with instructions to get all the supplies the peninsula missions could spare. For another month the colony suffered and abandonment of Alta California appeared to be near. At last, on March 19, the *San Antonio* arrived in San Diego Bay with fresh provisions and men. The crisis was averted, but only for a while.

Portolá was now determined to fulfill Visitor-General Gálvez's instructions. The second expedition north to establish a presidio and mission at Monterey was divided into two sections. The *San Antonio*, under its somewhat reluctant captain, Juan Perez, and carrying Father Serra and engineer Costansó, loaded with provisions, departed San Diego Bay on April 16. Next day Portolá began his overland trek accompanied by Father Crespi, Lieutenant Fages, twelve Catalonian Volunteers, seven leather-jacket soldiers, and a pack train.

It took Portolá's men slightly more than a month, following *El Camino Real*, to reach and correctly identify Monterey, arriving on May 24, 1770. The *San Antonio* reached Monterey Bay on June 1.

Sunday, June 3, 1770 was one of the most significant days in California history. Portolá presided over the Act of Possession ceremony, formally proclaiming Spanish sovereignty over Alta California. Ground was broken for the Presidio of Monterey. Father Serra dedicated Mission *San Carlos Borromeo* nearby; a few months later the mission was moved to its permanent location at Carmel, six miles south of Monterey.

Portolá, accompanied by Costansó, departed Monterey aboard the *San Antonio* on July 9, never to return. Before he left, he appointed Fages military *comandante* of Alta California.

Until his appointment as *comandante*, Lieutenant Pedro Fages had played a supporting role in the drama of Spanish California; henceforth, as military commander and later as governor, he was a leading actor.

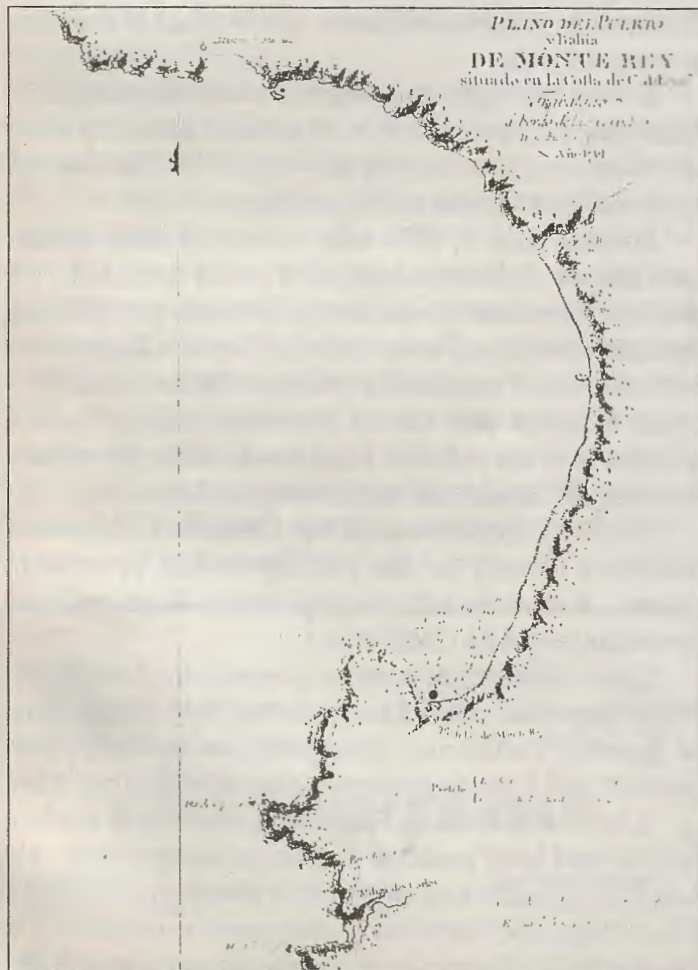
It is time to look at Fages as a man. It is evident that he had both positive and negative qualities. He was a bold leader and expert trail blazer and explorer. His courage and devotion to duty were exemplary. On the debit side, Fages was accused of being a brutal disciplinarian subject to violent outbursts of temper, ar-

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## Pedro Fages From Page 53

rogance, and stubbornness. His tour of duty as military commander of California was marred by frequent disputes with Father Serra and other Franciscan missionaries.

