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DE BELLISLE ON THE TEXAS COAST

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DE BELLISLE ON THE TEXAS COAST

HENRI FOLMER

Simars de Bellisle was a young French officer who, in 1719, at the age of twenty-four, left France to serve in Louisiana. There is no doubt that his wanderings on the Texas coast are of interest to the American historian.

De Bellisle's entire "Relation" as reproduced by Margry,¹ is here translated. The sea voyage is of interest because it gives an idea of how the French emigrants crossed the ocean. Perhaps not every ship was commanded by such strange officers as the "Maréchal d'Estrée," but there can be little doubt that every crossing was accompanied by adventure of some kind and by some form of danger.

His narrative has a story in almost every paragraph. The sea voyage, which begins with the robbing of an Irish captain of his merchandise and continues through a meeting with a pirate, a dinner offered by the French captain to the pirate, a shipwreck; de Bellisle's wanderings in the wilderness and the death of his companions from starvation, his captivity at the hands of the Indians, his rescue from the stake by an Indian matron, his anthropophagy, and finally his love affair with Angelica — all these adventures would provide enough material for a novel.

The author regrets that he did not have access to de Bellisle's "Memoir" mentioned by de Villiers,² which seems to contain further information on de Bellisle's adventures in the wilderness. It would be valuable also to have some day a translation of this document which, according to de Villiers, was written after the "Relation" and completes this account.

¹ Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1879), VI, 320-47. Cf. also: Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1758), II, 232-40. Le Page du Pratz met de Bellisle and, after his return to France, became a friend of de Bellisle's family there. Cf. also: Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes Occidentales* (Paris, 1768), Part II, 134-51. The author wants to express his gratitude for the use of the valuable material in possession of the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library in Chicago and of the Ethno-History Collection in the Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.

² M. de Villiers and P. Rivet, "Les Indiens du Texas et les Expéditions Françaises de 1720 et 1721 à la Baie-Saint Bernard," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris, Nouvelle Série*, T. XI, fasc. 2 (1919), 417.

The passenger list of the "Maréchal d'Estrée" is found in A. L. Dart's "Ship Lists of Passengers Leaving France for Louisiana, 1718-1724," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXI, No. 4 (October, 1938), 970. These lists are most enlightening to the student of early Louisiana history.

Simars de Bellisle was born in 1695³ and left La Rochelle in 1719. His "Relation" starts at this point and the translation reads as follows:

Relation of what has happened to me since the 14th of August, 1719, when I left from La Rochelle, with the vessel "Maréchal d'Estrée" to come to Louisiana until the 10th of February, 1721.

We set sail to go to Santo Domingo and after two weeks of sailing we saw a small Irish ship. Our Captain chased it and having caught up to it ordered it to strike sail, which the little ship did. The Captain of our ship sent his second officer on board the Irish ship, with orders to take butter or anything else he might find. Immediately the second officer went to the little ship. When he reached it, he ordered the hatch to be opened; not finding any butter, he carried out two small barrels of wine, and two cases of raisins, which he put in his shallop. The captain of the Irish ship, seeing that he was impudently robbed, jumped headlong into the shallop of our ship in order to protest, believing that such an order could never have been given and that the officer who was sent [to his ship] had stolen the money which was given to him to pay for what he had taken. But no one had given the second officer any money. The latter began to beat him [the captain of the Irish ship] with a stick and chased him back to his vessel. He [the second officer] then returned. As soon as he arrived we set sail for San Domingo, which we passed without any of the pilots on board noticing it. We learned this from a pirate who attacked us in the following manner.

It was already night when we saw him coming. He caught up with us in less than an hour and running behind us, without asking who we were, shot a cannon ball at us. At the same time he shouted to us to put our shallop to sea and to surrender immediately. Afterwards, seeing that we were stronger than he, he lowered the sails and ran behind us. Nevertheless, he followed us the whole night and at daybreak was a hundred paces from us. Because he sailed four times as well as we did and we saw that he could catch up with us whenever he wanted to, we advised the Captain of our ship to strike his lower sail, and to wait and see what the pirate would do. This was executed. The pirate seeing this maneuver was doubtless intimidated. He lowered his dory to offer his apologies for having fired upon us without knowing who we were and to tell us that he mistook us for English.

It seemed to me that the Captain of our ship should have retained and imprisoned him. Nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, he invited this pirate to come and dine on our ship, which he did, and during the dinner the pirate captain proposed to our Captain that he should lend him

³ M. de Villiers, *La Découverte du Missouri et l'Histoire du Fort d'Orléans* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1925), 83-84.

his crew to loot an island in the neighborhood. He would have accepted if we had not prevented him. When all these discussions were finished and the party was over we asked the pirate whether we were still far away from the French Cape. He said that we had passed it long ago and that we were in the Old Channel.⁴ Everyone on board our ship was very much surprised, especially the Captain and the Pilot, who thought we were well above the wind. We passed, without knowing it, quite some dangers, not counting the one we were in. It is very dangerous to pass this place without previous experience and we would not have known how to sail through it. We decided to ask this pirate if he did not have one [pilot] to give to us. He denied it but he had taken, a few days previously, a small Spanish ship, which was commanded by a certain Clavié from Bordeaux. This Clavié was on board his ship and he thought him well experienced in this bad passage. We sent immediately for this Clavié. As soon as he reached our ship we asked him if he would have the kindness to pilot us through this channel and to stay with us. He did not like it, but we could not do without him. When the Captain of our ship saw that he was experienced in these places, he took leave of the pirate and set sail, trusting his vessel into the hands of this Clavié to the end of the channel.⁵ He was quite right to do so, because soon we saw his experience. He saved us from our dangerous situation, in spite of the risks which are there. As soon as we had passed the danger, the captain of our ship began to treat this Clavié rudely and to show ill temper towards him. It was very sad for a man who had rendered such a valuable service, but one could not expect anything else from such a bad character. One had to have patience, hoping nevertheless to obtain justice at the first occasion, but I believe that he met the same fate as almost all who were on board and that he died a cruel death, as I will tell hereafter.

Being out of danger from that source [the Channel], we sailed for Louisiana, where we arrived twenty days later.⁶ In the morning before daybreak, the pilots saw land and told the Captain to take the draft. This Captain gave the order to sail on and said that it was not necessary yet.

He had but finished saying it, when the ship struck something several times with a terrific force. Everyone believed that we were lost. Yet the ship did not split open, because it was entirely new. It shipped much more water than usual. We turned around immediately in order to run towards the open

⁴ Probably the Old Bahama Channel, north of Cuba. This shows how far off its course the ship was.

⁵ The Old Bahama Channel is about 300 miles long.

⁶ The distance from the west mouth of the Old Bahama Channel to St. Joseph Island off the Texas coast, where they saw land, is over a thousand miles.

sea. This accident passed and daylight arrived. Sailors were sent up to see if they could discover land; they did see it. We ran towards land to a certain distance. After awhile the water was not deep enough and we turned again a little towards the open sea until we had four or five fathoms, always with land in sight. The officers and marines of this ship were supposed to land at a distance of more than a hundred leagues east of the Louisiana River [Mississippi].⁷ Yet we were more than a hundred leagues west of it,⁸ as you will see hereafter. This mistake was made because we sailed all the time towards the west, thinking every moment to see the mouth of the Louisiana River, for which we were looking. We sailed so far in this direction that finally the coast ran towards the southwest and imperceptibly towards the south. The pilots, looking at their charts, recognized their stupidity and realized that the Louisiana coast ran east and west and that sailing southwest or almost south as we were doing, we were approaching Vera Cruz.⁹ They told this immediately to the Captain, saying that without any longer delay we should change direction and sail towards the east in order to regain what we had lost. This was so clear that he [the Captain] could not disagree with it.

