

# A GRAVE CONCERN



PAUL G. CHACE

## Introduction

Father Junipero Serra's heart carried a grave concern, a personal failure. The simple version of this grave story was revealed, apparently on his death bed, to his biographer, Father Francisco Palou. However, Serra, a man who wrote a multitude of letters, never, never, wrote of this failure (Tibesar 1955, Beebe and Senkewicz 2015:332). Palou's simple story telling was, "... *the ardor and zeal of our Venerable Father overflowed....*" (James 1913:83).

Why did Serra's heart pour out this old sadness from decades earlier? Why?

The answer, it is here posed, Serra's failure was laden for him with personal, heavy, emotions. Heretofore, the simple story did not recognize the deep emotional involvements between the two principles, Serra and Naguasajo. Naguasajo was the Captain (*Kwaaypaay*) of the Native Kosaii Kumeyaay village where the Spanish in 1769 established Alta California's initial Presidio and where Serra began the first Mission. What really happened? The story becomes a tragic saga.

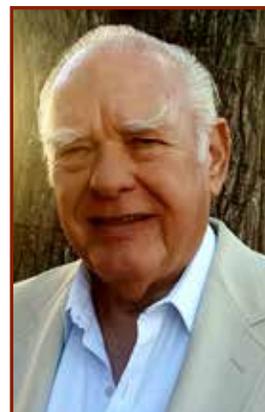
## Sources

Instead of a simple story, the complex history requires pulling together Spanish chronicles which occurred in 1769, 1775, and 1776; and then re-framing Palou's simple 1787 story. In 1776, anticipated a civil court trial of the captured Naguasajo, first-hand legal testimonials were penned by the California Governor, Presidio Commander, and Presidio Sergeant. Heretofore, these accounts have not been published or linked into the story.

Further, intriguingly, the complex tale involves a secret oral-tradition of long-standing among the Native Kumeyaay. For seven years, the Kumeyaay had successfully hidden the heroic Naguasajo and quietly protected this powerful leader from the Spanish. Naguasajo's distinguished role in the bloody assault to assassinate Serra in August 1769,

## About the Author

Paul G. Chace is a Trustee of the Presidio Heritage Trust of San Diego. He is a contributing author to the Trust's *PRESIDIO CITADEL NEWSLETTER* promoting Old Town San Diego, with its rich multi-cultural heritage, in Native Kumeyaay territory. This citadel became California's Capital in 1827 but that passed in three years. Interpreting the ever enduring but adapting lifeways of the Native Kumeyaay is a prime goal, never conquered and now with sovereign casinos. Chace received his Ph.D. (1992) in Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. His career spans over 40 years, first as a museum curator, and then as the head of Paul G. Chace & Associates, a cultural resources consulting firm specializing in cultural resources management and preservation law. Elected a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association in 1976, Chace has served as President of the Society for California Archaeology and the Pacific Coast Archaeological Society.



and then his role in the November 1775 Mission revolt, had never been revealed. The Spanish's conducted many interrogations, but Naguasajo's involvements were never mentioned (Carrico 2017). Naguasajo was quietly, secretly, protected by the Native Kumeyaay.

### **Beginning, "International Alliance"**

The complete emotionally laden story needs to begin with the very founding of the Spanish's settlement at San Diego in May 1769. Yet, it would be two months later, on July 1, before Father Serra arrived on the scene.

