

Champ d'Asile
Report by Castaneda to Gov. Martinez
Nov. 24, 1818

Champ d'Asile
No. 9. Report by Castaneda to Gov. Martinez
Nov. 24, 1818

{The original translation is in the files of the Sam Houston Regional Library & Research Center, FM Rd 1011, P.O. Box 310, Liberty, TX 77575. The copy in my possession is a very hard to read Xerox copy of a handwritten translation – translator not known. All notes marked by a superscript are mine.
Sheldon Kindall, July, 2003}

A copy of the Report given to this Government by Capt. Don Juan de Castaneda, Commandante of the Division, that marched upon the enemies located in the areas of the Trinity.

Although in order to give Your Lordship a detailed report of the operation of the Division which under my orders marched upon Cayo Gallardo, I might wish to use the greatest brevity, it is not quite possible for me to forbear withholding myself so that Your Lordship having been told in detail of all that has happened, may judge if something remained to be done in the execution of the instructions that they gave me and according to the conditions that prevailed = ¹ The 16th of last February ², I began my march from this Capital at the head of 240 men, including officers. It was well known to your Lordship of the delays ³ that this troop suffered with regard to clothes, mounts, pack animals, and food, and very well known to me and apparently of general knowledge that Your Lordship exhausted all of resources available to him for the best equipment and supplies for a detachment by established opinion experienced the most cruel hardships attendant to the ill-fortune of the place to which we were directed = Although all was a troop of Cavalry Your Lordship knows very well that 60 of the these //115 ⁴ left at that time doing service as Infantry and marched afoot overland because of the total lack of horses on which to mount them. In spite of the fact that the remainder left mounted, the deplorable state of their gaunt and exhausted animals, with the exception of some few of little service, was not unknown. Neither was it hidden that the most of the individuals were without shirts, coats, and pants – many of them entirely naked – and with only one pair of shoes, without cape or wind breakers to protect them. All of this will give you an idea – even though slight – of the distress that they suffered in order to surmount so many and such great hardships that the country through which they traveled in order to arrive at the point of their destination, offers. It is sufficient to say to Your Lordship that entire days of marching through lakes and swamps with few rests of short duration would have been impossible for us if the guides had not been so skilled and the visible protection of the Gods of the Armies had not been so evident – it had not rained one single day during the time of the entrenchment as it had during the time the march was made = It seems to me that with the attached log below in No. 1, Your Lordship will be informed of the order of our march and the incidents that occurred in it and so I do not make an overly long narration which, in this case, would be unnecessary and I go on to point out

briefly what may merit the attention of the Government.= As is seen in the log, I came to the outskirts of the Rio Trinidad at a place named Rancherias on the 9th of the past October . Inasmuch as I was, in this place, now near the enemies which we presumed to be at Cayo Gallardo, I did not wish to go farther without making a careful and quiet exploration and by this to provide an opportunity for the best arrangement for the Troop for its arms and ammunition if the use of them should occur. = On this point I sent, at the beginning of it, the Corporal from La Bahia, Blas Esparga, one of the two that were guiding me through the countryside, with four soldiers available for the purpose, with an order to go to Atascosito with the greatest caution and quietness to see if it had enemies. In which case he should not lose the chance for looking closely for whatever might be able to guide us to a favorable outcome withdrawal and give me prompt information. If he did not find anything he should send me the information by two soldiers and continue with the other two soldiers to reconnoiter Cayo Gallardo where, according to accounts, a fort was built by the enemies. I cautioned him that on the 12th, without fail, if he did not return in the time that I calculated necessary I would be in Atascosita with the Division. - On the 11th at mid-day I noted that the spies had not returned and that it was past the prefixed time and I thought at that moment of passing to the opposite side of the Trinidad with the greatest number of people fit for duty and that this would be the most desirable, insofar as possible, in case that the enemy made an attack. At the same time I knew it was useful and even necessary to plan for a site of protection whereon to fall back to await an opportune time and the orders of Your Lordship in the not remote case of the enemy having the greatest number of forces of the highest quality or because of his extra ordinary advantages over me, I would not (should have to) compromise the honor of the Troops without a chance for a safe retreat. I decided to build a redoubt with a stockade and chose for the purpose the terrain most suitable – which I found naturally made on an arroyo of the same site of the rancherias – For this purpose - and the entrenchment and stockade which was to be built, marked out, - I ordered the Lieutenant from Nueva Viscaya, Don Juan Lupan, who with 50 men was to remain in //117 that place to care for all the supplies and the cattle herd and the remaining horses – after the Troops mounted. At the same time I left the orders most suitable for the preservation of their post and the rest that was to their case. I made known to him, also, that he was to place an outpost on the point of the Trinity which was nearby, for the purpose of receiving the couriers or dispatches that I might order and the remaining happenings that might come about. All was arranged in best way possible and I went through a strict review of arms and ammunition. I set out with the 160 remaining men – inasmuch as we have suffered losses from desertions – mounted on only one animal each with the number of cattle and supplies necessary for 15 days – with regard to the fact that conditions might delay me = This day was spent until well into the night in crossing the Trinidad on rafts and making camp on the opposite side with the vigilance that the advanced position of the place in which I was, required. I sent after that time, two soldiers who knew the terrain, for the purpose of going near Arascosito and seeing if my scouts were there = At daybreak of the 22nd ⁶, I began the march anew with

