

The Establishment of the Department of San Blas and Its Initial Naval Fleet: 1767-1770

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DURING THE reign of Carlos III, Spain exerted a mighty thrust of energy to conquer and colonize Alta California and other territory on the Pacific Coast.¹ Animating the zeal for renewed naval exploration were the need for security and for the maintenance of international prestige. Notwithstanding the timeless distractions of Indian rebellions and the problems which beset Jesuit projects for settling Lower California, the fundamental crisis involved the former factor: foreign penetration of the "Spanish Lake."² This motive originated in the Russian activities along the northwest coasts from 1740 to 1760. In 1763 Spanish officials finally learned the full significance of these movements. The Spanish minister in St. Petersburg informed his superiors that the Russians had organized stock companies for the commercial development of Alaska and that they had continually probed the coasts of North America, moving south toward California.³

Spain's initial preparations for exploring the Pacific Coast were designed to thwart Russia's activities and to assert the earlier claims of Spanish explorers of the 16th and 17th centuries. By 1767 Viceroy Francisco de Croix of Mexico had been informed about Russian movements and, in conjunction with Spain's Secretary of State, the Marqués de Grimaldi, he arranged a definite project for Spanish

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¹ The following published works provide background material on the Department of San Blas: Charles E. Chapman, *The Founding of Spanish California* (1916), *A History of California: The Spanish Period* (1921), and "The Alta California Supply Ships," and "Difficulties of Maintaining The Department of San Blas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIX (1915-1916); Fray Francisco Palóu, *Historical Memoirs of New California*, ed. by Herbert E. Bolton (1926), 4 vols.

² For a thorough discussion of the motives, see the chapter entitled "Obstacles in the Way of Advance," in Chapman's *The Founding of Spanish California*.

³ Francisco Antonio Mourelle to Viceroy Conde de Revilla Gigedo, "Viajes a las Costas de California y parte de N. O. de la América en 1774," Feb. 15, 1791, in "Historia y Viajes," I (575), MS, original in Museo Naval, Madrid. Museo Naval hereinafter cited as MN.

naval exploration.⁴ Viceroy Croix commenced his preparations with zeal and enthusiasm during the year 1767, receiving valuable assistance from advisors and officials headed by the new *visitador general*, José de Gálvez.

Convening a junta of New Spain's military, civil, and ecclesiastical leaders in February, 1768, Viceroy Croix explained the crisis and proposed bold measures for exerting Spain's natural and predetermined rights to the Pacific Coast.⁵ At the conclusion of the conclave, the viceroy confidently entrusted the execution of these plans to José de Gálvez and dispatched him on a second inspection of the northern provinces and California. This appointment was a natural selection since Gálvez had recently returned from his first *visita* of the Sonoran provinces and he was particularly well informed on matters of transportation, internal security, and defensive measures affecting the frontier.⁶

The Sonoran campaign of 1767-1768 emphasized the need for a permanent coastal port in Nueva Galicia. Both José de Gálvez and Colonel Domingo Elizondo (the military commander of the Sonoran Expedition, 1764-1767) realized the strategic importance of such a port for shipping supplies and personnel along the Pacific Coast and into the Gulf of California. Consequently, Viceroy Croix issued the following specific instructions for opening and developing a new coastal port:

It has been determined to be indispensable to form a Port where all possible advantages accrue and where the constructed vessels can be maintained for the Expedition of other Provinces and in order to establish a reciprocal and legitimate commerce among Your Majesty's subjects, I determined with the agreement of the Visitador-General to entrust very especially to Colonel Domingo Elizondo, Commander of the Troops assigned to the cited Expedition, to Manuel Rivero, to Francisco Estorgo and other persons of good repute and love for the well-being of the State, that they examine for

⁴ See the correspondence between the Marqués de Grimaldi and Francisco de Croix in José de Gálvez, "Ynforme Que En Virtud de la Rl. Orden de 24 de Mayo de este año hizo el Yllmo. Sr. Visitador Gral. Dn. José de Gálvez, al Exmo. Sr. Virrey Dn. Antonio María Bucareli del estado de los graves asuntos que tubo á su cargo, dividida en quatro partes." México, Dec. 31, 1771 (3119), MS, in Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Hereinafter cited as Gálvez, "Ynforme."

