

# The Other Side of the Coin: The Viceroy, Bodega y Quadra, Vancouver, and the Nootka Crisis<sup>1</sup>

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In his "Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain," the German naturalist and scientific explorer, Alexander von Humbolt, wrote disparagingly of the Nootka crisis: "A few sheds erected on the coast, and a miserable bastion defended by swivel guns, and a few cabbages planted within an enclosure, were very near to exciting a bloody war between England and Spain."<sup>2</sup> In a narrow sense, he was right. But the crisis which resulted from the seizure in July 1789 of three ships of the British fur trading syndicate of John Meares by Esteban José Martínez, the commandant of the infant Spanish settlement, had long-term consequences that neither Humbolt nor the courts of Great Britain and Spain could have foreseen. What began as an incident on a far distant, virtually unknown shore was seized upon by the British Prime Minister William Pitt as an opportunity to meet two preoccupations of the moment. An election would soon have to be called, and he was anxious about his majority in the Commons. He was also under considerable pressure from the commercial community eager to gain access to the markets of Spanish America and to increase England's trade in the Pacific basin. A successful challenge to Spain's 300-year-old claim to exclusive sovereignty over the Pacific Ocean, he hoped, would galvanize support for his government.<sup>3</sup> The Nootka Convention of 28 October 1790, by which Pitt achieved his purpose, constitutes a watershed in the history of Spain's vast empire in the Americas. It marked not only the end of her largely theoretical and outmoded claim to such exclusive sovereignty but also symbolically the beginning of her rapid decline as an imperial power.

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<sup>2</sup> London edition, 1811, vol. II, 357.

<sup>3</sup> John Norris, "The Policy of the British Cabinet in the Nootka Crisis," *English Historical Review* CCLXXVII (October 1955): 562-580.

Historians who have studied the Nootka Controversy for the most part have confined their research to the diplomatic and strategic aspects.<sup>4</sup> Little attention has been paid to how the crisis was viewed from the perspective of *Nueva España* by the Viceroy, the second Conde de Revilla Gigedo, and by his naval chief, Captain Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, and to the latter's negotiation with Captain George Vancouver, the commissioners appointed by their governments to settle the terms under which Nootka was to be turned over to England in accordance with the provisions of the Nootka Convention.<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that the examination which follows will show how in one important instance diplomacy at the outer reaches of two empires was conducted. It may also allow some interesting speculation as to what might have happened had matters not been resolved in the way they were.

Accompanied by Bodega y Quadra, the newly appointed naval commandant of Spain's principal naval base for the Californias and the Pacific Northwest at San Blas on the Nayarit coast, Revilla Gigedo arrived in Veracruz from Spain in August 1798. The outgoing Viceroy, Manuel Antonio Florez, wrote immediately inviting him to meet urgently in Guadalupe to discuss a situation of the "utmost gravity": the commandant at Nootka had just seized two English ships.<sup>6</sup> As he was on the point of relinquishing his office, he did not think it appropriate for him to give instructions to deal with the crisis he saw looming.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A selective bibliography is listed in Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973. The classic study and still most useful is William R. Manning, "The Nootka Sound Controversy," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1904*, 283-478. In addition to articles on specific aspects listed by Cook, of interest are Christon I. Archer, "The Transient Presence: A Re-appraisal of Spanish Attitudes towards the Northwest Coast in the Eighteenth Century," *BC Studies* 18 (Summer 1973): 3-32; Charles Marie Boissonnault, "Mirabeau donne la Colombie 'espagnole' à l'Angleterre," *Memoires de la Société Royale du Canada*, Serie IV, Tome X (1972): 103-13; Howard V. Evans, "The Nootka Sound Controversy in Anglo-French diplomacy — 1790," *Journal of Modern History* 46 (1974): 609-40; Luis Mariñas Otero, "El Incidente de Nutka," *Revista de Indias* 27 (1967), 335-407; Christian de Parrel, "Pitt et L'Espagne," *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* 46 (1950): 58-98; Paul Webb, "The Naval Aspects of the Nootka Sound Crisis," *The Mariner's Mirror* 61 (1975): 133-54; J. Holland Rose, "Sea Power and the Winning of British Columbia," *The Mariner's Mirror* 7 (1921): 74-79; and the same author's *William Pitt and the National Revival* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1911), chapter XXV.

<sup>5</sup> A good but incomplete treatment of the controversy from this perspective will be found in Warren L. Cook, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Argonaut and Princess Royal*. For some reason, Florez did not include *North West America*.

<sup>7</sup> Their correspondence, consisting of nine letters exchanged over a five-week period, is to be found in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico, hereafter referred to as

The Viceroy-elect did not appreciate having the problem unloaded onto him so unexpectedly and refused to be hurried. But in reply he did not hesitate to say that, rather than seizing the ships, Martínez should have “told their captains to return when they could to the ports from whence they came.” He doubted whether they should be considered pirates and could not believe the British government would have ordered Meares to take possession of a Spanish port. To do so would have been inconsistent with the instructions given Captain James Cook in 1776 not to “enter ports and establishments” along Spain’s Pacific coast.<sup>8</sup> Rumours of a Russian expedition to take possession of Nootka had proven false because the two countries enjoyed the most harmonious relations. For the same reason, the Viceroy-elect doubted England would attempt to occupy Nootka. Nor did he consider the situation “very dangerous.” England, he said, was too far away to mount an expedition, and if she did Spain had the necessary forces to deal with it. In any event, the matter would first have to be considered by the two courts and, he felt certain, appropriate instructions would be received in due course. As if to emphasize his unhappiness at being asked to pull the outgoing Viceroy’s chestnuts out of the fire (Florez, acting on a rumour that the Russians were planning to occupy Nootka, had ordered Martínez to occupy it without waiting for the home government’s authorization), Revilla Gigedo added that it was too late in the season to send an expedition north to reoccupy Nootka. Not wishing to appear totally negative, however, he undertook to order Bodega y Quadra and six other naval officers who had come with him from Spain to proceed to Mexico City as soon as possible.

The Nootka Convention removed the immediate danger of war but left unresolved a number of issues the crisis had brought to the fore. Having been negotiated on the basis of incomplete and inaccurate information and in the highly charged atmosphere of Pitt’s belligerent diplomacy, the Convention was silent on two issues of particular importance to Spain. In the first place, now that she had been compelled to acknowledge formally she no longer had exclusive sovereignty over the Pacific Ocean, there was a need to establish a clear dividing line between Spanish and British interests in the Pacific Northwest. Secondly, there was the question of

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AGN, Ramo Historia, vol. 65. At a later date, for some reason that is not clear, Revilla Gigedo criticized Florez for not having briefed him on the events at Nootka.

<sup>8</sup> Cook’s instructions were not so precise. He was “strictly enjoined not to touch upon any part of the Spanish Dominions on the Western Continent of America.” See J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook, Vol. III, The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1967), ccxx.

reciprocal right of access to Pacific coast ports upon which Article V was open to differing interpretations.

Revilla Gigedo shared the view of his court that it was now imperative to reach an understanding on these issues. As he foresaw that implementation of the Convention would bring a host of problems, his correspondence with Count Florida Blanca, the Minister of State, was extensive.<sup>9</sup> The Viceroy's despatches putting forward his views and suggestions for dealing with the situation were not always replied to promptly — some were never answered — and the direction he received was minimal. Except for the issue of whether Nootka should be abandoned, however, there was never any conspicuous disagreement.

Underlying Revilla Gigedo's approach was his complete conviction that Britain never really had a case. His early enquiries satisfied him that although Martínez had acted "hastily" and that his failure to handle the situation with greater diplomacy would have "disagreeable consequences,"<sup>10</sup> he had nevertheless acted in accordance with the Royal *Cédula* of 25 November 1692, one of the "Laws of the Indies," calling for the arrest and detention of foreign ships entering waters claimed by Spain, its confirmation by the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 with England, and the Royal Order of 18 October 1776 instructing Viceroy Bucareli to "detain, take prisoner and prosecute any foreign ship entering our harbours in the South Seas."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he wrote Florida Blanca,

England had no right to establish itself in Nootka because, even though Cook arrived in this harbour in 1778, the Spanish discovered and took possession of it in 1774, as Cook acknowledged when recovering the two silver spoons stolen by the Indians from an officer of our expedition.<sup>12</sup>

The Viceroy amplified this view in a subsequent letter:

No one can deny that on 7 August 1774 Ensign don Juan Pérez in the frigate *Santiago* anchored off this harbour, naming it *San Lorenzo*, and on 23 July 1775 the same was done a little to the south of Nootka in the same frigate commanded by Lieutenant Don Bruno de Heceta and by the schooner *Sonora*

<sup>9</sup> As Minister of State, Florida Blanca was both chief minister and foreign minister.

