



THE ORIGINS AND FOUNDING PURPOSES OF THE
ORDER  GRANADEROS
Y DAMAS  GALVEZ



The Origins and Founding Purposes of the Order of Granaderos y Damas de Galvez

There is an important knowledge gap of the founding process of the Order of Granaderos y Damas de Gálvez. A group of persons, not all of them members of the Order, asked the only direct surviving witness to fill the gap.

Said witness is Ambassador Erik I. Martel, III Marques de San Fernando, Honorary Governor General of the Order de Granaderos y Damas de Galvez who has produced an Affidavit to that effect.

In July 2010 it was officially sent to the Governor General and now sees the public light for the benefit if those interested.

1. - The Spark

Mid 1974 I was posted to Houston as Consul General of Spain. Before the trip, I bought in Madrid a number of books on the Spanish participation in the history of the US. I read them sailing across the Atlantic toward New York. My attention was caught by a fact that I ignored completely: the Spanish participation in the American war of Independence. For the first time I came across the name of Bernardo de Gálvez - his existence was completely unknown to me, as I think it was to a vast majority of even well informed Spaniards.

In those books I read that Texas had been part of Spain for three hundred years. I thought this fact would make much easier my task of making Spain better known over there.

One of the first Texans I met asked me where did I come from. "Spain", I said. "And where in Texas is that" he retorted. During my first visit to Galveston I asked the Mayor for the origin of the name Galveston. He said it could derive from the name of an old local hotel named after someone called Gálvez. And who could that Gálvez be, I inquired. He said he thought it could be a French pirate from Louisiana.

As time went by I came across other misinformations or even omissions relative to Spain's contribution to the history of the United States. The Italian consul and not the Spanish consul was the guest of honor at the yearly New World's Discovery celebrations or Coloumbus Day. It seemed as if said Discovery was an Italian deed whilst the undisputable fact is that it was the deed of Spanish Mariners under the orders of their Admiral Christopher Columbus. The Spanish explorers were considered simply as greedy gold seekers and not the truly almost tireless human beings trying to go beyond in pursuit of a dream. The settling of what is today the United States of America was considered to be an exclusively English enterprise (Virginia) while the Spaniards settled there almost a hundred years before. Christianization was the work of the Pilgrims casting to oblivion the sacrifice and even martyrdom of so many Spanish missionaries well before the time of said Pilgrims. The only external help to the American war of Independence came from France (Lafayette). Spain's intervention was utterly unknown.

It became under the growing impression that a great number of the Hispanics I got acquainted with thought that in a way they were considered less than fully Americans.

Could it not be - I wondered - a consequence of misinformation and omission referred to? Which in turn lead to ignoring the Hispanic origin of nowadays deeply American expressions, traditions, customs, behaviors, instruments and working methods. All this witnessed by a myriad of Spanish words used to name towns and geographical features and landmarks all over the country. This lead me to conclude that if the Americans were made aware of the founding character of the Hispanic contribution to the history of their country, their consideration of citizens of Hispanic ascend might change. Maybe they would be viewed as belonging to a group of descendants of first day Americans. This would undoubtedly lead to further their pride in being a part of a country that their ethnos contributed historically to create. And as a whole the United States would be an even more integrated nation.

2. - The Bicentennial

I arrived in Houston mid 1974. The Nation was preparing itself for the celebrations of the Bicentennial of the American Independence. Birthday presents to the United States were expected of foreign Consulates and Embassies. I wondered what could be Spain's present and how would I go about getting a present at all.

Said celebrations were coordinated at the federal level by the John W. Warner, head of the American Bicentennial Administration. Below that level there were regions comprising several States. The head of the southern region was Shirley Abbot. Under him there were State, County and local heads of the Bicentennial Administration.

3. - The Idea

Very early in my stay in Houston I thought of the importance of setting the historical record straight as to the Spanish contributions to the history of the United States. It was a way of making Americans acquainted with

my country and bringing closer the people of both the United States and Spain. Both objectives were typically part of my diplomatic functions.