⁵ Herbert I. Priestley, *José de Gálvez, Visitador-General of New Spain*, University of California Publications in History, V (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1916), 238-240.

⁶ Gálvez, "Ynforme." Miguel Costanzó mentions that Gálvez personally offered to undertake the journey to California in order to put the viceroy's project into effect. See: "Diario histórico de las Viajes hechos por mar y Tierra a la Nueva California, 1770," México, Oct. 24, 1770, in *California: Historia y Viajes*, Tomo I (575), MS, original in MN. Hereinafter cited as Costanzó, "Diario histórico."

themselves the most appropriate place for such an important matter and having performed this and taken the other official notices to form the most reliable judgment, that they purpose among other matters that the stated place of San Blas is the most appropriate and still the only one all along the coast from Puerto de la Navidad up to the port of Culiacán.⁷

In April, 1768, Visitador Gálvez left the capital and began his famous inspection of Nueva España and Lower California. After an important visitation in Guadalajara, José de Gálvez journeyed to the west coast, arriving in May, with a recent dispatch of urgency and haste spurring him forward.⁸ He completed a thorough inspection of the previous government shipping center, Mantachel, located three miles southeast of San Blas, and then turned his attention to the port of San Blas.

The historic background and development of Nueva Galicia's ports, including San Blas, Chacala, Mantachel, Xacala, and Valle de Banderas, is closely connected with voyages of exploration. Spanish naval leaders and even foreign intruders of the 16th and 17th centuries knew of the excellent facilities of these ports and their exploits, from Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán down to the commercial activities of Nicolás Cardona and the military operations of Admiral Pedro Porter Cassanate, were centered in this region.⁹

Situated on the west coast of Mexico some 12 leagues south of the Río Santiago and 75 leagues from Guadalajara, the port of San Blas possessed a small, but sheltered harbor and plentiful forests of cedar and other timber. The inner basin was relatively small, accommodating only a limited number of vessels at one time, but in the outer harbor there was an adequate anchorage for larger vessels.¹⁰ The abundance of fresh-water streams was also an attraction

⁷ Marqués de Croix, "Ynstrucción que ha de observar el Comandante Comisionado Don Manuel Rivero para la Población de San Blas y havilitación del Puerto de este Nombre en la Costa del Mar del Sur," México, Jan. 11, 1768, in Archivo General de la Nación, Marina, 44. Hereinafter this archives will be cited as AGN.

⁸ Gálvez, "Ynforme." The viceroy's dispatch reached Gálvez somewhere between Guadalajara and San Blas and contained the following mandates: (1) Gálvez must organize and dispatch a maritime expedition from the west coast to the port of Monterey using the newly-constructed packets *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe*; and, (2) he must "take the advisable measures for safeguarding of that Peninsula from the repeated thrusts of the Russians who arrive from the Tartar Sea to make landfalls on the coasts of Northern California." *Ibid.*

⁹ Álvaro del Portillo y Díez de Sollano, *Descubrimientos y exploraciones en las costas de California* (Madrid, 1947), pp. 209-290; Marcial Gutiérrez Camarena, *San Blas y las Californias* (México, 1956), pp. 31-42, 45-66.

¹⁰ Juan de Pantoja, "Plano que comprehende el Puerto de San Blas y Parte de la Ensenada de Mantachel," 1785, in *Cartas y Planos*, MN. Hereinafter cited as Pantoja, "Plano del Puerto de San Blas."

for Spanish maritime leaders, but among all the natural resources of San Blas none was more readily exploited than the excellent timber stands. During more than fifty years of naval construction in Mantanchel and San Blas, the Jesuits and other traders utilized these choice woods and established permanent facilities.¹¹