information now that there were no signs of the French in Atascosito and that the Corporal with the soldiers had continued on as far as Cayo Gallardo – not knowing that it had been abandoned and the cause for this. = At 8 in the morning I came to Atascosito and saw to be true what had been told to me. I wanted to delay and to order out new spies and to be more prepared because of the possibility of an attack in case that the enemies might have captured the first two who were now causing me alarm. I considered it to be more desirable to move to a point where it would be clearly evident to me what the fort contained. //118 I decided to continue the march with the greatest consolidation and order = Shortly after leaving, the Corporal and two soldiers met me and told me that they had found the fortifications of the enemy evacuated and that it was not located above ? on (upon) ⁷ Cayo Gallardo but farther below on the banks of the Trinidad; that they had slept there the night before. They told me too, that they had seen a well used footpath that would lead near the lakes. They followed it and at a distance of six or seven leagues from the fort they found a small ranch where the Corporal saw a woman. In order to investigate this he left his horses somewhat hidden and approached through the brush ⁸ to a distance of 20 paces from the house from where he also saw that it had cows, pigs, chickens, and the rest of the things that indicated that it had been there for some time. On this basis and figuring that the occupants of the ranch were obligated by necessity to be of service to me by giving information to me – willingly or by force – of what would further my operations, I hastened my departure with the intension of taking them by surprise before the day would end. The intervening distance and the firm conviction that I would lose many horses if the Troop trotted, prevented the possibility of the whole of the Troop, which I considered necessary to be consolidated at all times, arriving in time. Because it was already five in the afternoon and I was two leagues from the house, I decided to leave an encampment there with the few supplies that I was carrying and march with a party of the less badly mounted in order to fall upon them before it grew dark = Forty men along with the Lieutenant of the Presidial Company of Bexar, Don Jose Sandoval, who acted as Adjutant of the Division, and one Subaltern continued along the road at a long trot and by twilight had surrounded the two //119 huts that the ranch had. After the precautions necessary in such cases and making certain that in all that area there were no enemies that might endanger me I began to examine and to determine the number of people that it had and the cause of its establishment and the object that kept them there = It had two Anglo-Americans, one of these was married and had his wife there. They had already been there for more than one year. When asked by whose order they were living in that place and the purpose for which they remained, they answered that they had no order from anyone and that they believed that the land was in the United States and their object was to live there by hunting and by the trading that they did with the peaceful Indios. The few belongings that they had show that this was evidently true. The greatest part was of deer skins and they had no other arms than their carbines and were without other signs that would cause suspicion. Therefore, and after being told by these same that nearly two months ago the enemy left suddenly from the fort of the Trinidad and reunited on the Isle

