

CORONADO'S EXPEDITION TO THE SEVEN CITIES OF CIBOLA,
AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF HIS ROUTE.

By F. W. Cragin

In Early Far West Paper NO. 1, we have seen that the great expedition which was to be led ~~by General Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and his~~ ^{officers} ~~to the Seven Cities of Cibola, to the Grand Canyon and lower portions of the Colorado River of the West, and eastward ultimately to Quivira—that, in short, was destined to include a whole galaxy of forever famous explorations, in Sinaloa, Sonora, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, entering even within the border of California, almost certainly within that of Colorado, and possibly within that of Nebraska—~~ was sent forth by Don Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, after deliberate thinking and planning, and after having set on foot a series of preliminary reconnaissances that extended over several years; ^{although} ~~following~~ ^{not immediately} ~~as a~~ ^{an abortive one by President Guzman, his predecessor in the rule of New Spain.}

The army assembled at Compostela, capital of the Pacific Coast province of Nueva Galicia, in February, 1540. ~~It~~ It

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~~CORONADO'S EXPEDITION TO THE SOUTHERN PARTS OF CALIFORNIA.~~

consisted of between 250 and 300 Spaniards on horseback, a few score footmen, ~~and~~ several hundred—one account says a thousand—friendly Indians and Indian servants, and some negro slaves.*

Footnote

*There is considerable discrepancy ^{as to numbers} in the several accounts of Coronado's force. See Winship, ~~fourteenth Annual Report of Bu.~~ *8th Ann Rep XIV*, ~~Annual Report of Bu.~~ p. 378; where also the description of the army, here ~~given~~ is given.

"It was a splendid array as it passed in review before Mendoza and the officials who helped and watched him govern New Spain, on this Sunday in February, 1540. ~~and~~ The young cavaliers curbed the picked horses from the large stock farms of the viceroy, each resplendent in long blankets flowing to the ground. Each rider held his lance erect, while his sword and other weapons hung in their proper places at his side. Some were arrayed in coats of mail, polished to shine like that of their general, whose gilded armor with its brilliant trappings was to bring him many hard blows a few months later. Others wore iron helmets or vizored headpieces of the tough bullhide for which the country has ever been famous. The footmen carried crossbows and arquebuses, while some of them were armed with sword ~~and~~ and shield. Looking on at these white men with their weapons of European warfare, was the crowd of native allies in their paint and holiday attire, armed with the club and the bow of an Indian warrior. When all these started off next morning, in duly ordered companies, with their banners flying, upward of a thousand servants and followers, black men and red men, went with them, loading the spare horses, driving the pack animals, bearing the extra baggage of their masters, or herding the large droves of 'big and little cattle', of oxen and cows, sheep, and, maybe, swine*, which had been collected by the viceroy to

Footnote

*In a footnote, Winship cites Herrera's Historia General as mentioning pigs among the food supply of the army.

assure fresh food for the army on its march. There were more than a

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thousand horses in the train of the force, besides the mules, loaded with camp supplies and provisions, and carrying half a dozen pieces of light artillery — the pedreros, or swivel guns of the period."

A ~~very~~ large proportion of the men of the army proper, were young scions of the Spanish nobility and ^{unmarried} "gentlemen", ~~restless~~ restless ~~spirits~~ spirits, ~~and of little use as colonists~~ who had come to New Spain in search of wealth and adventure, ^{and were} ~~and~~ of little use as colonists, and who by their steadily increasing numbers ^{in New Spain were creating} ~~were becoming~~ a problem

for Mendoza, as to ^{how} ~~how~~ to dispose of them without offending ~~the~~ ~~king~~ influential ~~with~~ the Court of Spain; and the expedition and army for northern exploration was therefore not planned by him for ~~the~~ discovery, conquest, ~~and~~ and golden or political reward alone, but ^{partly also} ~~as~~ as a solution to that problem. As gentlemen who came ~~added to the young colonies~~ ^{provided} armed with letters of introduction from those high in authority ~~in~~ in Spain, regardless of the fact that ^{some} ~~many~~ of them had been sent away to prevent them from sowing their wild oats at home, or ^{had come to flee difficulties already kindled there;} ~~or~~ and regardless of the trouble they would make as guests, ^{in New Spain. Worse} they must be

supported and entertained by the settlers and producers of the colony, ~~and~~ ~~on the~~ ~~community,~~ ~~and~~ ~~than~~ than useless when unemployed, they might ~~nevertheless~~ be highly profitable ~~as~~ as soldiers; for by just such young aristocracy ^{armies of} very much of the ^{New World} discovery ^{and conquest} that had so greatly distinguished and enriched Spain within then recent years, had been accomplished. Mendoza was therefore wise in his day and generation, and proposed to kill two birds with one stone.

