

Royalist Scourge or Liberator of the Patria? Agustín de Iturbide and Mexico's War of Independence, 1810–1821

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Agustin de Iturbide was a pivotal figure in the epoch of Mexican independence and as he became emperor of his independent nation. He is less well known for his earlier roles in the army of New Spain and as an effective though controversial counterinsurgency commander in the provinces of Guanajuato where he became captain general. Iturbide maintained a high profile with the viceroys and senior commanders and he was particularly hard on the insurgent leaders and their followers. He developed rough counterinsurgency techniques and unlike most royalist commanders, he kept detailed journals of his exploits that illustrate the nature of the brutal and lengthy war. Iturbide also abused royalists who got in his way and he appeared to profit significantly from his campaigns. In 1816, he came under severe criticism from the Cura of Guanajuato for his abuses and for over three years he lived in Mexico City as a sort of internal exile. Iturbide received a new lease on life in 1820 as a counterinsurgency commander and in 1821 as a liberator who issued the Plan de Iguala and established a new government with the Treaty of Córdoba. The present study traces Iturbide's career and different roles from 1810 to 1821.

Agustin de Iturbide fue una figura fundamental en la época de la independencia mexicana cuando se hizo emperador de la nación independiente. Él es menos conocido por su participación anterior en el ejército de la Nueva España, como un eficaz aunque controvertido comandante de la contrainsurgencia en las provincias de Guanajuato, donde ocupó el cargo de capitán general. Iturbide mantuvo un rol importante con los virreyes y los comandantes mayores y fue particularmente duro con los líderes insurgentes y sus seguidores. Desarrolló técnicas de contrainsurgencia ásperas y a diferencia de la mayor parte de los comandantes monárquicos, mantuvo diarios detallados de sus acciones que ilustran la naturaleza de esa guerra brutal y larga. Iturbide también abusó de los monárquicos que se metieron en su camino ya que pareció sacar considerable

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ganancia de sus campañas. En 1816, fue criticado severamente por el Cura de Guanajuato por sus abusos; durante más de tres años vivió en la Ciudad de México en una especie de exilio interno. Iturbide recibió un nuevo impulso a su vida en 1820 como comandante de la contrainsurgencia, y en 1821 como un libertador que proclamó el Plan de Iguala y estableció un nuevo gobierno con el Tratado de Córdoba. El presente estudio recorre la trayectoria de Iturbide y sus diferentes roles, de 1810 a 1821.

Key words: New Spain, Mexico, War of Independence, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, Royalist Army, Guanajuato, Valladolid, Nueva Galicia, Irapuato, Agustín de Iturbide, Cura Antonio Labarrieta, Guerrillas, Bandits, Fortifications, Military, Violence, Atrocities, Retribution, Intimidation, Gachupines, Junta Revolucionaria, Spanish Constitution.

Palabras clave: Nueva España, México, Guerra de Independencia, Insurrección, Contrainsurgencia, Ejército Monárquico, Guanajuato, Valladolid, Nueva Galicia, Irapuato, Agustín de Iturbide, Cura Antonio Labarrieta, Guerrilleros, Bandidos, Fortalecimientos, Ejército, Violencia, Atrocidades, Castigo justo, Intimidación, Gachupines, Junta Revolucionaria, Constitución española.

Born on September 27, 1783, the same year as Simón Bolívar, Agustín de Iturbide grew up in Valladolid (Morelia), the pampered son of a wealthy peninsular family. Educated at the Seminario de Michoacán, on October 8, 1797, at fourteen years of age, he entered the Provincial Infantry Regiment of Valladolid as a *subteniente* during the reestablishment of the provincial infantry unit ordered by Viceroy Conde de Branciforte.¹ His military education over the next decade took place within the regular training assemblies of the provincial militia and during mobilizations of the regiment when he served at the cantonments situated near Jalapa during threats of a British invasion and, again in 1808, when Napoleon invaded and occupied Spain. In June 1808, Lieutenant Iturbide requested permission to retire from his regiment because of illness contracted while he was on duty—with the maintenance of his *fuero militar* and permission to continue wearing his army uniform. He noted that should he recover his health sufficiently, he would resume his military career. In a scribbled margin note written much later on the document, an any-

1. Relación de los meritos y servicios del Teniente Coronel Don Agustín de Iturbide, Silao, 31 de agosto de 1812, Archivo General de la Nación, México, Sección de Operaciones de Guerra (cited hereinafter as AGN:OG, vol. 426. See also William Spence Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), 3-14.

mous historian wrote, “El Emperador electo en 1822—que distante estaba de serlo.”²