<sup>10</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #34 of 27 March 1791. AGN, Ramo de Correspondencia de Virreyes, hereafter referred to as CV, vol. 164.

<sup>11</sup> That is the Pacific Ocean. This Royal Order was issued when José de Gálvez, the Minister of the Indies, became aware that Cook was setting out on his third voyage, the main purpose of which was to seek a western entrance to the supposed North-west Passage. The arrest of Cook was one of the objectives of the Arteaga-Bodega expedition of 1779.

<sup>12</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #32 of 28 February 1791. AGN, CV, vol. 164. AT.

under Don Juan de la Bodega [*sic*], repeating the act of taking possession of the district.<sup>13</sup>

England, he went on, had been dispossessed of no buildings or land at Nootka or elsewhere. Meares had never claimed possession, and when he departed in 1788, nothing was left behind. When Martínez arrived in 1789, he found no English establishment and was given no information about the purchase of any land.<sup>14</sup>

As for Article II, providing for compensation, the Viceroy considered its terms had been met by the measures already taken by Florez and himself. The two captains had been well treated before being released, their ships careened and restored to their owners with their cargoes of furs. In addition, the officers and crews had been paid their wages for their time in custody at Spanish rates of pay for the South Seas (which were more generous). Optimistically, Revilla Gigedo believed that all this, done at great expense to the Treasury, was sufficient to meet the obligations of the Convention. But no one could have anticipated Meares would seek damages to the extent of £469,865, a greatly exaggerated amount he claimed to be the value of his losses, including the value of the sea otter skins collected and the loss of profits sustained while his ships were used by the Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

Revilla Gigedo was particularly troubled by the question of reciprocal right of free access to settlements established by either England or Spain to "carry on their commerce without disturbance or molestation." Article V of the Convention signalled Britain's formal entry into the Pacific at Spain's expense to fish, trade, and establish colonies. It also embodied the attainment of Pitt's objective to breach Spain's claim of exclusive sove-

<sup>13</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #34 cited above. AT. The Viceroy's history is a bit off, as Pérez never took possession at Nootka. If he is referring to Hezeta taking possession at Point Grenville, Washington, as seems to be the case since in the same paragraph he mentions the massacre of six men of Bodega's ship, the date should be 14 July 1775.

<sup>14</sup> Article I of the Convention read: "It is agreed that the buildings and tracts of land situated on the Northwest Coast of the continent of North America, or on islands adjacent to that continent, of which subjects of His Britannic Majesty were dispossessed about the month of April, 1789, by a Spanish officer, shall be restored to the said British subjects."

<sup>15</sup> After a protracted negotiation, this amount was reduced to 210,000 pesos "fuertes" and in the Second Nootka Convention (12 February 1793) was agreed to represent complete indemnification for all Meares' losses, including land and ships. In his *The Founding of the Second British Empire*, London, 1964, Vincent Harlow notes (vol. 2, page 462): "... In the event Spain fended the business off for three years until it became lost in the exigencies of war when Spain joined the coalition against Jacobin France. Richard Etches, Meares and their associates did not receive a dollar."

reignty, so fundamental to Spanish colonial policy. The Viceroy's letters to Florida Blanca indicated he was less concerned with this loss than with the practical problems he would now face. It was not just the ambiguities of this Article that worried him. He foresaw Article V giving rise to a host of difficulties unless English and Spanish settlements were sufficiently far apart. To avoid these, he boldly recommended Nootka be abandoned. Giving it up, he wrote, would represent no material loss as its islands were "barren and rugged" and the effort to maintain the settlement was no longer worth the tremendous cost in money and manpower.<sup>16</sup> No doubt having in mind Manuel Quimper's report of his exploration of the Strait of Juan de Fuca in the summer of 1790, he suggested a suitable harbour in the strait would provide both better shelter and a site for monitoring the movement and designs of English ships. This settlement would be Spain's northernmost and, by the terms of the Convention, no English ship suspected of smuggling or piracy would be allowed to pass south of it.

Though he consistently urged withdrawal from Nootka, Revilla Gigedo never doubted that Spain had every right to retain it and was under no obligation to restore to England "something she never owned." Even three years later, he would write the Minister of State, the Duque de Alcudia:

Our King undoubtedly has just title to dominion over the coasts in the North West of America and the adjacent islands, because in the course of nearly three centuries we have occupied a considerable amount of them, we have repeatedly undertaken costly expeditions to discover and settle them at the expense of the Royal Treasury and his subjects, we have taken possession in the name of the King of everything discovered and we have always prohibited establishments of foreign powers and the navigation of their ships. We have prosecuted those who have violated peace treaties dealing with these matters.<sup>17</sup>

The need to abandon Nootka was a conviction Revilla Gigedo continued to hold throughout his administration. In his view, the settlement was unproductive, indefensible, and a drain on the Treasury, and the cost of maintaining it was no longer commensurate with its importance for reasons of prestige or trade. The conclusion of the Convention, he thought, had greatly reduced its value as a symbol of Spanish sovereignty, and the

<sup>16</sup> A report requested by his successor showed that in the four years from 1789 to 1792, the cost of shipping to man and sustain Nootka amounted to 350,573 pesos. This figure is exclusive of foodstuffs and equipment for the settlement, and for the salaries of the military, naval, and religious personnel stationed there. AGN, Ramo Provincias Internas, vol. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Alcudia, letter #162 of 12 April 1793, paragraph 118. AGN, CV, vol. 173. AT. This important and lengthy letter deals with the major issues of Revilla Gigedo's administration in the interrelated areas of exploration, defence, and the Nootka crisis. Alcudia was the former Manuel Godoy and the Queen's favourite.

explorations of the coast of Cook in 1778, Lapérouse in 1786, Quimper and Fidalgo in 1790, and Malaspina, Eliza, and Narvaez in 1791 had lessened the concern that any Pacific entrance to the supposed North-west Passage lay either in Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, or the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Even before the Convention was signed, when war appeared to be a real possibility, Revilla Gigedo, who believed British naval strength in the Pacific greater than it was, feared British naval superiority in the Pacific would make it impossible to provide any credible defence of the settlement or the long coast line of the Viceroyalty. He saw Spain's limited forces too thinly stretched, and renewed tension was always possible now that the sea otter fur trade had become so vigorous and clashes between traders and natives more frequent.

A further element influencing his thinking was the conviction that what motivated British policy was not so much the profits obtained from the fur trade, important as they were, as the desire that

San Francisco be the [northern] limit of Spanish possessions, to establish from this point [north] what would be common to each nation and freedom to fish a distance of ten leagues from our Pacific coasts. This [purpose] can be seen as conspiring to encourage illicit trade and destroying that of New Spain and the Philippines by the clandestine introduction of goods and merchandise from Asia and Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Withdrawal from Nootka would make it possible to consolidate resources and strengthen the defences of the California *presidios* and missions. Even these, he confessed, he would abandon, so costly were they to sustain, were it not for their great success in converting natives and developing agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as for the great prospects they held for future economic and social development.<sup>19</sup>

To meet the requirement of the Royal Order proposing that the entrance to the strait be the dividing point between Spanish and British interests,<sup>20</sup> he thought the settlement could be located in one of the best harbours on the north shore, where neither the British nor anyone else would be fishing or trading for sea otter pelts. They would be active in the best hunting grounds to the north of the strait, access to which by virtue of Article V Spain would not in any event be denied.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 211. AT.

<sup>19</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #44 of 1 September 1791. AGN, CV, vol. 164.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Order of 25 December 1790. AGN, Ramo Reales Cédulas, hereafter referred to as RC, vol. 147, *expediente* 222. The Royal Order stated that the point should be fixed at 48°N, but Revilla Gigedo correctly pointed out that the latitude was 48°30'N.

