

# MARIEL CHAOS

## Mexican War of Independence Rages on in Small Scale Naval Battle. Spain Wins, First Mexican Republic Loses Brig Guerrero

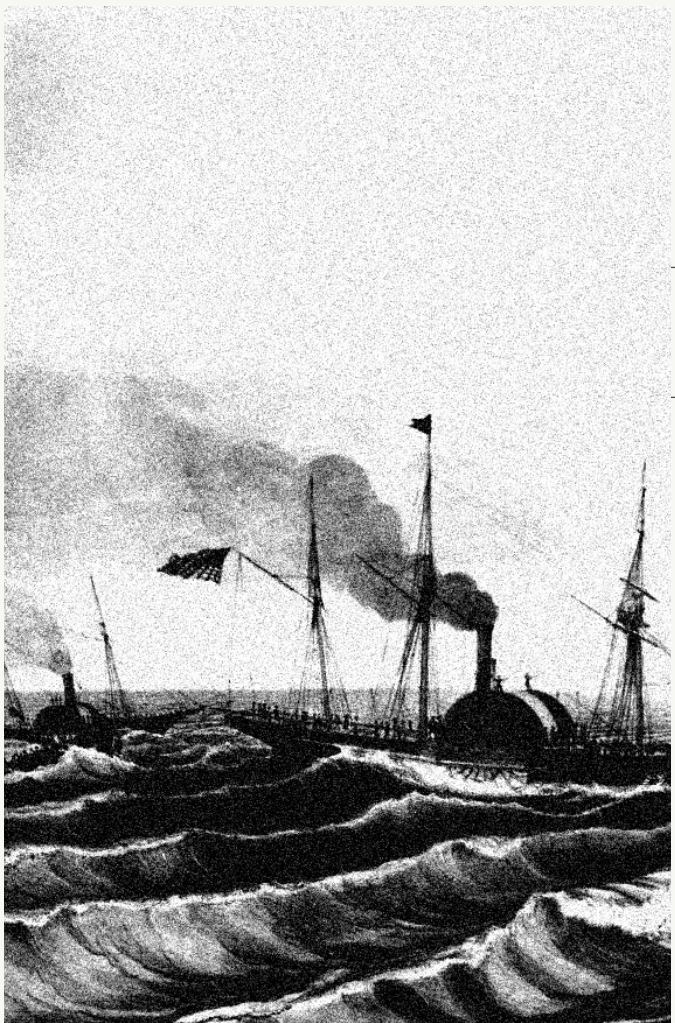
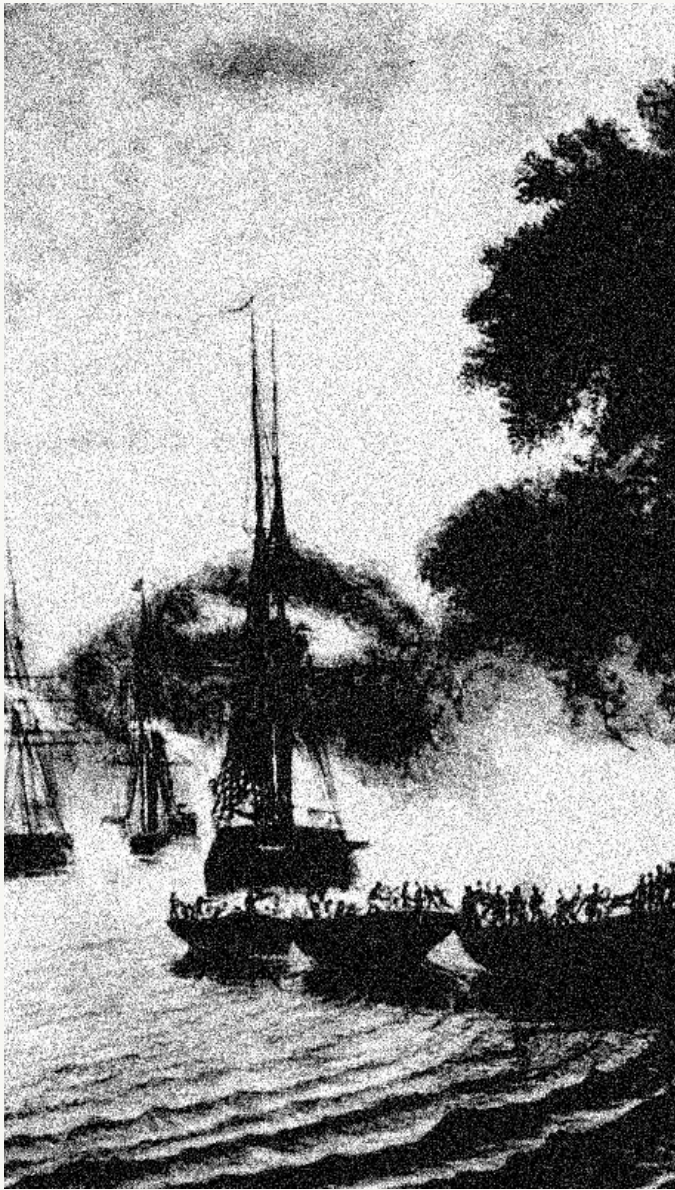
### Background of the Battle of Mariel