It must not, however, be supposed that all of the army were of this class; and even ^{among such} ~~in this~~ class, there were doubtless young men of ability and worth; given only the opportunity to develop and prove the same by action. Indeed ~~Castañeda~~ Castañeda evidently had a very high opinion of the material of this army, and remarks, "There were so many men of such high quality among the Spaniards, that such a noble body was never collected in the Indies, nor so many men of quality in such a small body, there being three hundred men."*

Foot note

*Castañeda's Narrative, Winship's Translation, ~~with~~ ~~the~~ Bu. Eth. Ann. XIV, 476.

~~ibid.~~, p. 477.

Footnote

Concerning the captains who went to Cibola, Castañeda relates, "when the viceroy, ~~Don Antonio de Mendoza~~ saw what a noble company had come together, and the spirit and good will with which they had all presented themselves, knowing the worth of these men, he would have liked very well to make every one of them captain of an army; but as the whole number

was small he could not do as he would have liked, and so he appointed the captains and officers, because it seemed to him that if they were appointed by him, as he was so well obeyed and beloved, nobody would find fault with his arrangements. After everybody had heard who the general was, he made Don Pedro de Tovar ensign general, a young gentleman who was the son of Don Fernando de Tovar, the guardian ~~of~~ and lord high steward of the Queen Doña Juana, our demented mistress — may she be in glory — and Lope de Samaniego, the governor of the arsenal at Mexico, a gentleman fully equal to the charge, army-master.*

Footnote

*In Mendoza's letter to the King, ~~which I have just read~~ we read "how the warden, Lope de Samaniego, was going as army master, both because he was a responsible person and a very good Christian, and because he has had experience in matters of this sort", and how the viceroy had received news, since then, "that after they had passed the uninhabited region of Culiacan and were approaching Chiametla, the warden went off with some horsemen to find provisions, and one of the soldiers, who was with him, who had strayed from the force, called out that they were killing him. The warden hastened to his assistance, and they wounded him in the eye with an arrow, from which he died." (Rep. cit., p. 547.)

The captains were Don Tristan de Arellano; Don Pedro de Guevara, the son of Don Juan de Guevara and nephew of the Count of Oñate; Don ~~San~~ Garcia Lopez de Cárdenas; Don Rodrigo Maldonado, brother-in-law of the Duke of the Infantado; Diego Lopez, alderman of Seville, and Diego Gutierrez, for the cavalry. All the other gentlemen were placed under the flag of the general, as being distinguished persons, and some of them became captains later, and their appointments were confirmed by order of the viceroy and by the general, Francisco Vasquez. To name some of them whom I happen to remember, there were Francisco de Barrionuevo, a gentleman from Granada; Juan de Saldivar, Francisco de Ovando*, Juan Gallego†, and Melchior Diaz — a captain who had been

Footnote

*Or Obando; ~~was killed~~ killed a few months later in the siege of Tigues. ~~Those words were found nearly three and a half centuries later, in western Kansas, about 85 miles south of the east line of Colorado and nearly 30 north of the Arkansas river.~~

mayor of Culiacan, who, although he was not a gentleman, merited the position to be held. The other gentlemen, who were worthy substitutes, were Don Alonso Manrique de Lara; Don Lope de Urrea, a gentleman from Aragon, Gomez Suarez de Figueroa, Luis Ramirez de Vargas, Juan de Sotomayor, Francisco Gorbalan, the commissioner Riberos, and other gentlemen, men of high quality, whom I do not now recall. The ~~infantry captain was Pablo de Melgosa of Burgos, and of the artillery, Hernando de Alvarado of the mountain district."~~ ~~and~~

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"Monday, February 23, 1540," says Winship, "the army which was to

Footnote *Rep. cit., page 382.

conquer the Seven Cities of Cibola started on its northward march from Compostela," the then capital of New Galicia; 112 ^{Spanish common} leagues ~~west-northwest of the City of Mexico.~~ For nearly 80 ~~leagues~~ ^{such} ~~leagues~~, "the march was along the ^{much used roads} which followed the coast up to Culiacan;" and in the ^{Historical} Introduction to his "Journey of Coronado," he says, "a month later, on Easter day," it

Footnote *March 28; Rep. cit., page 342.

entered Culiacan, then the northwestern outpost of European civilization, half way up the mainland coast of the Gulf of California. Here Coronado reorganized his force and, "on the 22nd of April," he started

Footnote *Coronado's letter of August 3, 1540, to Mendoza.

northward into the unknown country with a picked force of ~~and~~ two hundred men equipped for rapid marching, leaving the rest to follow at the slower pace of the pack-trains and the four-footed food supplies." Of this picked force, nearly half were Indians; but of others, it included seventy or eighty cavaliers, twenty of thirty footmen, a small part of his artillery, and probably a few negroes, of whom there were a number in the expedition as a whole. He reached Valley of Hearts on the 26th of May, Chichilticalli on the 20th or 21st of June, and the province of Cibola on the 7th of July.