Commander Fages and Junipero Serra, father-president of the California missions, faced a formidable task. In the summer of 1770 there were only two Spanish settlements in all of Alta California, San Diego and Monterey, and they were 400 miles apart. Each place had a presidio and a mission under construction. Provisions were in short supply and had to be brought by ship from the west coast of Mexico. They were surrounded by thousands of native peoples, many of whom resisted Franciscan attempts to incorporate them into the mission communities and became increasingly hostile. Much of this hostility was directed toward the soldiers, who too often commit-



Monterey Bay, 1791

ted outrages against native women. Fages imposed harsh disciplinary measures against the offending soldiers whenever he learned of an outrage. Three soldiers who forcibly raped two Indian girls at San Diego were brought to the Monterey Presidio, flogged, and put in ball and chain. All too often, however, the offenders were never caught. Desertion, caused by brutal discipline and poor living conditions, posed a problem. Fages spent much of his time pursuing runaway soldiers.

To accomplish his tasks, *Comandante* Fages had only nineteen soldiers in Monterey and, although Captain Rivera y Moncada, recently returned from Baja California, had twenty-two soldiers at San Diego, the latter refused to cooperate - possibly out of jealousy because Fages had been appointed military commander instead of him. (Birth probably played a major part in Fages' appointment over Rivera y Moncada. The former was Spanish-born and held a Royal Commission, while the latter was born in Mexico and received his commission from the Viceroy in Mexico City.)

Despite problems with the military *comandante* and the unwillingness of much of the native population to accept Franciscan control, Father Serra went ahead with his plan to establish new missions and Christianize the "heathens". Mission *San Antonio de Pádua*, located in an oak-dotted valley on the eastern flank of the Santa Lucias, 25 leagues (62 miles) south of Monterey, was founded on July 14, 1771. Missionaries and soldiers journeyed up *El Camino Real* from San Diego to establish Mission *San Gabriel Arcángel* on September 8, 1771. Serra added a fifth mission when *San Luis Obispo de Tolosa* was dedicated on September 1, 1772. Each mission required a military guard of a corporal and five *soldados*, an obligation that Commander Fages found increasingly difficult to fulfill. His appeals to the Viceroy in Mexico City for more soldiers went unheeded.

Fages' most notable accomplishments during his first tour of duty in California were his trail-blazing exploits, which commenced shortly after he became military commander.

On November 21, 1770 Fages, accompanied by six soldiers and a muleteer, left Monterey to seek a land route to Point Reyes by going around the great estuary discovered by Sergeant Ortega the previous year. Fages and his men rode northeast across the Salinas Valley, then north through the present sites of Gilroy and San Jose. They turned east through marshy ter-



rain below the southern end of San Francisco Bay and followed the eastern shore of the great estuary as far north as present-day Alameda. The verdant, well-watered country was inhabited by many Indians, most of whom proved timid but friendly. From their camp near Alameda, Fages sent four soldiers to explore the terrain ahead. The soldiers traveled about seven leagues north and climbed to the top of a hill, probably in the vicinity of today's Berkeley. From their vantage point they looked west across the great estuary to "the mouth of the *estero* which they believed was the one which had its entrance through the bay of *La Puerta de San Francisco*", wrote Fages in his report. Next day Fages rode north to see for himself. They had discovered the "Golden Gate" (so named by Fremont in 1846), the first non-Indians to view the entrance to San Francisco Bay from the landward side.

Fages realized that it would require many days to reach *Punta de los Reyes*, his hoped-for destination. This realization, along with worries about the security of Monterey Presidio, caused him to turn back. Fages and his men returned to Monterey on December 4, completing their fourteen day *jornada* of exploration.

The search for a land route from Monterey to Point Reyes continued to haunt Fages. He tried again a year and a half later. On March 20, 1772, *Comandante* Fages, this time accompanied by Fray Juan Crespi, six Catalonian Volunteers, six *soldados de cuera*, Crespi's Indian servant Paje, and a muleteer, set out from Monterey. They followed the 1770 route and continued north through present-day Berkeley and Richmond, reaching the southeast shore of San Pablo Bay. They rode along the shoreline as it swerved eastward, along Carquinez Strait and the delta of the Sacramento River. The strait and delta proved impassable obstacles for the horseback party, and once again Fages was frustrated in his attempt to reach Point Reyes. They climbed to a high point south of the delta. Crespi wrote, "We saw that the land opened into a great plain as level as the palm of the hand, . . . all level land as far as the eye could reach. Below the pass we beheld the estuary that we were following and saw that it was formed by two large rivers." The two rivers were the Sacramento and the San Joaquin. Crespi, Fages, and the soldiers were the first Europeans to look upon California's great Central Valley.