The Viceroy also concurred in the instruction of the Royal Order that a line be drawn from the dividing point at the entrance to the strait due north to  $60^{\circ}$ , the latitude of Prince William Sound, and forwarded a map to show how he interpreted the instruction.<sup>21</sup> Such a division, he said, would prevent "the English from penetrating (overland) to our missions and the Province of New Mexico." From the Spanish point of view, the proposal had the additional merit that the Strait of Juan de Fuca would become Spanish waters and reflected Spain's concern not to cede land where a passage across North America might be found. On the other hand, it evidenced what little knowledge the Spanish authorities had of the geography and economy of the interior of the continent. Revilla Gigedo recognized that England might object on the grounds that her ships could be prevented from entering the strait to trade with the natives.<sup>22</sup> But neither he nor any Spanish authority realized that Britain would never countenance any obstacle to free access to the Pacific Ocean. Nor could Britain agree to her traders being denied access to the vast lands which were the vital fur-gathering grounds of the Hudson's Bay and North West companies.

When six months passed without a reply, the Viceroy wrote again,<sup>23</sup> repeating his view that nothing would be lost by abandoning Nootka. He now suggested Neah Bay (or Fuca, as he named it), on the south shore of the strait at its entrance, as a point from which traffic in and out of the strait could be observed. He outlined his plan in some detail. The construction would be of a temporary nature. Ideally it should have the same strength as Nootka but be manned by a garrison of at least twenty-five to thirty men, the greater number of them married to reduce costs of rotation, and defended with a battery of six cannon. Optimistically, Revilla Gigedo did not expect that England would oppose the idea, since in addition to Nootka she would receive Port Cox (Clayoquot Sound), where Meares had planned to establish a factory.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This map is reproduced in Cook, op. cit., fig. 27, and Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca*, hereafter referred to as Wagner, *Spanish Explorations* (Santa Ana, California, 1933), 60. In his monumental *Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800* (Berkeley, 1937), Wagner states, #814, that this map "seems to have been drawn up to illustrate the proposal of the Viceroy . . . in 1792." However, it is clear that his letter #34, cited above, was his response to the Royal Order of 25 December 1790. In it, Revilla Gigedo says he is attaching the map to his letter.

<sup>22</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #34, cited above.

<sup>23</sup> Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #44, cited above.

<sup>24</sup> Neah Bay had first been visited by Manuel Quimper, who formally took possession of it on 1 August 1790, calling it Nuñez Gaona.

The simultaneous appointments of Revilla Gigedo as Viceroy and Captain Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra to return to *Nueva España* as naval commandant at San Blas brought together at a critical time two exceptionally able men. They were to prove an effective team, working together with a high degree of mutual respect and sharing a common approach to the political, diplomatic, and strategic issues they would confront. That both were born in the Americas, Revilla Gigedo in Cuba and Bodega y Quadra in Peru, was undoubtedly an important bond.

The specific advice Bodega y Quadra offered the Viceroy to deal with the crisis cannot be isolated. It may be assumed, however, that Revilla Gigedo's despatches developing both the substance of the instructions and the tactics Bodega y Quadra should follow as commander of the Expedition of the Limits, as it was to be called, represented a consensus of their views. It may also be assumed that they agreed on Bodega's title as it indicated clearly that Spain attached the greatest importance to this aspect of the forthcoming negotiation. When together in Veracruz before setting out for the capital, they would certainly have discussed Florez' letter with its first news of the seizure of the English ships. Bodega y Quadra recorded that they had a further meeting before he left Mexico City for San Blas.<sup>25</sup> The Viceroy himself reported a third meeting when he summoned Bodega y Quadra to Mexico City to review his instructions with him. Bodega's contribution is more easily identified in the manner in which he prepared for and conducted his negotiation with Vancouver at Nootka.

Though King Carlos IV suggested Bodega y Quadra be named Spain's commissioner, he left the choice up to the Viceroy. Revilla Gigedo did not hesitate to appoint him for he felt no one was better qualified for the assignment. Born of a noble Basque family, Bodega y Quadra had taken part in two important voyages, the first in 1775 in command of a thirty-six-foot schooner *Sonora*, in which he reached the top of Kruzof Island (latitude 57° 18'N) and Bucareli Bay (latitude 55° 14'N) in the Alaska Panhandle, and the second in 1779, in command of the frigate *La Favorita*, reaching Hinchinbrook Island at the entrance to Prince William Sound and Cape Elizabeth at the entrance to Cook Inlet. These voyages had given him an extensive first-hand knowledge of the Pacific Northwest and a reputation as an intrepid and intelligent maritime explorer. As commandant at San Blas for a year on a previous occasion, he had demonstrated energy and

<sup>25</sup> Bodega y Quadra, "Viage a la Costa N.O. de la America Septentrional por Dn. Juan Franco. de la Bodega y Quadra, del Orn. de Santiago, Capitán de Navío de la Rl. Armada y Comandte. del Departmto. de Sn. Blas en las Fragatas de su mando Sta. Gertrudis, Aranzazu, Princesa, y Goleta Activa. Año de 1792," hereafter referred to as Bodega, "Viage." Of the three known copies, none are signed by

imagination in coping with its problems and inadequacies, its unhealthy climate, not to mention the chronic shortage of shipping to meet all the demands placed on the Department, especially the annual re-supply expeditions to the California *presidios* and missions. Of particular importance at the present moment was his familiarity with his government's thinking on issues of strategic policy.

The Viceroy's instructions were voluminous,<sup>26</sup> a reflection of the importance he attached to the mission and in no way an indication of a lack of confidence in the ability of Bodega y Quadra to carry them out. In his instructions the Viceroy wrote:

I am entrusting this mission to your care because of my good opinion of you, warranted by your zeal, skill and conduct. Your knowledge and experience in the northern coasts of this America assure the greatest success of this important mission.<sup>27</sup>

Implementation of the Convention and preparation of Bodega's instructions were not the Viceroy's only concerns at this time. Closely related to both was the urgent need he felt for more explorations northwards. As it was known that Vancouver would be surveying the North Pacific coast and searching for the North-west Passage, additional discoveries and

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Bodega y Quadra. The copy in the archives of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MS 145 and 146) is certified, as is the copy in the Huntington Library, San Marino (HM 141), but the copy in the Library of Congress (MS 19,519) is not. As normally at least one copy of a journal would be signed by the author, it is conceivable that such a copy might exist somewhere or has been lost forever. The copy in the archives of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been published by Salvador Bernabeu Albert in his *Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra: El Descubrimiento del Fin del Mundo (1775-1792)* (Madrid, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> These were contained in several communications, the most important of which were forwarded to Florida Blanca under cover of letters #56 of 29 October 1791, and #71 of 3 January 1792. AGN. CV, vol. 164 and vol. 168 respectively. In addition, Bodega was provided with a translation of portions of Meares' Memorial to the British Government with a commentary in the form of talking points, and memoranda on a variety of matters expected to come up. The formal instructions boiled down to a package: Nootka was to be given up, lock, stock, and barrel, provided it could be satisfactorily relocated at Neah Bay or at some other site in the strait. The strait would be agreed to be the boundary between Spanish and British interests. A joint survey would be undertaken to establish it and charts jointly made to record the agreement. Everything to the south of it would be Spanish and everything to the north British, except that Spanish ships would have the right of access to Nootka. Additionally, a line would be drawn due north from the entrance to the strait to 60°; everything to the west of it, that is the coast, would be British and to the east, the interior, Spanish.

