The Cannon of Champ d'Asile

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What happened to the cannon that the settlers of Champ d'Asile brought to the camp? Much speculation and some surreptitious excavations have been done concerning the field pieces.

The earliest description of the cannon was given by Don Juan Castaneda the Spanish Captain sent to destroy Champ d'Asile. One translation of his correspondence says he stated that according to reliable information, the French had eight cannon; two number 6 caliber, one number 3 caliber, four number 2 caliber and one number 1 caliber. He continued by stating that the guns were not set in a battery but had been placed in the Plaza of Arms, and were in a serviceable condition. Castaneda did not say where he obtained the information, but it was obvious from his report that he did not find the guns in the abandoned camp of Champ d'Asile.1

A second translation of the Castaneda correspondence by Xavier Blanchard Debray, (1819-1895) a French soldier and translator for the General Land Office of Texas, stated that there were 15 cannon at Champ d'Asile; eight 6-pounders, two 3-pounders, one 11/2-pounder, and four 1-pounders, which although not all placed in battery were on the parade ground, ready for service.2

In a letter of Governor Antonio Martinez, dated October 6, 1818, is the following paragraph, "Also a corporal and four soldiers have just arrived. They went on observation duty from the post of La Bahia with strict orders to make a close examination of the fortification at Callo de Gallardo (Champ d'Asile). They in fact went inside the said fortification, and they found only two Americans who explained to the corporal that the rebels had abandoned it about two months ago for fear that troops were being sent against them, as the Indians had made them believe; and although on their departure the Americans left their cannon, some negroes returned afterwards and carried them to Galveston."

Hartmann and Millard, after arriving back on Galveston Island, stated, "The camp we formerly occupied having been burned, we hurried to lay out another and were soon established in it. In order to insure ourselves against the assaults of those who might wish to harass us, we threw up entrenchments, and placed our artillery upon them."3

No further references to the cannon have been found as to the number or disposition of the guns, so it is assumed the guns were taken away by the French or ended up in the arsenal of the pirate/privateer Jean Laffite.

Endnotes:

1. Don Juan Castaneda to Governor Martinez, November 24, 1818, A.G.I. Sevilla Estado Mexico, legajo 14, pp. 124 through 126, unknown translator, Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty, TX.

2. Xavier B. Debray, translations, Accession 2004/0446, Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, TX.


Map showing the settlement on the Trinity River, 1818
—Courtesy of Liberty County Historical