Hardly had Fages returned to Monterey than a crisis developed. The *San Antonio* was late in arriving

History of California, Vol. 1, H.H. Bancroft



**Route of the Portolá Expedition, 1769  
and the Fages Expedition, 1772**

with provisions from Mexico, and the soldiers and padres at Monterey and Carmel faced a serious food shortage. The fearless military commander set out to remedy this by hunting bear and wild game in the nearby hills. His most celebrated bear hunt was in *Cañada de los Osos* (Canyon of the Bears) near San Luis Obispo. Fages and his Catalonian Volunteers bagged enough grizzly meat to keep the Monterey Presidio, Mission San Carlos, and the Indian neophytes from starvation. For these daring exploits Fages was nicknamed *El Oso* - perhaps as much for his rough character as for his bear-hunting abilities.

Fages' most remarkable *entrada* came late in 1772 - the exact dates are unknown - when, in pursuit of army deserters, he explored Southern California's desert and mountain interior. Desertion by some of the *soldados de cuera* was a recurring problem for Fages. The leather-jacket soldiers felt that Fages discriminated against them in favor of his Catalonian Volunteers and resented his harsh discipline, particularly after Captain Rivera y Moncada left for Mexico and they came under Fages' direct command. Twice before soldiers had deserted from the military outpost of San Diego (The San Diego Presidio was not completed until 1776). Fages had been obliged to make special trips to the southern port to bring them back. This time, the dis-

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contented soldiers fled far into the interior. Fages was determined to find and punish them.

If Fages kept a diary of this inland *entrada* it has been lost; all we know about it is contained in a brief *nota*, or addendum, to a report he wrote in 1773 describing his exploration of the East Bay and Sacramento Delta with Crespi the previous year:

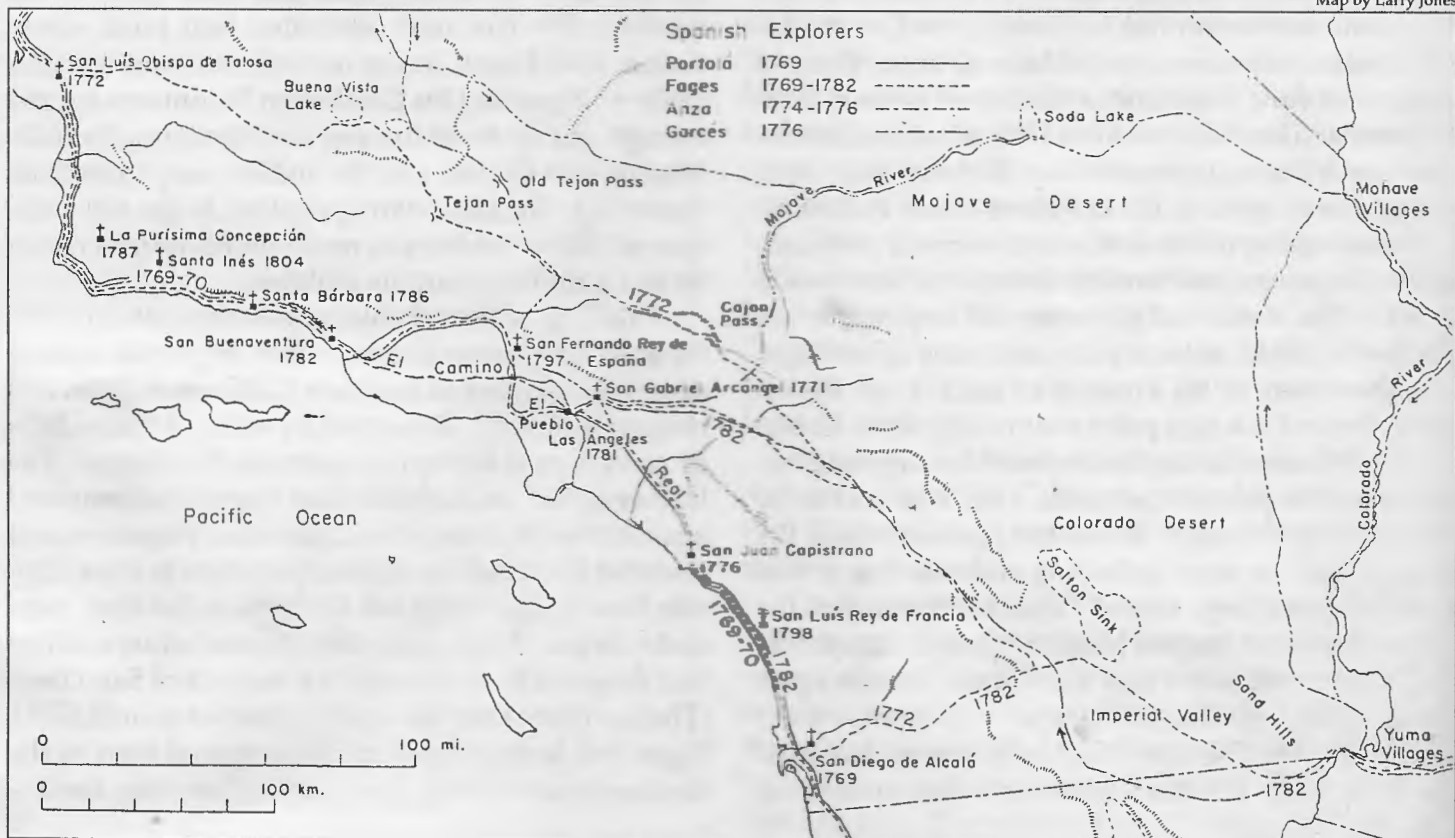
*"Last year, coming from San Diego in pursuit of deserters, I went and struck the plain fifty leagues toward the east. Lack of water forced us into the sierra, but when we were parallel with the mission of San Gabriel we went about fifteen leagues to strike the plain again and went along the plain toward the north, keeping close to the sierra, on account of water, traveling for about twenty-five leagues, until we reached the pass of Buena Vista. Most of these twenty-five leagues we were passing through groves of palms, the land both to the east and the south having more palm groves. But the country appeared to be very short of water. We saw many smokes all along the plain."*

Royal Presidio of San Carlos at Monterey, Nov.  
27, 1773 (signed) Don Pedro Fages (rubric)"

Fages' brief *nota* gives too few details to pinpoint his route, but the late Herbert Eugene Bolton, master historian of the Spanish borderlands, has given us a logical, close approximation of the inland *entrada*. From San Diego, Fages and his small force of soldiers headed east, probably up the San Diego River to the Cuyamaca high country, then dropped down Oriflammé Canyon to Vallecitos Creek - the route he used in reverse in 1782 (see later). He then turned north into Borrego Valley. Borrego tilts northward to a pronounced cleft in the mountains, obvious to any explorer. The cleft is Coyote Creek, which divides the San Ysidro and Santa Rosa mountains. Not only does Coyote Creek provide ample water and pasture, it also offers a direct route across the mountains. Evidence that Fages ascended Coyote Canyon is provided in the diaries of the Anza Expedition that used the route two years later. Horse tracks were seen in the canyon, and native Indians told the Anza party that soldiers had passed this way before.

From upper Coyote Creek, we must use conjecture as to Fages' route, for his *nota* gives us no hint

Map by Larry Jones



until he is "parallel" to Mission San Gabriel. Coyote Canyon divides into three branches at what is known today as the "Turkey Tracks." The right branch, heading north, is Horse Canyon, which leads to Vandeventer Flat on the present Santa Rosa Indian Reservation. The middle branch is Nance Canyon, which leads north westward to Anza Valley. Tule Canyon, the third branch, heads west into the mountain ridge south of Terwilliger Valley. Two years after the Fages *entrada*, Anza took the ridge between Nance and Tule canyons up to the valley later named for him. But there is no reason to assume Fages did. Traveling up Coyote Canyon today to the Turkey Tracks, Horse Canyon, the largest of the three branches, appears to be a feasible route. If Fages took this fork he would have crossed the mountains either by Garner Valley and the South Fork of the San Jacinto River into the San Jacinto Valley, or via Palm Canyon to the Coachella Valley. If he took the latter course, Fages would have been the first non-Indian through San Gorgonio Pass. But again, this is all conjecture.