But my ambition took me beyond that. This was not unrelated to the fact that I was the father of a young Texan and eventually of other two. I envisaged a group of Americans that for reasons of their own would be ready to embark upon this kind of project and to make it to endure beyond my time of service in the United States.

But not just Americans. They had to be American patriots. Their patriotism had to motivate them to want to learn more about the Hispanic history of their country in a way that is not taught in school history books. To share the thus acquired knowledge with their fellow Americans and in a special way with the millions of Hispanics that have been deprived of their old legitimate home in American history.

The idea of organizing such a group started to whirl in my head. It had come to my knowledge the existence of an organization named Conquistadors of Brandenton in Florida. With great success they annually celebrated the landing of Hernando de Soto's expedition to that zone in 1539 attired as Conquistadors. This made me aware of the Americans being healthily uninhibited in the matter of wearing uniforms and of the importance of dazzling uniforms as a means of conveying public messages. In view of the Bicentennial celebrations I thought it appropriate that the group in mind wear the uniforms of the Spanish soldiers that fought the British in the American war of Independence. The uniform of Grenadier would be a good choice. They were the first ones to enter in combat paving the way to the rest of the army. They impressed their opponent with their tall hats and their powerful grenades.

4. - Charlie Barrera's and Henry Guerra's visit

My secretary told me that two gentlemen from San Antonio had asked for an appointment. They came to Houston. They underlined the Hispanic importance of their city. They wanted to know if and how could the Consulate General collaborate in the coming celebrations of the Bicentennial.

I thought San Antonio in the light of its heritage and the very positive attitude of the two gentlemen, would be a good point of departure for my project. I described it to them fresh from the oven. We kept enthusiastically talking about it. So much so that the appointment ended in the three of us having lunch together.

That was the beginning of profound friendship that I have held very dear all these years and the moment when the idea of the Granaderos materialized. I asked Charlie to think about starting the group in San Antonio. And so he did.

5. - First steps in San Antonio

Back in San Antonio, Charlie started the process of founding the first Chapter. We kept in touch a least on a weekly basis. This gave me a chance to listen to Charlie's input and to monitor the conversion of my original

idea into a reality. I do not recall a single disagreement between us. He selected, convinced and recruited the first Granaderos to whom he managed to transmit his enthusiasm for the Order. I remember names such as Raymond Ugalde, Manuel Borrego, Ventura Pérez y Henry de León....and the day they proudly wore their uniforms in front of the media(June 1976)

6. - The Uniforms

But to get the group in gear we needed the uniforms. No Uniforms, no Granaderos. There was no other way but to convince and obtain them from my Government. In the first place, I had to sell to my superiors the idea of the Order of Granaderos. At first sight they would tend to think that a Consul General with such a large jurisdiction had an agenda not really related to getting a group of Americans into XVIII century military uniforms to embark into the quixotic adventure trying to a certain extent to change the way their history is taught. In the second place, I had to refer to the fact that the U.S. Government was expecting bicentennial anniversary presents and that the uniforms would be highly appreciated. In the third place there was the no small matter of the money involved for I was asking for a hundred fully geared grenadier uniforms.

In the first and third matter I had the invaluable support of my father from whom I modestly inherited a certain capacity to turn dreams into realities. The fact that he was a greatly appreciated four star admiral, a good friend and a colleague of the Minister of the Army did help things. In any case said Minister liked the idea and gave orders to the Army Museum and the historical department of the Army Ministry to research the different grenadiers uniforms that could have been used by the Spanish army in its battles against the British in the south east United States at the exact historical moment of those battles. That is the kind of uniform that where sent to me. Each set included, as I recall, a complete uniform and grenadier cap, sable, musket, epaulettes and bayonet. Each set had a bulk price of 1975 U.S. Dollars \$ 1000. The Ministry sent a hundred sets. About twenty of them never arrived in Houston. I was told unofficially that the Embassy in Washington and the Consulate General in New York kept them to present them to museums and similar institutions.

In the second matter I had the unconditional help of Shirley Abbot. In mid 1975 I met the gentleman in his capacity of Bicentennial Regional Director. I had discussed at length with him my project. I thought that I could profit from his interest, to get the "Anglo" input in the development of the idea. And eventually to ask him for the support of the Bicentennial Administration in the matter of the uniforms. I had to convince my superiors that the U.S Government would more than welcome the uniforms as a Bicentennial present. He managed to obtain the highest possible support.