<sup>27</sup> Revilla Gigedo also assured Florida Blanca of his complete confidence in Bodega: "Quadra's [*sic*] scrupulous observance of his instructions is guaranteed by the high regard I have for the zeal, talent, prudence and substantial character of this distinguished officer and his practical knowledge of things." Revilla Gigedo to Florida Blanca, letter #64 of 27 November 1791. AGN, CV, vol. 164. AT.

formal claims of possession would strengthen the Spanish position. The Viceroy's plans, developed with his government, called for an intensive effort that Bodega y Quadra would co-ordinate and implement. He was instructed to follow up the findings of Fidalgo's survey of Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet and Manuel Quimper's exploration of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Francisco Eliza and José María Nárvaez would explore Haro Strait, seen but not entered by Quimper, and Jacinto Caamaño would explore the Queen Charlotte Islands and the Alaska Panhandle. Eliza was also given the impossible task of surveying in one season the coast from 55° N to San Francisco, a reflection of a lack of appreciation of the immense length of the coast line and its intricate geography. For the intensive survey of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Alejandro Malaspina, after arriving back in Acapulco from the Gulf of Alaska on his great scientific voyage, travelled to Mexico City and persuaded Revilla Gigedo to assign the mission to two of his officers, Dionisio Alcalá Galiano and Cayetano Valdés, in two urgently built schooners, *Mexicana* and *Sutil*.<sup>28</sup>

Historians who have studied the Nootka crisis have generally dismissed the Bodega y Quadra-Vancouver negotiation as unimportant as no agreement emerged from it. For example, in his *History of British Columbia*, H. H. Bancroft said merely:

The representatives of the August [*sic*] powers eat much together and talk in genuflections . . . Letters pass and deep diplomatism [*sic*] is in order. To whom shall belong the several shanties on this barbarous coast of primary importance to civilization? . . . In aught save urbanity and obeisance, they cannot agree.<sup>29</sup>

And in his classic study, W. R. Manning stated that "it would be of very little value to follow in detail the negotiation between (Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver) since the mission accomplished nothing."<sup>30</sup> The accounts of each commissioner not only describe how they viewed and carried out their delicate mission, they also tell us a good deal about themselves and their relationship. Moreover, the stalemate had significant consequences. Both courts were given an opportunity to reassess their positions in the

<sup>28</sup> Revilla Gigedo had appointed Francisco Mourelle to command this expedition with Jacinto Caamaño as his pilot, in the specially built schooner, *Mexicana*. But Malaspina persuaded the Viceroy to give the task to his officers because, he said, they were highly qualified navigators and familiar with the chronometer. This change of plan required a second schooner, *Sutil*, to be built hastily. They did not operate under Bodega's command. See Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina and Galiano; Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast, 1791 and 1792* (Vancouver, 1991), and John Kendrick, *The Voyage of Sutil and Mexicana, 1792, the last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast of America* (Spokane, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> H. H. Bancroft, *History of British Columbia* (San Francisco, 1887), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Manning, *op cit.*, 464.

light of the fuller and more accurate information the negotiation brought to light. The warlike atmosphere dissipated as fear of the impact of the French Revolution brought them closer together, eventually for a brief period as allies. Spain continued to have a presence in the Pacific Northwest until 1795 when, under the terms of the Third Nootka Convention, she voluntarily withdrew for reasons of European rather than imperial policy. Britain, having other priorities, was unable to capitalize on Pitt's diplomatic success until 1813, when Astoria, at the entrance to the Columbia River, was sold to the North West Company, to be replaced in 1825 by Fort Vancouver.

The character and personality of Bodega y Quadra suited him admirably for a demanding and delicate mission. He had already given evidence of how with tact and understanding he could get along with the most difficult of his fellow officers and civilian associates. His natural charm and outgoing nature augured well for success and, with a clear understanding of what was expected of him, he would make use of both. Even in the remote wilderness of Nootka Sound, he wanted to receive his British counterpart with appropriate dignity and formality. He obtained an advance of a year's salary to purchase a number of gastronomic delights and rare foodstuffs<sup>31</sup> which Vancouver somewhat inelegantly called his "best provisions." He also took with him to Nootka his personal silver service, which astonished all who enjoyed his "open house" dinners.<sup>32</sup> Immediately upon his arrival at Nootka, he ordered renovations to the commandant's house so as to "receive and entertain the English more fittingly." All ships in port, whatever their nationality, were provided daily at no cost with milk from the cows and goats, fresh bread from the oven he ordered enlarged, vegetables from the garden, and fresh eggs and meat. In addition to admiring the diligence with which Bodega y Quadra cultivated the trust and friendship of the Nootka chief, Maquinna, visitors recorded countless gestures, large such as offering free of charge the modest resources of the settlement for repairing and careening ships, and small such as offering shelter in his residence to the distressed fur trader, Matthew Weatherhead, even giving him 200 pesos from his own pocket to help him on his way through *Nueva España* back to England.

Such hospitality, both here and later in Monterey, was aimed primarily at Vancouver and his people, but also at the ships of other nationalities.

<sup>31</sup> Janet R. Fireman: "The Seduction of George Vancouver: A Nootka Affair," *Pacific Historical Review* LVI, 3 (August 1987): 427-43.

<sup>32</sup> Even today this elegance causes astonishment. It should not be forgotten that Bodega y Quadra was born in Peru, where the use of silver for domestic purposes was, and still is, common in both well-to-do and less wealthy families.

Revealing his purpose, he wrote in his report that “[Vancouver] and all sixteen French, Portuguese and American vessels touching [Nootka] during my residence will spread word of the assistance for which they are indebted to me.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Bodega y Quadra saw his mission in part as a diplomatic enterprise to recover some of the prestige Spain had lost at the hands of Pitt. In this strategy, he was practising correct diplomacy, though perhaps in an exaggerated manner. But as an ambitious officer, he also saw that a successful mission in defence of Spanish interests represented an opportunity, perhaps his last, to obtain his much sought after promotion to flag rank.<sup>34</sup>

Vancouver presents a contrast in almost every respect.<sup>35</sup> Born of a prominent middle-class family in King’s Lynn, Norfolk, he had been at sea almost continuously since the age of fourteen. He was an able officer and like Bodega y Quadra knew the Pacific well, having sailed with Cook, his exemplar, on his second and third voyages. Vancouver’s voyage ranks as one of the great feats of seamanship of all time. It covered some 65,000 miles — almost three times around the world — and took four and a half years to complete. The accuracy of his survey of the British Columbia and Alaskan coast was itself a magnificent achievement. Unlike Bodega y Quadra, however, his personality is less easily assessed. In some respects it was complex, even enigmatic; in others it was quite straightforward. A strict disciplinarian, he had a strong sense of duty and a singlemindedness of purpose in carrying out his mission. Though handicapped by steadily worsening health,<sup>36</sup> he was very much in command of his squadron. But his judgement in dealing with his people led him into difficulties. He did not have a “happy ship.”

Spain’s principal objective for the meeting of the two commissioners was to ensure that British expansion was confined to the coast north of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and thus to oppose any claim to land from there south to San Francisco. For Bodega y Quadra this required reaching agreement on four issues: the devolution of the settlement, an agreement on a dividing line between Spanish and British interests, an understanding on the issue of joint access, and the rejection of any claim for compensa-

<sup>33</sup> Bodega, “Viage.”

<sup>34</sup> In a personal communication, Dr. Donald C. Cutter has suggested that possibly Bodega y Quadra did not wish to reach an agreement with Vancouver as a stalemate would serve this purpose just as well.

<sup>35</sup> See my article, “Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver: A Contrast in Personalities,” *Columbia* 4, 1 (Spring 1990): 16-21.

<sup>36</sup> See Sir James Watt, “The Voyage of Captain George Vancouver 1791-95: The Interplay of Physical and Psychological Pressures,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 4, 1 (Summer 1987).

tion. The first two were connected in that the offer to turn Nootka over to Vancouver and relocate the settlement at Neah Bay was conditional upon Vancouver's agreement that the Strait of Juan de Fuca be the dividing line with Spanish ships having the right of access to Nootka.

