



# **The Last Conquistadors of Southeast North America: Pedro Menéndez and the Collapse of La Florida's Frontier**

*Larry Richard Clark*

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Between 1513-1543, the American Indians of southeast North America survived three decades of invasions by the most powerful nation in Europe, imperial Spain. These Spanish conquistadors failed to claim this land they knew as La Florida. It will be King Phillip II and a new strategy that returns Spain's conquistadors to La Florida; first, in 1559, as the Viceroy of New Spain sends hundreds of soldiers, along with 1,000 colonists, to the Gulf Coast near present day Pensacola; and then secondly, in 1565, when Supreme Commander Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and his captain Juan Pardo are compelled to complete Hernando de Soto's mission to mark a trail from the Atlantic to the silver mines of Mexico. Once again, Spain does not understand that the Creek, Cherokee and Catawba will fight to protect their homeland. "The Last Conquistadors of Southeast North America" examines this forgotten story of America as a greatly expanded Spanish empire, conceived by king and emperor Charles, is passed to his son, King Phillip II. Pedro Menéndez, after removing French Huguenots from Fort Caroline near present day Jacksonville, Florida, is credited with establishing the first Spanish settlements in North America at St. Augustine in 1565, and next, his capital at Santa Elena the following year. Thereafter Spain will occupy the Atlantic coast of North America decades before England's failed "Lost Colony" (1585) on Roanoke Island, North Carolina and forty years before England's first permanent settlement at James Towne, Virginia (1607) — and the French founding of Quebec (1608) in New France, Canada. After all, this is Spain's Golden Century when much had been gained in so little time: Hispaniola (1493), "The Mother of America;" Puerto Rico (1508), Jamaica (1509), Panama (1510), Cuba (1511), Mexico (1521) and Peru (1533). With Spanish ships now sailing back and forth across the earth's seas, King Philip II rules a vast worldwide empire estimated to encompass 7.5 million square miles at its peak. In addition, the extraordinary wealth in spices, gold, silver and gems flowing into Spain allow's King Phillip to not only pursue colonization in the New World, but also follow his Catholic mission to stamp-out heretical Protestants in Europe. At this same time he will also compete with France, England and the Ottoman Empire as the world's defender of the true holy faith.

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