When the uniforms and armament finally arrived, I welcomed Shirley's help in convincing U.S. Custom that the Spaniards were not trying to equip an army of their own within the borders of the United States.

The arrival of the uniforms was a key day in the history of the Order. I called Charlie in San Antonio. We were very excited. It was as if we could touch the idea converted into material reality. I asked Charlie to come and see them and to prepare for the go ahead with the formal founding of the San Antonio chapter and public introduction of the Order. The occasion was covered by the press. The Granaderos wearing for the first time their uniforms in San Antonio newspapers.

7. - The By-laws

I started writing the by-laws in my wooded garden home in Memorial, Houston. This used to happen at night after a long day of consular affairs and frequently of diplomatic receptions or classes at Rice University and playing with my first born, few months old at the time, and tucking him in bed.

Charlie needed them urgently. We would discuss the progress at great length over the phone. Finally they were sent to San Antonio and approved by initial members of the Order.

I do recall that they were fairly complicated. I dealt maybe in excess at matters such as describing the different kinds of uniformed Granaderos units and ranks. Conditions for promotion. Insignias, badges and decorations. Etc. The reason for this could be found in my interest in military organization inherited from my father and my mind set as former professor of Constitutional Law.

I also recall that eventually they were modified - much later - but I am unable to describe the scope and magnitude of said modification.

8. - The visit to the King

There were several reasons for establishing in said By-Laws a periodical visits to the King of Spain: It provided an occasion for the Order to report on its activities, achievements and projects during and for a given period of time and for suggesting to the Royal House ways in which the Spanish Government could support the work of the Order. Having to report should act as an added incentive for the Order to produce results. Being received periodically by the King should reflect the importance of the Order vis a vis encouraging present members and interesting future ones. Traveling to Spain for the occasion could be used as a field trip to the history of Spain this side of the ocean

9. - The “Galvezianos”

The by-laws also included “Galvezianos”; I had in mind people such as Henry Guerre. He was in fact the first Galvezianos and he was a convinced Granadero. Very active with the media and ceremonial but was not inclined to wear uniform.

Other Galvezianos joined eventually the Order. They were History professors and other members of the Academia and in general people of notorious influence in the economic, political or social fields who shared the aims of the Order and were ready to help achieving them.

10. - The Damas

Females had no military role in times of Gálvez. For that reason women were not initially thought of as possible members of the Order. I was visiting officially San Antonio discharging my consular duties. As almost always I took time to visit with the Barreras and in a relaxed atmosphere enjoy their friendship and talk our favorite subject, i.e., the Granaderos. Charlie's wife Alicia offered as a drink. We talked about the role of Gálvez's wife: Feliciano Sanit-Maxent in his life and if the memory does not fail me about those Spanish ladies in Cuba who sold their jewelry to fund the American Revolution. I had witnessed the constant support Alicia gave to her husband and her enthusiasm for the project of the Granaderos.

I proposed the creation of a woman's branch of the Order. Both of them were excited about the idea. Alicia thought there had to be some kind of uniform for them. She proposed the Cape. I proposed that as in the case of the Granaderos there be some sort of ranks among the Damas. We would follow the hierarchy of ranks established in the Spanish Order of Merito Civil and to use the modified design of its different decorations of said Order that I had come up with for the Granaderos. but in their feminine version.

Both Charlie and I decided to appoint Alicia organizing head of the Damas. Suffice to say that Alicia's dedication was only comparable to that of Charlie's.

11. - First step toward a State-wide organization: Ambassador Shirley Abbot and El Paso

Charlie met my request of founding the San Antonio Chapter with an exemplary dedication. Ambassador Abbott received the same request relative to El Paso. I have to state that his dedication to the Granaderos was only second to Charlie's. If Charlie was the first Granadero Shirley was the first Anglo member of the Order. As I have said he started contributing to the founding of Granaderos even before he became a member. Shirley became the founder of the, for a long time, very active chapter of El Paso.