On September 16, 1810, with the outbreak of the Revolt of Cura Miguel Hidalgo, Iturbide was in Valladolid where he observed firsthand the spontaneous popularity of the uprising and its capacity to attract large numbers of supporters. By early October, violence swept into the Intendancy of Valladolid, which for the next decade was to become one of the most fertile provinces for widespread popular insurgent activity. Iturbide was in Valladolid (now Morelia) when the authorities received word from the *subdelegado* of Zimapequaro near Maravatío that on October 7, rebel forces commanded by a Colonel Luna, also known as El Torero Luna, captured the Intendant of Valladolid Province, Manuel Merino; Colonel Diego Rul, the Conde de Casa Rul, commander of the Provincial Infantry Regiment of Valladolid; and Colonel Diego García Conde, commander of the Provincial Dragoon Regiment of Puebla who Viceroy Francisco Javier Venegas had just appointed as military commander of the Province of Valladolid.³ When this news reached the city of Valladolid, Iturbide organized a small mounted rescue force of thirty soldiers, a sergeant, and two corporals of the Regiment of Valladolid, and he recruited fifty-six rancheros who happened to be in the city and paid to uniform and to equip them as lancers.

When the interim intendant refused to contribute a single real to fund the mission, Iturbide arranged to pay each of his men five reales per day from his own purse, and he covered all of the costs incurred for the transport of baggage and pasturage for the horses. Nevertheless, well before Iturbide's force reached the town of Maravatío, forty-one of the rancheros recognized the dangers inherent in the mission and deserted from the column, leaving only fifteen of their original number. The better trained militiamen did not desert, but the remaining force was scarcely large enough to protect a small pueblo in tumult let alone to risk instant annihilation in a clash with Hidalgo's great multitudes.⁴ At the hacienda of Queréndaro, Iturbide confirmed that the three missing

2. Viceroy José de Iturrigaray to Antonio Olaguer Feliu, no. 1606, 23 June, 1808, AGN, Mexico, Sección de Correspondencia de los Virreyes (CV), Serie 1, vol. 237.

3. For accounts of these events, see José María Luis Mora, *México y sus revoluciones*, I (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1965), 69–70; Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México desde los primeros movimientos que prepararon su Independencia en el año de 1808 hasta la época presente*, I (México: J. Mariano Lara, 1850), 462. For García Conde's most interesting captivity account up to the liberation of the prisoners following the Battle of Aculco, see Lucas Alamán, I, Apéndice, documento num. 18, 54–68; García Conde to Viceroy Francisco Xavier Venegas, no. 16, Aculco, 7 October 1810, AGN:OG, vol. 898.

4. Relación de los méritos, 31 de agosto de 1812, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

royalist prisoners had been captured at the pueblo of Ucareo. As aggressive in his approaches as he would be throughout the war, Iturbide sought to locate and to liberate the captives, but he failed to obtain sufficient information concerning their whereabouts. Entering the town of Maravatío,⁵ the small force of thirty-two lancers formed up to charge a band of 130 to 150 rebels. However, Iturbide's assumption that better discipline would give the advantage to his lancers soon changed as the entire town erupted into tumult. Rather than taking the offensive against disproportionate odds of success, Iturbide decided to occupy and to defend a strongly built house. This turned out to be a good idea since by midday the insurgent vanguard force of Hidalgo and an estimated 600 angry men from surrounding pueblos entered Maravatío.⁶ After twelve hours of skirmishing and aware that Hidalgo's "great rabble" was only nine leagues away at Acámbaro and that assistance was unlikely, Iturbide withdrew his soldiers to safety. He continued to inquire assiduously, though without success, concerning the whereabouts of the three royalist prisoners and learned nothing.⁷

A few days later in Mexico City, Iturbide visited Viceroy Venegas and received a rather cool reception and sharp criticism rather than praise for his actions. The viceroy expressed reservations about Iturbide's failure either to prevent Maravatío from falling into insurgent hands or to have organized a successful rescue of the three eminent royalist captives. Chastised by the chilliness of this meeting, Iturbide vowed that in case some doubts existed about his military prowess, he would take steps to restore his honor and to set the record straight. Nevertheless, he continued to promote the opinion that he and his men had behaved with great valor throughout the mission and deserved viceregal approbation rather than disapproval. Later, when Venegas granted high honors to the royalist soldiers and officers of the Provincial Infantry Regiment Tres Villas for their heroic stand at the Battle of Monte de las Cruces near Toluca against Hidalgo's multitude, Iturbide appealed, requesting the same recognition for his detachment of Valladolid troops at Maravatío. He underscored his ar-

5. Iturbide knew Maravatío very well, and since December 1808, he had owned the hacienda of San José de Apeo situated near the town. See William S. Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico*, 12-13.