At the time of José Gálvez' arrival on the west coast in May, 1768, the port of San Blas was only partially developed. However, on the basis of his inspection, and in accordance with the viceroy's dispatch, Gálvez confirmed the site of Spain's new naval station and supply depot. On May 16 he convened an important junta for the purpose of outlining royal plans for occupation of Alta California and he formally established the Department of San Blas. This military conclave was attended by officials of the inspector's retinue, including his scribe and advisor, Juan Manuel de Viniegras, the engineer and cosmographer, Miguel Costanzó, a pilot and mathematician named Antonio Faveau y Quesada, and important leaders from San Blas: Manuel Rivero Cordero, Vicente Vila, and Juan Pérez.¹²

Visitador Gálvez also explained the organization of the Naval Department of San Blas during the junta. The new department functioned as an independent organization in the kingdom of Nueva España, deriving authority directly from the viceroy and ultimately from the king. Owing to its exclusive military organization—that is, as a unit of the Royal Armada under the *Ministerio de Marina*—the Department of San Blas was never subject to the civil ordinances or regulations of the Audiencia of Guadalajara in whose jurisdiction it operated. And finally, José de Gálvez specified that San Blas should be organized and regulated according to the Royal Ordinances for Arsenals and Naval Stations which guided all major bases in the Spanish empire.¹³

¹¹ Jesuit construction projects are described in the following works: Gutiérrez Camarena, *San Blas y las Californias*, pp. 67-71 and Francisco Javier Alegre, *Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España*, new ed. by Ernest J. Burrus, S. J. and Félix Zubillaga, S. J., Tomo IV (Rome: Institutum Historicum S. J., 1960), 231-235, 241-243.

The numerous varieties and plentiful supply of timber close to San Blas was a natural attraction for maritime construction projects. Owing to the durability and lightness of these woods, the builders from San Blas were practically self-sufficient in basic construction supplies. See: "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas," undated, *Pacífico América*, Tomo II (127), MS, original in MN. Hereinafter cited as "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas."

¹² There are various MSS in the Museo Naval concerning the San Blas junta. The following are applicable: Costanzó, "Diario histórico;" "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas;" and Juan Manuel de Viniegras, "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas," Feb. 16, 1769, in *Costa N. O. de América*, Tomo I, (331), MS.

¹³ Josef de Rada, "Ynstrucción para que en el Departamento de San Blas se observa los Artículos de las Reales Ordenanzas de la Armada, y Arcenales en

In addition to outlining the regulations and ordinances for the new department, José de Gálvez made the following appointments:

Manuel Rivero Cordero *Comandante de Marina* and of the Department
 Juan de Urrengoechea y Arrinda Accountant
 Francisco de Hijosa Commissary Officer
 Juan Pérez Captain of the new packet *El Príncipe*
 Vicente Vila Captain of the new packet *San Carlos*.¹⁴

Among the entire group of new officials, the Comandante, Manuel Rivero, was the most efficient and experienced administrator. As commissary officer in the port of Mantanchel, he handled shipments from the mainland to Lower California and Sonora from 1760 to 1765. During the expulsion of the Jesuits, Rivero was entrusted with receiving and accounting for the personal effects of the deposed missionaries. His efficiency in this assignment brought praise from the visitador and doubtless established him as the outstanding leader in the port of San Blas. Early in January, 1768, Rivero was appointed Comandante de Marina.¹⁵

In addition to his endeavors in Mantanchel, Rivero was also occupied with shipbuilding farther north on the Río Santiago. This task was undertaken at the time of José de Gálvez's first inspection of Sonora and the *Provincias Internas* in 1767. Owing to excessive distances from Mexico to the frontier, and the requirement for troop concentration for his Sonoran campaign, the visitador ordered Rivero to construct four new vessels on the coast of Nueva Galicia in 1767.¹⁶

todo lo asequible. . . ,” México, Nov. 23, 1782, in AGN, Marina, 34. A summary of José de Gálvez's efforts in establishing the Departamento de San Blas are described in the first part of this *expediente*.

