

Retreat from the North: Spain's Withdrawal from Nootka Sound, 1793-1795

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The concluding act of the Nootka Sound Controversy took place on 28 March 1795, when representatives of Spain and Britain met at Friendly Cove (Yuquot) on the isolated Northwest Coast. The meeting ended a drama which had threatened to submerge the European powers in a major conflict. For historians, as well as for contemporary observers, the ceremonial raising of the Union Jack, followed by the departure of the military garrison from New Spain's most northerly outpost, marked the end of an epoch. Remarkably, however, the record of what took place during the last days of Spanish Nootka has not been published until the present. In 1917 when the British Columbia historian, Judge Frederick H. Howay, described the withdrawal from Nootka in an article for the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, he lacked the archival data to explain what had taken place. Instead, he added a colourful, if completely fanciful, final scenario.¹ As the Spaniards sailed away, the abandoned buildings remained as the only sign of civilization's touch. Immediately the Indians reoccupied their summer village site and in their search for scraps of metal and iron nails smashed all vestiges of European habitation. Howay described them "like ghouls"² exhuming coffins from the graveyards to find nails suitable for fish hooks. No recent historian questioned the lack of documentation for this information. Indeed, when Warren L. Cook researched his volume *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven, 1973), he found no evidence to dispute Howay. Since the laconic dispatches of the British representative, Lieutenant Thomas Pearce, made little mention of Indian activities, Cook adopted Howay's descriptions.³

For most Spanish officials in Madrid and Mexico City, the Nootka

¹ Frederick H. Howay, "The Spanish Settlement at Nootka," *Washington Historical Quarterly* VIII (July 1917): 163-71.

² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³ Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 422-23.

Conventions and the prospect of abandoning their most advanced base on the Pacific Coast did not imply a strategic or political loss. There had been some officers, such as Esteban José Martínez, who promoted settlement and commerce, but they were unable to generate much enthusiasm in administrative or business circles.⁴ Explorers and seamen had to experience firsthand the splendours of coastal geography — the untapped forests, fisheries, and protected harbours — before they became advocates of a permanent Spanish presence. Even at that, however, the incessant fog, dampness from unceasing rainfall, isolation and apparent lack of easily worked natural resources repelled men who were unaccustomed to this environment. While the officers were prepared to serve the national interest and the largely inexperienced Mexican seamen and soldiers were stoical in their acceptance of inadequate shelter, poor clothing and bad diet, the great majority rejoiced when their tours of duty ended and they could return to Mexico. The maritime fur trade in sea otter pelts attracted some attention, but this was not an activity which Spaniards could join quickly. They enjoyed neither the experience nor the entrepreneurial flexibility to compete with the British or American fur traders. Members of the Mexico City merchant guild who controlled investment in New Spain were exceptionally conservative and unwilling to fund what they considered to be a risky business venture. Even though the viceregal regime sponsored experiments to confirm the potential of markets for furs through the Spanish Philippines into Canton and men such as Martínez and Alejandro Malaspina promoted the fur trade, they generated very little interest.

Without the development of some economic underpinnings, northern exploration and settlement were an unacceptable drain upon the Mexican exchequer. Not only did the mother country require Mexican silver to finance imperial military expenditures, but the possessions of the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean demanded subsidies to bolster their weak economies and defences. Perhaps if the Franciscans had been more successful with their mission at Nootka Sound the regime would have been more willing to invest in souls and to continue the traditional Spanish interest in converting the Indian population of the Americas. At Nootka, this task had fallen to the friars of the Colegio de San Fernando of Mexico City, who enjoyed extensive experience in the northern Mexican frontier prov-

⁴ *Diario de la navegación y exploración del Piloto Segundo Don Esteban José Martínez*, 27 December 1774, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico (cited hereinafter as AGN), Sección de Historia, vol. 61. This was the first of many efforts by Martínez to arouse interest in permanent Spanish occupation of the Northwest Coast.

inces and more recently in ten missions they had established in Upper California.⁵ The Franciscans developed a pattern or method for the conversion and civilization of nomadic Indians that had at its core the settlement of villages and creation of an agricultural economy. It was essential to teach the Indians devotion to the soil and to accustom them to the routine of daily labour. Every aspect of life from dawn to dark was controlled by the missionary, who had to maintain absolute control over his neophytes. Certain conditions were essential before the Franciscans felt that a mission could succeed — there must be a good climate, potable water, building materials and pasture lands. Most important of all, however, there had to be an adequate source of agricultural land suitable for vegetables and grain. Without land there could be no harvest, and without a harvest the Indians could not be controlled and kept in the mission.⁶

Although the Upper California missions did not challenge the accepted pattern, the Franciscans who accompanied the expeditions northward and who worked at the Nootka Sound base found themselves having to deal with an entirely new set of circumstances and requirements. The Northwest Coast Indians were wealthy in terms of food resources and their movements from village site to village site, depending upon the season and the maritime or land-based fishing and hunting, did not fit the pattern set down by the Franciscans. The friars could not get close enough to the Indians to overcome fears of bellicosity, but the most important factor was their inability to adjust to a region where there was not an abundance of agricultural land. The Franciscan training and experience made no provision for novices who could not be settled around an agricultural mission.⁷ While some observers were critical of the rigidity of the friars and argued that Christianity which had been taught by fishermen in the first place should be communicable to Indian fishermen, there was to be no spiritual conquest.⁸ The Franciscans settled back to minister to the garrison and satisfied their Indian mission by purchasing children who were brought for sale. Like many other observers, they believed that they were saving the children from sacrifice and cannibalism. In many respects,

⁵ Informe del Apostólico Colegio de San Fernando de México, 8 January 1787, AGN, Sección de Documentos para la Historia de México, vol. 15, second series.