6. Iturbide al Virrey Venegas, México, 16 de octubre de 1810, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

7. Shortly after, Venegas transferred Iturbide and his force to serve under the orders of Colonel Torcuato de Truxillo who had come from Spain with Viceroy Venegas following duty as the commander of the Regimiento de Dragones de Granada. See Venegas a Torcuato Truxillo, 19 de octubre de 1810, AGN: OG, vol. 426. In general, few contemporary observers had regard for Truxillo who Brigadier José de la Cruz described as being "de ningún instrucción" and Félix Calleja criticized as "un loco con una espada." See José de la Cruz to Venegas, Valladolid, 6 January, 1811, AGN:OG, vol. 146; and Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México*, II, 78.

gument pointing out that his men were the only soldiers of the Infantry of Valladolid who had not committed the depravity of joining the enemy when Hidalgo occupied the city. This time, Viceroy Venegas concurred and awarded each of Iturbide's men a badge of valor and fidelity.⁸

Even at this early stage in his career as a combat commander, Lieutenant Iturbide (who would be promoted to captain following the Battle of Las Cruces) emerged as a dynamic royalist officer who stood out as one to be watched. Iturbide's limitless ambition, his loyalty to his network of friends and soldiers, his willingness to press hard for his projects with senior commanders, his remarkable energy and gritty persistence, and his total dedication to King Fernando VII, soon brought him special recognition and favor. In many respects, Iturbide's self-promotion was absolutely shameless, but a string of victories as a hard-driving battlefield commander reinforced his reputation. Perhaps best of all for the royalist cause throughout the war, Iturbide did not shy away from combat whether it involved conventional field operations, sieges directed against rebel-held strong points and islands, or irregular warfare utilizing the brutal techniques of counterinsurgency. In 1812, still very early in his career, Iturbide boasted that he had been in nine major actions—all of them more glorious than the level indentified by the *Reales Ordenanzas Militares* as "distinguished."⁹ He ingratiated himself with senior well-placed military patrons such as Brigadiers Diego García Conde, José de la Cruz, and Félix Calleja del Rey, who watched over him for years and often overlooked his tendencies to be arbitrary, cruel, and corrupt. Indeed, as a veritable scourge of the insurgents in the Bajío provinces, Valladolid province, and in bordering districts of Nueva Galicia, Iturbide was an effective bludgeon for use against the insurgent side. He was a man intolerant of criticism and driven by his absolute commitment to his religion, to the certainty of the justice of the *Causa Buena del Rey* (the Just or Royalist cause), and of the evil of the insurgency.

The decade of war established Iturbide's career and provided him with the platform necessary not only to rise to prominence but also to attain the momentary pinnacle of success and power as the Emperor of

8. Iturbide to Venegas, Mexico, 8 February, 1811; and Venegas to the Conde de Alcaraz, 11 February, 1811, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

9. Relación de los Méritos, 31 de agosto de 1812, AGN:OG, vol. 426. These included his role at Las Cruces on October, 30 1812; at Iguala on July 3 and 4, at Acuichio and Sipimeo on September 7 and 14, 1811; at Valle de Santiago on May 25, 1812; in the capture of Cabecilla Albino García, June 1812; at Calpulalpam against the Cabecillas Chito Villagran and Padre José María Correa, June 1812; in the action of July 24, 1812, in the Valle de Santiago; at Salamanca on August 7, 1812, in defense of the convoy. Iturbide noted that he had been in many lesser engagements, paid for spies and couriers in his employ, and rewarded his valiant soldiers often from his own purse.

Mexico 1822–1823. As an extremely tough counterinsurgency commander, even given the violence and chaos of the times, Iturbide possessed a streak of cruelty that he directed against his foes. As the military commander and ruler of Guanajuato province he accorded his enemies rough justice and was arbitrary in his treatment of many royalists who might otherwise have been his allies. In some respects, Iturbide failed to escape his years of experience as a highly aggressive counterinsurgency commander accustomed to practicing exemplary violence and imposing solutions rather than seeking constructive advice. If he was ever a man of destiny, he also had a sinister side to his character that made him a self-righteous, bloody-minded bludgeon of his critics, opponents, and supposed enemies. Equally, Iturbide could be charismatic in his leadership of his troops and absolutely charming to his friends and followers—particularly those in high offices whom he wished to cultivate.¹⁰ Although he was a criollo and proud of his origins, Iturbide worked effectively with peninsular officers.