The initially founding was a shore landing party on May 1 from the Spanish ship, the *San Carlos*, led by Lieutenant Pedro Fages. The landing party of 28 men immediately encountered Kosaii Kumeyaay warriors. However, within a few minutes, Lt. Fages met with Naguasajo as the Captain (*Kwaaypaay*) of the Kosaii Kumeyaay. As two, bold, diplomatic, soldierly leaders, they immediately formed an "International Alliance" (Chace 2017). Captain Naguasajo led Fages and his Spanish troopers to the Kosaii village, where they were greeted by the women and children. They were shown the Kosaii's villagers' log fort, which soon would be rebuilt by the Spanish as a palisaded Presidio with two cannons. The Kosaii villagers under Captain Naguasajo provided food and fresh water to the needy Spanish under the leadership of Lt. Fages, and they acceded the Spanish encampment on Kosaii territory (Costanso, in Hemert-Engert and Taggart 1910:118-120; also Vila, in Rose 1911:97; Costanso, in Engstrand 1975; Fages, in Engstrand 1975; Crespi, in Bolton 1926, IV:257; and Mogilner 2016:139-149).

This amicable "International Alliance" with Fages lasted for two months. For proper historians, it is frustrating that this "International Alliance" is not explicit in the chronicles, but there are 14 obvious implications for its existence (Chace 2017).

Naguasajo and Fages were quite able to communicate successfully, yet there were no interpreters. Linguistically, both leaders were able in a variety of dialects, almost certainly. Highly esteemed as a Kumeyaay *Kwaaypaay*, the Captain of a village prior to the last century, typically was an outsider born elsewhere, one could speak several languages, and with diplomacy served to direct community activities (Shipek 1982). It appears that through May and June, Naguasajo with Fages quickly learned or improved language skills, as well as Naguasajo's understandings of Spanish culture. The expedition's diarist at that point wrote that the Kosaii Kumeyaay held Fages in great respect and bestow him affection as "*Don Pedro Fages*" (Costanso, in Engstrand 1975). Similarly, Fages knew and picked up various languages quickly, and

while campaigning in Sonora the prior year had formed diplomatic alliances there with the Native Yaqui (Sanchez 1990:29-30). Later, in legal affidavits, where interpreters were required and explicitly listed, no interpreter ever were recorded for Naguasajo.

After two months, in July, accommodating relationships were altered, quite drastically.

### **Serra Arrives**

On July 1, Father Serra arrived at San Diego with the final contingent of the overland Portola expedition (Tibesar 1955 I:133-139, Beebe and Senkewicz 2015:203-206). The Spanish, blessed with the expedition being reassembled altogether, organized a High Mass ritual on July 2. The Kosaii Kumeyaay, even as heathens, were encouraged to view it all. The Kosaii Kumeyaay villagers now recognized that the Spanish presence had swelled to about 150 men, with some 300 big mules and horses, all settling nigh to their dwellings.

Although unmentioned in any of the Spanish chronicles, there also should have been a change-of-command ceremony of some sort. Lt. Fages would have introduced Serra to Naguasajo and Naguasajo to Serra, along with appropriate personal commentaries. All to say, Serra would have known Naguasajo personally, on a face-to-face basis. Serra, for his role, would have known that his immediately local proselytizing efforts should have been focused upon Naguasajo, the Captain of the Kosaii Kumeyaay village. Between these two men there probably would have followed a series of emotional meetings, undoubtedly serious and intensely religious meetings on Serra's part. For Naguasajo, over the next three weeks, his earlier diplomatic and amicable leadership role transformed into one of secret but deadly hatred.

Especially significant, Naguasajo and the Kosaii Kumeyaay would have noted that even their key friend, Lt. Pedro Fages, was leaving to march on to Monterey. Thus, any personal pledges about a peaceful alliance were nullified (Fages 1937).

After resting and organizing themselves for a few days, on July 14, the majority of the Spanish left the valley to begin their ordered march onward to found Monterey. The Kosaii Natives keenly would have observed that there remained only an extremely small contingent at the garrison, three Franciscan Friars and eight soldiers, plus fourteen other men; some of those were ailing and hospitalized (Taggart 1909:51).

Two days later the Kosaii Natives observed that the Catholic Fathers had raised a large symbolic cross to mark their religious endeavors in founding a new Mission. With gifts and trinkets, the Kosaii Kumeyaay were

enticed to come around, and Serra conducted a High Mass ceremony to dedicate the new San Diego Mission (Palou 1787, in James 1913:79-80).

