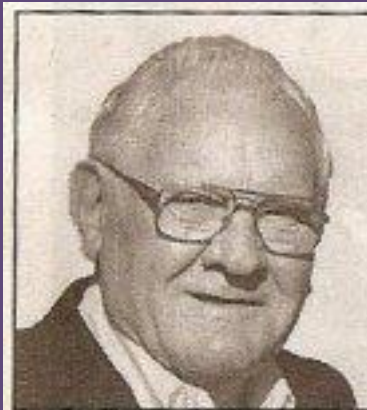
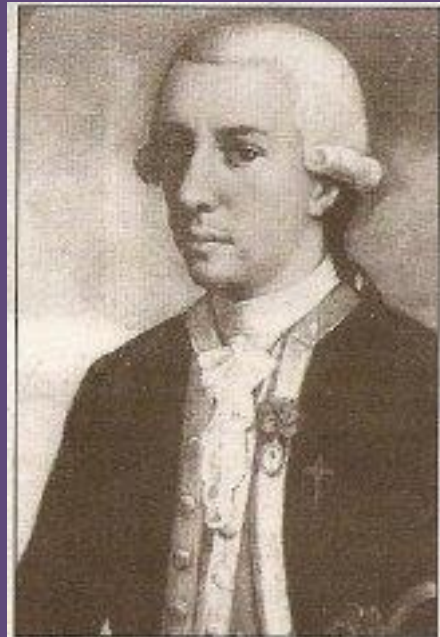


OUR PAST



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Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, above, arrived in Nootka in 1789 with prisoner Captain Don Pedro Alberni.

Prisoner Alberni was insolent to bureaucrat

Captor Eliza named inlet after him

Captain Don Pedro . Alberni wasn't in chains when he arrived at Nootka ,in 1789, but he probably should have been. He was under arrest by royal decree, a prisoner ordered into the close custody of one Francisco Eliza and Juan Francisco de Bodega y Quadra under transportation from San Blas in sunny Mexico to the cold shores of a remote Spanish outpost.

Senile and weak of memory Urrutia may have been, but he knew how the bureaucracy worked. He ordered Alberni placed under house arrest - and to prepare for an immediate march to the port of San Blas where he would embark for San Lorenzo de Nuca - or Nootka as we know it.

Alberni was given four days to get

Maybe Quadra sensed that sympathy and misread it because when Alberni and his men arrived in San Blas he failed to make the arrest. Gigedo was not amused. He reminded Quadra that Alberni "should have been arrested as soon as he arrived at San Blas - this being the essential point of my resolution" and requested immediate, written confirmation that Alberni was

Expedition leader Eliza would later give his prisoner a touch of immortality by naming a nearby large inlet from the open Pacific deep into the surrounding hills the Alberni Canal - thus also bestowing that name on the old town of Alberni at the mouth of the Somass River and on the new town Port Alberni that eventually absorbed the old.

Alberni, guilty of insolence toward a senior bureaucrat and for refusing to obey orders must have seemed an unlikely candidate for such honour. His defence was that he was a commanding officer who believed the welfare of his men was of primary concern.

In the mid-1780s Alberni clashed with one Don Antonio Villa Urrutia, the Regent Of Guadalajara in Mexico (New Spain) and Alberni's civilian superior. The dispute escalated from local to provincial level when Alberni claimed that for almost a year "on the last day of every month I have found it necessary to supply the payroll out of my own pocket, or to shame myself by borrowing.

Had Alberni confined his arguments to the failure of Urrutia's notary (accountant) to pay his troops on time, he might have prevailed, but the good Captain's patience had run out. He accused the paymaster of "moroseness [and] known vengefulness and hate ... against military men" and demanded Urrutia order him to pay the back wages - or fire him. He despaired his demand would be in vain because Urrutia's "senility and weak memory cause him instantly to forget my pleas and complaints."

ready and march but informed Urrutia he was defying his order. A bad misitake. Urrutia appealed to the most senior bureaucrat in the land for support and that authority had little option but to support his local governor.

On Dec. 17, 1789, Urrutia informed Alberni that "the Captain General of New Spain ... His Excellency Count Revilla Gigedo has communicated to me the order which I read to you yesterday that without loss of time your company must be [in] San Blas" to ship out for Nootka. He gave Alberni four days to get on his way.

Alberni stalled, said he needed more time but would possibly get underway some time in January, maybe even the 15th "if God permits." Urrutia again complained to Gigedo and the Captain General responded with direct orders to Alberni to get moving and another to Bodega Quadra, commander at San Blas to arrest Alberni on charges of insubordination as soon as he arrived.

Gigedo was observing protocol but appeared to have some sympathy for Alberni's cause. In a covering letter to Urrutia he suggested the paymaster responsible for the wage delays be "relieved immediately of the duty of revising monthly accounts and confer this duty upon another who will be satisfactory and prompt in forwarding statements."

indeed now charged and would remain confined on board ship until he arrived in Nuca.

2 years later on November 12, 1792, Quadra got another note from Gigedo approving the return to San Blas of Alberni and his men and noting without further comment: "His Majesty has been pleased to grant to the said Alberni the rank of Lieutenant Colonel ... " The promotion was probably based on a report from spanish scientist Don Joseph Mariano Mozino de Figueroa from Nootka that Alberni had proved to be an "industrial genius ... to him are owed the houses and offices and gardens that have afforded relief and gratification to so many navigators. He employed his crew in their production; he excavated wells and aqueducts; he bred a number of birds; arid would have been able to defend from hunger the entire personnel by his continuous expedients."

Eight months later a message was scribbled on a rock near Bella Coola: "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada by land, the 22nd of July, 1793". In March 28, 1795, the spanish flag came down at Nootka, the Union Jack went up and in a few years Quadra and Vancouver's Island became Vancouver Island.

(I am indebted to *Correspondence Relating to Don Pedro Alberni* compiled and translated from original spanish by newspaper reporter and historian B.A. McKelvie and presented in bound copy in 1934 by the Victoria Daily Colonist to the Mayor and City Council of Port Alberni.)