¹⁴ Unknown author to José de Gálvez, México, Nov. 11, 1769, in Archivo General de Indias, Guadalajara, 104-6-16, from a transcription in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. Materials from this source are hereinafter cited AGI (transcription in BL). See also Herbert I. Priestley, *José de Gálvez*, p. 247.

The most prominent officers, Juan Pérez and Vincente Vila, commanded the new packetboats *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe* to San Diego and subsequently to Monterey, and in 1774 Pérez achieved distinction in leading Spain's first major naval exploration of the northwest coasts in the frigate *Santiago*. Of the remaining officers, Francisco Hijosa served the Department faithfully for a period of 20 years but Urrengoechea y Arrinda remained in office only a short time.

¹⁵ Croix, “Ynstrucción;” Gutiérrez Camarena, *San Blas y las California*, pp. 74, 80.

¹⁶ [Antonio Pineda,] “Origen de la Construcción de Buques,” n.d., San Blas, in *Pacífico América*, Tomo II (127), MS in MN.

Manuel Rivero's construction project was designed primarily to support the Sonoran campaign of 1767-1768; however, the most significant aspects of the project subsequently proved to be the vessels' participation in the expedition of 1769 to Alta California.

As supervisor of the construction project, Rivero utilized the following services and personnel: first, he selected a suitable construction site on the Río Santiago about 12 leagues north of San Blas; second, he transferred a substantial amount of equipment to the new site and built shipways and docks; and last, he hired an experienced naval constructor, Francisco Pacheco, “dependiente de la Real Armada,” for technical assistance on the project. In accordance with Rivero’s instructions, Pacheco laid down four new keels on the Río Santiago consisting of two packetboats and two *goletas*.¹⁷ In the fall of 1767, Rivero’s subordinate launched the vessels (having christened the packetboats *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe*) and prepared to deliver them to the port of San Blas.¹⁸

The final delivery of the four vessels to San Blas involved a difficult transit along the Río Santiago during the rainy season. In any season the river was difficult and treacherous; it was a tortuous passage filled with sand bars, a strong current, and large quantities of logs and floating debris. Nevertheless, Francisco Pacheco began the operations in September and, by moving the vessels through a series of channels connecting with the river, he was able to by-pass the normal water route via the mouth of the Río Santiago. Apparently this transit was completed in two phases: “All of the difficulties were conquered and the *naves* arrived there in the months of September and November, 1767, while the river was abundant in water.”¹⁹

The construction and delivery of the vessels was an exceptional feat considering the primitive working conditions and the problems of shipping and receiving all finished ironwork and special instruments from Mexico via mule train. However, as a result, by 1768 the San Blas naval forces consisted of the following vessels:

¹⁷ The major difference between the two types was one of size. A packetboat of this period was a large two-masted sailing vessel, much like a brigantine, displacing up to 200 tons. The goleta or schooner of this era was a small, two-masted vessel whose light draft made it ideal for coastal exploration. Measuring up to 100 feet in length, the goleta was popular in the Department of San Blas where a total of seven schooners were completed from 1767 to 1791 compared with only three packetboats. See: *Diccionario marítimo español* (Madrid, 1864), pp. 284, 397.

¹⁸ “Resumen General Sacado de los Extractos que tratan en Particular de los servicios que han hecho los Bageles del Departamento de San Blas desde el año de 1767 hasta el de 1791,” San Blas, Sept. 9, 1791, in *Pacífico América*, II, (127), MS in MN. A detailed account of each vessel including its origin, construction, burden, and a brief narrative of the voyages completed is contained in the above-cited tome as “Noticias del Departamento de San Blas.”

¹⁹ [Pineda,] “Origen de la Construcción de Buques.” The vessels’ transfer from “el Corte de Maderas” on the Río Santiago to the port of San Blas is accurately described by Juan Pantoja, in “Plano del Puerto de San Blas.”

