

Pedro Menendez de Aviles Claims Florida for Spain

Spain was upset to learn that France was building colonies in Florida. As a result, Pedro Menendez de Aviles was sent to drive out the French colonists. Menendez was born in 1519 and ran away from home to be a sailor at the age of 14. He eventually became an officer in the Spanish navy. In 1549, the king of Spain commissioned him to fight pirates off the coastline. He did such an outstanding job that Philip II, who became king in 1556, granted him permission to start a colony in Florida to try to drive out the French. Before long, Menendez and over 2,000 sailors, soldiers, and their families set sail in 11 ships for Florida.

The Birth of St. Augustine

Menendez and his crew had planned to sail up the St. Johns River to Fort Caroline, a French settlement. But Menendez soon discovered that French ships blocked the mouth of the river. Menendez withdrew and sailed to a smaller harbor just south of Fort Caroline. Here they set up a camp and began to call it St. Augustine. Of the original 2,000 people who started the voyage, only 800 arrived on the Florida shore. With the help of the Timucuan Indians, Menendez and his men built a fort. On September 8, 1565, he officially named it St. Augustine. This became the first permanent settlement in the United States. He then claimed all of Florida for Spain.

The Battle with the French

Menendez began to threaten Fort Caroline. Jean Ribault, the French explorer, knew the Spanish were busy building the fort at St. Augustine, so he took many men and ships to attack them. But severe storms hit the coast and all of Ribault's ships wrecked in an area known today as Daytona Beach.

Menendez took advantage of this and left with 500 soldiers to attack Fort Caroline. The Spanish were able to take control of the fort and they killed almost all the French soldiers. The women and children were let go.

Menendez renamed Fort Caroline, San Mateo. Afterwards, he returned to the beaches and killed most of the French soldiers that had survived the shipwrecks, including Jean Ribault. Several of the survivors claimed that they were Catholic, so Menendez allowed them to return to France.



Pedro Menendez received permission from the king of Spain to start a colony in Florida.

The Watchtowers and the Forts

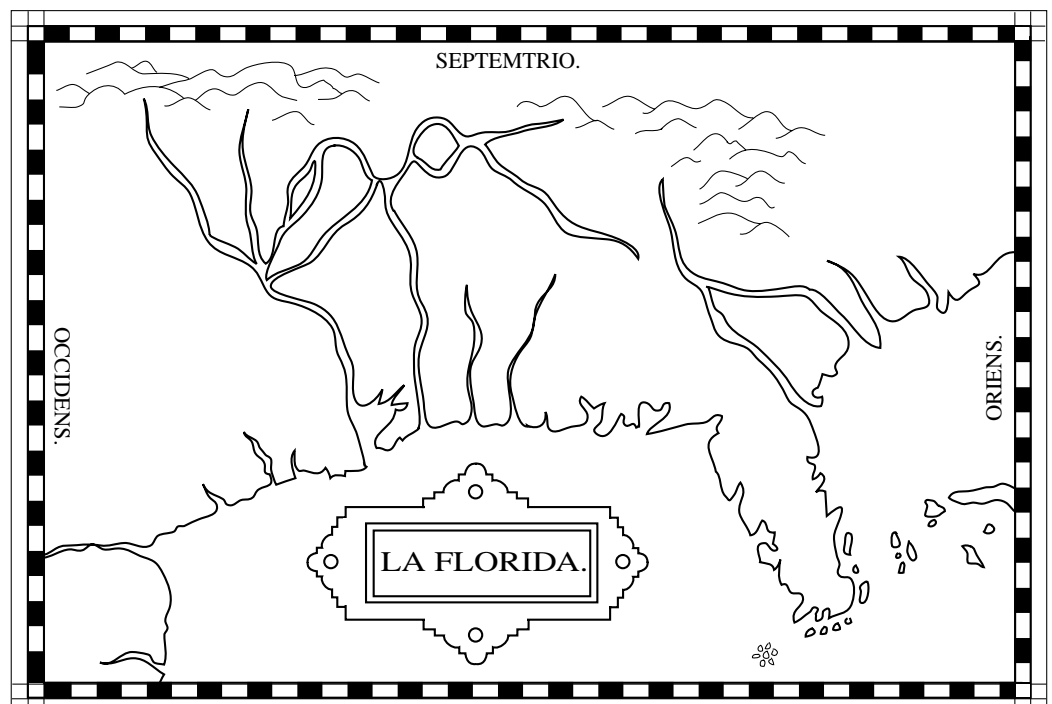
The inlet where Menendez and his men killed the shipwrecked soldiers was called Mantanzas. It is a Spanish word that means slaughters. In 1569, a wooden watchtower and a fort were built on the Mantanzas Inlet. The watchtower was used as a lookout for British ships.

Pedro Menendez became Florida's first Spanish Colonial Governor. He wanted to make sure that all of Florida stayed under Spain's control. In order to do this, he began to explore and to establish outposts up and down the Atlantic coast. In 1566, Menendez had watchtowers built at Cape Canaveral and Biscayne Bay.

Next, Menendez sent two ships of settlers to what is now Paris Island, South Carolina. In 1569, more settlers arrived there and the town began to bloom. It was named Santa Elena and became the capital of Spanish Florida. By building a string of forts along both coasts, Menendez helped the Spanish control Florida for many years.

The Native Americans and the Spanish Missionaries

Menendez was successful in signing a treaty, or agreement, with the Calusa Indians to trade gold for food and other supplies his troops needed to survive. Menendez was a staunch Roman Catholic, and one of his goals was to convert Native Americans to the Catholic faith. He requested that all ships coming from Spain carry priests. These priests became missionaries, which led to the period of Spanish missions in Florida history. Menendez went back to Spain to collect more settlers, but died on September 17, 1574, before he could return to Florida.



“La Florida” included the entire eastern half of North America on this Spanish map from 1584.