⁶ Nuevo método ó gobierno de las misiones, Colegio de San Fernando, October 1772, AGN, Sección de Documentos para la Historia de México, vol. 15, second series.

⁷ Fray Severo Patero to Viceroy Manuel Antonio Flórez, Nootka Sound, 13 July 1789, AGN, Historia, vol. 65.

⁸ Iris H. Wilson, ed., *Noticias de Nutka: An Account of Nootka Sound in 1792 by José Mariano Moziño* (Seattle, 1970), p. 85.

however, the eighteenth century friars were pale imitations of their sixteenth century predecessors.⁹

By as early as 1791, the Mexican viceroy Conde de Revillagigedo was more interested in establishing a demarcation line between Spanish and British territories than in holding the entire coast. Already, available information pointed to the conclusion that there was little likelihood of discovering a passage through the continent to Hudson's Bay or Baffin Bay.¹⁰ Further exploratory voyages would be needed to prove the non-existence of an easily navigated Northwest Passage, but until these were completed Revillagigedo was content to set the boundary at the Strait of Juan de Fuca. In his view, a small garrison of twenty-five to thirty men accompanied by their families to prevent the need for annual relief would be quite sufficient to show the flag without draining the treasury. When Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, commander of the Marine Department of San Blas, pressed for an increase in Spanish commercial activity to counter British predominance, his proposals were dismissed without serious consideration. Revillagigedo went through the motions of publicizing the fur trade in the business community, but he was convinced that "the miserable exchange of skins" was a weak base for commerce.¹¹

Once this attitude received official approval from the imperial government, the Nootka settlement became little more than a negotiating point to be held until an agreement emerged from the talks with Britain. A small force was sent to occupy a post at Puerto de Nuñez Gaona (Neah Bay), inside the entrance of Juan de Fuca Strait. Meanwhile, the boundary negotiations between Bodega y Quadra and Captain George Vancouver soon became deadlocked over the exact meaning and scope of the Nootka Sound Convention.¹² Without a demarcation line far to the north of the California settlements, Bodega saw no alternative to maintaining a military presence at Nootka Sound.

For the Spanish officers, soldiers and seamen, the stalemate meant a sentence to almost three years' confinement in their isolated northern settlement. Forced to maintain rigorous military discipline and watchful-

⁹ A similar point is made by Father John F. Bannon about Texas, where the nomadic Indians baffled the eighteenth century friars sent to convert them. See John F. Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (New York, 1970).

¹⁰ Conde de Revillagigedo to the Conde de Floridablanca, no. 44, 1 September 1791, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (cited hereinafter as AHN), Estado, leg. 4289.

¹¹ Revillagigedo to Alejandro Malaspina, 22 November 1791, Museo Naval, Madrid (cited hereinafter as MN), vol. 280; and Revillagigedo to the Conde de Aranda, no. 120, 30 November 1792, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

¹² Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire*, pp. 371-75.

ness in case of Indian attack or even an assault by one of the fur trading nations, the garrison had no time for idleness or comfort. Half the troops were kept in the cramped little island fort under orders to serve “. . . as if they are in the presence of an enemy.”¹³ Two-thirds of the crew of the frigate *San Carlos*, which wintered at Friendly Cove, were left aboard the anchored vessel. They served four tours of watch with sentries posted at all times at the bow and stern. These were relieved hourly in winter and every two hours in the summer. The remaining soldiers and sailors resided in the shore establishment, but there was little improvement in living conditions. Fortunately, the round of daily activities helped the men to endure the passing months or years. Gardens had to be cultivated, the bakery kept in operation, livestock guarded and the base infirmary maintained. Soldiers not stationed in the fort stood sentinel duty around the buildings and patrolled the settlement to prevent disorders or fires. There was almost no release from this routine, since members of the garrison were under strict orders to stay within the confines of Friendly Cove. If the occasion did arise for visits to Indian communities or other duties outside the port, an officer had to accompany the common soldiers and seamen. This was to eliminate incidents with the Indians that might be caused by theft of their property or abuse of their customs. On several previous occasions, Spanish seamen had exacerbated relationships by stealing planks from Indian buildings and propositioning women. Even when the Indians came to Friendly Cove to trade, strict regulations were enforced to prevent overcharging, extortion and sexual contacts. Complaints by Indians against any member of the garrison were heard by the commander and the guilty were flogged or sentenced to other punishments.¹⁴