### **Strategic Planning, "International Assault"**

Over the following three weeks, Naguasajo with his Kosaii Kumeyaay warriors very quietly planned a complex strategic assault to kill Serra and annihilate the Spanish. Culminating the previous "International Alliance," this "International Assault" was planned for mid-August, to climax specifically on a Sunday after High Mass. The Kosaii military leadership had observed the Spanish culturally patterned activities and carefully assessed the settlement's defensive weaknesses.

The Natives' strategic assault plan was to separate the eight armed Spanish soldiers. First, on both the Thursday and Friday nights beforehand, some Kosaii Kumeyaay with their reed canoes quietly approached the *San Carlos* anchored in the bay to strip away the cloth sails; thus, it was deemed necessary to station on board two soldiers from the Presidio guard. Second, for Holy Days, one Father went out to the ship to celebrate Mass, and two soldiers served as protective escorts. Third, two other soldiers guarded the pastured horses. Thus, the Kumeyaay recognized that only two soldiers actually remained at the garrison following Mass on Sundays (Palou 1787, in James 1913:80).

The grand Native revolt occurred right after Mass on Sunday, August 15, 1769. The Kosaii Kumeyaay warriors under Naguasajo suddenly attacked in force. There were deaths on both sides (Palou 1787, in James 1913:80-82; see also Bolton 1926, II:266, 269; Carrico 1997; Saunt 2010; Beebe and Senkewicz 2015:210).

Serra remained sheltered in his hut throughout the assault, "*praying to God that the victory would be for our Catholic Faith...*" (Serra, in Tibesar 1955 I:151). The hut was under direct attack, for inside with Serra was Father Viscaino, who "*wishing to see..., raised a little the agave mat which served as a curtain, or door, to the room, but he had scarcely done so when an arrow pierced his hand...*" (Palou 1787 in James 1913:80-82). Moments later, as Serra subsequently told his biographer, "*Suddenly the servant called Joseph Maria who personally attended on the Fathers, rushed into the little shack, and falling down at the feet of our Venerable, cried out: 'Father, absolve me, for the Indians have killed me.' No sooner had he received absolution than he died, as his throat had been pierced by an arrow*" (Palou 1787, in James 1913:80-82). In all likelihood, Serra remained in his Mass vestments which probably were splashed with spurting arterial blood, an emotional episode. (See also a similar account in Serra's own letter of 10 February 1770, in Tibesar 1955 I:149-155.)

The Spanish guns prevailed; the Natives retreated.

Immediately thereafter, with this defeat, the sovereign Native Kosaii abandoned their village that adjoined the Presidio. The entire Kosaii village territory effectively was ceded to the Spanish.

There is no historical record of Naguasajo for the next seven years.

Serra left San Diego and focused on creating new California Missions.

### **Second Strategic San Diego Mission Revolt, 1775**

On the night of November 5, 1775, according to the Spanish government's subsequent narratives, it was hundreds of Native Kumeyaay warriors that attacked the San Diego Mission. Reportedly, they were organized together from fifteen or more villages. They attacked the Mission, sacked and burned the structures, killed Father Luis Jayme and several others. The wounded Spanish and stunned survivors retreated in the morning to the Presidio to communicate the catastrophe. The Mission locale, just a few miles up the river valley from the Presidio garrison, had been established just two years earlier.

From a Native Kumeyaay military perspective, this 1775 Mission revolt had involved complex strategic planning. With numerous Native Kumeyaay warrior groups coming together for this surprise assault, some from considerable distances, quiet but lengthy advance planning certainly was involved. And, like the 1769 revolt, this attack occurred when the Native warriors recognized that there were a reduced number of soldiers at the Presidio, many being away to establish and build a new Mission at San Juan Capistrano (Chace 2017, Saunt 2010:681).