of Galveston where they remain. I was puzzled and undecided about the course I should take. I believed it impossible even to think of beginning an expedition against them since I was aware of the insurmountable difficulty of 18 leagues of sea which separated us and was without launches or means to sail – which obstacles incline me with sorrow⁹ to destroy the fortifications and began my return – having the orders of Your Lordship and the many assignments more in view, I would do what was possible for obtaining with evidence accurate knowledge of the condition of Galveston – the number of people that it had and so forth. //120 I conceived an all-out effort on my part for obtaining it and I consulted with some of the officers of the division on the means for conducting it according to the purpose. I decided to send someone to parley. For this service Lt. Sandoval volunteered and set out the following day which was the 13th, in one of the launches which was found on the Bayou of that ranch known as Punto de Busto. He was accompanied by a drummer¹⁰, two soldiers, and one of the English who, because of being skilled in the passage, volunteered to navigate the launch and take them to Galveston. His wife and belongings were left in hostage and he was told that she would die if he was treacherous. The said officer took a packet sealed and confidential to the Commander of that group which writing contained what is shown in No. 2. = It was not improbable to me that the group would perhaps receive my letter with indifference and that the threats that it indicated to them would be resisted because of my inability to see them carried out for they knew very well that in the end a place would not be lacking to them through which to escape by passing to the United States, but since my aim was to seek positive information later about these means in order to make good the lack of forces and supplies for their destruction, I decided to speak to them in the language which was recognized by them as fitting to the honor of the Armies and directed to the highest service of both Majesties. I was convinced that the Superior Government would approve this decision born of my good intention. Six days have already passed since the departure of the envoy; during which time I personally carried out some explorations throughout the territory and placed some outposts on the more distrusted paths – in particular near the Trinidad immediate to its mouth //121 in order to see any new landing that they might possibly intend. The tardiness of the envoy was causing me some apprehension since three or four days was sufficient time for going and returning. I was thinking over new measures when on the night of the seventh day I was told of the arrival of said Sandoval at the Bayou. He brought in a his company five officers from the Island¹¹, one of which brought in a sealed letter the answers from his Commander. The other four came in order to row the boat because of the lack of sailor who should do this = With this information, I permitted that these individuals should land and that along with my Adjutant they should present themselves to me, which they did. The one commissioned delivered the answer to me, whose content is set forth under No.3 which includes an official translation. This then was translated into Spanish by the same bearer since it was written in French and did not answer my purposes but knowing (I knew) certainly by the terms in which it was expressed that they must not have much confidence in the same and that my undertaking was giving promise of a

favorable result. I benefited by this error and by the humility with which they answered with respect to the evacuation of the place, which proved more than anything else about certain secret incidents which my Adjutant had told me about and of which by separate and confidential letter I informed Your Lordship because the delicacy of the affair required it be done in that way. I decided to send back the envoys from Galveston with the greatest haste – having treated them with all consideration and courtesy because I was told that the same had been done by them with mine. I wrote anew to the acting Commander since the real one was absent, what was made known in the copy marked No.4 in order that if the preceding (aforegoing) was not true, the failure of an undertaking already underway would not rest in me. They set sail in the morning following the night of their arrival which was the 19th and because they lacked a pilot it was necessary that those who went the first time should do so again. They took their canoe for the return and since the one Anglo was not enough it was necessary for his companion to help him along with a soldier who would serve for the oars = Among other measures which I took for my security while I remained on that point was to send on the 14th, a day following the departure of the Adjutant, a detachment of 8 men, well mounted, to the interior, making use of the carrier mules because of having no other means, with a letter directed to the first legitimate authority of the United States. It was put in the terms which the copy that No. 5 includes, indicates, and was done so for the purpose of avoiding the alarm that our nearness on their frontiers may cause and for evading at any time the protest which by this circumstance might be made for ulterior purposes. The envoys also carried other instructions for their conduct in certain duties and the discharge of them. As yet they have not returned to my command even though they have had more than enough time. By this I fear that they may have run into bad luck or that some of the mules may have been lost. In which case I hope that the Government will reimburse the owners of them since they were used for the good of the Service = Already those from Galveston were about nearly 8 days overdue. I had no information concerning them – which circumstance was making me hesitate. I strongly desired to destroy //123 the fortifications and return – in consideration of the fact that the supplies were now running low, a good deal of the Troop were ill, and some had deserted. Since by that date I already counted 41 days of march. This should make evident the crises which it imposed upon me. The supplies that you gave me may not last for 50 days without rationing – considering the distance which separates me from the capital and the lack of aid in regard to provisions which might have been supplied to me. The condition in which I was and the delays that I would suffer on the journey were well known – especially if the rains were coming. The loss of the soldier who was the last to die and the fact that he did not see ended the undertaking already begun, burdened me most heavily since up to that time I was sustained by the hope for attaining the state wherein it might be easily seen that my writings about our Troop did not lack truth and that by this means they would be held in high esteem. That in which I was trusting, according to what Your Lordship told me, did not appear – having been its most notable failure since it assured the total conclusion of all these designs which were the sole purpose for