1. Two packetboats, the *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe* (also called "El Toisón," and "San Antonio," respectively), displacing 193 tons each; and
2. Two schooners, the *Sonora* and *Sinaloa*, both of 30 tons burden.²⁰

After presiding at the San Blas junta in May, 1768, José de Gálvez remained on the coast of Nueva Galicia for approximately ten days working on preparations for the forthcoming maritime expedition to California. During this period Gálvez formulated a secondary plan to support the naval expedition. He proposed that Spanish officials of Lower California dispatch a company of soldiers overland, from Loreto to San Diego, thus eliminating the many risks involved in sending a single expedition. The pilots and military officials at San Blas readily accepted this suggestion and relishing their approval Gálvez concluded the following:

Considering that the maritime voyages are of an uncertain nature and very conditional since they are made at the mercy of the Sea and of the Winds, and that the short expeditions of the two proceeding centuries had no other effect than to scout some of the Ports, I determined, with the advice of those Officials and Pilots who had been in San Blas, to assist in the accomplishment of Monterey with an expedition by land which was actually effected by the packetboats, since it is to them that we owe the discovery of that Port and the erection of the Presidio and Mission of San Carlos.²¹

Once again José de Gálvez was occupied with plans for transporting troops and supplies across the Gulf of California. For the Department of San Blas, he specified numerous supply voyages to Lower California and the Sonoran provinces with finished goods and subsistence products. At the same time there was a need for ferrying troops, missionaries, miners, and settlers from the mainland to the settlements at Loreto, La Paz, Real de Santa Ana, and Cabo de San Lucas.²² The vessels of the Department of San Blas received identical assignments except for the two new packetboats, *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe*. As previously noted, these vessels had been selected to complete the sea

²⁰ "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas." Gutiérrez Camarena in *San Blas y las Californias* attributes the entire construction project to Manuel Rivero, who worked in Mantachel (p. 80), while Priestley indicates that the total amount expended for the two packetboats was 70,000 pesos, (p. 236).

²¹ Gálvez, "Ynforme."

²² *Ibid.* Inspector Gálvez possessed great zeal for developing the spiritual and economic welfare of Lower California; consequently, San Blas vessels were continually plying the Gulf of California during the years 1768 to 1770. In addition to vessels of San Blas there were five large canoes which operated along the coasts of Lower California during the same period. See: Juan Gutiérrez, "Renta de Cargo, y Data de los efectos que han estado Cuidado de Don Juan Gutiérrez, Governador Interino, e Yntendente de Real Hacienda de la Península de Californias desde el Día 19 de Abril Del año de 1769 hasta 23 de octubre Del mismo año," Real de Loreto, Oct. 31, 1769, in AGN, Marina, 32-A.

voyage to California although both ships made one round trip from San Blas to Guaymas before departing on the "Sacred Expedition" to occupy Upper California.

In March, 1768, the *San Carlos* left San Blas on its maiden voyage. Under command of Felipe Ximénes, the packetboat sailed to Guaymas, disembarked its load of troops, and then returned to San Blas on July 20. *El Príncipe* also sailed from San Blas to Guaymas in the same month taking a similar cargo. The captain of *El Príncipe*, *piloto* Miguel del Pino, completed the vessel's first voyage as follows:

They carried on board the Treasurer of the expedition to Sonora, Don Francisco Hijosa, who passed to the referred destination with 500 men of the Regiment of América, 21 of the Company of Catalonian Volunteers and different munitions and arms. Concluding its commission, the said vessel returned to this Department on the 30th of August of the same year, with the deposed missionaries of Sonora Province, having left in Guaymas the above-cited Treasurer, troops and munitions.²³

The remaining vessels of the Department of San Blas (excluding the new packetboat *San José* under construction in the shipyard)²⁴ were considerably smaller than the *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe*. These included the ex-Jesuit vessels *La Concepción* and *Lauretana* and the new schooners *Sonora* and *Sinaloa*. Of all these vessels, the new goleta *Sonora* provided the least amount of service because of its transfer to the Philippines immediately after construction. In December, 1767, the *Sonora* sailed from San Blas carrying *pliegos del Servicio Real* to Cavite, and henceforth the vessel's activities were confined to the latter port.²⁵

