JEAN LAFITTE'S PLAN TO BETRAY THE LALLEMAND EXPEDITION:  
FELIPE FATIO'S REPORT, JUNE 27, 1818

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Confidential(1)

Most Excellent Senor:

Don Juan Lafita who has just arrived from Galveston and with whom we have had a secret conference in the house of the Reverend Padre Sedella(2) has given us in detail what he has seen at that place relative to the expedition of General Frances Lallemand(3) and of his statements concerning which we hasten to bring to the attention of Your Excellency.

Before going into detail we believe ourselves to be obligated to remind your Excellency that the expressed Lallemand is one of the talented men by whom Bonaparte was served for his principal intrigues in the times of terror and who was assigned to Dinamarca where he played the same role as Junot in Portugal, Bernadotte in Suecia, La Forest in Russia, and because of the same it seems to us necessary to remind Your Excellency of the regrettable consequences that may result from the presence of such a fearful man on the frontiers of His Majesty in this part of the world and the necessity of stopping his expedition at its beginning.

Don Juan Lafita (alias No. 13) says that the lack of supplies for the expedition at present and the lack of maintaining his maritime connection forces this General to bind himself with him in a friendship sincere in appearance.

He began by declaring his peaceful views. It was planned to form an establishment at the place that would offer the greatest security for the refuge of the unfortunate French who were accompanying him and others that were hoping for conditions different from those of Europe and America. This declaration was supported by the eloquence that was natural to him and demonstrated at the same time that by being in accord with our government in order to form a barrier against the ambitious aims of the United States he was only fearful of that Republic.

With these and other reasons (No. 13 adds) he deluded him to the point of helping him with some supplies without which he would have dispersed his small army composed of 120 men, all officers of rank and sub-
Facsimile reproduction of the first page of Fatio's report to the captain general. Note the numeric cipher, presumably one of the Spanish diplomatic codes. (Archivo General des Indias, Papales de Cuba, Legajo 1877)
alterns. Supplied in this manner the group was directed to the place that he believed most fitted and he constructed a fort of sufficient size upon the banks of the Rio Trinity at 11 leagues from its mouth and 15 from Galveston, forming there another establishment [Champ d'Asile]. (4)

No. 13 greatly praised Lallemand and his troop. He says that the troop labors with dedication without complaint about the privations that they suffer. These are many and great but the leaders give them such example and inspiration along with the hope of improving their lot that the persuasion is much more than gladness is not seen in the faces of the adventurers in the midst of hunger and privation. He adds that a great treaty has been made with the nearby Indians not only in order that they may supply them with provisions but also to serve them in the communications that he was initiated in Natchitoches and in all the Internal Provinces (5), particularly in the capitol of San Antonio and La Bahia. This statement No. 13 has made to us in the presence of the respectable Padre Sedella and we cannot give less than total belief to it -- as much for assembling the information that we have through other ways as well as the fact that he has always transacted with us in the greatest sincerity and shows us now that he desires to cooperate in the destruction of that gang of adventurers.

The plan that he has proposed to us is simple and if it is carried out in the quickest possible way much blood and money would be saved and many great ills would be nipped in the bud. He says that Lallemand has not been in all of this year in a condition to operate with his forces because of not having gathered together the adequacies for the plan of taking possession of the Internal Provinces. In spite of the fact that daily he received reinforcements he [Laffite] would assemble the ambush on the banks of the Rio Trinidad [Trinity] at a suitable distance from the fort with a party of forty or fifty men. This party would have for its sole purpose the cutting off of the supplies that the Indians bring up the river by taking possession of their canoes, hiding them in the woods and not permitting for any reason that the Indians have communication with the adventurers -- at least as far as possible. By this method they would stop sending their canoes in search of supplies and these being taken from them and from the troop their complete destruction would be attained.