The general monotony of this life lifted only when foreign fur traders put into port or when the Indians threatened to break the peace. On 10 July 1793, for example, the shepherds reported the presence of some Indians around the base's flock. When fourteen canoes were sighted, twelve soldiers were sent to light bonfires and to fire their muskets into the air. Surprised by this activity, the Indians raised a great clamour — shouting and mocking the now reinforced flock and its military escort — before they withdrew to their canoes. The following day, Chief Maquinna and other dignitaries appeared to inform the Commander, Lieutenant Ramón Saavedra, that they had been absent from their village during

¹³ Salvador Fidalgo to Ramón Saavedra, Nootka Sound, 31 May 1793, AGN, Historia, vol. 71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, and Francisco Bodega y Quadra to Saavedra, 11 March 1793, AGN, Historia, vol. 70.

the incident. Saavedra accepted this explanation and assurances that the noise resulted from shouts of fright, but he told Maquinna to guard against any repetition.¹⁵ The remainder of the summer passed uneventfully until August 11, when part of the crew of the French schooner *Flavie* mutinied. After some fighting, the captain and officers managed to suppress the seamen and place the prisoners in irons.¹⁶

The Spaniards did make efforts to aid the Indians during periods of food shortages. Exceptionally bad weather during the autumn of 1793 made life miserable for all of the inhabitants of Nootka Sound. The Spaniards were confined to their establishment and exposed to the teeth of the storms which swept in from the Pacific. The Indians were unable to prepare winter food supplies, and by as early as mid-November the band under Chief Tlupananul was reduced to little more than a diet of roots. The chief took the unusual step of requesting the services of a Spanish priest to say Mass to bring fish; unless something was done, he feared that all of the Indians would die of hunger. Moved to compassion by the plight of this band, Saavedra ordered that a kettle of cooked beans be made available daily. When by good fortune a whale beached itself near Friendly Cove, Tlupananul requested the aid of a launch to help secure it before the news spread to other Indian communities. Because of the intensity of the storm, however, Saavedra refused to risk any lives. The Indians could not afford to be cautious and went out anyway. Some other villages were not quite as badly off, but reports from Estevan Point indicated that as many as eighty Hesquiat men and women had perished from starvation.¹⁷

Despite Saavedra's efforts to befriend the Indians, mistrust and violence were always close to the surface. The Spanish officers were fearful that a minor incident could provoke a major attack and confusion about Indian laws and relationships caused additional difficulties. On 25 February 1794, for example, a large number of Indian fishermen came to Friendly Cove to catch herring. When one man went aboard the Spanish vessel

¹⁵ Desde la salida de la fragata *Princesa* del mando del Teniente de Navío D. Salvador Fidalgo que verificó el 7 de junio del año pasado de '93 han ocurrido hasta el día las siguientes novedades en este establecimiento, *Diary of Ramón Saavedra, Nootka Sound*, 15 June 1794, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

¹⁶ According to Thomas Manby of the *Chatham*, the mutiny resulted from a political dispute. The captain declared himself in favour of the French king, which angered the anti-royalist sailors. See Thomas Manby, *The Log of the proceedings of his Majesty's Armed Tender Chatham, 1793*, Transcript, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

¹⁷ *Diary of Ramón Saavedra*, 15 June 1794, entry for 17 November 1793, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

and sold four fish, Maquinna's brother Guaclazapé went after him and administered a most terrible beating while the crew members looked on in growing horror. Witnesses to the incident were certain that the victim was dead and reported the matter to Saavedra. Aware of the quickening tempo of activity in the settlement and fearing some form of punishment, the Indian fishermen began to flee. The Spaniards detained two canoes, but the Indians — including a sister of Maquinna — dove into the water and swam out to other canoes.¹⁸

Anticipating future reprisals and other trouble, Saavedra decided to frighten the Indians by ordering the fort commandant to fire a cannon ball over the heads of the fishermen. Relenting somewhat, he released the two canoes which belonged to Chicomasia, a brother-in-law of Maquinna. He asked Chicomasia to tell Maquinna to visit Friendly Cove to explain the incident and to punish his brother who had committed the assault or murder. Because the victim had been carried off during the height of the turmoil, no one was certain about his condition. When Maquinna did not appear, Saavedra closed the port to fishing and dispatched a launch armed with two swivel guns. The Indians withdrew out of range, but returned to fish as soon as the launch stopped pursuing them. Annoyed by their audacity, Saavedra ordered two mortars with solid shot fired over their heads. This brought Chief Tlupananul into the port with information that the victim had not died; he suffered only from a broken arm and other minor injuries. Unsatisfied, Saavedra repeated his insistence on seeing Maquinna and ordered Tlupananul to transport the wounded man to the post for medical treatment. The following dawn, however, the Spaniards arose to find as many fishing canoes active in Friendly Cove as there had been before the incident. Saavedra ordered a ball fired over their heads but, inured to this sort of inconvenience, the Indians continued to fish. As they had indicated on previous occasions, the fisheries were of crucial importance to their well-being and they could not accept any closure of the waters of Friendly Cove. They would tolerate temporary occupation of their summer village site, but nothing more.¹⁹ Saavedra

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, entry for 25 February 1794.