I forgot to tell you that while running this course we saw a bay¹⁰ with an opening of three leagues. We halted before it in order to fetch fresh water, because we had none left on board. We anchored therefore before this bay, and we sent people to measure the draft, with the order to enter it in order to obtain water more easily. We were forced to anchor at open sea because there was not more than seven or eight feet of water at the entrance and we sent the shallop and the dory for water. They could not fill more than eight or ten barrels and even that with much difficulty, because they found only brackish water.

But to return to my subject, the pilots had told him this and we changed direction. After sailing a few days we again saw land, which ran east and west. We continued to run in this direction until we reached the bay¹¹ of which I spoke before. When we were almost opposite the entrance of this bay, Mr. Legendre, an officer who embarked on the ship to go to Louisiana, and Mr. Clavié, captain of the little Spanish ship which the pirate, of whom I have spoken before, had captured and this Mr. Clavié we took to pilot us

⁷ De Bellisle meant Mobile or Biloxi.

⁸ In sea leagues this would be about 345 miles, which is not so far off.

⁹ They were still about 600 miles from Vera Cruz.

¹⁰ Galveston Bay. This description is vague. *Cf.* Beranger's account here below. The location of this Bay will be discussed more in detail at the end of this study.

¹¹ Galveston Bay.

through the Old Channel, were both behind the poop. They noticed that the ship touched the sand. They did not delay to inform the Captain of this and told him that it was time, without waiting an instant, to set to sea again, because it was quite clear that otherwise the ship would ground. He answered, that he would touch the sand again and that he would find the entrance.

This unhappy man had not yet finished speaking before this ship grounded completely.

Now everyone passed sad moments, especially when we saw that at the time of such an accident, the Captain of the ship went to bed and locked the door of his cabin from the inside. The lieutenant had become crazy, witnessing this accident. The ensign was in his cabin below deck and said that if the Lord would save him from this danger, he would not sail any more.¹² Therefore, there stayed on deck only the commanding mate and the pilots. One day had passed already since the ship grounded. When none of the officers left their cabins, nor tried to rescue the ship, the mate said that he would float the ship from this bank or that he would die in the attempt. He did it in the following manner: he told the pilot to ask the Captain, through the door, what he wanted them to do. The Captain answered to this question that they could do what they wanted, but that they should fasten the two topsails, which were hoisted to the top of the mast. The pilot repeated this order to the mate. Hereupon the mate of the ship said that it was a great shame. He called all men on deck and told them: "My children, follow me." He put himself in front of everyone and began to run from one side of the ship to the other and all these people followed him. He repeated this many times. This gave a little movement to the ship and at the same time he hoisted all the sails. There was a strong wind blowing seawards. This wind in the sails, joined to the movement which the ship made because of all the people, freed the ship from this sand bank in less than two hours.

When the ship began to rock, the captain left his cabin and again took command of the ship. We put out a little to sea, tacking the whole night. When the day came we held council among the five officers who were on board and we decided to be put ashore. We made the pilots come, who told us that they were pleased with the resolution we had taken and asked us to light three fires every evening. They said that within four or five¹³ days we would be at the Ship Island, and that as soon as we would be there, we

¹² One realizes that de Bellisle and his companions did sail under very unreliable officers, which explains his willingness to land at the first opportunity.

¹³ How completely lost was everyone on this mad ship, is evident by this statement. The Ship Island, near Biloxi, was almost 400 miles east from their location.

should send them a vessel to bring them, or otherwise they would certainly perish. We asked the Captain if he would loan us his shallop to permit us to land. He said to take it. We took with us for four or five days, only biscuit. Furthermore, we took our rifles, our swords and a little ammunition. All this belonged to us. We landed with this in front of the same bay where we had become stranded the day before, hoping to return in a short time. It was evening when we landed.¹⁴

We remained this first evening at our place of landing. When the morning came we did not see the ship any more. This was contrary to what they had told us. We walked then towards the east along the shore of the bay. During four days we found very beautiful paths, but the fifth day we suddenly came to a place which was submerged and where the mud was up to our necks.¹⁵ It was impossible to advance any farther. We wanted to get inland, but we found it submerged just the same. We were forced to take the resolution to retrace our steps, which he did. Already we had run out of biscuits. From time to time we killed some game, though it was very little. After marching a long time and retracing our steps, we found a little rowboat on the beach. Probably it had floated down the Louisiana River and had been washed up by the sea at this place. We decided to pull it along the beach and portage it over a distance of a quarter of a league towards a river which we saw. This river made a large detour and flowed into the sea at the entrance of the bay, of which I have spoken heretofore.

All five of us went after this little row-boat which was entirely new. After we had made rollers with a hatchet, which we had brought with us, we rolled it, in less than a day, towards this river.¹⁶

More than a day had passed since we had eaten. In the morning I went with Mr. Legendre to hunt, because we had used the preceding night to rest

¹⁴ De Bellisle landed with four other officers: Alain, Courbet, Duclos, and Legendre. Le Page du Pratz's account differs greatly from De Bellisle's "Relation." Cf. also the passenger list of the "Maréchal d'Estrée," *supra*, footnote 2. The names of the officers on the ship's list are spelled:

Habains, Courbette, Duclos, Legendre, and Simarre. The accounts of Béranger and Bossu also differ greatly.

¹⁵ They apparently had reached the marshes of the mouth of the Sabine River, a distance of about fifty miles.

¹⁶ It is difficult to identify this river, which is about 125 miles long, according to the Journal, yet probably it was the Trinity River or the San Jacinto. De Villiers says that the "Mémoire" does not speak at all of the exploration of this river. Cf. de Villiers, "Les Indiens du Texas et les Expéditions Françaises," 418, n. 1. Béranger writes that de Bellisle found the row-boat after his companions had all died and that it was small and old. Cf. a MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library, "Mémoires de la Louisiane: A Collection of Mémoires concerning French Possessions, 1702-1750" [MS. No. 293], 77.

from the fatigue caused by rolling the little row-boat. In the evening we returned with a deer which we had killed and which we brought to our comrades. We roasted it and we ate as much as we liked, because we were starving.

We ate so much of it that we thought we should die from overindulgence, because we ate it without bread.

When this was done and the rest of our meat was almost finished, we decided two days later to embark in our row-boat and to ascend the river as long as we should find water enough. We left immediately and we rowed with all our strength. We made this day six to seven leagues and then we halted to hunt in this place. We finished eating the rest of our deer, and the next day we re-embarked to ascend the river farther. We advanced in this manner eight or nine days, when we found the end of this river, which had its source in a little pond.¹⁷ We went around it to see if there was not a little river which we could ascend. We did not find any.

We were therefore obliged to return to where we started. We had almost nothing to eat and we were so tired that we could hardly move. As the river descended we let ourselves drift. We ate but a few little birds, which we killed because it was very difficult to find deer, which were very frightened by the Indians who come here in the summer. Because it was winter we did not find any. We saw, nevertheless, while descending this river, a dead deer at the edge of the water. It was beginning to smell very bad. We stayed there two days to eat from this animal and to rest a little. Because we had but a joint of this deer left we embarked. We had decided to regain the seacoast. As I have said before, this river flowed toward the sea and the entrance of the bay. We landed after traveling eight days. We went to a little promontory,¹⁸ where we found some oysters. We halted there to eat some of them because my comrades were unable to continue, due to hunger and fatigue, and were unable to collect them, Mr. Legendre and I excepted. We caught a large amount, which we opened in a pot which we had with us.