After the land expedition had started, the viceroy had sent his chamberlain, Don Hernando de Alarcon, with a small fleet, up the coast from Acapulco to cooperate with Coronado's land expedition.

Prior to this voyage of Alarcon, the Gulf of California was ~~thought~~ ^{by nearly every one} believed to be a sea, communicating at its northern end as well as southern with the so-called South Sea, or Pacific Ocean; and what we now call Lower California was ^{generally} thought to be an island, ^{this supposed island was} named by Cortés, like the colony he founded there in 1535, Santa Cruz, * and was

Footnote *The colony of Santa Cruz was at or near the site of modern La Paz. Cortés withdrew it in 1536; and La Paz was not founded until 1633, when, in connection with the pearl-fishing enterprises of Francisco de Ortega, twenty-eight men were left there under Diego de Cañedo, "with Brother Juan de Zuñiga to say mass." (Bancroft, N. Mex., 172.) Cortés located Santa Cruz on the spot where Fortun Jimenez, piloto mayor of one of Cortés' vessels and discoverer of the supposed island, having murdered the ship's captain, had landed and himself been murdered with over twenty of his companions, in 1533. (Ibid., pp. 45-50.) The Bay of Jimenez (now Bahía Paz) was named by Cortés "Bahía Santa Cruz"; the common name of bay, ~~land~~, and colony being the saint's day on which, according to the few survivors of the unfortunate expedition of 1533, Jimenez had landed there.

later called by others, after Cortés himself, "the Isle of the Marquis." Captain Ulloa, sent by Cortés, the viceroy's rival, had indeed, in 1539, reached the shoals and bars at the northern end of the "Mar de Cortés", as the Gulf was called, or at a point ^{where there} was "a strong flux and reflux of the waters every six hours, the ~~sea~~ ^{the sea} ~~shores seemed to unite about a league~~ ^{the sea}

appearing to flow into and from a lagoon, or else there was a great river," and "where the low sandy shores seemed to unite about a league off," it being "the opinion of most of the officers that they did so unite, forming a gulf and making Santa Cruz a part of the main".*

*Ibid, pp. 79, 80.

While Ulloa's explorations made it appear improbable, they did not absolutely negative the popular assumption of a northern passage from the Sea of Cortés to the Pacific; and it was left to Alarcon to really prove its falsity, though even this did not suffice to prevent its recurrence long afterward. Alarcon passed through these shoals with his ships and discovered the Colorado River of the West on Thursday, the 26th day of August, 1540, explored it with small boats for many leagues twice up and down, left a letter of record where it would be found by any later explorer, and returned; having proved that the Sea of Cortés was a gulf, and the Isle of the Marquis a peninsula. This letter was soon afterward found and read by Melchior Diaz, who was sent from San Hieronimo de Señora by orders from Coronado, then at Cibola, to search for Alarcon and to explore in that direction.

The account of Alarcon's discovery of the Colorado River, as given by Winship, is so interesting that we reproduce it in full at the end of this chapter.

It is surprising to find how largely Ulloa's and Alarcon's discoveries were forgotten or ignored by geographers, after their main results had been incorporated upon ^{many of} the world's maps for approximately a century. In Volume XV of ~~the~~ Bancroft's Works, (page 81), is ^{reproduced} ~~represented~~ Domingo Castillo's map of the coast regions northwest of Acapulco; ^{dated} 1541. It ^{shows} ~~represents~~ "California" as a peninsula and the body of water on the east of it as a gulf. According to Bancroft, this map was made "from the results of this" [Ulloa's] "voyage only, so far as the outer coast is concerned"; but within the coastline it shows the estuary of a river legended "Rio Buena Guia," the name given to the Colorado River by Alarcon in 1540, and in the interior, northeastward, about latitude 37°, a black square and the word "Cibora" denotes the Cibola of which Niza had brought back such wondrous tales in 1539. Accompanying Winship's "The Coronado Expedition," in the Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, are ^{reductions of} ~~copies of~~ ten sixteenth

Ulloa's account of the discovery of the Colorado River