¹⁹ The Spaniards permitted the Indians to erect pallisades in the cove to trap herring and to collect spawn. Often there were a large number of Indian men, women and children employed in this fishery and they erected temporary plank buildings close to the Spanish establishment. It is interesting that the Indian perception of fishing rights has not changed in the nearly two centuries since Spain occupied Friendly Cove. In March 1975 members of the Nootka Bands slashed the nets of non-Indian herring fishermen who attempted to fish in Friendly Cove. After the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs sent a brief to Ottawa, the Department of Fisheries closed the area to non-Indian fishermen. See "Indians Slash Fishnets,"

dispatched the launch once again and shots from the swivel guns forced the fishermen to withdraw. As they did so they complained that they were from Tlupananol's village and had no connection with those who had committed violence.²⁰

After further negotiations, Saavedra explained to Nazapi and Apecos — two Indians who knew the Spanish language very well — that he meant no harm to Maquinna and merely intended to ask the chief to control his brother. Such cruel punishment for a minor misdemeanor, if there was any offence involved, seemed to be totally unwarranted. When Nazapi agreed to bring the victim for medical attention, fishing was resumed. He was found to suffer contusions on his shoulders, a broken right arm from his elbow to his hand, and two dislocated fingers on his left hand. To settle any remaining suspicions on the part of the Indians, Saavedra ordered the drag net sent out so that the canoes of Tlupananol and Anapé (Maquinna's father-in-law) could be filled with fish.²¹

Satisfied by these acts of good faith, Maquinna and Guaclazapé appeared at Friendly Cove on March 1. Saavedra welcomed them but at the same time delivered a lecture about the evils of excessive violence. Guaclazapé responded that in a time of food shortages, all Indians were prohibited from selling fish. The injured man had refused to obey a direct command. Saavedra accepted the argument, but rejected the rigour of the punishment. He asked Maquinna to ensure that in the future Guaclazapé should carry a cord or whip in place of his heavy club. A thin rope or whip applied to the buttocks was quite capable of hurting enough to bring correction without incurring serious injuries. To seal friendship once more, Saavedra acceded to Maquinna's request that the drag net be sent out to catch herring for the Indians. Despite several attempts around Friendly Cove, however, few fish were taken and the chiefs proposed a move to a nearby bay where the fish were thought to be more plentiful. Saavedra refused, still fearful of treachery once the Indians were beyond the range of the fort cannon.²²

This incident served to illustrate the relationships between the Spaniards

Victoria Times, 19 March 1975, p. 9; and Barbara Lane, "Indian Regulation of the Herring, Roe Herring, and Herring Spawn Fisheries at Nootka Sound from the 1780's to the Present," Unpublished Paper prepared for the Land Claims Research Centre, Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, April 1975.

²⁰ Diary of Saavedra, 15 June 1794, entry for 26 February 1794, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

²¹ *Ibid.*, entry for 27 February 1794.

²² *Ibid.*, entry for 1 March 1794.

and Indians. While it was possible to communicate on some levels, misunderstandings and mistrust were still common. Like other Spanish commanders, Saavedra looked to Maquinna as the chief executive authority or ruler of the bands of Nootka Sound; in reality, no chief could exercise this level of control. With the bands often working at cross purposes and various chiefs condemning the activities of their rivals, it was exceptionally difficult for any Spaniard to sort out the facts. When incidents occurred, retribution was often misdirected and the wrong Indians were punished. This further confused the situation and aggravated minor matters.

Although no further events took place to mar good relations, the Spaniards were very surprised when Maquinna arrived on March 19 asking permission to take up residence at Friendly Cove until good weather allowed a move elsewhere. He was followed by Guaclazapé, Chicomasia, other chiefs and all of their bands. Alarmed by the large numbers concentrated close to the Spanish establishment, Saavedra made sure that all of the Indians settled within the field of fire from the fort and ship cannon.²³ While this development fitted the needs of the chaplains, who wanted the Indians nearby to facilitate religious conversion, nothing could have been further from Maquinna's mind. He was terrified that his brother-in-law, Chief Wickananish, the powerful leader of the Clayoquot Sound Indians to the south, planned a surprise attack with the purpose of killing Maquinna and taking vengeance against all of the bands of Nootka Sound. According to information given to Saavedra, the dispute originated with a marriage arrangement involving Wickananish's daughter Estocoticlemot which had gone sour. Maquinna was well aware that Wickananish possessed numerous muskets and even two cannon with powder and ball that had been sold to him by an American captain named Josiah Roberts.²⁴ Under this threat, Maquinna was quite willing to subject himself momentarily to Spanish rule. He asked Saavedra if Spain would take vengeance if the Clayoquot Indians succeeded in their evil design to kill him. Saavedra responded in the affirmative, explaining that the king and all Spain loved him. Maquinna stated that he lived in this belief — adding that he loved Saavedra, whom he considered as his father.