When the oysters were cooked, I told my comrades to come and eat them. Messrs. Alain and Duclos approached, but Mr. Courbet, lieutenant for this province, said that he could not walk a step and that he gave up from weakness and emaciation. It amazed us to see such a strong man suddenly beaten down. I took the oysters to him. He wanted to eat them, but he was unable. He could not even walk. He then said to me,

“My dear friend, I take leave of you. I do not feel strong enough to live until tomorrow, and I am starving.” This saddened me very much. I

¹⁷ The river the French ascended was probably a fork of the San Jacinto River.

¹⁸ There is near the mouth of the San Jacinto River a promontory.

immediately took my rifle and went hunting. The Lord allowed me to kill a deer in less than two hours after I left. I first carried a joint to my comrades. I had a piece boiled and when cooked I brought it to Mr. Courbet. He said to me, looking wild, that he could not eat. I put a piece in his mouth, but he could not swallow. At the same time he put his hand on me and said, "My dear friend, good-bye forever. I have not half an hour left to live." Truly, he had not finished these words when he fell in my arms and died in less than a quarter of an hour, without struggle.

Under these circumstances, we passed sad hours. Finally we dug a hole and buried him. This was the first one of my companions to die.

As soon as this was accomplished, I said to my three other comrades that we should leave in the morning to reach the sea, which was not more than three days from where we were.¹⁹ They agreed and we left accordingly. The next day we landed to rest and to eat a few oysters which we had caught at the place where our first comrade had died.

It was here that Mr. Legendre told me that he was unable to continue and, truly, the poor man, having taken leave of us, lay down. We covered him with a coat and he fell asleep. When two hours had passed, we said we should leave soon. We wanted to wake up our comrade, but he slept too profoundly and soon we saw that he was dead. This saddened us as much as when the first one died. Again we dug a hole and buried him. We were but three left. We said, one to another, that this destiny would soon await us all. We prayed and we decided to leave in order to reach the sea, which we did. We arrived there after a day and a half and at the same place where we had landed from the ship. The morning after we arrived there my comrades told me that they trusted themselves in my hands and that, as far as they were concerned, they were so weak that they could hardly move. I told them that I would do all that I could to keep them and myself alive with the little ammunition which was left, and that when it would be exhausted, we would be forced to follow the same road as our two other friends who died. At the same moment, I took my rifle and went hunting. I had told my friends that I would not return until I had killed a deer. I had not gone yet a hundred paces away from my friends -when I saw a deer which was drinking in a brook near a bosquet of reeds which hid me from him. I approached very quietly to the edge of the reeds. When I saw that the animal was within the range of my rifle, I shot him and killed him on the spot. I went first to my comrades and told them what had happened to me. We left immediately to fetch my game. We had quite some trouble in loading it in the row-boat, but our hunger gave us strength and we succeeded. Finally we made a large fire

¹⁹ This distance would indicate that they had ascended the San Jacinto River.

and roasted part of it. We ate as much as we wanted. Having satisfied our hunger, we woke up three or four hours later. After we had gotten up, we decided together that we should cross to the other side of the bay, on the west coast, in order to find out whether we could see something there. We needed for this crossing fair weather and no wind because our row-boat was small. We decided therefore to cross the first time the weather would be fine. We roasted what was left of the deer which I had killed. The next morning we had beautiful weather. I asked my friends if they wanted to cross. They consented and we made it very well because we had no wind. When we reached the other side, I went walking along the beach where, in a corner, I found oysters. I went to tell my friends, who were very pleased. We went there immediately and stayed there eight or ten days without thinking of leaving, though we had crossed to this side to go along the seacoast towards the West in search of people. I told my friends nevertheless that we should leave as long as we had some strength left. Mr. Alain, who was such a great friend of mine, said that he would not leave me until death separated us, and that we would leave when I wanted. Mr. Duclos said that he would stay there, being unable to march. We told him that he took a very tragic resolution and that, in spite of it, we would leave and that, if we met people, we would come to fetch him and, if we did not, we would return anyway. He agreed to this. I had killed a deer the previous day. Each of us carried a shoulder and we left the rest to Mr. Duclos, who remained there. Mr. Alain and I took leave of him with tears in our eyes, and we shared the rest of the ammunition with him. We began to walk very courageously. We were not yet two leagues away when my comrade said that he was unable to continue. I told him, in order to encourage him, not to lose hope for so little reason, and that we would meet people if we continued, but if we stayed in the same place we would perish. He said to me that, as far as it concerned him, he was going to return to Mr. Duclos, whom we had left behind less than four hours ago. I answered him that it was very sad for me to see myself all alone, but that nevertheless I was going to succeed or die, and that I would march as long as I had the strength. He told me to do so and that he was sorry not to be able to follow me. I embraced him and we said good-bye to each other. I left first in order not to lose a moment. He said that in half an hour he would retrace his steps to rejoin Mr. Duclos. After I left I marched with extraordinary fortitude for four days. The fifth day, at two o'clock in the afternoon, I saw a river, two or three leagues wide, where I arrived in the evening. This river blocked my passage.²⁰ It was very sad for me to retrace

²⁰ The Brazos River is about forty-five miles west from the place de Bellisle left his companions. Doubtless this was the river he speaks of. Because of his weakness he might easily

my steps, especially because I had no good news to carry to my friends. I wanted to go inland, but it was entirely impossible to do so because I found the country submerged as high as to my neck. I was therefore forced to return. With this object in mind I set out and when I had marched to within half a quarter of a league from the place where I had left my comrade I saw very clearly something red on the same spot. This struck me forcibly and I did not doubt that it was my comrade who had died. I approached the spot and saw that I was not mistaken. I touched him and found him stiff and smelling very bad. I quickly dug a hole and buried him. I leave it to the reader to imagine how much I suffered. After I had buried him, I continued on my way to go to my other comrade, who was but two leagues from there. I finally reached the place and, approaching the tent which had fallen down, I called Duclos. There was no answer. I thought that he was also dead. When I lifted the tent, I saw that he was indeed dead and that he was still warm. I buried him, like the others.

When I knew myself alone, I died a hundred deaths every quarter of an hour. I remained two days without eating, lacking the strength to take food. Nevertheless, the third day I fetched some oysters, because they were there, as I told hereinbefore. I ate much and almost all which was left. At that time I had no ammunition left, and I did not know what to do to stay alive.²¹ I decided to cut grass and I cooked it. I ate much of it and at first I thought I would die.

There were also trees in that neighborhood, which the sea washes ashore. Because these trees were dry and almost rotten, one finds yellow worms in them as long as a finger. I collected some and roasted them in the fire. I found that they tasted very well.

Two weeks after the death of my last comrade, when I was looking for these worms at noontide, I saw an island which was in the middle of the bay where I was, and on the island I saw Indians who had come there to collect eggs which the birds had laid on the beach. It was the beginning of summer. This is the season when they come down in pirogues from the end of the bay. I looked carefully to be sure I was not mistaken and that there really were people. I saw that there were people. I embarked immediately in my

have required four days to cover this distance.