Once past the San Jacinto Mountains, Fages turned northwest and crossed low hills into the San Bernardino Valley, now "parallel", as he wrote, with San Gabriel Mission. But why did he not visit the mission? The most feasible answer was that he was not on good terms with the Franciscans there. Instead, Fages turned northwest and crossed Cajon Pass, the first European to do so, and entered the Mojave Desert. He then skirted the northern base of the San Gabriel Mountains in a northwesterly direction. Water was readily available from Big and Little Rock creeks and from numerous springs and seeps at the foot of the mountains. The palms he mentioned were Joshua Trees, abundant in the high desert. The "many Smokes" were undoubtedly Indian campfires. Continuing northwesterly, along the south edge of Antelope Valley, he reached Tejon Pass, again the first European to do so. Fages called it *Paseo de Buena Vista*, the Pass with the Good View. While the view from the pass itself is limited, once the traveler descends into Grapevine Canyon a magnificent panorama opens over the southern San Joaquin Valley. Fages followed the canyon into the great valley, then turned west, passing Buena Vista Lake and its many Indian villages, and crossed the Coast Range to Mission San Luis Obispo.

In a report written in 1775, Fages again mentioned the San Joaquin Valley and the pass at its south end:

"The Plain of San Francisco [San Joaquin Valley] extends from the mouth of the river to a village called Buena Vista near the Portezuelo de Cortes, where there are many grapevines." Neither of the two names Fages used for today's Tejon Pass - *Buena Vista* or *Cortes* - remain in use, but the grapevines he noticed led later to the name *Canada de las Uvas*, present-day Grapevine Canyon.

Did Fages ever catch the deserters, the original reason for his *entrada*? Apparently not, for he fails to mention them. Still, Fages deserves more credit for his 1772 journey than many historians give him. He was undoubtedly the first European to visit the Mojave Desert and the southern San Joaquin Valley, and first to cross two of Southern California's major gateways - Cajon Pass and Tejon Pass - and he may well have traversed a third - San Gorgonio Pass.

Fages returned to Monterey to face increasing discord with Father-President Serra. The two had never really cooperated, largely because they had different views on their primary objectives. To Serra, the establishment of missions and the saving of souls was the whole purpose for his presence in California. Fages saw his job as preserving Spanish sovereignty over the new province, as well as providing guards for the Monterey Presidio, the military post at San Diego, and the five missions, and maintaining a force to suppress Indian unrest and pursue deserters. To do all this, Fages had only sixty-one soldiers in all of Alta California.

The final break between Fages and Serra came over the military commander's refusal to provide soldiers for the establishment of a mission at San Buenaventura. Serra was absolutely committed to the founding of this sixth mission, and Fages demurred on the ground that

*Continued Page 58*

### ***John Charles Fremont, Character as Destiny***

**By Andrew Rolle**

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### Pedro Fages From Page 57

soldiers were not available. Upon Fages' refusal, Serra took the extraordinary step of traveling to Mexico City to appeal to the Viceroy for the military commander's removal. The father-president sailed from San Diego on October 20, 1772 and, after a long journey made longer by ill-health, reached Mexico City on February 6, 1773. He was granted an audience with Viceroy Antonio Maria Bucareli y Ursua, successor to Croix, in March.

Serra presented a whole list of charges against Fages, the main points being that the military commander was incompetent, insolent and annoying toward the priests, cruel toward his soldiers, and constantly meddling with mission management. Along with his complaints against Fages, Serra presented thirty-two recommendations bent on improving the situation in California to his satisfaction.

After consulting his council, Bucareli agreed to some of Serra's recommendations. Fages was removed as military commander largely because it was believed that the discord expressed by Serra could damage Spain's hold on Alta California. Fages was recalled to Mexico City, his future career in question. After a trip marred by illness, he arrived in New Spain's capital city in late 1774.