The negotiation was carried out in Nootka over a period of three weeks and conducted almost entirely by letter. In all, thirteen were exchanged.<sup>37</sup> There were, of course, opportunities for informal discussion. Bodega y Quadra took the initiative from the outset, greeting Vancouver with a lengthy letter setting forth the essence of the Spanish position. After defining the nature of Spain's historic right to Nootka by virtue of prior discovery and settlement with the consent of the natives and recalling in detail what had occurred in 1788 and 1789, he declared that the "injuries, prejudices and usurpations which Captain Meares represents (in his Memorial) are chimerical." Two of the ships seized, *Argonaut* and *Princess Royal*,<sup>38</sup> and their captains had been released, their cargoes returned, and the wages of their officers and crews paid. He attached affidavits signed by three witnesses to the events of 1789, the Portuguese trader Viana and the American traders Gray and Ingraham, who fortuitously returned to Nootka shortly after Bodega's arrival.<sup>39</sup> Confirming the Vice-roy's earlier investigation, they assured him Meares had purchased no land and that the large house he claimed to have built was only a shack, "very small and made from a few boards got from the Indians." It was removed when he left and did not exist when Martínez arrived the following year. In short, there was nothing to be turned over and no further damages to make good. Even so, since the King of Spain wished to establish a solid and permanent peace with all nations and, in order to remove any possible source of discord,

far from intending to continue in this harbour, I am ready without prejudice to our legitimate right, nor to that of our Courts better informed, generously to cede to England the houses, workshops and gardens which have been

<sup>37</sup> The Spanish texts of the letters will be found in Bodega's "Viage" and the English texts in Vancouver's report to the Admiralty, dated Friendly Cove, 26 September 1792, published by the Provincial Archives of British Columbia in its report for 1914. Both texts will be found in the Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office 5/187, ff88 to 101, and AGN, Historia, vol. 70.

<sup>38</sup> In his introduction to Colnett's Journal (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1940, xxvi,) F. H. Howay states that upon Colnett's release in San Blas in the course of setting out what Colnett called the "Spanish Balance," Bodega y Quadra established the value of *North West America* at \$92.00 but was persuaded to agree to \$500. She was twice rebuilt and remained in Spanish service first as *Santa Gertrudis la Magna* and then as *Santa Saturnina*.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Manby, the Master of *Chatham*, recorded that the "arrival of an American Brig stopped the intended plan (to turn over Nootka) the Master of her having sufficient influence with the Spaniards, persuaded them that the treaty between the

cultivated with so much labour and remove myself to Fuca and there establish the dividing point.

This, his letter went on, would be Spain's last, that is northernmost, settlement. He proposed that in accordance with Article V, north of Fuca each nation would enjoy "common use, entry and commerce" but no other nation would unless agreed jointly by Spain and England. Neither in this letter nor in a subsequent one did Bodega y Quadra propose the line due north from Neah Bay to latitude 60° or the joint survey to establish the boundary.

Vancouver refused to be drawn into an argument on historic rights and the creation of boundaries. He certainly never expected to be faced with such issues.<sup>40</sup> Inadequately briefed and never provided with formal instructions, he could only insist on the strict fulfilment of Article I, that Nootka and all its facilities and Clayoquot Sound be turned over to him. It is possible that at first Vancouver did not grasp the significance of the phrase "without prejudice to our legitimate right," by which Bodega y Quadra meant that he was not empowered to surrender Spanish sovereignty over Nootka. Throughout, Vancouver doggedly insisted that his mission was only to receive without restrictions of any kind the lands of which Meares claimed to have been dispossessed together with all their facilities. At no stage did he offer anything by way of a compromise. Bodega y Quadra modified his position slightly by offering complete cession of the small cove on the north side where Meares had built his little *North West America*.<sup>41</sup> Vancouver rejected it, scornfully terming it in his report "that

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two nations only gave the English the spot of which they were dispossessed of." Quoted in W. Kaye Lamb, *The Voyage of George Vancouver, 1791-1795* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984), 666. The degree of influence exercised by the Americans over Bodega y Quadra, if any, is problematical. Spain shared with the infant United States an animosity and distrust of England. Yet Spain had reason to be concerned over the aggressive entry of American traders into her waters and American fur traders, for their part, would not have viewed with equanimity the intrusion of British traders settled in Nootka. Moreover, what Bodega y Quadra learned from Gray and Ingraham merely confirmed what the Viceroy's earlier enquiries had revealed. In any event, as Dr. Cutter has written in a personal communication, Spain needed support for its position and the American captains were fully willing to lend such support. In turn, they received informal recognition of their incongruous position.

<sup>40</sup> The Royal Order of 25 December 1790, cited above, also informed the Viceroy that the Spanish ambassador in London had been instructed to imply ("insinuar") that Spain favoured establishing the boundary between their respective interests at the 48° parallel, the latitude of Puget Sound. If this action was taken, Vancouver was not advised of it.

<sup>41</sup> In his letter to Vancouver of 13 September 1792, he said: "I am ready to deliver to you all that was occupied by the English at that time as something belonging to Great Britain," implying that he could offer the small cove as the only parcel of

small pittance [*sic*] of rock and sandy beach." Had he accepted it, he wrote Nepean, the Under Secretary of State,

there can be little doubt I should either [have] proved myself a most consummate [*sic*] fool or a traitor to have acceded to any such cession without positive directions to that effect.<sup>42</sup>

Vancouver also rejected Bodega's offer to divide the entire cove in half but without relinquishing sovereignty. One attempt at oral negotiation, conducted in three languages — always a dangerous procedure in diplomacy — only served to worsen matters and resulted in a major misunderstanding which led to a tart exchange. Vancouver did not succumb to Bodega's blandishments, and the commissioners could only agree to refer the entire issue back to their governments.

By refusing to surrender sovereignty, Bodega y Quadra was being less forthcoming than his instructions allowed.<sup>43</sup> His caution was not misplaced, however, as he was to learn in Monterey on his way home that King Carlos IV would not agree to giving up Nootka until British intentions became fully known.<sup>44</sup> Revilla Gigedo despatched the only ship available, the tiny *Santa Saturnina* (ironically, Meares' *North West America*), with the Royal Order, but she reached no further than San Francisco.

The thirteen letters the commissioners exchanged are for the most part repetitive on matters of substance. Those of Bodega y Quadra, always courteous but not always drafted in the clearest language, were a persistent effort to persuade Vancouver that Meares' claims were spurious, that although Spain had a valid historical and legal claim to Nootka, his offer

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land Spain was required to turn over under Article I. This he could do as his instruction permitted the transfer of anything Vancouver could prove to have belonged to Meares. Bodega, "Viage." AT.

<sup>42</sup> Vancouver to Nepean from Monterey, 7 January 1793. This important letter was not an official report but a justification of his stand at Nootka and was intended to be used only if his conduct were questioned. It is reprinted in full in Lamb, *op cit.*, 1578-81.

<sup>43</sup> Article VIII of his instructions authorized him to "abandon Nootka, move the establishment to the north coast of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and thereby surrender to the English the lands they claim to have acquired and purchased from Port Cox or Clayoquot to Nootka and from which they are presumed to have been dispossessed." AT. One can ask whether it was with tongue in cheek rather than out of deference to superior authority that Revilla Gigedo later apologized to the Minister of State, Alcudia, for having instructed Bodega y Quadra to turn Nootka over to Vancouver: he said he felt "very conscious of having been mistaken." Letter #162 to Alcudia, cited above, paragraph 137.

<sup>44</sup> Royal Order of 23 February 1792, AGN, RC, vol. 151, *expediente* 115. Following the downfall of Florida Blanca and his replacement by Aranda, the leader of the cabal against him and a strong critic of the Nootka Convention, the government adopted a harder line.

to leave it, subject to his important proviso, was sincere. Vancouver's letters, also courteous though phrased in firm tones, reflected a growing sense of impatience, even frustration with Bodega's insistence on issues he considered outside the scope of their mission. Even a casual reading reveals his distress and embarrassment at not having been adequately briefed and at the failure of his superiors to support him with written instructions.

Vancouver's rigid stance thwarted Spain's central purpose, as it precluded any discussion of limits. When Bodega y Quadra proposed the strait as the line of demarcation, Vancouver adamantly considered the matter "foreign to the object of our present business." To Bodega y Quadra, however, the issue became more important than perhaps he had anticipated. In his reply to Bodega's first letter, Vancouver said he assumed that the new settlement at Neah Bay and any other formed south of it as far as San Francisco would be governed by the "free access" clause of the Convention. He thus unwittingly confirmed a conviction Bodega y Quadra shared with the Viceroy and Madrid that England's real purpose all along was to prevent Spain from the establishing any settlement north of San Francisco. Bodega y Quadra concluded from this remark that Great Britain was also laying claim to the entire coast north of it.<sup>45</sup> "England," he wrote the Viceroy, "not only aspires to special dominion and right to trade but also to sovereignty which Vancouver claims to be founded on Article I of the Convention."<sup>46</sup>

Bodega y Quadra had reason to be suspicious. Earlier that summer, on 4 June, near Possession Point on Whidbey Island at the entrance to Puget Sound, Vancouver took formal possession of the entire coast from Cape Mendocino north to Cape Flattery, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound, Georgia Strait, and all the islands in between. Even had he been tempted to do so, Vancouver could not have accepted either of Bodega's offers. To have allowed Spain to retain the rest of Nootka would have undermined his own claim of possession and possibly England's diplomatic position as well. As Bodega y Quadra says nothing of this occurrence in his report, Vancouver could never have mentioned it to him.