²¹ According to his "Mémoire," he ate his dog, as soon as he was able to catch it. Cf. de Villiers, "Les Indiens du Texas," 418. Le Page du Pratz says that he caught a "rat de bois" (perhaps a Florida rat) and ate it raw. Bossu writes that de Bellisle's companions tried to kill his dog in order to eat him, but that he escaped and returned when de Bellisle was the sole survivor, bringing him a "rat de bois," but that later "a tiger" had a fight with his dog and that he was forced to kill him. Bossu adds, however, "and then ate him." Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, 140.

little row-boat to go to the island to join the Indians whom I saw. I thought to die during the crossing because it is two leagues wide and I was exhausted and very thin. But I risked everything. I finally reached this island. First I landed, and I saw at a distance of a hundred feet three men. I went towards them, and approaching the one nearest to me, I wanted to embrace him. But he drew back as if he had never seen a White. I thought then that they would kill me.²² When the other two came near, they took my hand and had themselves led to my row-boat. They took immediately everything which was in it, and which consisted of our rifles, our swords, our silver forks and knives, my coat, and a few other things. When that was done they began to take my stockings off, my breeches, my coat, my shirt and my hat, and finally left me as naked as my hand. They had collected on this island more than five hundred eggs. They had cooked some. They offered me some. I ate as long as I was hungry. I also ate from a fish they had. After I had satisfied my hunger, I thought about my nudity. I covered myself with my hands and I asked one of these Indians to give me one of my shirts. They began to laugh at me and to mock me, without giving me my shirt. When the night came I suffered very much because I was naked. There were so many mosquitoes that I thought I would die. I was obliged to hide under water to my neck and I passed the night in this manner, while this rabble did not possess enough humanity to give me something of my clothing to prevent these mosquitoes from biting me so much.

When the morning came, they made me embark with them and they took me to the shore, which was visible, and where their wives and other Indians were. When I arrived there, I heard these people, and even those with whom I had come, yell frightfully. This made me tremble and I thought that they would kill me any moment. They made a day and a half pass without giving me anything to eat. Later they gave me boiled wild potatoes, which I ate with great appetite. Two days after my arrival at this place, I saw five or six pirogues coming. They also came from the end of the bay and landed where I was. At their arrival the same yelling occurred as before. I did not know what it all meant, though later I learned that it was their custom to yell as well for good as for bad news.

I passed the entire summer in this country with them in going everywhere in search of food because they possess no cabins or fields.²³ That is why they

²² Dubois says: “. . . they did not kill and eat him because of his extreme meagerness; they offered him human flesh but he preferred fish . . . then they took him to their village to fatten him. . .” Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, 141.

²³ In his “Mémoire” de Bellisle called this tribe “Caux Indians,” whereas at the time he wrote the above he still did not know the name of his Indian masters. De Villiers writes that it is

travel in this manner the entire summer. The men kill a few deer and a few buffaloes and the women search for wild potatoes. They do this when the weather is fine. When it rains no one goes out to look for food, and they pass easily two or three days in this manner without food, drinking only water and throwing it up without any effort. They told me to do the same and that this was good. I passed the entire summer with them in this manner. They did me no other harm but to let me go around naked.²⁴

When the beginning of the winter came, we all left to join a band of their people who were waiting for us at the end of the bay. We arrived there at the end of seven or eight days. We made but three or four leagues a day. It was at that place that they began to treat me much worse than before. If they needed water or wood they ordered me to go and get it. In the beginning I told them to go and get it themselves because I knew a little of their language. When I told them this the second time, there was one who gave me a blow with all his force. I understood then that I should obey without replying. I went therefore to get wood for them. As soon as I returned, a woman told me to fetch some water. I did this. Since they began to treat me badly, I could not say a word without receiving a slap or a blow with a stick or being beaten with any object upon which they could lay their hands. The big ones as well as the little ones beat me, and the ones to whom I was kind beat me most.

When I saw what a sad life I had with the Indians and that they would not conduct me to the whites, whom they said were near, I decided to tell them that I would be glad to stay my whole life with them, but that if they would

possible de Bellisle called his captors Caux Indians after the name of the Indian woman who saved him from being killed. De Villiers suggests the name of Cocos Indians. The author was unable to verify these suggestions because he did not have access to de Bellisle's "Mémoire." Cf. de Villiers, "Les Indiens du Texas," 421. Le Page du Pratz calls de Bellisle's captors Atac-Aspas, which means man-eater. Cf. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, Part I, 114-15. H. E. Bolton, in an article on the Mission Rosario, mentions the names of several Indian tribes living about the Matagorda Bay, among whom he mentions the Cocos. Bolton thought that these Cocos might be the same tribe as the Coaques met by Cabeza de Vaca. H. E. Bolton, "The Founding of Mission Rosario . . .," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, X, No. 2 [October, 1906], 114 ff.

²⁴ According to the "Mémoire," he had to dig wild potatoes with the women, to carry continuously several children on his back, and because he broke a jar he received twenty blows with a switch. An Indian matron saved him from death by "marrying" him, in order to save this young captive for her own pleasure. De Bellisle chose the least evil and accepted the position of cherished slave—though this did not prevent his "wife" from beating him. Bossu writes that de Bellisle was taken as a "dog," meaning slave, by a widow, "*déjà sur le retour*," who later "adopted him and set him free." According to Bossu, de Bellisle became a respected warrior of the tribe, due to this matron and his bravery at war. Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, 142-43.

take a letter, which I was going to write, to the White Man of whom they had spoken, they would be well rewarded; that in order to prove this, I would stay with them while two of their people would carry this letter, and if they should not be satisfied with the reception which they would receive, I would submit myself to all the harm they wanted to inflict on me. They told me to write first and that they would take the letter with pleasure. To this end I tore a piece of white paper from a letter, because we had landed with a quantity of letters destined for this country. I cut a pen with a poor knife and I made ink with charcoal and water. With this I wrote, addressing my letter to the first White, explaining to him all that had happened to me and the sad state to which I was reduced, and that I begged him to come and get me as soon as he received my letter because otherwise my life would not be safe.

When I had written, I asked the Indians if they were willing to leave, to which they answered in the affirmative. I therefore gave them this letter with our commissions which I had always kept. They were unwilling to take any other letters. They promised me that they would bring an answer within two or three weeks. All that they promised was nothing but deception. When these three weeks had passed, I asked them, "Why do the Indians, who have taken these letters, not come back?" They told me that what they had done was to mock me, and that I must think them very dumb to believe that they would expose themselves to being badly treated by carrying this letter. Nevertheless, this letter had been taken but it was for the purpose of showing it to all their tribes. That is the way these people are. When they have something, every one of them must see it.