which it should have been considered. Doubtless the bad weather or some unforeseen irremediable accident might have prevented it. Notwithstanding that by these events I presumed that the Isle was evacuated by now because of the promise that they made in a letter and because they were already in a deplorable state and full of misery. As Lt. Sandoval pointed out in his report, they should have left. I wanted to make up my mind about the final decision. Later in the night of the 8th day which was the 26th the Americans and the soldier arrived without any answer from the Commander of Galveston but by the information that I sent separately to Your Lordship from whose contents I decided that my Adjutant with both canoes and only 6 soldiers should set out anew //124 on the following day, the 27th, and be stationed on the point that I marched out to him for that purpose of discharging the secret commission that the received official message stated and under an order so that after executing the commission he should take the canoes and enter the mouth of the Trinidad and go by water until he arrived at the abandoned fort of the enemies where I would await them with all my Division. This new maneuver already begun I ordered the Americans and their woman and the few belongings that they had – whose inventory and seizure I omit because they had little value - to be escorted by a detachment until they passed out of the limits of the Spanish Government. I warned them that in the future they would be treated with the severity of our laws – just as any others – if they were found in our territory without the necessary permission. I was brought to this decision by seeing the usefulness of the services that they rendered to us, the illiteracy of both men because of the lack of education, and their willingness to respond with work. Through a statement which I made to their Government it seemed to me to be politically useful to do the same with the other two Americans who were captured in the village of the Coyates Indios where they were trading. From them I took the deerskins that were distributed among the Troop. I sent both and another who came to volunteer for service as a spy or for any other duty in which he might be used – he claimed to have done this at other times in the past – with an escort out of our territory – well advised and warned. This done and the huts burned, I distributed among the Troop some pigs which were taken from those which the Americans had since they were running in the woods. I set out on the 2nd in the direction of the fort – all the Troops that I had on the left of the Trinity, with the exception of //124 the detachments that were escorting the Americanos and the one at the outpost at the mouth, doubled back = If the enemy because of the lack of supplies and other conditions had not seen the necessity of abandoning their position its taking and destruction would surely have cost a great deal of blood because of its location and because the fortifications were constructed with all the rules of the profession. They were built with great advantages over a small Division of only Calvery that might have set itself at the front although the valor and constancy of the Troop, by which it was strengthened, would surely have overcome the peril = An irregular five sided figure, with its ditch above the bank of the same river, whose small fort was connected by means of an entrenchment (brestworks) with a redoubt of a squared figure, with its ditch at 32 toesas from the first mentioned – a covered way leaving from the last mentioned in the direction of the quarters which