The community at Friendly Cove continued to expand during most of the month of April 1794. All the chiefs frequented Saavedra's house and the Spanish officers were welcomed when they visited the Indian dwell-

²³ *Ibid.*, entries for 19, 21 and 26 March 1794.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, entry for 29 March 1794.

lings. Both sides shared provisions and a great deal of trade took place. Maquinna, usually fearful of allowing Indian women anywhere near the Spaniards, must have considered the danger from Wickananish to be greater. For his own part, Saavedra made every effort to prevent incidents or confrontations. He enjoyed the added activity of the Indian community, and his own position and prestige were enhanced because the chiefs who visited Maquinna were paraded through his residence for gifts and a glass of brandy. Maquinna considered the arrangement to be at least semi-permanent, for on April 8 he directed the construction of a house which was more than seventy feet in length.²⁵ A few days after the chief, his brothers and all of their families had moved into the new dwelling, Wickananish sent a canoe with a gift of six sea otter skins for Maquinna and Estocoticlemot's aunt, who was to accompany her home. This sign of friendship allayed Maquinna's fears. He told Saavedra that the story about Wickananish resulted from a malicious rumour spread by the Hesquiat Indians. In a matter of a very few days, all of the Indians moved away to summer village sites.²⁶

While the visit of Maquinna and the other chiefs presented an ideal opportunity to observe Indian culture at first hand, the banquets and entertainment depleted the Spanish food supplies. For reasons which are difficult to explain, they did not smoke or salt fish, and although whales were caught and the meat sold back and forth among the Indians, neither Spaniards nor Mexicans developed a taste for this viand. As a result, by May 1 the garrison was placed upon three-quarter rations. This was further reduced to two-thirds on May 26. By this date, emergency plans were set into motion to dispatch the *San Carlos* to Monterey leaving a skeleton force of thirty-two soldiers under Saavedra. Fortunately the frigate *Aranzazu* arrived on June 4 with provisions and correspondence.²⁷

Everyone in the garrison hoped for orders to conclude the Nootka business and return to Mexico. Not only had several seamen and soldiers perished over the winter, but no one wanted to face the prospect of yet another dreary year of isolation. Since the past June there had been only 112 days of tolerable weather free of rain, snow, hail or high winds.²⁸ The climate, poor diet and forced inactivity contributed to depression and serious illnesses. The base chaplain, Father Nicolás de Loera, who had served for over fifteen years with the navy on voyages of exploration and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, entry for 8 April 1794.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, entry for 13 April 1794.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, entries for 1 and 26 May and 24 June 1794.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, entry for 14 June 1794.

spent three winters at the Nootka establishment, suffered from pulmonary bleeding and an inguinal hernia. Shortages of replacements caused the San Blas naval authorities to order him back to Nootka Sound despite the fact that the naval surgeons supported his petition for retirement. Loera blamed his deteriorating condition upon the harshness of the northern climate.²⁹ Even the medical staff suffered. The surgeon of the *San Carlos*, Luis Pava, who like the chaplain spent three winters at the Nootka base, suffered recurrent chest pains after having been through several bouts of scurvy. Saavedra used cases such as these to illustrate the urgent need to replace the garrison on a regular basis. Indeed, his own robust good health had been destroyed. Beginning in June 1793, he discovered that when he exerted himself to shout orders, blood from his throat literally poured from his mouth. The surgeon expressed concern for his life — so much so in fact that he bled the poor commander twice and prescribed other medicines. Saavedra recovered from his ailment, but continued to suffer illnesses during the winter which he blamed upon the cold and damp climate.³⁰ Others suffered from severe cases of scurvy and did not respond to treatment until they could be moved to California or some other location of better climate. It is difficult to explain why the Spaniards continued to contract scurvy since several scientists, including Alejandro Malaspina, had suggested remedies such as spruce beer or *sapineta*. Obviously the information was filed away in archives rather than made available to the personnel stationed at the northern base.

As if to underline the level of isolation and neglect, Saavedra had to pester the Mexican authorities for the most basic and elementary needs of the garrison. Supplies and lumber were available from the Indians if there were trade goods to exchange. In 1794, however, only thirty copper sheets were sent north to cover both gifts and commerce. This was insufficient to maintain friendship let alone to pave the way for commerce or encourage the Indians to present fresh fish and meat. Saavedra asked for shipments of blue cloth and abalone shells, which by this time were in more demand than copper at Nootka Sound.³¹ Even the few soldiers who were sent as replacements arrived without any of the necessary equipment. Saavedra described the men sent from the Fixed Company of San

²⁹ Nicolás de Loera to Bodega y Quadra, San Blas, 31 March 1793, AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 3; Luis de Pava to Revillagigedo, Nootka Sound, 12 June 1794, and Saavedra to Revillagigedo, no. 20, Nootka Sound, 31 August 1794, AGN, Historia, vol. 44.

³⁰ Saavedra to Revillagigedo, 15 June 1794, AGN, Historia, vol. 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Blas as almost naked. He was angry that troops stationed in the most hostile of climates were issued with old and worn-out uniforms. After the hard voyage northward, during which the men had to wash their garments in sea water, the replacements arrived dressed in rags even before they had to face the winter. These men lacked equipment as well as adequate clothing; officers complained about having to place soldiers on guard duty with cartridges rattling about in their pockets.³²

The garrison spent most of the summer of 1794 without knowledge of what Spain intended to do with the settlement. Much of the time was spent on routine maintenance and preparation for the coming winter. On August 26 Maquinna reported that Wickananish with twenty-five war canoes had fallen upon the Hesquiat Indians at night, beheading or otherwise killing seventy people and carrying off many children as prisoners of war. This information was confirmed by the arrival of several refugees and an increase in the numbers of Indian children offered for sale to the Spaniards.³³ Saavedra had no idea what caused the raid and was powerless to do anything other than to record the events. On 31 August 1794 the frigate *Princesa* arrived, bringing Brigadier Manuel de Alava, colonel of the Regiment of Puebla, who was to take charge of negotiations with the British.³⁴