Notwithstanding the age and service of *La Concepción* and *Lauretana*, these vessels proved a great asset in San Blas' supply activities. A summary of the service of *La Concepción* from 1767-1777 indicates the following trips out of San Blas: to the roadstead of Loreto, 13 times; to the port of Guaymas, 5 times; once to La Paz, Mazatlán, and Ensenada de Cerralvo. Conversely, the *Lauretana* was much less serviceable due to her smaller size and inferior construction. During three year's service, from 1768-1771, this vessel completed only three round trips out of San Blas: once to the port of Guaymas in 1768 and twice to Loreto in 1770. By March, 1771, the *Lauretana* was entirely unsatisfactory as a transport, and department officials

²³ "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas," summary of the packetboat *El Príncipe*.

²⁴ The packetboat *San José* displaced 180 tons and was the first vessel completed at the new Department's *darzena* late in 1768. Compare later movements of the *San José*, *infra*.

²⁵ "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas," summary of the schooner *Sonora*.

put the vessel up for scrap. A contemporary judgment of this ship is evident in the following summary which José de Gálvez wrote to Viceroy Bucareli:

We also have the service and substitution of two small packetboats named *La Concepción* and *Lauretana* which the Jesuits had for voyages to Loreto and Mantachel. . . . But already the *Lauretana* is almost unserviceable, and this circumstance, combined with its poor construction, which advice is made by naval officials, there leaves only the other one named the *Concepción*, with the large goleta, *La Sonora* [*sic*] which is a vessel of great sail and a secure one for making the navigation through the interior gulf and to serve in the continuation of the mainland with Old California.²⁶

José de Gálvez continued his inspection of Nueva España and California at a grueling pace; on May 24, 1768, he embarked on the schooner *Sinaloa* and after a round of activities, including ceremonies of possession-taking on Las Islas Marías and a sojourn in Mazatlán, he landed in Bahía del Cerralvo on July 5. He quickly commenced preparations for the maritime expedition, and then waited for the *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe* from San Blas. Both vessels had been ordered to outfit in the Department of San Blas for the voyage to San Diego (these operations consisted of loading clothing and long-term supplies which would not be susceptible to spoilage) and then to cross the Gulf and stop in La Paz for final provisioning and ultimate instructions. The former vessel departed San Blas on September 26, 1768, but its arrival in the port of La Paz was greatly delayed because of strong head winds in the Gulf of California.²⁷

The inspector was evidently chafing in La Paz over the delay of the new packetboats, and when the *San Carlos* finally reached port, Gálvez and the other officials were amazed. The pride of San Blas' naval vessels, came limping into La Paz in the poorest of material condition. The arrival of the *San Carlos* has been keenly portrayed in the following summary by Juan Manuel de Viniegras:

We first witnessed the entrance of the *San Carlos* into the Port of La Paz on the 25th of December taking aboard more than six inches of water per hour, short of crew; her tackle and rigging were in shreds, with two broken

²⁶ Gálvez, "Ynforme." A comparison of the *Lauretana* and *La Concepción* indicates that the former vessel displaced 54 tons and the latter 62 tons.

The "large goleta Sonora" (actually a new vessel, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*) was completed in 1769 at San Blas, and displaced 59 tons. This vessel was extremely dependable as Gálvez hinted, serving the Department until 1783. *Pacífico América*, II (127), MN.

²⁷ The outfitting of the *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe* was first commenced in San Blas and later completed in Lower California. Preparations at the former location are described in Miguel Costanzó, "Diario histórico." Consult Juan Manuel de Viniegras, "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas," Costa, N. O. de América, Tomo I (331), MN, concerning final preparations for the maritime expedition.

anchors; the cargo damaged except for some barrels of flour and without any fresh provisions whatsoever.²⁸

Once again José de Gálvez met the challenge and conquered tremendous obstacles in order to launch the expedition. By personal encouragement and unfaltering determination, Gálvez supervised a complete overhaul of the *San Carlos* including the difficult task of careening the vessel on dry ground. He made thorough preparations for such an emergency by gathering together a skilled group of workmen including a master-builder, six naval carpenters, three blacksmiths, two caulkers, and two rope-makers as well as an abundance of tools and equipment. In order to complete the arrangements for fresh provisions, Gálvez ordered corn and other fresh produce from the mainland and then organized a great *matanza*, providing the packetboat with both dried and salted meat plus lard and tallow. His final preparation was a fishing expedition which netted a large catch of fresh fish.