To complicate matters, just after sending Vancouver his first letter, dated 29 August, Bodega y Quadra learned from Galiano and Valdés,

<sup>45</sup> Menzies, Vancouver's botanist-surgeon, correctly surmised that Bodega's purpose, in addition to settling on a line of demarcation, was to "ascertain our claims on this coast." C. F. Newcombe, ed., *Menzies' Journal of Vancouver's Voyage, April to October, 1792* (Victoria, 1923). Entry for September 15.

<sup>46</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo from Monterey, #408, 24 October 1792, AGN, Historia, vol. 70. AT. Revilla Gigedo did not share Bodega's concern to the same degree. As mentioned above, to him English attempts to infringe upon Spain's monopoly of trade and smuggling were a greater worry.

returning from their circumnavigation of Vancouver Island, that Neah Bay, which they had visited, would not be satisfactory as the harbour was too exposed to winter storms, an opinion confirmed by a *junta* Bodega ordered convened to consider the matter. Bodega was also aware that the explorations of the strait by Quimper in 1790 and Eliza in 1791 had revealed no other suitable sites near its entrance.

It was undoubtedly at this stage of the negotiation that Bodega y Quadra became convinced that Nootka should be retained, at least for the moment. He decided to temporize, falling back on the concept of "right of property" which, he said, he had no authority to alienate.<sup>47</sup> This change of tactic did not escape Vancouver. Menzies called Bodega's change of attitude "wonderfully prevaricated."<sup>48</sup>

On the question whether or not Nootka should be retained or given up, Bodega y Quadra was as ambivalent as the Viceroy. Like Revilla Gigedo, he never doubted Spain's right to Nootka. He stated his conviction clearly in a letter to the Viceroy:

I do not consider that England has a right to claim ownership of the port of Nutca [*sic*], nor does Spain have any obligation to cede it, nor to compensate the least injury. Although Cook visited it in 1778 and it has since been frequented by different voyagers. Pérez discovered it in 1774 and Martínez established himself in 1789 without opposition or violence and with the acquiescence of the natives . . . On his arrival he found no buildings of any kind. Meares had only a little shack which no longer existed nor was it located in the settled [part of the cove] . . . Macuinna, the chief of the village, recognizes what he has ceded to us and denies any purchase as claimed by Meares.<sup>49</sup>

At an earlier time, however, Bodega y Quadra had questioned Nootka's value. Soon after assuming command of the Naval Department of San Blas, three years earlier, he wrote the Viceroy:

(Nootka) is an establishment that cannot be maintained without great cost and heavy loss of life because of its rigorous climate, no space for growing crops, the bad character of the natives and inadequate landing and loading

<sup>47</sup> In his correspondence and "Viage," Bodega appears to have drawn a distinction between "possession" and "occupation" and "sovereignty" and "property."

<sup>48</sup> Menzies to Sir Joseph Banks, Monterey, 1-14 January 1793. I am indebted to Dr. Kaye Lamb for this quotation. Menzies and Vancouver were right in observing this change, but it would not have struck them so vividly had they grasped the full meaning of the phrase "without prejudice to our legitimate right" in Bodega's first letter.

<sup>49</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo, #408, cited above. AT. An identical letter to Aranda is to be found in the Archivo Histórico Nacional, hereafter referred to as AHN, Madrid, Estado, *legajo* 4288. It was essentially an interim report on his negotiation with Vancouver.

facilities. In a word, it is a harbour that produces nothing but water and firewood.<sup>50</sup>

Viewing his responsibilities for Alta California from steamy, mosquito-ridden San Blas, Bodega y Quadra could see nothing but problems. Not only did Nootka have to be provided with virtually everything to sustain it; so far distant was it from San Blas that the return voyage of a re-supply mission tied up precious shipping for at least five months. To add to these difficulties, he had at the same time to administer the Viceroy's ambitious exploration program, assure the annual re-supply of the California missions and *presidios*, manage a ship-building and repair program and oversee a variety of other tasks normal for a busy naval base. Shipping available was inadequate and chronically insufficient, and officers and civilian staff were overworked. Moreover, the wretched climate led to a high level of sickness and absenteeism. As almost everything had to be imported, the high cost of living led to constant appeals for pay increases. Compounding the commandant's problems were the heavy seasonal tropical rains which brought all activities of the base to a standstill.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in anticipation of his meeting Vancouver Bodega y Quadra would concur in Revilla Gigedo's opinion that Nootka need not be retained. Upon his arrival in Nootka, he took a number of steps which indicated he had every intention of turning it over to the British commissioner. Thus he ordered removed all but two of the cannon from the battery at the entrance to Friendly Cove as they would be required for saluting. He also sent back to San Blas the two largest ships of his flotilla with a good part of the garrison. Impatient at Vancouver's delay in reaching Nootka — he had already been waiting nearly three months — he informed the Viceroy he had decided to hand over the settlement to New, the captain of Vancouver's store ship, *Daedalus*, who had brought with him the duplicate of Florida Blanca's letter authorizing restitution to its bearer.<sup>51</sup> After Vancouver's arrival, Bodega y Quadra invited him to store ashore the supplies and equipment New had brought him and the two commissioners, to quote Menzies, discussed the "mode of putting us in possession." Especially noteworthy was Bodega's proposal, again to quote Menzies, "to take a jaunt up the Sound to visit the Chief of Nootka & his tribe at (Tahsis) that he (Bodega) might have the pleasure of

<sup>50</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo, 14 March 1791, AGN, Ramo Histórico de Hacienda, *legajo* 479. AT. It is conceivable that this letter may have influenced the Viceroy's thinking.

<sup>51</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo, 19 July 1792, AHN, Estado, *legajo* 4288.

recommending the English commanders & and their officers . . . as the place was soon to be given up to the English."<sup>52</sup>

Yet in a letter to Revilla Gigedo from Monterey on returning from the north, Bodega y Quadra recorded a dramatic about-face in his perception of the importance of Nootka. Rationalizing his decision not to turn over the settlement to Vancouver, he described Nootka in glowing terms:

It is the best proportioned [harbour] to be found on the entire coast. One can winter in it without fear and leave it quickly at any time. The inhabitants are docile, the climate healthy, there is no shortage of arable land nor of wood for construction.<sup>53</sup>

In his report, he went further:

My lengthy stay in this harbour has made me see the advantages of the area for a permanent establishment. . . . The soil is fertile and the small areas cultivated to date provide excellent produce; potatoes reach an enormous size and alone could provide an item of subsistence in case of need. . . . Enough wheat could be grown to feed a thousand people. . . . Livestock would also prosper, especially goats and pigs.<sup>54</sup>

Clearly the negotiation with Vancouver convinced him that retention of Nootka was essential. By extolling the sound in exaggerated terms, Bodega y Quadra may have wished to assure his superiors Nootka possessed some positive advantages that ought to be taken into account in the event the two courts agreed to renegotiate the Convention after receiving their commissioners' reports. It was now clear in his own mind that Nootka had an importance over and above its physical assets. It was not just a matter of right but of strategic necessity. Britain's ultimate purpose to hem the Spanish in north of San Francisco had been revealed, Neah Bay had been found to be useless, and, despite the findings of the Alcalá Galiano-Valdés expedition, there was still a slight chance that a passage to the mythical inland sea or river reported by Martín de Aguilar on the Vizcaino expedition of 1602-1603 might be found in this latitude. And Nootka would provide a suitable base from which to carry out further exploration. In short, Bodega y Quadra had come to the conclusion that at least a holding action was essential to leave his court free to decide what action to take, whether to retain Nootka and maintain a continued presence in the Pacific Northwest or follow the Viceroy's recommendation and withdraw at least as far south as San Francisco. What the Viceroy

<sup>52</sup> Entry for 4 September.