After a few days had passed, they told me that all the men were going to hunt buffaloes and were going to war against their enemies, and that I should keep myself ready to go with them the next day and that I should carry part of their baggage on my back. Indeed, the next morning they took their horses and their arrows, and after putting a few deerskins on their horses' backs, instead of saddles, they told me to go ahead and that they would catch up with me soon because they were on horseback. I asked them to loan me one. They told me that it was not decent for a man of a different color to possess a horse and that I should go on foot. We left then and they go very fast because they have good horses, and I had to keep up, naked as I was. Sometimes thorns would enter the soles of my feet, which would hurt terribly and which would sometimes force me to halt. Immediately when the Indians saw that I did not go fast enough and that I halted, one of them would come behind me to give me a few blows with a whip on my shoulders to wake me up, telling me not to sleep on the road: that my legs were strong enough to follow them. I walked for two days under these conditions, and the third day we arrived at a prairie which seemed endless in every direction

and where numerous buffaloes were grazing. We halted there to hunt. They gave their horses a rest for the remainder of the day, and the next morning they mounted their horses, taking their arrows. They discovered a herd of eighty or a hundred buffaloes. They caught up with them very quickly with their horses, and when they were opposite them, they shot them with their arrows very skillfully, without halting. That morning they killed fifteen or sixteen buffaloes. We ate as much as we wanted because we had not eaten for two days. When this expedition was finished, we saw smoke at a distance of about a league and a half. One of them asked me what this was. I told him that it was a fire on the prairie. He asked me if there were people. I answered him that some one ought to be there and that no deer had lighted the fire. They said that eight of their band would go there to kill the people and that they were their enemies. They left to go towards this smoke, where they found ten or twelve Toyals.²⁵ That is the name of their enemies. Nevertheless, they were able to kill but one, who was up in a tree to knock walnuts down. With their arrows they made him come down much more quickly than he had climbed up. When this man was dead, they loaded him on their horses and brought him to the place where we had stayed to wait for them. When they returned, they threw this Indian on the prairie. One of them cut his head off and another one cut the arms off, while they skinned him at the same time. Several of them ate the yellow fat, which was still raw, and finally they devoured him completely.²⁶ Afterwards one of them asked me why I had not warned them that there were twelve to fifteen at the place of the smoke because if they had known they would all have gone and would have destroyed them all, instead of killing only one. I told them that I could

²⁵ De Villiers writes (*Cf. "Les Indiens du Texas"* 419) that Margry misspelled this name and that the manuscript speaks of Tojals, not Toyals. Béranger says in his memorandum that he visited these Indians in 1720, which indicates that the adventures of de Bellisle took place around this region. *Cf.* a MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, *Mémoires de la Louisiane*, MS. 293, p. 78.

²⁶ Béranger wrote on this incident that de Bellisle had been on a war expedition, and that the Indians, with whom he was a slave, had made some prisoners. The unfortunate wretches were eaten and, according to Béranger, the anthropophages laughed at de Bellisle's refusal to take part in this feast. Under the pretext of serving him smoked buffalo meat, they served him human flesh. When de Bellisle discovered this trick, according to his "Mémoire," "it made him vomit until he threw up blood." *Cf.* de Villiers, "Les Indiens du Texas," 417, 419; and the MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library, "Mémoires de la Louisiane: A Collection of Mémoires Concerning French Possessions, 1702-1750" (MS. No. 293), 78-79. *Cf.* also Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, p. 143.

not know the number.²⁷ He gave me a slap in the face with all his might, calling me a dog. I asked an Indian who was at my side to tell them not to beat me any more. When I had finished saying it, the brother of the one who had beaten me did the same and, furthermore, he gave me a kick in my back which threw me on the ground. I fainted and I remained a quarter of an hour without consciousness. I thought that they were going to kill me, but they did not touch me any more. We passed the night in that same place. They decided the next morning to return to the place where they had left their wives. We left accordingly at daybreak. They went very fast. All I could do was to follow them, running as fast as I could. In addition, they had given me my portion of buffalo meat to carry.

The second evening we reached a little river, where we passed the night. I was so tired that I could not go any farther. Consequently, I fell on the ground like a dead man and I slept without waking up till the next morning. Then I had to leave to join their wives, where we arrived at four o'clock in the evening. As soon as the women heard that their husbands had killed one of their enemies, they began to dance for joy, and continued to do so without halting a moment during two days, holding in their hands a bone or a nail of one of their enemies which their husbands had killed.

I must not forget the country I saw during this journey. On the morning we left to go on the buffalo hunt, as I have said hereinbefore, we came across beautiful prairies and I saw similar ones for a distance of forty to fifty-five leagues. This is the most beautiful country in the world. The earth is almost black. Grass grows there to a prodigal height, and in abundance, which is a certain sign that the earth is good. I dare to affirm, in spite of the fact that I am no pilot, that we passed along the bay where we landed with my five comrades,²⁸ who are dead now. I would recognize the place and from the entrance of this bay I would go without difficulty everywhere I have been and to every place which I saw.

I have yet to tell the story of how I saved myself from these barbarians.

Four days after our arrival from this buffalo hunt we left the place where we had joined the women, to go here and there in the woods to look for food. We were a band of fifteen. I told hereinbefore that I had written a letter, and that these Indians, instead of taking it to the French, had sent it to all the

²⁷ The writing of the letter by de Bellisle apparently made the Indians believe that he possessed supernatural knowledge. L. Lévy-Bruhl has written very interestingly of this belief on the part of the primitive peoples. Cf. L. Lévy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité Primitive* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922).

²⁸ Margry's text reads five. De Bellisle actually had but four companions. One might construe from this passage that his Indian captors lived northeast of Galveston Bay.

bands of their tribe. This letter finally reached the last band, which lives at a distance of more than a hundred leagues from the place I was, and at a distance of ten leagues from a tribe called Biday.²⁹ The Lord permitted that at that time some Assinai Indians passed there. They are an allied tribe of the French, who visit them daily.

These Assinai were visiting this band where my papers were. They saw them and asked what they were. They were told that these papers were found at the seacoast. The Assinai, without explanation, took them and left from there to return home, which is at a distance of seventeen or eighteen days from that place. When they arrived there they showed these papers to all their villages and they decided to take them to Mr. de Saint Denys, who lives at the fort of Saint Jean the Baptiste de Naquitoche³⁰ and at a distance of seventy leagues from these Assinai. Consequently, they left home to carry out this decision and when they arrived at Naquitoches and Mr. de Saint Denys, they gave him my letter and our commissions.

Mr. de Saint Denys, when he had examined them, told these Assinai that he would answer me, and ordered them to go and bring me and that he wanted me dead or alive. They answered him not to worry and that they would carry his answer to me and would bring me. These two Indians took leave of him and left immediately to return home. When they arrived there, they told to all their people what they were ordered to do. Thereupon they decided to leave the next morning to go and bring me. When daybreak came they took two of their horses and went on their way.

All this happened without my knowledge, and I did not even know the name of the Indians with whom I was.

One day, when I was near the fire, I heard a rifle shot. This surprised me. I asked what it meant. They answered that no one knew. At this moment I saw two Indians on horseback arrive, who were the ones who brought life to me. As soon as they were near me, all the people of the tribe with which I was living approached. Then the two Assinai showed the letter, which Mr. de Saint Denys had given them for me. The Indians with whom I was could not understand what all this meant. They took this letter and after they had all looked at it, one after another, my turn came also. I wanted to take it, but they told me that they would give it to me, but the next morning. The two

²⁹ The Bidai Indians are now extinct. Cf. F. W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, I, 145.

³⁰ Natchitoches. The direction de Bellisle travelled later with these two Assinai guides shows clearly that he came from the southwest, reaching the Bidai village first, then the Assinai village, and only afterwards Natchitoches. Had he come from the south (for instance, assuming that he had landed in Vermillion Bay in Louisiane) it is rather improbable that the Assinai, who knew the region well, would have taken him first to the Bidai village and not to Natchitoches.

Indians who had brought the letter, seeing that the ones with whom I was would not give it to me, snatched it out of their hands and delivered it to me. These people are very much feared by the tribe with whom I lived.