During a record-breaking span of 15 days, the workers careened the *San Carlos*, repaired the seams, and then outfitted the ship:

They labored at the same time and installed all new tackle and rigging on the vessel, and they fabricated ropes and hawsers with respect to what the ship carried, quickly delivering the staples in abundance and an exquisite mess supply for eight months with dry provisions enough for one year. There were constructed six storerooms on board in which everything was accommodated with proper order, and a living compartment for the troops and seamen, and finally, the vessel was assigned crewmen which His Excellency had previously enrolled.²⁹

By early January, 1769, the *San Carlos* was ready for sea; the visitador ordered a solemn communion and benediction to be recited aboard by Franciscan Father-President Junípero Serra, and the occasion was duly concluded by Gálvez. He addressed the crew personally, and as his advisor recalls the ceremony: "He gave us with his natural eloquence the most fervent exhortation which filled us with faith and firm intentions to give up our lives before failing in this

²⁸ "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas," *ibid.* The Viniégras account is only a partial statement of the *San Carlos*' misfortunes enroute to La Paz. Compare the following professional opinion of Costanzó: "Since it [*San Carlos*] had struggled such a great deal in the Sea being forced by the Winds, it was weakened and some of the oakum was cast off from its seams through which it began taking aboard water." "Diario histórico. . . , 1770," (575), MN.

²⁹ Viniégras, "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas." The complement of the *San Carlos* and *El Príncipe* was 30 men while the older packets carried a crew of 20. At La Paz an additional group was embarked on the *San Carlos* consisting of 25 soldiers of the Company of Catalonian Volunteers and their commander, Lt. Pedro Fages; the engineer, Miguel Costanzó; the surgeon, Pedro Prat; and a Franciscan, Fray Fernando Parrón. Costanzó, *ibid.*

noble enterprise." On January 11, Vicente Vila commanded the *San Carlos* out of La Paz, escorted by Gálvez in *La Concepción*. Both vessels reached Bahía de San Bernabé on the 14th, but since *El Príncipe* still had not arrived, the visitador dispatched the *San Carlos* for San Diego the next day.³⁰

El Príncipe was much more fortunate in making the transit of the Gulf since she sustained less structural damage. After making a landfall in Bahía de Pulmo, Captain Juan Pérez informed Gálvez of his condition and then turned south because of contrary winds forcing him away from La Paz. Finally, on January 25, Pérez anchored in San Bernabé and, although there was little permanent damage, *El Príncipe* required the same amount of provisioning as the *San Carlos* and an overhaul for safe measure. Again the visitador's skilled caulkers, carpenters, and builders fell to work and within 18 days the careening and compartmentation were completed.³¹ On February 15, *El Príncipe* sailed from San Bernabé preceded by the same religious ceremonies and salvos. The expedition was launched and, with the accomplishment of his mission, José de Gálvez retired to Loreto for a brief rest and further planning.³²

The only additional vessel in San Blas' original naval fleet was the packetboat *San José*—the legendary "Lost *San José*" of Gálvez' maritime expedition. The last of three packetboats completed at San Blas in the period 1767 to 1770, the *San José* was somewhat lighter than her sister ships, displacing 180 tons. Since the vessel was not completed until December, 1768, Gálvez ordered it to serve as the supply ship of the expedition.

On December 30 the *San José* sailed out of San Blas bound for Loreto with provisions for both the troops and missionaries of that

³⁰ Vicente Vila, "Sucinta Relación de lo acaecido en la Navegación del Paquebot San Carlos desde el día 11 de enero que salió del Puerto de La Paz hasta el 29 de Abril que ancló en el Puerto de San Diego," San Diego, July 6, 1769, in Costa N. O. de América, Tomo I.