consisted of 28 wooden houses strong enough with their loopholes manned that they could be as said fortlets – as is shown on the map that No 6 includes. It had eight pieces of Artillery – two of the caliber of 6 – one of the caliber of 3 – four of 2.5 – and one of 1. Although they were not set in a battery, they had them in their Plaza of Arms ready for use (according to reliable information). It was the work of the 14 men which it had as a force. In relation to the establishment of a colony to which they directed their arms such a place is not in conformity with what they describe in their writings, which is exactly why they must be regarded as hostiles. I leave the import of these operations to the consideration of the Superior Government whose insight will gauge and penetrate the spirit of their intentions = On the 30th, the day //126 following my arrival at the fort, at a very early hour the razing and destruction of all was underway. This operation could not be finished. After nightfall, the Adjutant came with the canoes and soldiers after having satisfactorily discharged the duty that I had committed to him – from which a great usefulness will result for the good of the service of his Majesty. An explanation of this is not suitable here but is as an individual item in reserved official mail which I humbly sent and which Your Lordship will be advised and told of what happened and I believe that by the same humility it will be elevated to the knowledge of the Superioridad. = I finished the destruction and total demolition of everything and reduced to ashes all of the habitations. On the 31st, I turned with all my force to fall back to the rancherias to join with the small detachment that I had left there for the care of the supplies. I knew that without doubt it was utterly impossible to remain longer because of the urgent reasons that I have made known. I came to the cited point on the first of the month and after destroying the stockade and entrenchment that I had made, I gave the order to start the return march on the following day – of whose happening Your Lordship will know in detail from the log. = The Division of 130 men under the Command of Capt. Rafael Fernandez which Your Lordship sent for the purpose of reinforcing me in the execution of what was arranged by the Senior Commandant General, joined me on the 11th near La Bahia with orders that Your Lordship gave me in his official letter of Oct. 28th which I answered immediately. With all the force united I presented myself to Your Lordship in this Capital on the 22nd of this month = All this has been the fruit of my operations and Your Lordship can evaluate impartially the fruit of these //127 by the content and findings of the reserved official letter. = I report to Your Lordship that 158 horses have been lost through death and exhaustion as the general report that includes it makes known. It states that those which were traded to the Coyates Indios in exchange for goods by reason of my order - from which act the past consideration that the soldiers should not be deprived of everything prevailed upon me – although tobacco was prohibited = It would be a serious affront to justice unless the merit acquired by the worthy officers and Troop were recommended to Your Lordship – those that went with me on this expedition and endured with the greatest perseverance the misfortunes that were the consequence of being in a wilderness, especially since the wretched Troop was naked and barefoot and with a ration less than what was necessary to live on and had not been supplied. I am proud and content with the satisfaction of seeing that in spite of having to swim across the rivers, and tailing

on the floats made of cow skins, and in spite of their delays and the miseries by which they were already overcome and the hardships of the march, - of those adversities they only boasted and from which it can be understood the profound purpose which reveals in each and everyone the intense desire to destroy the enemy. By their valor and constancy they indicated to me that having come to the point they would have, without doubt, given a day of new glory to the honor of our arms - nevertheless I am pleased to have gained advantages without bloodshed. All are worthy of consideration, but distinctly and in particular, Lt. Don Jose Sandoval, which gallant officer I recommend to the favor of Your Lordship with the hope that Your Lordship does the same with the Superioridad - as much valor, zeal and force that he has proved previously and for what he has shown during //128 all the march by discharging the duties of Adjutant that I conferred on him, as for the fearlessness in having volunteered to go to Galveston in disregard of the perils of the sea which could be a fearful thing because of the kind of boat in which he went which was a canoe made of a piece of thick log - the oars of which injured the hands of everyone. He concealed his impressions and at the same time the distrust that on any basis he should have of an unscrupulous person of whom it possible to fear some treachery or villainy and for whose services and merits related to the discharge of his duty with the ability and subtlety that was necessary, he is worthy of the devotion of his Majesty and the Governor that represents his August Royal person = So too, are the individuals who accompanied him - in particular on the first trip - whose names are found in the reports that said Sandoval gave to me and in the original that included to Your Lordship - as also is the soldier of the company of the Alamo - de Parras, Cristobal Pena who is the one that served at the oars on the return - being detained 8 days because of bad weather and bringing the important information which he reported to me = Also worthy of consideration is the well deserving Padre Chaplain of the Compania Valante de Parras, Don Francisco, Xavier Trevino, because of the merit he has acquired in the (illegible) expeditions that he has made and by the enthusiasm with which in this he was trying to inspire and foster in the Troop the love of the King and the sacrifice that they must make on their part in defense of His Royal rights. Neither do I wish to pass over in silence the merits acquired by the Corporal of La Bahia, Jose Maria Ximinez, Sargaint, and Blas Esparza who served as guides during the march - the first being sent to the interior and has not yet returned, and the second, in spite of being quite sick //129 after his departure, endured with perseverance and exposed himself to danger as imminent as that of the spies. The residents of this Capital, Don Jean Teramundi and Don Angel Navarro are worthy of the same consideration who in category of adventurers and with permission from Your Lordship, faithful in all the hardships and desirous of sacrificing their lives with weapons in their hands, volunteered to go to the interior with sealed papers. I accepted their offer and the same of Jose de la Garza, servant of Don Feliz Truddenann of Natchitoches, which individual by order of Your Lordship accompanied me in order to serve me as interpreter = I may not close without calling the attention of the Government to the merits acquired by Lazaro Orrantia, who learned in surgery has treated for 3 years all the sick and wounded in this