In spite of the favourable prospects for a return to Mexico, Saavedra's sojourn at Friendly Cove was far from over. Neither Alava nor Captain George Vancouver, who arrived on September 9, had specific instructions from their governments on how to solve outstanding questions. The Nootka Sound Controversy could not be settled in 1794. Details on the final accord signed in Madrid on 11 January 1794 had not reached the Northwest Coast. Alava and Vancouver engaged in negotiations and visited the Indians.³⁵ Saavedra learned that he would soon be restored to his command since Alava had no intention of spending the winter at Nootka Sound. Both sets of negotiators sailed for Monterey in mid-

³² Saavedra to Revillagigedo, no. 11, 15 June 1794, and Antonio Hernández, commander of the Fixed Company of San Blas to Branciforte, Tepic, 20 September 1794, AGN, Provincias Internas, vol. 3.

³³ Saavedra to Branciforte, 31 August 1794, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

³⁴ Saavedra to Revillagigedo, no. 19, Nootka Sound, 31 August 1794, AGN, Historia, vol. 44. Alava replaced Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra, who died before completing the negotiations with Vancouver. The Regiment of Puebla was one of the four regular infantry regiments of the Mexican army. Alava had been transferred from the metropolitan army to raise and command this regiment.

³⁵ George Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific and Round the World III* (London, 1798), p. 308.

October, leaving the Friendly Cove garrison to face another solitary winter.

Unfortunately, Saavedra kept few records of events during the months between October 1794 and March 1795. His sparse notes indicate that both Spaniards and Indians suffered from an exceedingly harsh winter. Pacific storms were common enough, but on December 8 and 9 a gale tore through Nootka Sound knocking down mature trees and damaging any building that stood in the way. The Indians confessed that they had never seen a wind storm of such intensity. As in the previous year, Indian food supplies were depleted well before the weather improved. Many came to trade valuable clothing and other articles for food at the Spanish settlement. Again, a number of children were exchanged; by March 1795 there were twenty-eight children in the settlement.³⁶

In the meantime, Spain and Britain had lost interest in the Northwest Coast. To conclude the Nootka Sound Controversy, there would be a meeting of official representatives at Friendly Cove. There a Declaration and Counter Declaration were to be read. Spain was to recognize British claims and to restore lands which in theory had been taken when the Spaniards established the post. The British representative would receive the lands, hoist the Union Jack as a sign of possession, and then both nations would withdraw. From this date forward, Nootka Sound was to be open to the nationals of both countries, who might construct temporary buildings but no permanent settlements. If a third nation attempted to establish itself on the Northwest Coast, both Spain and Britain would co-operate to defend the shared sovereignty.³⁷

Vancouver learned about this final Nootka Convention from Alava when they arrived at Monterey late in 1794. With his ships in need of repairs and resupply, he saw little reason to await his own instructions on the final agreement. Since his surveys of the Northwest Coast were complete, he set sail for home.³⁸ To carry out the British part in the final act of exchange, royal marine Lieutenant Thomas Pearce was sent from England by way of Havana and Mexico City to San Blas, where he embarked with Alava in the Spanish vessel to Nootka Sound. As was customary, Pearce gathered data along the way on the well-being and defences of Spanish possessions.³⁹

³⁶ Saavedra to Branciforte, San Blas, 10 June 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

³⁷ Convention signed at Madrid, 11 January 1794, transcript, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

³⁸ George Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery III*, p. 332.

³⁹ Thomas Pearce to the Secretary to the Lords Commissioner of the Admiralty, Mexico City, 1 December 1794, transcript, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

Saavedra had no inkling of these changes until 5 p.m. on 16 March 1795, when the warship *Activo* anchored at Friendly Cove. Aboard he found what was a rather unusual diplomatic mismatch — a brigadier-general in the person of Alava representing Spain, and a mere lieutenant for Britain. Both possessed plenipotentiary powers to conclude the Nootka affair. Alava assumed command, informing the garrison that “. . . they should withdraw with the greatest brevity, embark the artillery, and demolish the fort and buildings in order to execute the conclusion of the delivery.” Needless to say, the garrison required little in the way of encouragement to fulfill these orders. The following morning they began to remove the cannon from the fort. In their enthusiasm and haste, the soldiers dropped an old twelve-calibre bronze culverin, founded in 1677, which simply fell apart. Alava noted that it seemed to break from its own weight and would have to be destroyed anyway since it was in such bad condition.⁴⁰ Fortunately, the Spaniards did not have to employ such weapons in defence of their northern base. Once the cannon had been embarked, the soldiers tore down the gun platforms and began to strip useful lumber from the commandant’s house and other buildings.