Father Serra and the Spanish authorities were deeply distressed, even perplexed. Serra and the Governor traveled to San Diego as soon as possible to conduct investigations. As the leader of the California Missions program, Serra was particularly troubled: Father Luis Jayme had been martyred, other Christians killed, valuable church articles stolen, and the buildings burned. Mission San Diego was a smoldering ruins, and its religious records were lost. The troops at San Juan Capistrano were called back and an intended new mission effort there was curtailed.

Father Serra, along with Governor Rivera, Presidio Commander Ortega, and Presidio Sergeant Carrillo throughout the coming months sought the capture of Native renegades and the identities of revolt leaders. To initiate civil trials, they conducted numerous interrogations, virtual inquisitions, sometimes with tortured testimonies. The Spanish authorities seemed willing to accept facile stories, while the Native Kumeyaay appeared unusually able to virtually repeat facile explanatory tales, which the civil authorities often took as confirmatory (Saunt 2010).

Importantly, Naguasajo's identity and any of his roles were never, never mentioned in any of the many carefully documented legal interrogations (Carrico 2017). It certainly would appear that Naguasajo was quietly and secretly protected among the Native Kumeyaay.

### **Betrayal, August 1776**

A Kumeyaay rumor of warriors arming themselves for another insurrection led to a military raid to the Kumeyaay village of La Punta, near the southern tip of the San Diego Bay. Sergeant Mariano Carrillo, a ranking Presidio soldier, led the military raid on August 9. The Native villages leaders had departed, 'gone out fishing,' but Carrillo separated and bound "a *Gentile of Corral village*" [in El Cajon Valley]; he "*played the innocent,*" speaking and asserting that he was there only to secure fish and denying to Carrillo anything about attacks, seemingly spoken all in clear Spanish. Next, Carrillo isolated and questioned a Mission neophyte in the village who was similarly unforthcoming, until bound and under torturous duress. This greatly distressed neophyte then blurted out the betrayal of Naguasajo in their midst. He identified Naguasajo to Carrillo as being a revolt organizer. Carrillo securely trussed up Naguasajo, and very probably also beat and tortured him. In his later prepared legal testimonial, Carrillo expressed that he attempted to further interrogate Naguasajo; but Naguasajo apparently refused to utter another word. Carrillo next confronted and lashed a second La Punta villager, who confirmed all the details that the first villager had confessed (Ortega 1776; see also Rivera y Moncada 1776; and Saunt 2010:695-696).

This long-held secret Kumeyaay oral-story about Naguasajo was out.

The bound Naguasajo was brought to the San Diego Presidio and placed in the jail.

Sergeant Carrillo repeated the revealed Naguasajo story to the authorities at the Presidio, to Commander Ortega and Governor Rivera. The following day, Governor Rivera penned cryptically in his diary that he examined or verbally confronted the jailed Gentile Naguasajo, but he left learning nothing new. Naguasajo seemingly again had refused to speak; the dairy does not express that Naguasajo talked at all. ("*Examine de palabra a dicho gentil y salio conforme con las demas noticias.*") Three days later, Rivera with two legal witnesses revisited and again examined the jailed Naguasajo but penned in his diary that they learned nothing new. ("*Tome declaracion al gentil; produjo igualmente como queda apuntado.*") Rivera's dairy does not express that Naguasajo ever actually spoke (Rivera 1977:290, as translated by Dr. Alijandra Mogilner).

## Serra Informed

It is stated that Sergeant Carrillo directly repeated the revealed Naguasajo oral-story to Father Serra, probably on August 13, Naguasajo's fourth day in jail. (Serra never wrote about this grave confrontation, a personal failure.) Only much later, Fr. Serra would pour out the tale to Fr. Palou, expressing quite simply his profound emotions, "*the ardor and zeal of our Venerable Father overflowed...*" Serra's telling was not a confession, which under the Code of Canon Law would not be allowed to have been repeated (Omlin 2017). Rather, it actually was a gravely personal accounting, for Serra and Naguasajo long had known each other.

