



Captain of the Phantom Presidio: A History of the Presidio of Fronteras, Sonora, New Spain, 1686–1735 (Spain in the West Series)

Fay Jackson Smith

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Life of the Spanish Frontier was treacherous at best. But when settlers and soldiers were at the mercy of a petty tyrant such as Don Gregorio Alvarez Tuñón y Quirós, captain for life of the presidio of Fronteras, it became unbearable. From 1702 until his removal from office in 1726, this officer manipulated and embezzled his way to wealth and power at the expense of the settlers and soldiers he bullied.

Fronteras, Sonora, located only forty miles south of Douglas, Arizona, is little remembered today. It was established at Santa Rosa de Corodeguachi in 1701 as a military post at which was stationed a "flying company" or squad of cavalry who were to protect the settlers and missions scattered over a vast area from depredations by the Apaches.

The account of life at the presidio, based on primary source documents, reveals in vivid detail the hardships of the lives of the settlers, soldiers and missionaries. These pioneers shared the greed, fear, loneliness, heroism, and racial tensions that are still with us today. The conflicts between the military and Jesuits, the abuse of Indians in the mines, the religious instruction within the mission are covered in detail.

The suffering of the soldiers under the command of Don Gregorio is revealed in the report of the General Inspector of the Presidios, Don Pedro de Rivera, whose investigation and inquiry at Fronteras finally put an end to Don Gregorio's malfeasance. The details of military life and mistreatment, including food and clothing, pay, regulations, and the manner in which Don Gregorio abused them for his own gain, provide a new appreciation of the lot of these frontiersmen.

Juan Matheo Manje figures prominently in the work, as he was Don Gregorio's principal adversary throughout the latter's career, and it is in large part through his written appeals for relief that Don Gregorio's crimes came to light. Manje is best known as the friend and escort of Father Kino. His numerous letters to the viceroy, and representation of the settler's interests against Don Gregorio are detailed.

Juan Bautista de Anza, whose son of the same name led the first settlers to San Francisco, finally replaced Don Gregorio in 1726 as Captain of Fronteras. No longer would it be a "phantom" presidio whose captain was always absent, and whose flying troops were too poor and weak to protect the settlers.

Appendices containing important primary source material never before published are included in the work. Eight documents, including the transcript of Don Gregorio's testimony to Rivera, Rivera's regulations for Fronteras, and missions and ministers in Sonora, 1722, accompany the text.

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