When I saw the letter, and when I read what it contained, what a great joy did I feel at that moment! I leave it to the reader to imagine it. When these Indians noticed the joy I felt, they asked me the cause. I told them that a chief had written to me and had told me that if they all wanted to go to him with me, they would be well rewarded. They answered me that I could go alone, but that they did not want to go. The two Assinaiis told me not to worry and that we would leave the next morning. They showed me a little wood at a distance of a quarter of a league where I should wait for them at daybreak. That night lasted longer to me than a year.

When the day finally came, I left unknown to anyone.³¹ I had not gone a hundred paces when I saw two Indians, with whom I was living, coming and very near them the Assinaiis, who had come to take me. The first ones, when they came to me, took me by my throat and told me that if I should leave they would kill me with their arrows because they feared that I would avenge myself of all the bad treatment they had inflicted on me. At that very moment the two Assinaiis joined us and when they saw that these unlucky creatures were ready to kill me, they told them that if they dared to do me the least harm, they should count that within a short time they would be all destroyed by the Assinaiis. This made them tremble from fear and immediately they let me go, not understanding why these Indians chose my side.

³¹ Bossu writes that the Indian widow wept bitterly at his departure. *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, 148.



This charming picture of de Bellisle's departure from his Indian matron is a reproduction of an illustration found in Bossu's *Nouveaux Voyages*. One sees de Bellisle dressed in a shirt sent to him by St. Denis and politely holding a hat, equally a gift from St. Denis, according to Bossu, in his right hand. A beautiful courser, held by a patient Indian, is waiting to take him back to civilization. The Indian matron who, according to Bossu, was among the "delegation" which returned on the "Subtile" to Louisiana in 1721, does not show any ravaging effects of time on her beautiful figure. The artist, G. de Saint Aubin apparently, was carried away by the romantic story. De Bellisle seems to console her by assuring her of his everlasting love. The mounted Assinais, one of them shooting off his rifle, are in the background. To complete the picture, the artist has added two amputated arms, apparently a remnant of a meal.³²

³² Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages*, Part II, 148.

As soon as I saw myself freed from the hands of my hangmen and in company with people who were friends of the French, I embraced them heartily and with much proof of my gratitude. They gave me a buffalo hide, with which I dressed myself from feet to head, and afterwards they made me mount one of their horses.

We left immediately and at the end of four days we reached the first village of the Bidayes, an Indian tribe. They gave us what they had to eat. We traveled in this manner more than seventeen or eighteen days, at the end of which we reached the first village of the Assinaiis.

As soon as these kind Indians saw us at a distance of thirty paces, they saluted me with twenty rifle shots (they receive these rifles from the French). At the same time an Assinaiis Indian came to me. She shook hands with me and said in Spanish to me that she was very sorry to see me in such a sad state and that she wished she had known of my bad situation earlier, that the French would have had no difficulty in fetching me, and that her people would have gone on their own initiative.

After this nice speech, she said to me that she begged me to stay with her during my sojourn in their village. I accepted with pleasure. When I was in her lodge, all the Assinaiis of this village came and told this Indian woman, called Angelica, to inform me that they had to leave the next morning to go to war against their enemies, called Sadamon, and that at the end of ten days they would return and that all of them would then take me to the fort Saint Jean the Baptiste of Naquitoche and the French. I asked her to tell them that I agreed. I needed at least that much time to rest because my ankles were very much swollen from fatigue.

When the morning came, all these Indians took leave of me and left to march against their enemies. During the sojourn I made with this Angelica, she served me all the best she had, and she had as much love for me as if I had been her child. I found this treatment so sweet when compared to what I had received previously that in less than eight days I was cured from all my ills. At the end of these days I asked Angelica why their men did not come as they had promised me. She answered me that they would not delay. Finally, instead of ten days, which time they were supposed to be absent, I stayed two months and a half because these Indians did not return from their wars. This worried me very much. Angelica noticed it. She drew near me and asked me what caused me to be sad. I told her that she should know why and that I was sad because I longed to return to my country.

She told me that this was quite natural and that she did not understand why the men did not return from their war to conduct me;³³ that I should be of good cheer; that the next morning she would take three horses and that she would give me two of her children to conduct me to the French. This pleased me very much. The next morning I saw that the horses were indeed ready and that food for my journey was prepared. She asked me if I wanted to leave. I answered her that I wanted to. She told me that I would have to cross two great rivers and asked me how I would do this and how I would make her children cross, who did not know how to swim.³⁴ I invited her to come with all the women of the village to watch me cross the first river. They all came. As soon as I reached the edge of the water, I entered it and I took one of her children who were to guide me. I swam him across boldly, carrying him on my back, and I returned to take the other one. I repeated it and, afterwards, I made the horses and the baggage cross. Everything went well. My skill made this Indian woman very happy. She took leave of me and asked me to take care of her children, begging me to leave them with the French until she would come to take them. I assured her that I would do so and that they had nothing to fear with me.

We mounted our horses, my two little guides and I, and at the end of six days, having crossed all the rivers, we reached Naquitoches and the French.

I leave it to the reader to imagine whether I did not return to life after being dead.

I forgot to say that this Indian woman, called Angelica, had lived with the Spaniards since her childhood. That is why we understood each other so well.

This is the story of what has happened to me since the 14th of August, 1719, till the 10th of February, 1721, when I reached the French at Naquitoches.

When I came to this first French fort I went to the Commander, who made me leave at the end of eight days in a carriage which was going to New Orleans. When I arrived there, I went to Mr. Paillou, Major General of this province, who told me to be ready to leave the next day for Biloxi. I

³³ Angelica seems to have deceived our young hero about the length of his sojourn at her lodge, for fear he might not accept her suggestion to wait for the return of the warriors. Apparently her plan worked well, but after two months and a half, her white lover became restless.

³⁴ As to the age of Angelica, we might assume that her two children were still rather young, because they had not joined the war party and did not know how to swim. They were to wait in Natchitoches because they were too small to travel alone. Yet they knew the road to Natchitoches, and we can put their ages at perhaps twelve and thirteen. This would make Angelica about thirty years old. De Bellisle was then about twenty-six.

embarked according to his order, and the same day, at eight o'clock in the evening, I went to Mr. de Bienville, to whom I had the honor to give an account of my adventures and who had the kindness to make me an officer. Since my acceptance into the service, I found so much pleasure in serving under such a general that I am already cured from all my ills from which I suffered during my ill fortune.

The question now arises as to the location of de Bellisle's adventures. Did they take place in Louisiana, around Vermillion Bay, or in Texas?

The author of this study has no intention of entering into the controversy as to which bay was called St. Bernard, St. Louis, St. Madeleine, San Bernardino, or San Espiritu. Scholars such as Bolton, de Villiers, Davenport, Hallenbeck, and others have discussed this problem which dates from the days of Cabeça de Vaca and La Salle, and it is still unsolved. The old geographers and cartographers have profusely used and misused the saint names of almost the whole calendar when baptizing the many bays of the Texas and Louisiana coast, leaving the modern historian with the delicate task of identifying the names and locations.

In this paper the only question which really matters is the identification of the bay around which de Bellisle's adventures took place. It might be called "de Bellisle's bay." The identification of this bay is entirely based on his second voyage to this place under de la Harpe in 1721. Only by answering the following two questions can the location of de Bellisle's bay be determined. The first question might be put as follows: Which bay on the Texas coast did de la Harpe and Béranger visit in 1721; and, secondly, was this bay, called by them Bay St. Bernard, the very same one where de Bellisle landed in 1719?