part, by the good fortune of having made outstanding cures particularly in the action at Perri in June of the past year, and who has suffered on this expedition the greatest labors in curing the sickness gratis, as he has always done. I record to Your Excellency and to the public that he does not actually have a shirt and that he lives by alms (offerings). I hope that Your Lordship in view of all that has been explained, may be pleased to elevate to the knowledge of the Superioridad the merit of all these individuals for their satisfaction and the appreciation that it may be kind enough to grant them. I acknowledge to Your Lordship on my part my intense purpose for by which it I have provided the lack of greatness necessary for measuring up to the confidence that I had the high honor of striving for. God protect Your Lordship for many years. Bexar, Nov. 24, 1818 = Juan de Castaneda – Senor Governor of the Province of Texas, Colonel Don Antonio Martinez.

Transcription Notes – Sheldon Kindall

- 1 I think this symbol indicates a "page change" in the original letter. It often replaces a period (.) at the end of a sentence. There is an inconsistency in amount of verbiage between these symbols – maybe the Translator simply failed to note all page changes.
- 2 (Translator's note:) This word is misspelled – the Capt. began the march on Sep. 16th

A note on "Translator's notes": These notes appear in an uncoordinated way. Sometimes they are in the margin, sometimes in the text, and some on an inserted extra page.

- 3 (Translator's note:) may be "shortages"
- 4 I think this symbol indicates a page change in the Bexar Archive record and the page number. As in note 1, there are gaps where, apparently, the Translator just forgot to include the Bexar Archive page change. It would probably have been better to leave such symbols out of this transcription. I left them in because I really don't know what the hell they are.
- 5 (Translator's note:) "blanket"
- 6 (Translator's note:) 22 is a typo. 12th?
- 7 This is an exact copy of the text. The Translator struggled with the translation at this point. A shame, because this is one place where exactness would help.
- 8 (Translator's note:) The word here is "hierbas" – tall weeds, herbs, grass
- 9 (Translator's note:) "condolor mio" – the correct meaning is not conveyed here. He regrets that he cannot advance on Galveston.
- 10 (Translator's note:) "im tambor" – a drummer. This word has another meaning applicable to this incident – have not yet found it.

- 11 Five French Officers! This is not a parley. This is the genesis of collaboration. It would really be nice to know what the "secrete" message is that Castaneda keeps mentioning.

A note from Sheldon Kindall: Translating Old Spanish is very difficult. It takes more than knowledge of today's language. This particular translation appears to be what one gets after a first pass – it suffers from incorrect verb tenses, faulty use of adverbs (especially for direction), and a literal translation (sometimes) of the very wordy romantic language. The next step would be to put this into good English. However, we are trying to read between the lines and extrapolating in order to pin point the location of Champ d'Asile. I would rather have this translation than a finished, "good English" version.