<sup>53</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo, 24 October 1792. AHN, Estado, *legajo* 4287. AT.

<sup>54</sup> Bodega, "Viage." AT.

thought of Bodega's change of heart is not known, but he did not alter his opinion. In the event, the home government decided to retain Nootka, until 1795.<sup>55</sup>

In his pioneer work, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca*, Henry R. Wagner harshly criticizes Vancouver for not being more forthcoming. In his view, Vancouver's "stubbornness" made it impossible to reach agreement on the plan to make the strait the boundary. "He could only see his instructions," he wrote, "and even insisted on interpreting them in the narrowest possible sense."<sup>56</sup> Wagner did not take into account the difficulties Vancouver faced. He was not the Admiralty's first choice to command the survey and the assignment of British commissioner was given him at the last moment. What oral briefing he received before leaving England was based on Meares' mendacious Memorial. Though promised written instructions to guide him for his meeting with the Spanish commissioner, as already noted none were received or, for that matter, ever drafted. His superiors were quite unaware of how extensively the Spanish had explored and mapped the coast and the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the number of places at which formal possession had been taken. Vancouver would have been very ill at ease had he engaged Bodega y Quadra in debate on historic rights and claims.

It is not difficult to imagine Vancouver's astonishment, even mortification, to discover that Article I of the Convention covered only a "chasm not a hundred yards wide in extent in any one direction." He asked: "Can this chasm possibly be considered the districts and parcels of land & intended to be ceded to me on the part of His Britannic Majesty?"<sup>57</sup> All Vancouver had to guide him was a copy of the Convention and the duplicate of a letter from Florida Blanca authorizing the Spanish commissioner to restore what was called for by Article I. In the absence of any further direction, he rightly concluded he could do no more than insist on the exact wording of the Convention and what "my own common understanding dictated as most compatible with honour and Duty."<sup>58</sup>

Vancouver had other difficulties. He had not been provided with a Spanish-speaking officer, and it was only by chance that a "young gentleman" who came on *Daedalus* was discovered to speak Spanish.<sup>59</sup> Nor

<sup>55</sup> See Christon I. Archer: "Retreat from the North: Spain's Withdrawal from Nootka Sound, 1793-1795," *BC Studies* 37 (Spring 1978): 19-36.

<sup>56</sup> Wagner, *Spanish Explorations*, op. cit., 66.

<sup>57</sup> Vancouver to Nepean, cited above.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Bodega y Quadra was provided with a junior officer, Felix Cepeda, who was fluent in both English and French, but as he was a difficult character, he was sent back to

had any thought been given to how he would manage if the lands and facilities were turned over to him. In his letter to Nepean he asked: "In what manner should I act, whether to contriving some mode of retaining them or evacuating them. . . . I was left totally in the dark in what measures to pursue [*sic*]." <sup>60</sup>

Though on a personal basis both mariners got on well and their relationship was generally cordial, understandably there were moments of tension. In his letter of 20 September, for example, Vancouver sharply accused Bodega y Quadra of delaying his departure. In response to Bodega's invitation, he had deposited ashore the stores *Daedalus* had brought him as, he said, Bodega y Quadra had led him believe that the settlement and its storehouses would be ceded to him. Because he now had to reload his ship, precious time had been lost. In his report Bodega y Quadra termed this reproach "trivial," adding that although he could refute it, he decided to "take no notice of it." Bodega's lavish hospitality and charm undoubtedly helped to keep the atmosphere more agreeable than it might otherwise have been and, happily, Vancouver was able to rise above his difficulties and respond.

It is part of our folklore that despite their failure to reach agreement a warm, personal friendship developed between them. We have Vancouver's word for it that "this difference of opinion had . . . no effects [*sic*] on the rights [*sic*] of hospitality and friendship." There is no doubt they enjoyed a good personal relationship stemming from the high regard and respect they had for each other, both as mariners and as persons. They approached their task and carried it out as professional diplomats would have. We find present the civility and courtesy expected of superior representatives of government.

We are familiar with the many genuinely felt tributes Vancouver pays his adversary in both his report and in his "Voyage," praising Bodega y Quadra for his generosity, warm hospitality, and consideration extended to all visitors. But there are no such thoughts to be found in Bodega's papers. In his report he says nothing about Vancouver of a personal nature.

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San Blas before Vancouver's arrival. See unpublished paper entitled "*Felix Cepeda and North Pacific Exploration*" given by Dr. Janet R. Fireman at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Victoria, B.C., May 1990. Vancouver's wording of his report makes it clear that Dobson was not appointed to serve as interpreter. Bodega y Quadra does not say who translated Vancouver's letters for him, but in his report and "Voyage" Vancouver states that Dobson performed this task for him as well.

<sup>60</sup> In his "Voyage," Vancouver said in reply to Bodega's question that he would leave "Mr. Broughton in the *Chatham*." Bodega y Quadra does not mention this.

Apart from two references to “our sincere friendship,” an expression which in Spanish is virtually a cliché, the only compliment he pays Vancouver relates to his examination (actually Broughton’s) of the Columbia River.<sup>61</sup> Because Bodega’s report and his other papers relating to their association to date are only available in Spanish, there is a general disposition to assume he warmly reciprocated Vancouver’s numerous gracious expressions of appreciation. There is no clear evidence this is the case.

Given the nature of their delicate mission and their meeting in the aftermath of a bitter dispute, both commissioners felt it necessary to justify their failure to reach agreement. Bodega y Quadra assured the Viceroy that should the King for political reasons eventually decide to cede Nootka, “nothing has been lost by suspending [the turnover of the settlement] as Vancouver did not come to the coast for this reason alone and has to return next year to conclude his survey.”<sup>62</sup> Vancouver’s letter to Nepean, referred to above, was not intended for “communication” unless “my conduct shall fall under Sensure [*sic*],” but its bitter, even angry tone, accusing his superiors of failure to support him, testifies to the depth of his anxiety lest the Lords of Admiralty order an inquiry into his conduct. Was it because of their own failures they did not do so?

Bodega y Quadra received a warm letter of congratulations from the Viceroy for his defence of Spanish interests but only formal thanks from the Minister of State, Aranda. Despite Revilla Gigedo’s strenuous efforts on his behalf, his hoped for promotion did not materialize and his desire for a less arduous assignment such as the governorship of Callao, the port of Lima, was never acknowledged. He was grudgingly awarded a bonus of a year’s salary, but this amounted to only a fraction of the heavy personal expenses he incurred receiving Vancouver at Nootka and Monterey. Moreover, as the bonus was not finally agreed to until after his death, it had to be paid into his estate. Worry over his failure to obtain complete reimbursement and his inability to settle any of his already substantial debts, which by now amounted to well over three years’ salary, together with his rapidly declining health, undoubtedly contributed to his death a year and a half later.

Vancouver received no thanks of any kind. Philip Stephens, the Secretary of the Admiralty, thought he should have accepted Bodega’s offer of the small cove as a face-saving measure to end the matter.<sup>63</sup> In an un-

<sup>61</sup> “He examined it with that meticulous care that characterizes . . . this indefatigable navigator.” Bodega, “Viage.” AT.

<sup>62</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo from Monterey, 24 October 1792. AHN, Estado, *legajo* 4288. AT.

<sup>63</sup> I share Dr. Lamb’s view that Stephens was not being critical of Vancouver, that he

signed minute he said in part: "All that We really are anxious about . . . is the Safety of our National honour which renders a *Restitution* necessary. The Extent of that *Restitution* is not of much moment."<sup>64</sup>

Vancouver's health had so deteriorated that he could not be given another command. Instead the Admiralty commissioned him to prepare his journal for "Publik information," a project that occupied him for the two years of life left to him, but which had to be completed by his brother, John.