When I brought my second son home for the first time, I had to kind of sell the product to my oldest. Something not totally unrelated happened at the inauguration of El Paso chapter. I had no doubt in my mind that Charlie was the head of the whole organization. An as such I asked him to come to El Paso and perform as such. Shirley accepted Charlie's role as Charlie accepted his new responsibility. It was of great importance for the project that there be no waves between my two good friends.

A very dedicated member of that chapter was Sheldon Hall. Among other things he was instrumental as far as I know in recovering for El Paso their claim of being the place of the First Thanksgivings in the U.S (Juan de Oñate 1598) and of publicly it reenacting it every year.

12. - Growing: Galveston and Houston Chapters

When it comes to these two chapters, I have to remember someone important in the organization of the Order: Frank Titrico. He lived in Houston not far from me. He had close relations to Mrs Moody of Galveston's Moody Foundation. Through them I was introduced to Bob Baker as I recall the CEO of said foundation. The three of us intervened to convince Bob to accept the task of founding Galveston Chapter. All this was of course done in consultation with Charlie and as in the case of El Paso he was introduced by me as head of the Granaderos at the inauguration of the chapter

When it comes to Houston, as we say in Spanish after the Gospel (mt.13.57) "Nobody is a prophet in his own land." It took me very long to get a Chapter going. Separately I had several candidates to that effect. It was not easy to orchestrate their working together to establish the Granaderos in Houston. Finally in 1978 it happened thank to the effort of Frank Titrico, Benjamin Suarez and Antonio Reñazco. Antonio was the last one to allow himself to be recruited. But he has also been the longer lasting Granadero and, along with Margie, they have been and are a very special couple to the Order.

13. - On the way to becoming a nation-wide organization

While still Consul General in Houston and with the help of Shirley Abbot and Frank Titrico, and as always with Charlie's consent, we almost succeeded in opening new chapters in San Francisco, Santa Fe, Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

In the meantime I was posted to Gibraltar (end-1979) and to Madrid (mid-1984). I have to confess that after leaving Houston my interaction with Charlie and the information flow about the Granaderos became less regular, and with Charlie's passing away it ceased completely. To be very frank I doubted about the Order's continuance.

In 1989 I was sent again to the cherished country birthplace of my three sons. This time as Consul General in Miami covering the area where Gálvez won his best-known battles. But I lost my own battle when it came to recruiting uniformed Granaderos in Miami. But in exchange I managed to gather around me a solid group of what I may call de facto Galvezianos. Media people who believed in the Granadero philosophy and allowed me to disseminate it among their audiences or readers. Educators and historians who opened their classrooms and their writings to said philosophy. They published books on the subject. Their joint effort lead to the pertinent Board of the State of Florida to determining a change in the text books an to introduce in them Gálvez and the Spanish contribution to the war of independence and, in general, Spain's contribution to the rest of the history of the United States.

In the meantime Antonio Reñazco was elected Governor General. He visited me in Miami. I was happy to learn that the Order continued to exist and it had plans to do it for much longer. That set me in another founding spree. I found two willing and successful founders: Maria Davies who founded the Pensacola Chapter and Teresa Milan who founded the Jacksonville-San Agustin Chapter. As I did with Charlie in its time, I asked Antonio to enter in contact and inaugurate the new Chapter.

14. -The Order today

I returned to Madrid in 1997. Since then I was not kept up to date as to the activities-if any- of the Order. Exceptionably and sporadically I have heard from Antonio Reñazco. I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of members of the Order on the occasion of their visit to de Prince of Asturias. It made me very happy to see that the organization was well and alive and with new young faces guaranteeing the future. I am under the impression that Antonio Reñazco has been to a great extent responsible for keeping th Order functioning after Charlie's passing. Nothing has lead to believe otherwise.

May these final lines be of remembrance and gratitude to my faithful friend Charlie Barrera for his long-lasting dedication to the cause of the Order to the very last minute of his life. I cannot begin to describe how much I-we-owe to Charlie's role in the development of my idea of the Granaderos and his essential contribution to making of it the Order we know today.