Viceroy Bucareli evidently had second thoughts about removing Fages from his California command. Several years later he wrote that he regretted the removal "after I had come to know him." The Viceroy recognized that the deposed commander was a loyal soldier of the crown with superior ability. José de Gálvez, former visitor-general of New Spain who had sent Fages to California in the first place, and now Minister of the Indies in Madrid, was highly disturbed by Fages' removal from command. Gálvez wrote, "nowhere . . . do I find any reason, or justification, for this action other than the complaint of Fray Junipero Serra. It seems to me that the matter was handled in a most irregular manner, since Fages was deprived of an audience in which he might answer the charges against him. . . . It is His Majesty's desire that Don Pedro Fages be employed as captain of one of the frontier presidios of New Spain, so that his honor will not suffer or his good services go unrewarded."

While in Mexico City awaiting reassignment, Fages wrote a long report on conditions in Alta California

entitled "A Historical, Political, and Natural Description of California by Pedro Fages, Soldier of Spain, Dutifully Made for the Viceroy in the Year 1775." This report is today highly valued by historians, anthropologists, and naturalists.

Fages resumed active duty in early 1776 when he was appointed Captain of the Second Company of Catalanian Volunteers, newly arrived from Spain, with headquarters in Guadalajara. His duties were routine - primarily providing for the security of Guadalajara and its environs. While there he was called upon to perform another service for Alta California. Indians had attacked Mission San Diego on November 5, 1775 and murdered Father Luis Jaime and two soldiers. Captain Rivera y Moncada, who had succeeded Fages as military commander of Alta California, requested twenty-five additional soldiers. Fages was given the task of recruiting the twenty-five from the Guadalajara and Tepic areas, which he accomplished by June 1776. The reinforcements reached San Diego in late September.

Fages' routine duties in Guadalajara came to an abrupt end in the fall of 1777 when he was ordered to proceed, with his Catalanian Volunteers, to the northern frontier of Sonora to fight rebellious Seris and Apaches. After four months at *El Pitac*, present-day Hermosillo, suppressing the Seri rebellion, Captain Fages and his Catalanians received their most trying assignment. They were ordered to the frontier Presidio of Santa Cruz (just below the present international border, about 70 miles south-southeast of Tucson), which had been repeatedly raided by Apaches. Fighting a number of bitter battles, the Catalanian Volunteers performed with distinction but, vastly outnumbered, were unable to quell the Apache revolt. Santa Cruz continued under siege.

While at Santa Cruz, Fages learned that his services to the crown had not gone unrewarded. Per his own request and to fill a vacancy, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel on October 22, 1778.

The fighting around Santa Cruz had taken a heavy toll among the Catalanian Volunteers. Because of death, desertions, and retirements, the company was at no more than half strength. Moreover, it was lacking in clothing and firearms. To restore the Catalanian company to full strength, the commandant-general of the Interior Provinces sent Fages to Mexico City to find European recruits and procure provisions. Taking leave of the "inhuman Apaches", as he called them,

Fages reached the capital of New Spain in January 1780.

While in Mexico City, Fages' personal life took a turn for the better. His request for permission to marry Eulalia Callis, daughter of his former commanding officer Colonel Agustín Callis, was granted by order of the King of Spain. The fifty year-old lieutenant colonel married Eulalia, who was less than half his age, in June 1880. The bridal couple journeyed to Arizpe, capital of Sonora, where Fages was now stationed, in time for the birth of a son, Pedro José Fernando Fages, called "Pedrito", on May 30, 1781.

Momentous events along the lower Colorado River would bring Fages once again to California. Shortly after he had left Alta California in 1774, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, in one of the truly magnificent *entradas* in the history of Spanish California, had forged a land route from Sonora to the coastal province. Anza had made two expeditions across what became known as the Anza Trail, in 1774 and 1775-76, the second one with thirty-eight families, 240 persons in all, to found the pueblo of San Francisco. The Anza Trail remained the only all land route to California until it was abruptly closed by the Yuma Massacre of July 1781, during which Father Francisco Tomás Hermenegildo Garcés, another intrepid explorer of inland California, and three other Franciscan priests were martyred.

