

## Chapter 1

### Voyage to Florida

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Knight of the Order of St. James, Asturian by birth, a man no less noble than brave, His Majesty's general of the Fleet of the Indies<sup>8</sup> and Adelantado of Florida by a particular honor bestowed on him by His Majesty after he had granted him an *asiento* to conquer Florida and to spread the word of the Holy Gospel in this land—seeing that Jean Ribault,<sup>9</sup> a Frenchman of the new Lutheran religion, had come from France with a big fleet and had arrived in Florida, and that the [French] had built a fort they called Fort of France next to an affluent river that crosses most of the land of Florida<sup>10</sup> in order to detain there all ships and vessels, and capture the passengers and the silver in the ships—informed His Majesty and the lords of his Royal Council of all of this, as well as of the perils that would ensue if they did not put an end to it, saying that it had to be done quickly, before the French could fortify themselves and earn the trust of the chieftains, for if the Adelantado were to have the native Indians as enemies as well as the French, who were inciting the [Indians] to become our enemies, whatever supplies he had been given to go to Florida and expel the Lutherans from that land would not suffice.

The Adelantado informed His Majesty of this in Santa María de Nieva<sup>11</sup> in April [15]65, and he informed the lords of the Royal Council of State and War who were there with him, and then came to Madrid,<sup>12</sup> where the court and the lords of the Royal Council of the Indies<sup>13</sup> were, to ask them to give him two galleys and [two] galliots in charge of Don Álvaro [de] Bazán [y Guzmán],<sup>14</sup> so that with those ships and with his *zabras* and *pataches*,<sup>15</sup> he might go to Florida before the French were reinforced, and that if they were, he would disembark in another harbor, the closest he could find to theirs, which he could do because the vessels he had requested were of

a shallow draft. There he would fortify himself and attempt to harm the enemy as much as possible, and to earn the trust of the chieftains. In the spring [of 1566], with the cavalry he was to receive from the Indies, he would be master of the field and of their harbor, because they had their fort two leagues inland up the river, so that they could not receive reinforcements or deal with the Indians. Accordingly, he would wage war on them quickly and with all discipline, and they would be driven out of Florida, to prevent them from implanting their evil sect in it.

His Majesty looked favorably upon this, but because he had news that the Turks were descending in force on Malta<sup>16</sup> and he had very few galleys to oppose them, he did not consent that any be given to the Adelantado, although he agreed with what he had said.

The next day in La Mejorada,<sup>17</sup> His Majesty provided that the Adelantado be given five hundred men, provisioned and paid for, with four warships, all at His Majesty's expense, so that with the five hundred men and ten shallops and *zabras* the Adelantado was taking at his expense, he should go to the islands of Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Cuba<sup>18</sup> to collect the cavalry, infantry, warships, and supplies that were already provided for.

The deal was referred to Francisco de Eraso,<sup>19</sup> who informed [the Adelantado] that His Majesty had ordered him to go to Valladolid to collect the authorization to recruit men and seize ships, and sureties for the officials of the House of Trade,<sup>20</sup> who were to take care promptly of the provisioning and payment of the men, borrowing some money for this purpose. The Adelantado replied that he was not pleased with the long delay this would entail in assembling the men, especially for Florida, which had been discredited among all countries as having a perilous coast. And since seven fleets with many men, which had gone to Florida by order of the emperor [Charles I] and of His Majesty [Philip II], had been lost at sea, it was hard to find soldiers and sailors. The five hundred men he was bringing along were from Asturias and Vizcaya, gathered and sought out by his relatives and friends, who were important people, accompanying him more to serve God and their king than for their own profit. But since so much time had already passed, the Adelantado would go post-haste to Seville by way of Madrid, so the lords of the Royal Council of the Indies might write to the officials of the House of Trade to give the Adelantado the fifteen thousand ducats they had offered him in the *asiento* to defray the great costs he would have to make. He wrote to his relatives and friends, asking them to recruit

as many men as possible in his name, and he said to Francisco de Eraso that delay would not be in His Majesty's best interest. He went to Seville, where he collected the fifteen thousand ducats, and arrived in Cádiz<sup>21</sup> on a large vessel that he owned. He gathered his men in his *zabras*, and in the ships that came from Asturias and Vizcaya he gathered two thousand one hundred fifty soldiers and sailors.