During the Mexican War of Independence (1808 to 1821), the former Spanish colony of New Spain successfully declared independence and defeated the Spanish colonial army. New Spain was reconstituted into the First Mexican Empire, with the new nation gaining de facto independence with the signing of the Treaty of Córdoba in 1821. However, the Spanish government did not accept the legitimacy of the treaty and continued to interfere in Mexican affairs, maintaining military garrisons along the Mexican coast. These Spanish holdouts suffered a major setback in 1825 when the Mexican Army captured the key port city of Veracruz, but Spain continued to launch armed expeditions against Mexico from the nearby island of Cuba. The island colony also served as an important Spanish naval base, allowing the Spanish to harass Mexican trade in the Gulf of Mexico and project power in the region.

### Battle Overview at Mariel Port in Mariel, Cuba

Seeking to challenge Spanish control of the gulf, the Mexican Navy began to conduct sorties in the region in the mid-1820s. In early 1828 a squadron of three brigs under the command of Commodore David Porter began to sortie into the gulf, seeking to disrupt Spanish shipping. One of the three brigs was the 22-gun Guerrero, which had recently taken on a crew of American volunteers in New Orleans and was under the command of Porter's nephew, Captain David Henry Porter.

On morning of 10 February, Captain Porter sighted the tall masts of merchant ships in the port town of Mariel, and so decided to raid the port. Approaching the port, Porter discovered and attacked the Spanish brig Marte, an armed schooner, and a group of merchant ships. Porter succeeded in scattering the Spanish ships, but word of his raid reached the nearby city of Havana; around 5:00 in the afternoon, the heavily armedA frigate Lealtad arrived off of Mariel, and soon began to pursue the Guerrero. Porter attempted to flee towards Key West, but by the morning of the 11th it was clear Lealtad was capable of overtaking the Mexican brig, and so Porter decided instead to stand and fight. Around 6:00 in the morning, Guerrero turned and was engaged by Lealtad, resulting in a two and a half hour battle between the two. Using its superior size and armament, the Spanish warship began to wear the Mexican vessel down, with Captain Porter and over eighty of Guerrero's crew being killed in action. Guerrero in turn inflicted heavy damage on Lealtad. Eventually the Mexican brig was forced to surrender, with the ship's crew (including future US admiral David Dixon Porter) being imprisoned in Havana. The battle at Mariel became the last ship-to-ship engagement between the Mexican and Spanish navies



### Spanish attempts to reconquer Mexico

Despite the creation of the Mexican nation, the Spanish still managed to hold onto a port in Veracruz that Mexico did not get control of until 23 November 1825. Spanish attempts to re-establish control over Mexico culminated in the 1829 Battle of Tampico, during which a Spanish invasion force was surrounded in Tampico and forced to surrender.

On 28 December 1836, Spain recognized the independence of Mexico under the Santa Maria-Calatrava Treaty, signed in Madrid by the Mexican Commissioner Miguel Santa Maria and the Spanish state minister Jose Maria Calatrava. Mexico was the first former colony whose independence was recognized by Spain; the second was Ecuador on 16 February 1840.

### Aftermath of Brigs and Naval Warfare

Guerrero was repaired and entered Spanish naval service under the name El Cautivo. The conduct and bravery of Guerrero's crew was commended by the Spanish, who treated the crew humanely and buried Porter with high military honors. After the defeat at Mariel, the Mexican Navy continued to operate in the gulf, though the loss of Guerrero was a major blow to the navy's strength.