How this tragic event came to pass is a complicated story, and we can only summarize it here. The primary fault, many historians believe, lies with Teodoro de Croix, nephew of former viceroy Carlos de Croix and at the time commandant-general of the *Provincias Internas*. Croix has been described as a hard-working, well meaning, but rather stupid man. He had been directed by the King of Spain to set up missions among the Yuma Indians, inhabitants of the lower Colorado, but the commandant-general decided to go one better. He would establish Spanish colonies along the Colorado as well as missions. Two of these colony missions were established in the winter and spring of 1780-81 - *Purisima Concepción*, on the hill where Fort Yuma later stood, and *San Pedro y San Pablo*, about eight miles up river.

There were troubles from the start. Salvador Palma, chief of the Yumas and long a friend to the Spaniards, had been led to believe that the missions, which he had long wanted, would be for his people only, and that they would receive horses, tools, blankets, and the like to improve their living standards.

Instead, the Yumas were set upon by a small horde of colonists and soldiers to protect them, who appropriated the choicest lands along the river and sent their cattle to graze at will in Indian corn fields. And then, to make matters worse, Captain Rivera y Moncada arrived with more soldiers and colonists, destined for California. Most of the emigrants moved on to the coast, but the Captain and about a dozen of his soldiers stayed, setting up camp along the Colorado directly opposite from the Gila, where their animals did further damage to the Indian fields.

Although Palma was hesitant to act, a number of

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**Solution to Trivia/Doodler from page 28**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1				M	I	S	S	I	O	N		C		
2			S				I				F	A	R	O
3		H	A	R	D	I	N	G	E			P		
4		N	I							T		C		
5			L	E	C	T	U	R	E		A	R		
6		F		R					P	I	N	E		
7	W	R	I	C	H	A	R	D	S	O	N		S	
8	O		A		V				R			P		
9	M	O	N	T	E		E		T			I		
10	E		C	V	A	L	L	E	J	O				
11	N		I		E					L				
12			S							F	A	G	E	S
13	E	S	C	O	P	E	T	A		O				
14		O							S	E	R	R	A	

1. Mariano Vallejo
2. Pedro Fages
3. Yerba Buena
4. Katie & Maggie Fox
5. 1859
6. Emma Hardinge
7. Clara Shortridge Foltz
8. Rev. Oliver Fitzgerald
9. The King's Highway
10. June 3, 1770
11. Pedro Fages
12. Father Serra

### Pedro Fages From page 61

Oriflamme Creek, then followed the Indian trail "from hilltop to hilltop" to the high Cuyamaca Valley. They turned southwest over gently rolling hills on the east side of the mountain valley, to a high point at an elevation of about 4900 feet, within the boundaries to present-day Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. At the top the party rested, and Fages wrote in his diary, "we found a different climate from that which we had been experiencing, and we noticed that there were numerous groves of pine and other trees in the entire neighborhood, also a great deal of pasture in the canyons between the hills on either hand, and plenty of water." Fages and his men were on top of the forested and well-watered Cuyamaca Mountains, quite a change from the arid desert country they had so recently crossed.

From the high point of the trail, the Spaniards rode south, descending today's Stonewall Creek into the upper end of Green Valley. Here they passed a large village of friendly *Camillares*; the rumors of Indian hostility in the San Diego back country proved false.

On April 20 they rode southwest, near today's Descanso, then west "along the crest of rugged hills" toward present-day El Cajon Valley and the San Diego River. Along the river they passed several peaceful Indian villages. Late in the afternoon they wearily rode into Mission San Diego, completing their historic *entrada* from river to sea.

After hearing Mass the next morning and partaking in the midday meal, Fages and his soldiers traveled on to the Presidio of San Diego, two leagues (five miles) west, where they spent the night. They rode north via *El Camino Real*, spent a night at Mission San Juan Capistrano, and reached Mission San Gabriel on April 25. Fages informed Governor Neve, who was at Santa Barbara, that he had completed his messenger duty and opened a route of travel between San Diego and the Colorado River.

After a quick trip north to Missions San Carlos and San Francisco, Fages returned to San Gabriel to make preparations for the march to the Colorado.

An advance party with most of the provisions departed on August 21, 1782. Neve and Fages, with the main body of soldiers, left a few days later. The two groups took the Anza Trail and were to unite before reaching the Colorado. However, a stunning direc-

tive from Commandant-General Croix altered the expedition. A courier carrying dispatches from Croix reached the Spanish party on September 4. Neve had been appointed inspector-general for the *Provincias Internas*, and Fages was designated to succeed him as governor of California! Fages turned back with an escort of soldiers, and Neve continued on to the Colorado with the main body and supply train.