³¹ Viniegras, "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas." José de Gálvez personally dispatched Captain Pérez to San Bernabé and then he departed La Paz in *La Concepción*. Using two launches and his own vessel, the inspector was able to transfer 62 men and their equipment to the cape in preparation for outfitting *El Príncipe*.

The visitador's advisor, Juan Manuel de Viniegras, reports that the material shortcomings of *El Príncipe* were the result of poor supervision during the vessel's loading in San Blas; he says, "it was dispatched at the same time that Don Manuel Rivero was gravely ill." *Ibid.*

³² The salvos employed in dispatching all three packetboats—*San Carlos*, *El Príncipe* and *San José*—cost 469 pesos for "nine arrobas, trece libras de Pólvoira." The visitador personally assumed the expense of this item; see: Juan Gutiérrez, "Renta de Cargo y Data . . . de Real Hacienda de la Península de Californias," 1769, in AGN, Marina, 32-A.

port. Immediately upon arrival, the task of loading additional supplies was completed and the *San José* attempted to make the passage south through the Gulf to Cabo de San Lucas. Still residing in Cabo de San Lucas, Inspector Gálvez received notice of the vessel's arrival at Bahía de Pulmo sometime in February, 1769. "The new and beautiful packetboat *San José*" was heading for San Lucas to make minor repairs and to resupply immediately before her departure for Monterey. For various reasons the packetboat was unable to reach Cabo de San Lucas, and it finally returned to San Blas in December, 1769.³³

At this point, however, the chronological sequence of the movements of the *San José* is vaguely traced at best. It is not certain whether the vessel completed her repairs in San Blas and headed directly for California or if the *San José* finally reached Cabo de San Lucas, completed the supplying and repairing, and then sailed northward. In tracing the final episode of the vessel's disappearance, the explanation of José de Gálvez (which is one of several theories) seems the most credible considering the circumstances:

It is to be presumed that the vessel was lost in the violence of some storm of which there are many that pass on up to 28 degrees of latitude, being also at fault in this occasion since the September equinox is regularly periodic and difficult in those Seas, making it worse in the interior gulf with all the many islands scattered there.³⁴

The Naval Department of San Blas proved to be another successful Gálvez endeavor, although not without periodic setbacks and disappointments. After 1768, the development of San Blas was characterized by frustration and distress. It suffered from an inhospitable climate, and the torrential rains caused crippling delays due to sickness. That any progress was achieved seems remarkable considering the original site of the villa was practically washed away in the first rainy season, and both administrative officials, Manuel Rivero and Francisco Ley, died in 1769.³⁵

³³ "Noticias del Departamento de San Blas."

³⁴ Gálvez, "Ynforme." The author has not attempted to present the entire narrative of the packet *San José* but rather an integrated part of its movements from San Blas to Lower California. Among several accounts, the Gálvez report seems more reliable and it probably offers more contemporary information than Costanzo's "Diario histórico" or Viniégras' "Noticias del Cabo de San Lucas."

³⁵ There is no record of Francisco Ley in Viceroy Croix's "Ynstrucción" of 1768, in which Manuel Rivero was appointed Comandante Comisionado at San Blas. In AGN, Marina, 32-A, however, there is a summary of San Blas activities (1768-1773) which notes the death of both Manuel Rivero and Francisco Ley in 1769. Both officials died in office without having subscribed to the customary *fianza* which protected the government from mismanagement and fraud.

In Gálvez, "Ynforme," there is reference to the "Comandante de aquel Puerto

By 1774, however, the Naval Department of San Blas received permanent recognition and status in Nueva España. On the basis of its successful production of sturdy, competent vessels San Blas was awarded the unique distinction of being the only major naval station on the Pacific Coast.

[San Blas] Don Francisco Ley," who petitioned Viceroy Croix for the reduction of salt prices in the department for the year 1769. It seems likely that Francisco Ley was appointed comandante in 1769 while Rivero continued to serve in an advisory capacity.