He made such good time that he sailed from Cádiz on St. Peter's Day [29 June 1565], with a fair wind.<sup>22</sup> Within thirty days of his departure he was hit by a great storm called a "hurricane,"<sup>23</sup> and was in great danger of being sunk with all his fleet, having lost all masts, sails, and rigging of the galleon in which he traveled. When all was calm again he found himself with only three ships, and since he had much spare sailcloth and rigging, he remedied the situation as best he could and landed in Puerto Rico, where with great diligence he got fitted out again within a week and left, having collected another of his ships that had gone astray during the storm. From there, from Puerto Rico, he took another one—making five ships in all—with one thousand soldiers and sailors, and announced to his men that he was going straight to Havana.<sup>24</sup>

After putting out to sea where it was suitable, navigating carefully as he went, being in a place where the sandbanks prevented going to Havana except by taking a much longer route, he called his captains together and entered into council with them, telling them privily that it was much less dangerous to go straight to Florida while the weather was good, before winter came, than to travel to Havana to gather the ships that had gone astray, as well as the rest of the fleet, cavalry, and infantry that His Majesty had ordered him to gather in Santo Domingo<sup>25</sup> and in that island [of Cuba], for if he did this he would be delayed and would not be able to go to Florida until spring, when the Lutherans would be stronger. Therefore, because he was not in a position to do anything else, he determined, with their consent, to go straight to the French fort and harbor in Florida, for he believed he had more than enough [forces] to take their harbor, as long as the French fleet had not arrived yet. He begged them to agree with him, and asked them, individually and collectively, to reassure their soldiers and sailors and to tell them that this was a very good decision, that the enterprise they were undertaking was of Our Lord God and of our king, and that they should have great confidence that His Divine Majesty would grant them victory in everything, and have great courage and patience to endure all the ordeals and perils that were to follow.

Some of the captains then answered, approving the Adelantado's decision, and showed themselves content with it, offering to set themselves with full will to all the ordeals and perils that were to follow, and [saying] that they would encourage their soldiers and lead them in all good discipline to be most obedient in their service. And without awaiting the opinion of the captains who had not replied (who the Adelantado thought were distressed by his decision), he said to all of them:

—Brothers, do stay in this cabin for two hours in the company of God, so that our secret not be known, and address this matter and talk it over so that you can tell me if you find any problems with my resolution. He who speaks out more will be the more my friend. Then, once your reasoning and mine are heard, let us determine what is best. Each of you, individually and collectively, and all the sailors and soldiers will be content to see that whatever is provided for in this matter has been thoroughly discussed and agreed upon.

The Adelantado left them closeted in that cabin and went out on to the ship's deck, where he ordered prayers and litanies to be recited. He asked all the men in the fleet—everyone in his ships—to kneel and beseech Our Lord to enlighten the Adelantado so that, in a decision he wanted to make, he would decide what was best for the service of Our Lord God and the spreading of His Holy Catholic Faith. All of which they did with great devotion. After this was done, the Adelantado withdrew to the sterncastle of the galleon with a Book of Hours in his hand, and he prayed for an hour in front of a crucifix and an image of Our Lady. Then he left there, since the two hours' time he had given his captains would have passed, and went to them in the cabin where he had left them closeted, and asked each and every one of them to tell him openly and clearly what they felt in their hearts and souls, what they thought about his plan, and if he should change it.

Addressing and talking over this matter for an hour, they resolved to follow the Adelantado's determination and go straight to Florida to the French harbor. When they left the cabin and the decision was announced in the galleon with her six hundred and four men and in the other ships, which sailed together all around her with a fair wind, the Adelantado ordered the decision to be celebrated as if he already had the victories that Our Lord God was to grant him on the appointed day. He ordered the men to play all the fleet's trumpets, fifes, and drums, and to deploy on all the ships the

banners, pennants, and campaign flags that he had brought for this enterprise, and to hoist the royal standard, giving it a royal salute by firing all the arquebuses and artillery on the ships. He ordered that all the men should get double rations that day, which gave the greatest of pleasure. This was seen very clearly in the happiness and rejoicing of all the men, who talked of nothing except to praise the Adelantado's decision.

On the evening of that day the Adelantado gave orders that all the weapons in the ships be given to the captains so they could distribute them among their soldiers, who were to keep them clean and ready. Since most of the soldiers were raw recruits, each of them was to shoot three rounds every day until they arrived in Florida in order to lose their fear of the arquebuses and be properly trained. Each round was to be shot with bullets into a target erected in the said galleon, with prizes awarded to the soldiers in the companies that did best, and to their captains, so they would take great care to make them skilled. With this daily drill, they also recited the catechism and the litanies, praying to Our Lord and beseeching Him to give them victory in everything. They sailed until 28 August 1565, St. Augustine's Day,<sup>26</sup> when they sighted the land of Florida. Falling to their knees and reciting the *Te Deum Laudamus*,<sup>27</sup> they all praised Our Lord, continuing their prayers and beseeching Our Lord to make them victorious in all their endeavors.