The first question can be best answered by consulting Béranger's accounts of his voyages of 1720 and 1721. In 1720 Béranger was sent out to occupy St. Bernard Bay. Sailing in August, his ship, the "Saint Joseph," followed the coast, but he missed the entrance of what he called St. Bernard's Bay and which is now Galveston Bay. In his account, Béranger writes:

I did not find the opening of the bay St. Bernard because the sea was so high and the Southwest-by-West wind was so strong that I had to drag the anchor, which made me pass this Bay by about thirty leagues towards the Southwest, and finding myself at the opening of a pleasant-looking bay ... I made the decision to enter it.³⁵

The description by Béranger of his visit to Matagorda Bay or Bay St. Louis, as he calls it, can be studied by following a map drawn by Devin during the time of the sojourn of

³⁵ Cf. a MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library, "Mémoires de la Louisiane: A Collection of Memoirs Concerning French Possessions, 1702-1750," MS. No. 293. (Translation by author.) Cf. also de Villiers' article, "Les Indiens du Texas," 407-12, which contains part of Béranger's account of this visit to Matagorda Bay in 1720. The entrance of Matagorda Bay is about thirty sea leagues, or about one hundred miles, southwest of Galveston Bay.

the “Saint Joseph” in the Bay.³⁶ Béranger writes in his account that the entrance of the Bay has nine feet of water and that he sailed five leagues into the Bay when a ridge of oysters prevented his reaching the mainland, which was about two or three leagues away.³⁷

All these events can be followed on Devin’s map. Béranger says further that he set foot on an island, called Bienville Island by him, and that he saw a large adder fifteen feet long at a certain place where the next morning he saw a large “rattlesnake rolled like a cable” which he killed with a spade. This point is marked on the map *Pointe au Serpent*. The place where he buried the arms of France is marked *Pointe au Chêne*. Leaving five men behind, Béranger reached Biloxi on November 20 after a journey of “twenty days of navigation.” What happened to the four Frenchmen and the Negro who were left behind among the Indians in order to make friends with them is not known. Very probably the Indians killed them or perhaps they made their escape to the Spaniards.

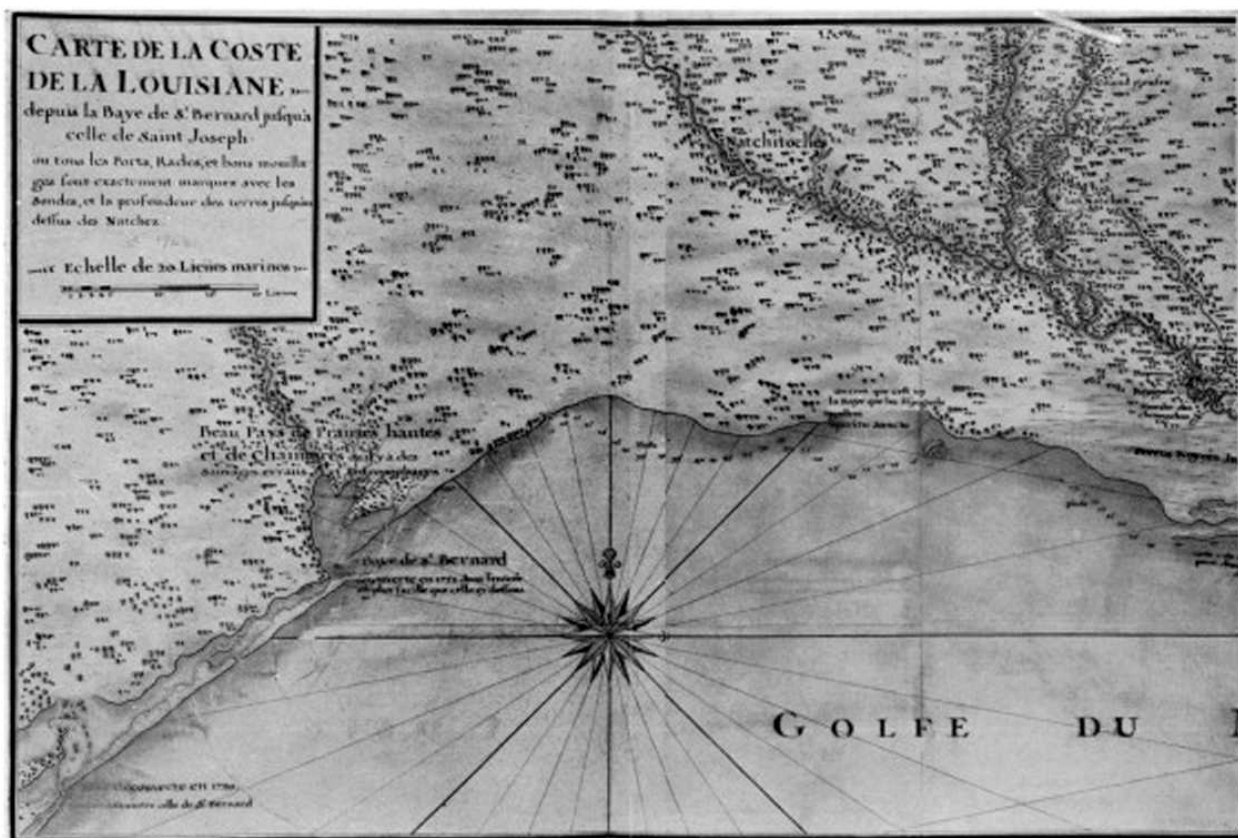
Bénard de la Harpe, while still in Paris, was nominated commander of the Bay Saint Bernard on November 19, 1720.³⁸ Leaving Lorient on April 5, 1721, for Louisiana, de la Harpe sailed from Biloxi on August 17, 1721. Captain Béranger commanded the small ship and among the small number of men on board was Simars de Bellisle. The cartographer Devin accompanied the expedition and drew again a map of the “true” Bay St. Bernard, which is reproduced here.

From Béranger’s account the author translates the following passages which, together with the map by Devin, establish clearly that this time St. Bernard Bay was Galveston Bay and that it was the same bay about which de Bellisle had wandered two years previously.

³⁶ The Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library possesses a MS. copy of this map (*Cartes Marines*, No. 84). De Villiers has reproduced the original in his article, “Les Indiens du Texas,” 416. Other maps to consult on this question in regard to the names of bays on the Texas coast are to be found in the Karpinski Collection in the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library. Cf. Nos. G.E.DD. 2987-8840; G.E.DD. 2987-8841; B. 4040-6; C. 4040-9; C. 4044-11; C. 4044-16; S.H.M. 9a-2a, 72; S.H.M. 9a-2a-146 [2]; S.H.M. 9a-2a-152; J. 9a-2a-a-7; J. 9a-2a-a-15.

³⁷ Sea leagues doubtless.

³⁸ Pierre Heinrich, *La Louisiane sous la Compagnie des Indes* (Paris: Guilmoto, Librairie Orientate et Américaine, n.d.), 115 ff.



Western part of a map of the Bay St. Bernard, very probably drawn by Devin while serving as cartographer under de la Harpe and Béranger August-September, 1721. This reproduction is taken from a MS. Map the possession of the Edward E. Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library

in Chicago (Cartes Marines, No. 159). It is doubtless a MS. copy. The date of discovery of the Bay St. Bernard is marked on the map as being the year 1722. It should read 1721 and the mistake was probably made by the copyist.