While these activities were taking place — about mid-day on March 17 — some Indians arrived with news that they had sighted a large vessel off Nootka Sound. For reasons which are not entirely clear, this information, or perhaps a combination of events, disturbed Lieutenant Pearce. Alava concluded that Pearce believed that the unidentified vessel was the *Providence*, commanded by Robert Broughton, whose seniority would cause him to assume command as British commissioner during the withdrawal ceremonies. Perhaps fearing the loss of his place in history, Pearce went to Alava, asking that the exchange of documents and other ceremonies take place on the following day before the vessel arrived.⁴¹ Surprised by this change in plans, Alava wrote, “I responded that it was regrettable to me we could not accommodate him [Pearce] since as we had agreed during our voyage, the act of exchange and raising of the British flag in sign of possession must immediately be followed by the retirement of the troops and abandonment of the establishment.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Alava to Branciforte, San Blas, 23 April 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴¹ Compendio histórico de las navegaciones practicadas por oficiales y pilotos en buques de la Real Armada sobre las costas septentrionales de las Californias, 1799, MN, vol. 575-bis.

⁴² Informe reservado que en calidad de extrajudicial pasa al EXMO. Sr. Marqués de Branciforte, Virrey y Capitán General de N.E. el Brigadier Don José Manuel de Alava sobre pasages ocurridos entre el Teniente de los Batallones de Marina Británica Don Thomas Pearce y dicho Brigadier comisionados por sus respectivos

Alava was polite but unmoving in his resolve and Pearce began to display some signs of annoyance. Perhaps the Spanish documents portray the British commissioner in a somewhat negative light, but Pearce's behaviour is difficult to explain. While he had been chosen for the mission because he knew the Spanish language, this was not evident in the misunderstanding that preceded the withdrawal. Possibly embarrassed at the prospect of receiving a pile of rubble rather than a perfectly good base — particularly if Broughton appeared in the middle of the business — Pearce wrote to Alava outlining his complaints. He had heard that the buildings were to be torn down, and if this was the case, the agreement between Spain and Britain could not be completed.⁴³ The first part was stating the obvious, to say the very least, since the Spanish soldiers and seamen were doing everything within their power to hasten the demolition process. Warming to the challenge, however, Pearce wrote another letter to Alava on March 19 expanding his position; in his view, the wording of the agreement demanded that the settlement should be surrendered intact and not demolished. Taking the dispute to an abstract level of interpretation, he stated, "... the destruction of anything conveys the idea of an act of violence, which is in direct opposition to the spirit of our instructions."⁴⁴ After four conferences and letters, during which the buildings were reduced to rubble, Pearce had little alternative other than to participate in the exchange ceremony. Broughton had not appeared and one British lieutenant — even with plenipotentiary powers — could not resist the will of a Spanish garrison.⁴⁵ Evaluating Pearce's behaviour in a letter to Viceroy Marqués de Branciforte, Alava wrote:

I knew that he possessed very little firmness of character. His subtleties were directed at seeing if he could obtain some advantage on the matters laid down in the accord. He would not turn over his commission to another because he wanted to sustain such unfounded pretensions. For this reason, I resolved to put an end to our conversations on the matter.⁴⁶

Neither side took the Indians into consideration during these negotiations and Pearce did not indicate how he planned to preserve the buildings.

Ministerios para concluir los asuntos de Nootka durante las conferencias que debían proceder la terminación de aquel negocio, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴³ Pearce to Alava, 18 March 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴⁴ Pearce to Alava, 19 March 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴⁵ Alava to Pearce, 20 March 1795, and note of Pearce, 23 March 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴⁶ Alava to Branciforte, 23 April 1795, San Blas, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

The exchange took place at 9 a.m. Saturday, 28 March 1795. By prior agreement, Alava and Pearce went to a little cove within the port named Bay of the Dead because it had been used as the garrison cemetery. It was the same spot where Captain John Meares had built a temporary hut — giving Britain claim to the territory. At this location, a flagstaff had been erected ready for the ceremony. Witnessed by the commanders, officers, chaplains and a few soldiers and sailors, the Declaration and Counterdeclaration were read as prescribed and the Union Jack was hoisted in recognition of possession. After a short while, Pearce asked that his colours be struck and Alava ordered the flagstaff dismantled. Everyone returned to the vessels so that the two ships would be ready to sail at the first favourable wind.⁴⁷

Alava, Pearce and the other Spanish officers took time to say farewell to the three principal chiefs of the sound. Their villages were less than a league from Friendly Cove and, as might be expected, they expressed more than a passing interest in the prospect of a Spanish withdrawal. The news must have been welcomed by Chief Maquinna, who was in the practice of asking the Spanish officers when they planned to vacate his summer village site. Alava presented each chief with gifts of copper and cloth that he had brought from Mexico for the purpose. Remarkably, he allowed Pearce to distribute some of these gifts since the British officer had nothing other than his flag to present the chiefs. Finally the Spanish commander gave each chief a silver medal dedicated by the merchant guild of Mexico City to the Spanish sovereign. The chiefs manifested sorrow at the imminent departure of Spain, causing Alava to remark that the gifts would pave the way for renewed good relations in the event of a return to Nootka Sound.⁴⁸ Pearce made no mention of using Spanish gifts although he was convinced that the Indians favoured Britain over Spain.⁴⁹

Stormy weather delayed the departure of the *Activo* until April 2 and the *San Carlos* under Saavedra did not weigh anchor until April 16. By this date almost nothing remained of the Spanish buildings and already the Indians were moving onto the site to set up temporary dwellings. Saavedra noted that continuing food shortages caused members of the bands to trade items of clothing and other valuable artifacts which the soldiers and seamen now wanted as souvenirs. One good omen associated with the European withdrawal occurred the day before the Spaniards

⁴⁷ Informe reservado de Alava, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁴⁸ Compendio histórico de las navegaciones, 1799, MN, vol. 575-bis.