Prior to his appointment to command the Limits Expedition, Bodega y Quadra does not appear to have been much given to reflection about Spain's role in the Pacific or to any strategic considerations affecting her future in the light of the growing presence in her "lake" of other European powers and the United States. His negotiation with Vancouver, however, in addition to confirming his suspicions regarding Britain's strategic designs on the Pacific coast, also served to bring home that Great Britain and the United States were mounting an ever progressively stronger challenge. He estimated that on the Pacific coast, English ships alone outnumbered Spanish ships three to one. Six frigates, six brigantines, and four sloops, all "on a certain degree of war footing" had called at Nootka that summer.<sup>65</sup> While there was great apprehension over the operations of pirates and smugglers, the rapid growth of the fur trade was the principal and immediate concern. Revilla Gigedo shared his fear that matters could become more serious should private traders be supported by their governments, as had been the case with John Meares.

To Bodega y Quadra, these dangers meant the threat to the security of the Americas had to be recognized and faced up to. Far from believing, as he had earlier, that Nootka should be abandoned, he was now convinced that it should not only be retained but also strengthened, as should all of Alta California. In this way, Spain's claim to the Pacific coast would be

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meant exactly what he said. Vancouver could not be criticized for not doing what he had been given no authority to do.

<sup>64</sup> See Lamb, *op. cit.*, 108-09. There is no indication that Vancouver was aware of this minute. When Broughton was on his way through Mexico City with Vancouver's report, he told the Viceroy much the same thing. Revilla Gigedo recorded he understood from Broughton that Britain's purpose "to wave the English flag over (Nootka)" was more to "uphold a point of honour rather than for any real interest" and that any advantage to be gained from holding it was "very problematic." Revilla Gigedo to Alcuía, letter 162 cited above, paragraph 260.

<sup>65</sup> Vancouver listed 18 ships "employed in commercial pursuits [*sic*]" on the Northwest Coast in the four weeks he was at Nootka: 11 English, 6 American, and 1 Portuguese. Menzies listed 12 English (including Vancouver's 3), 6 Spanish (all warships), 3 Portuguese, 1 French, 7 American, and 1 "colours unknown." Menzies also recorded that on the day Bodega departed, there were ten ships anchored in Friendly Cove and two others being assembled ashore, one American and the other English.

sustained and intensified. Holding these views, he was now at odds with the Viceroy who, as already noted, was admitting to thinking that not only should San Francisco be Spain's northernmost settlement but also perhaps all the California settlements and *presidios* should be abandoned.

Bodega y Quadra spelled out his concerns in some detail. In Monterey, on his return from Nootka, he was appalled to discover how weak the coastal defences were — so weak in fact that to all intents and purposes the harbour of this, the capital of Alta California, was defenceless. In anticipation of Vancouver's arrival, he ordered mounted a temporary battery of eight cannon on the hill overlooking the *presidio* to give the appearance of some defence. But the cannon and the powder to fire them had to be taken from his own ships. Vancouver does not mention this ruse in his extensive account of his stay, but the poor state of the defences could not be hidden from his observant eye. Bodega y Quadra made a detailed inventory of what he found and formulated some recommendations to remedy the situation. In particular, he urged that the California ports and *presidios* be given more substantial fortifications and the weak garrisons provided with more plentiful and up-to-date weapons. He also recommended that Spain's naval forces be better armed and "their numbers increased with light frigates which would command respect."<sup>66</sup>

Bodega y Quadra was also concerned with the larger picture. In letters to the Viceroy written in anticipation of the completion of his report,<sup>67</sup> and perceiving issues more clearly as a consequence of the four months spent at Nootka, he outlined what he believed to be the principal dangers facing Spain in the north Pacific. It had to be recognized, he wrote, that Spain did not have and would never have sufficient naval resources to prevent other nations trading in her waters and establishing settlements on the uninhabited portions of the lengthy coast. Nor could Spanish forces dislodge them from any settlements they might establish north of San Francisco. With England very much in mind and recognizing that rivalry with her could lead to a useless, expensive war, he wrote:

Even if we might be left with the advantage of a large number of victories, we would still be unable to prevent either navigation through such vast seas or entry into harbours which we cannot protect because of the great distances between them.

The main source of the threat, he believed, was the fur trade, which he thought should be tackled at its economic roots to make it less profitable

<sup>66</sup> Bodega y Quadra to Revilla Gigedo, Monterey, 24 October 1792, cited above.

<sup>67</sup> These letters, all dated 24 October 1792, are to be found in AHN, Estado, *legajo* 4288 and AGN, Historia, vol. 70.

for “foreigners.” He advocated amending the restrictive trade laws to enable Spanish merchants to offer more generous terms — terms other nations could not match unless they were prepared to accept lower profits. This Spain could do because the commodities particularly desired by the natives — copper, iron, and textiles — were plentiful in Mexico, as were abalone shells in Monterey. Moreover, they were much nearer the hunting grounds, and the economies of the textile centres of Querétaro, Cholula, and Guadalupe would benefit. In the knowledge that exploration was one of Revilla Gígedo’s top priorities, Bodega y Quadra craftily stressed that increased Spanish participation in the fur trade “would enable us at little or no cost to complete the geographic reconnaissance of the unknown part of the continent north of 55°.” To make certain the Viceroy took his point, he added that “it is of great interest to us not to leave to foreigners the glory of discovering unknown countries.”

Bodega y Quadra also realized that in addition to being the best weapon to defeat foreign intrusion, the fur trade was the only possible economic activity for Spain in the Pacific Northwest and that unless her merchants engaged in it, her ability to maintain a tenable position would always remain uncertain. Nootka’s central location in the best hunting grounds provided another reason for its retention.

Although Bodega y Quadra’s proposal was supported by Malaspina, Revilla Gígedo was far from enthusiastic. He was always skeptical of even modest proposals for state or private involvement in the fur trade, and he was totally opposed to others, such as that of Martínez, which called for an elaborate infrastructure of ships and operational bases. He saw high costs and great risks, financial and material. He did permit ships sailing north to carry a small supply of copper sheets, textiles, and abalone shells for trading, but such limited involvement was never sufficient to match the harvests of the English and American traders or threaten their profits.<sup>68</sup> Revilla Gígedo’s skepticism was soon vindicated. The sea otter was being hunted almost to extinction, and after prices began to fall at Canton, the Chinese government closed the market.

Bodega’s proposals for enhancing Spain’s status were realistic but well beyond Spain’s resources to implement. Moreover, the home government, presided over by a weak King and an administration divided over issues provoked by the French Revolution, was now more concerned with domestic matters and less with the problems of the Americas. Bodega does not appear to have pressed his views, perhaps because he was already suffering

<sup>68</sup> See Adele Ogden, “The Californias in Spain’s Pacific Otter Trade, 1775-1795,” *Pacific Historical Review* 1 (1932): 444-69.

a great loss of energy and the outward indications of a wasting illness that would soon take his life. But it should not be concluded he ever doubted Spain should continue to have a presence in the Pacific Northwest. It never seems to have occurred to him that the Nootka Convention of 1790, symbolically at least, might have marked the beginning of the rapid decline of Spanish power. His report as commander of the Limits Expedition is far from a gloomy document. There is nothing in it or in any of his later papers reflecting a sense of impending decline or the fact that in a very few years the greater part of Spain's American empire would disintegrate into a number of independent states.

There remains the intriguing question as to what would have happened had Vancouver proceeded directly to Nootka rather than first undertaking, as he did, his survey of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Georgia Strait, and the Inland Passage. Of course, he had good reason not to. Not being aware of when Bodega y Quadra would arrive in Nootka, he would not have wanted to waste valuable time waiting for him. He needed as much summer weather as possible for his survey, and knowledge of these inland waters would be as important to him as it was to the Spanish in the forthcoming negotiation. And he had to be certain that his store ship would have reached Nootka with needed supplies and the instructions he had been promised. On the other hand, had Vancouver sailed directly to Nootka, Bodega y Quadra might have turned the establishment over to him with little ado, as he had not yet learned that Neah Bay would not be a satisfactory alternative and he did not have unequivocal answers to three key questions: Had Meares purchased any land? If so, was it the entire cove or only a portion of it? And did he leave any installations?

We can only speculate how different British Columbia's history, indeed the history of the Pacific Northwest, might have been had Vancouver decided otherwise.