Thereafter, it was Fr. Palou who in 1787 first published this secret Kumeyaay story (Palou 1787, as translated by James 1913; see also Bancroft 1886:302, Engelhardt 1920:82, and Saunt 2010:696-697):

*".... The sergeant pointed out to our Father this miserable pagan (he was with the rest in the stocks), saying that he was the same one who had tried, in the year 1769, to take the life of his Reverence and of the others in the first days of the founding of the Mission."*

*".... Far from imitating the rest in repentance, he became set in his pagan errors and was one of the principal movers in the mutiny of the year 1775... as well as of those others who had a part in the cruel death and martyrdom of the Venerable Fr. Luis Jayme. Having been taken prisoner for his part in this last crime and placed with others in the jail of the garrison, he was there visited by the Venerable Father Junipero.... The Father wished to bring to the prisoners some comfort as well as to convert them to our Holy Faith.... Then it was that the ardor and zeal of our Venerable Father overflowed in a flood of exhortation and loving appeal toward this unhappy mortal [Naguasajo], begging him to become a Christian and assuring him that in case he did, God our Lord and the King would undoubtedly pardon his crimes. But he was unable to obtain a single word from him.... But this unhappy gentile, having committed suicide, was found dead on the morning of the 15th of August of 1776...." (James 1913:83-84).*

## Suicide, Epic Revenge

The imprisoned Naguasajo, strong and stoic, first attempted suicide during the night of August 13, following his fourth day of Presidio confinement and after his confrontations from Rivera and then from Serra. He was within a jail cell with other renegade prisoners; each were bound with rope. The sentinel outside was not particularly attentive. Naguasajo placed a line around his neck and hung himself. Only in the morning did the sentry observe the hanging captive, but this

guard was able to revive Naguasajo (Rivera 1977:290, as translated by Dr. Alijandra Mogilner).

Governor Rivera was distraught at this laxity and was personally responsible anticipating civil trials. Rivera ordered Naguasajo to be placed separately, in a different room apart from the others, restrained with rope and handcuffs, with an designated sentinel stationed immediately outside the door, which had no lock. During the night, Naguasajo was able quietly to make two turns of a rope tightly around his neck, suspend his body in a sitting position, curl his feet back, and mortally strangle himself. He was found in the morning by the agitated Governor (Rivera 1977:290-291, as translated by Dr. Alijandra Mogilner; see also Palou 1787 in James 1913:83-84, Bancroft 1886:302, Engelhardt 1920:82, and Saunt 2010:696-697).

### **Conclusions, Three**

First, this complex story for Serra was indeed grave. Serra's failed confrontation with the imprisoned Naguasajo must have filled his heart with quite personal and heavy emotions, for the two principles long had known each other. Naguasajo ended the relationship with epic revenge.

Second, this complex narrative story, a Kumeyaay secret oral-tradition once revealed to Sergeant Carrillo, also was grave for Naguasajo, as well as the Kumeyaay. For seven years, it had been widely but quietly whispered among the Kumeyaay. Indeed, it is the tragic tale of a heroic saga.

Third, this tragic saga is a key part of the founding of San Diego.

## *List of Sources*

- Bancroft, Hubert Howe  
The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XVIII, History of California Vol I. 1542-1800. The History Company, San Francisco, 1886.
- Beebe, Rose Marie, and Robert M. Senkewicz  
Junipero Serra, California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2015.
- Bolton, Herbert Eugene, editor and translator  
Historical Memoirs of New California by Fray Francisco Palou, Four Volumes. University of California, Berkeley. 1926. [Reissued 1966, Russell & Russell, New York.]
- Carrico, Richard  
Sociopolitical Aspects of the 1775 Revolt at Mission San Diego de Alcalá. The Journal of San Diego History, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1997.  
  