⁴⁹ Pearce to Philip Stephens, Tepic, 25 April 1795, transcript, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

sailed: a whale beached itself and became the basis for a major banquet of celebration.⁵⁰ Still fearful that the Indians might cannibalize children, Saavedra permitted his men to purchase as many as were offered for sale. While he was satisfied by the morality of this traffic, Viceroy Branciforte expressed some reservations. His inquiries at Acapulco, San Blas and Tepic seemed to point out that most of the children were being raised as the sons or daughters of the soldiers or seamen. At the same time, however, he informed the imperial government that he would investigate the numbers of Northwest Coast Indians resident in Mexico and whether there had been any complaints about poor treatment or sale of children.⁵¹

The friendly relations which had permitted Spain and Britain to conclude the Nootka Sound Controversy soured about the time the withdrawal was taking place. From Mexico, Viceroy Branciforte, xenophobic and fearful of his responsibilities to defend the enormous dominions under his charge, viewed the Californias and Northwest Coast as an area of potential invasions. He grumbled that Thomas Pearce, Robert Broughton and other foreigners had been permitted to cross New Spain and to visit cities such as Guadalajara, Querétaro, Mexico City, Puebla and Veracruz. Their knowledge about the lack of defensive capability and the weakness of the Spanish navy in the Pacific seemed likely to encourage an attack.⁵² To keep an eye on developments, the viceroy determined to dispatch reconnaissance expeditions every six months to examine the coast from the California settlements to Bucareli Bay in Alaska. The first and only of these missions, under the command of José Tobar y Tamáriz, sailed from San Blas on 26 March 1796. Encountering heavy weather and contrary winds, Tobar did not reach Nootka Sound until June 19.⁵³

War between Spain and Britain broke out on 7 October 1796. If the Spaniards had wished to renounce the Nootka Sound Conventions and to reoccupy the Northwest Coast, the occasion was perfect. There were no British warships in the North Pacific capable of resisting the return of a garrison to Friendly Cove or the occupation of some other harbour along the coast. For Viceroy Branciforte and the military planners of Mexico, however, the Northwest Coast had ceased to be a major area of concern. Rather than maintain the pretence of claiming the entire Pacific Coast of North America to Russian Alaska, the Spaniards recognized

⁵⁰ Saavedra to Branciforte, 10 June 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁵¹ Branciforte to the Duque de Alcudia, n.d., 1795, AHN, Estado, leg. 4290.

⁵² Branciforte to Alcudia, 3 July 1795, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Sección de Estado, leg. 23.

⁵³ *Compendio histórico de las navegaciones*, 1799, MN, vol. 575-bis.

reality: they would have to concentrate their attentions upon the much more valuable California possessions. As they were well aware, Captain Vancouver had obtained an accurate picture of the California defences — concluding that there was nothing on the coast to repel an enemy of Spain.⁵⁴ Others such as Robert Broughton and Zachary Mudge waxed eloquent about the resources and beauty of the California coast. Mudge, in a letter which ended up in Spain rather than its intended address in England, described “the miserable little fort” protecting the harbour at Monterey, California.⁵⁵

By 1799, the California authorities depended upon foreigners for information on the Northwest Coast. The pressures of war and high costs of defence precluded any new expeditions to Nootka Sound. Maquinna’s band reoccupied Friendly Cove and expressed satisfaction at seeing an end to Spanish domination.⁵⁶ This attitude changed, however, as Nootka Sound ceased to be the bustling centre of European activity and of the maritime fur trade. Part of the attraction had been the security and repair facilities offered by the Spanish establishment. From 7 June 1793 to 15 June 1794, for example, a total of seventeen foreign ships entered Nootka Sound. The destruction of the American vessel *Boston* in 1803 at the hands of the Nootka Indians caused other fur traders to steer clear of the region. By 1817, Maquinna, or his successor of the same name, looked back upon the period of occupation by the Spaniards as something of a golden age. From the Indian point of view, the presence of a Spanish garrison had ensured a flow of cloth and trade goods while at the same time deterring enemy raids.⁵⁷ Considering the turbulence and uncertainty which followed the Spaniards’ withdrawal, the Maquinna of 1817 might well have accepted the renewal of the small garrison at Friendly Cove.

⁵⁴ Vancouver to the Admiralty Board, 8 February 1794, transcript, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

⁵⁵ Letter of Zachary Mudge, 20 June 1796, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Sección de Estado, leg. 39.

⁵⁶ Michael Roe, ed., *The Journal and Letters of Captain Charles Bishop on the North-West Coast of America, in the Pacific and in New South Wales, 1794-1799* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 95.

⁵⁷ Camille de Roquefeuil, *A Voyage Round the World Between the Years 1816-1819* (London, 1823), pp. 96-97.