In brief, Neve was no more successful than Fages in trying to subdue the Yumas. The effort to punish the river people and reopen the land route to California was abandoned. The overland gateway to New Spain's northwestern outpost was no more.

Pedro Fages served as governor of California from 1782 to 1791. His return to Monterey came as an unpleasant surprise to Father Serra, who once again had to deal with him. Venerable Junipero Serra died in 1784, succeeded as father-president by Fermin Francisco de Lasuen, a Basque-born Franciscan priest who, along with Francisco Palou, had been Serra's assistant in California for eleven years. As governor, Fages made an effort to conciliate the church. Soon after his appointment, he visited all nine missions in California to ascertain their progress and needs. But the goals of the church and the civil government were simply too far apart. Fages dispatched a long letter to the viceroy complaining of church practices in 1785. Palou, at the time in Mexico City, replied to the complaints point by point and made his own charges against the governor. (Reading these charges and counter charges today, it appears that most of them were petty quarrels.)

Giving Fages almost as much trouble was his insufferable young wife, Eulalia de Callis. The family was reunited when Dōna Eulalia and Pedrito made the long trip from Mexico to Monterey in the spring of 1783. A daughter was born in August 1784, named Maria del Carmen. But Eulalia, used to the good life in Mexico City, soon tired of the lonely frontier outpost and its foggy climate. Matters went from bad to worse when Dōna Eulalia accused her husband of having an affair with an Indian girl; she threatened to leave him and return to Mexico.

Other than his unresolved disputes with the missionaries and his wife, Fages' performance as governor was creditable. His superiors in Mexico City must have thought so, for they promoted him to colonel in 1791.

In December 1789 Fages asked for permission to retire from office and return to Spain. He had not vis-

ited his homeland in twenty-two years. Citing his advanced age of almost sixty years, he claimed that he was no longer able to carry out his duties as governor. In May 1790 Viceroy Revilla Gigedo accepted Fages' resignation and named José Antonio Roméu to succeed him.

Fages remained governor of California until the spring of 1791. His governorship officially ended on April 16, 1791, when José Joaquín Arrillaga, the lieutenant governor, formally accepted the office for Roméu in Loreto, Baja California.

The ex-governor of California reached Mexico City and rejoined his family, who had arrived several months earlier, in December. Illness and Doña Eulalia's inability - or refusal - to leave Mexico City caused Fages to give up on his dream of returning to his native Spain. He would never see his homeland again. Although promised another governorship in New Spain, it never came to pass. He remained an officer *sin destino* (without assignment) until his death by natural causes at the age of 64 in December, 1794.

Pedro Fages, throughout his life, was an intensely loyal soldier of Spain. Even his enemies admired his bravery, his energy, his devotion to his duties as he saw them. He was a harsh disciplinarian, but so were most Spanish officers of his era. While it is true that he found it difficult to get along with Junipero Serra and other Franciscan missionaries, this was partly because the civil and military authorities had priorities that differed from those of the church. As an explorer and pathfinder in eighteenth century California, Don Pedro Fages ranks right alongside his better known contemporaries - Portolá, Anza, and Garcés.

### About the Author:

**John Robinson** is a retired educator who has a great interest in California history. This article is based on research for a forthcoming book, *Gateways to Southern California*, which will detail travel into the southern half of the state from Indian days to freeways. John also serves as a Historical Advisor to the *Dogtown Territorial Quarterly*.

### End Note

1. Fray Eusebio Francisco Kino (1645-1711) was a Jesuit Missionary explorer who spent most of his career in New Spain's northwest province of Pimeria Alta (today's Sonora

and southern Arizona). He founded twenty missions, including the famous San Xavier del Bac near Tucson. His explorations took him into unknown country north of the Gila River and west to the Colorado. From the banks of the lower Colorado he looked west at the Sierra Madre of California and determined that "*California no es isla, sino península*", disproving the long held belief that California was an island. The best source on Kino is Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Rim of Christendom: A Biography of Eusebio Francisco Kino* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936).

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The writer is indebted to George R. Stammerjohan, State Historian, California Department of Parks & Recreation, for his generous contributions regarding the Spanish military in 18th century California.