I found her [the Baye] on 29° 12^m of Northern latitude. . . . The mouth of the river of this bay is one league and a half wide³⁹ and on the North side; the sand-banks which run towards the South are more than three-quarters of a league; on the South side there is another one which runs towards the Southwest for the same distance. The sandbar⁴⁰ is easily half a league long. . . . The Bay is eleven leagues long. . . .⁴¹ At the end of the Bay there are two medium-sized rivers. . . ,⁴² We entered this Bay the 27 of August, 1721.⁴³

³⁹ Doubtless Béranger measures in sea leagues of 3 m. 45. The San Jacinto River has a wide mouth.

⁴⁰ Sandbar at the entrance of the Bay.

⁴¹ Eleven sea leagues, or thirty-eight miles. Only Galveston Bay could fit this description.

⁴² Trinity River and San Jacinto River.

The second question is answered also in Béranger's account, from which we translate the following:

Mr. de la Harpe went ashore with an ensign, Mr. de Bellisle, who served as interpreter. It will not be out of place to say something of this unfortunate gentleman. He was one of the five who embarked on the "Maréchal d'Estrée" which had the bad luck to pass Louisiana and . . . sailing a long time up and down the west coast . . . they underwent the horrors of shipwreck in running their ship ashore several times . . . the last time this happened to them was at the entrance of this Bay on the sandbanks of which I have just spoke. These unfortunate officers . . . believed nevertheless that it was not far from Louisiana and decided to undertake the voyage by land. . . .⁴⁴

Béranger gives in his memorandum a glowing account of de Bellisle's adventures and mentions also the island⁴⁵ where de Bellisle met the Indians. This account differs again from the ones by Le Page du Pratz, Bossu, or de Bellisle himself, but there can be no doubt that de Bellisle was in the very Bay where he landed in 1719. The following passages of Béranger's account, which the author translated, show this clearly:

When this gentleman recovered [from his hardship apparently] he embarked with us to remain with Mr. de la Harpe and to serve him as a second and interpreter. . . . They went four leagues into the Bay when they met the Indians who were much surprised to meet their slave well equipped. . . . He [de Bellisle] showed us several [Indians] who had treated him badly.⁴⁶

When de la Harpe tried to obtain permission from the Indians to establish a post on their territory, the Indians replied that he should go away and that if he remained, they would think that the French had come to "*revenge the bad treatment inflicted on de Bellisle.*"⁴⁷ Also the letter which de Bellisle addressed to the Company of the Indies, claiming the discovery of the Bay St. Bernard, is a further proof that his bay and the Bay St. Bernard of Béranger were one and the same. Margry has reproduced this letter, which reads as follows:

⁴³ Cf. a MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, "Mémoires de la Louisiane" (MS. No. 293), 74 ff. Cf. also H. H. Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), II, 619 ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. a MS. copy in the Edward E. Ayer Collection (MS. No. 293,71-76).

⁴⁵ This "island" is drawn on Devin's map, reproduced above.

⁴⁶ Cf. a MS. copy of Béranger's account in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, "Mémoires de la Louisiane" (MS. No. 293), 79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

At Biloxi, the 6th of October, 1721

Gentlemen.

I have the honor to write you the present letter to inform you about a voyage to a bay, which I have shown. The bay is situated at a distance of a hundred leagues west of the Mississippi.⁴⁸ In 1719 I landed there, when I had embarked on the "Maréchal d'Estrée," which ship got lost in these regions. I was a slave for fifteen months with the Indians at that place.⁴⁹ I was rescued by Mr. de Saint Denys, knight of the military order of St. Louis and Commander of the Red River or the St. Bernard Bay, to which honors he has been called by the King and the Council of Marine. He had the kindness to order the Assinai to fetch me, saying that he wanted me, dead or alive. These Indians did come, according to the orders they had received, and they took me to their villages, and from there they took me to Natchitoches, to Mr. de Saint Denys. I had the honor to thank him for having brought me back to life. Afterwards I went to Biloxi to Mr. de Bienville, my general, to whom I had the honor to give an account of my adventures and of the country which I discovered. It is the most beautiful country in the world. I had also the honor to assure him that I would find again the place, traveling by water or by land, and that I would guide them to the country which I had seen. Since then I have been ordered to follow Mr. de la Harpe on board of the "Subtile," Captain Béranger. I have indeed taken Mr. de la Harpe to said Bay and shown him the entire country. He found it the most beautiful country of the world and so did all the others who had come. After we had visited this country and the beautiful bay, I returned to Mr. de Bienville to give him an account of this voyage. I have taken with me nine Indians of the tribe where I was a slave. All that I had the honor to tell you, Gentlemen, is true, and no one should attribute to himself the discovery of such a beautiful country but I. Mr. de Saint Denys did me the pleasure to confirm what I had the honor to tell you, by signing my letter. He understands these Indians perfectly, and has inquired into everything that I have the honor to write. Nevertheless, Gentlemen, I see that Mr. de la Harpe, in his journal, wants to attribute to himself all the credit of the discovery of such a beautiful country, though it is due but to me. That is why I take the liberty to inform you of this and to ask you, gentlemen, very humbly to give me my promotion in this country. I forgot to have the honor to tell you that all the tribes consider Mr. de Saint Denys as their chief. I hope to receive the favors I have the honor to

⁴⁸ Measured in nautical leagues this is about correct.

⁴⁹ According to de Villiers (*Cf.* his "Les Indiens du Texas," 418, n. 2), his captivity lasted not longer than nine or ten months.

solicit from you, and I take the liberty to be, with a very profound respect,
Gentlemen,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

Simars, Saint Denys.⁵⁰

It seems, therefore, that there can be hardly any doubt left that de Bellisle landed in Galveston Bay in 1719 and that his adventures took place on Texas soil.

After his return from St. Bernard Bay, de Bellisle "was sent to the Missouri with de Bourgmond to construct a post there in order to halt the Spanish intrusions. The French feared a recurrence of an attempt similar to that of de Villasur in 1720.⁵¹ De Bellisle quarreled with de Bourgmond, and it does look as if de Bellisle was not a very easy person to get along with. When de Bourgmond went to the Padoucas in Kansas in 1724, de Bellisle did not accompany him.

In 1733 de Bellisle obtained a year's leave for France. On that occasion de Bienville wrote to the Count de Maurepas that he was—

... a very good officer who has been serving in the colony for more than twelve years, and has spent six at the most remote posts. He has a rather good plantation near New Orleans and does not lack property in France.⁵²

In 1734 de Bellisle was made lieutenant. In the same year he accompanied Petit Deliviliers on a punitive expedition against the Chakchiumas near the Yazoo River. During the attack on the village, de Bellisle tried to storm the door of a fortified cabin, but received two gun shots, "one in the left hand, which cut off one of his fingers, and the other in the side but which only entered the flesh."⁵³

In 1740 de Bellisle received the nomination of captain. Thirteen years later, in 1753, he was town commander of New Orleans. A description of him, dated in the year 1734, says: "He is very clever and intelligent and he possesses an imposing stature." In 1762 he was recalled to France because of his quarrel with de Kerlérec, and he died in Paris on March 4 of the following year.

⁵⁰ Margry, *Découvertes*, VI, 348-50.

⁵¹ Cf. Henri Folmer, "The French Expansion toward New Mexico in the Eighteenth Century" (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Denver, 1939), 100-98.

⁵² D. Rowland and A. G. Sanders in *Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Dominion* (Jackson, Mississippi: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1927), I, 619-20.

⁵³ D. Rowland and A. G. Sanders in *Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Dominion*, I, 284.