This small operation could not be realized unless it is done along with a pair of schooners and a ship of war in order that they may impede and cut off the resources that General Lallemand might receive through pirates, in which case No. 13 offers to help us. The vessels should be very maneuverable and well provided with launches of little draft in order to approach the mouth of the Trinity with troops that the ship of war must bring. There is no need of a force of 300 or 400 men in order to impede the flight of the enemy by land although No. 13 has assured us that Lallemand does not have an understanding with the American government and that on the contrary he shows a great contempt for it and its citizens and he does not wish to receive them into his army. We believe that
Lallemand has not been truthful with No. 13.

It is a positive fact that the American government has sent suitable orders, as Your Excellency knows, for taking possession of Amelia Island and of Galveston. It covers this violation of territory with the false pretext of both places being found in the power of adventurers and pirates.

It is a fact that the American flag waves over Amelia Island; it is a fact that even in Galveston, as yet, the reasons that oblige this President to send the cited orders no execution has been given to references to this last point and there is not the least probability that they will be given.

Hence it results to our way of thinking that the American government has contented itself with the taking of all of West Florida and part of the east and it delays its conquests for the present until it sees the impression that its Machiavelian conduct makes in Europe. Although on account of this it is in accord with Lallemand abandoning the insurrection in these valuable territories. This plan is intended to be carried out by every imaginable means within its reach.

The taking of Pensacola and of the Fort of the Barrancas by the Americans provides a place farther out where the intriguers will be able to carry out their wiles against our valuable possessions on this sea with much more certainty. While still little attention is paid to the plotters they will be able to arm themselves and to prepare expeditions in it with the silence and secrecy that is nearly impossible in a place of much commerce.

Furthermore because of its nearness to the Tombigbee it is feared that some of the new colonists would be moved to follow the fortune of General Lallemand if unfortunately he is permitted to increase his means.

The second No. 13 [Jean Laffite] leaves today for Galveston to join the first No. 13 [Pierre Laffite] to await the reply of Your Excellency and to bring over to his side the people necessary to his action for the success of the enterprise that they propose. If the expedition can be carried to an end after that in the space of one month or six weeks it will be so much better in the contrary case. No. 13 says he will agree [that] it may be suspended until after the equinox in September in order to avoid the heavy blows from the southeast which are in the habit of happening in that part of the sea and without having protection he says that under the last condition the expedition would be more successful because it would be possible to convene with the Viceroy of New Spain to whom we transcribe this official letter and to whom Your Excellency will be able to communicate your decision about the particular affair in order to proceed in agreement in an undertaking that not only secures our frontiers in this part of the world but will free the Mexican Sea of the pirates that infest it and will take away all hope from the later adventurers of
attaining their harmful intentions and we must add that the Nos. 13 hope that they will not see themselves afterward exposed and abandoned to the greatest dangers that threaten them more and more each day because of the reasons that the comprehension of Your Excellency will not fail to understand.

With these reasons we offer ourselves to the disposition of Your Excellency and pray that God guard your life many years. New Orleans. June 27, 1818. Most Excellent Senor Luis Noeli, Secretary of the Legation of His Majesty in the United States -- Felipe Fatio.

- Notes -

(1) Fatio's report to the captain-general, written in collaboration with Noeli, was composed in cipher (see illustration, page 17). The original MS is located in the Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 1877 (Seville).

(2) Fray Antonio de Sedella, cure at Saint Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, was the unofficial and secret representative of the Spanish king in Louisiana. See Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIII (1940), and Harris Gaylord Warren, The Sword Was Their Passport (Baton Rouge, 1943), 131, 137.

(3) Charles Francois Antoine Lallemand and his brother, Henri Lallemand, were general officers in the army of Napoleon before coming to the United States in the summer of 1816. For background information on the ill-fated Lallemand filibuster, see Hartmann et Millard, Le Texas, au Notice Historique sur le Champ D'Asile (Paris, 1819), Louis Francois L'Heritier, Le Champ-D'Asile, Tableau Topographique et Historique Du Texas (1819) and Warren, op. cit.

(4) Champ D'Asile was located near the present site of Wallisville, Texas.

(5) The interior provinces of New Spain: Texas, New Mexico, Upper and Lower California, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Nuevo Santander.