Personal communication, October 24, 2016, to Paul Chace, after reviewing again all the unpublished Spanish Mission revolt interrogation transcriptions Carrico holds in his personal library, 2016.
- Chace, Paul G.  
International Alliance -- International Assault, A Sovereign Kosaii Kumeyaay Perspective on the Beginning of the Spanish Presidio-Mission at San Diego. Unpublished paper presented at the California Missions Foundation Conference, February 19, 2017, Mission Santa Inez.
- Engelhardt, Zephyrin  
San Diego Mission. The James H. Berry Company, San Francisco, 1920.
- Engstrand, Iris Wilson, editor and translator  
Pedro Fages and Miguel Costanso, Two Early Letters from San Diego in 1769. The Journal of San Diego History, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1975.
- Fages, Pedro  
A Historical, Political, and Natural Description of California by Pedro Fages, Soldier of Spain, Dutifully Made for the Viceroy in the Year 1775. Translated by Herbert Ingram Priestley, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1937. (Reprinted, 1972, Ballena Press, n.p.)
- Geiger, Maynard  
Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848, A Biographical Dictionary. The Huntington Library, San Marino, 1969.
- Hemert-Engert, Adolph van, and Frederick J. Taggart, editors  
The Narrative of the Portola Expedition of 1769-1770 by Miguel Costanso. Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1910.
- James, George Wharton  
Francisco Palou's Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Junipero Serra, Founder of the Franciscan Missions of California. English Translation by C. Scott Williams. George Wharton James, Pasadena, 1913.
- Mogilner, Geoffrey  
Cosoy: Birthplace of New California. The Journal of San Diego History, Vol. 62, No. 2, 2016, pp. 131-158.
- Nuttall, Donald A.  
The Gobernantes of Spanish Upper California: A Profile. California Historical Quarterly, Vol. LI, No. 3, 1972, pp. 253-280.
- Ortega, Joseph Francisco (often cites as a Rivera y Moncada document)  
"Comand. [Joseph Francisco Ortega, San Diego Presidio Comandante] a [Goberador Fernando] Rivera manda hoy iniciar un espediente para averiguar una conspiacion de indios," August 10, 1776, copy of handwritten transcript; Archives of California, 222-33, C-A 1; University of California Berkeley, Bancroft Library. Translated by Dr. Alijandra Mogilner.

Omlin, Michael

Personal communication, May 4, 2017, to Paul Chace. Omlin, a graduate of Boston College and Saint John's Seminary, also provided Code of Canon Law electronic references.

Rivera y Moncada, Fernando de

Fernando de Rivera y Moncada to Antonio Bucareli y Ursua, September 22, 1776. Three page letter. Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City, Collection #: GLCO6287.06.

Diario del Capitan Comandante Fernando de Rivera y Moncada, Edited by Ernest J. Burros. Ediciones Jose Porrua Turanzas, Coleccion Chimalistac de libros y documentos acerca de la Nueva Espana, Two Volumes, Madrid, 1977.

Rose, Robert Selden, editor

The Portola Expedition of 1769-1770, Diary of Vicente Vila. Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1911, pp. 1-119.

Sanchez, Joseph P.

Spanish Bluecoats, The Catalonian Volunteers in Northwestern New Spain, 1767-1810. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1990.

Saunt, Claudio

"My Medicine is Punishment": A Case of Torture in Early California, 1775-1776. *Ethnohistory* 57(4), 2010, pp. 679-708. [Spanish translations about Naguasajo by Saunt are questioned; rather, Naguasajo never spoke after being bound; as translated by Dr. Alijandra Mogilner.]

Shipek, Florence C.

Kumeyaay Socio-Political Structure. *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 4(2), 1982, pp. 296-303.

Taggart, Frederick J., editor

The Official Account of the Portola Expedition of 1769-1770. Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1909.

The Portola Expedition of 1769-1770, Diary of Miguel Costanso. Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1911.

Tibesar, Antonine

Writings of Junipero Serra. Volume I (of Four Volumes). Academy of American Franciscan History, Washington, D.C., 1955.