There was also the problem of cooperation between the royalist military jurisdictions as Brian Hamnett illustrated very well in his 1982 article, “Royalist Counterinsurgency and the Continuity of Rebellion: Guanajuato and Michoacán, 1813–20.”¹¹ To escape hot pursuit, the insurgent bands simply crossed the boundaries of provincial military jurisdictions. By working out of frontier zones between Guanajuato, Valladolid, and Nueva Galicia, they were able to compensate for their chronic weaknesses caused by poor military discipline and inferior weaponry. In addition to operations to disperse insurgent-bandit formations within his own territories, Iturbide recognized the essential need for military cooperation between royalist forces of the different provinces. He visited Valladolid where Colonel Torquato de Truxillo was uncooperative, but assisted Captains Antonio Linares and Pedro Celestino Negrete who com-

10. The controversy over Iturbide shifts back and forth over time. See, for example William Spence Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico* (Durham: Duke University press, 1952). In Chapter Two, “Struggles for Mexican Independence,” Robertson devotes sufficient space to Iturbide’s early career to develop a clear view of his potential weaknesses. See also Timothy E. Anna, *The Mexican Empire of Iturbide* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990). Anna, who did not devote much space to Iturbide’s service as a royalist wartime commander, declared, “To paint Iturbide as a unilateral force of evil, a usurper, a tyrant, ignores the context of his life, the challenges that he faced in creating a nation and founding a government, and the multitude of failings of his opponents and enemies” (237). As Anna pointed out, almost all Mexican historians have accepted the blackest of interpretations of Iturbide’s career. For uncritical interpretations of Iturbide’s most positive side, see Francisco Castellanos, *El Trueno: Gloria y martirio de Agustín de Iturbide* (México: Editorial Diana, 1982).

11. Brian R. Hamnett, “Royalist Counterinsurgency and the Continuity of Rebellion: Guanajuato and Michoacán, 1813–20,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 62:1 (February 1982), 19–48.

manded forces near the borders of Nueva Galicia under Brigadier José de la Cruz.¹² During these years, Iturbide became the major advocate of cooperative military assistance, and he visited surrounding jurisdictions on a regular basis. By doing so, he came to know many of the officers who in 1821 changed sides to support the Plan de Iguala. Notwithstanding his tendency to profit from war and his penchant for violence, Iturbide was more successful in his career than all other royalist commanders—even with setbacks that might have ruined some other officers; he reached the apex of achievement and served a brief tenure as emperor of the new nation.

Unusual for royalist army commanders in the Independence War, Iturbide kept a detailed *Diario Militar* that covered the period from January 1812 to July 1813 and an enormous archive containing copies of his correspondence detailing his campaigns, communications, and activities throughout most of the war. Available today on microfilm from the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C, this is a quite remarkable personal archive that chronicles wide-ranging activities well beyond the level of official military reporting and correspondence. Iturbide kept a daily diary of events—sometimes during the most difficult conditions of exhausting counterinsurgency warfare as he led his forces in pursuit of rebel bands or worked close to the front lines during many sieges. Though all commanders submitted detailed combat reports and dispatches regarding their activities, no other major royalist commander was as thorough in recording daily events, adding personal views, and commenting on other topics of relevance. Sometimes to his detriment, Iturbide recorded his personal thoughts regarding the enemy and his unofficial views concerning the war's progress. His voluminous correspondence chronicled his relationship with a broad circle of friends, superiors, and sometimes with his enemies. It is possible to gain insights into his thinking on subjects that most other royalist army officers simply did not or would not commit to paper. Indeed, if other royalist field commanders kept daily journals and personal archives that have survived, today these documents are most likely kept strictly confidential within the families of their Mexican or Spanish descendants. Iturbide recorded a daily tally of the number of leagues he traveled—almost as if he attached a pedometer to his horse. In his own reckoning, in a year and a half from January 1812 to July 1813 he traveled a total of 3,794 leagues¹³ or almost 21,000 kilometers in frenetic pursuit of rebel forces, siege preparations,

12. José de la Cruz to Venegas, Huichapan, 7 December, 1810, AGN:OG, vol. 142. In December, 1810, Iturbide served as an adjutant under José de la Cruz.

13. *Diario Militar particular de D. Agustín de Iturbide y Aramburu, el que lleva en sus expediciones desde la convalecencia de la fiebre de que curó en Valladolid, y contrajo*

convoy escort duties, and multiple visits to surrounding military jurisdictions to meet regional commanders for consultations and conferences. He also made many trips to distant towns, along with visits and planning sessions at Celaya and elsewhere to meet with his immediate superior, Brigadier Diego García Conde,¹⁴ commander of the Provincial Dragoon Regiment of Puebla.

In comparison with Iturbide, García Conde, a peninsular officer from Barcelona, commenced his career in 1772 and was typical of the most senior royalist army officers in New Spain. A politically oriented peninsular officer from Barcelona, in 1812, he was over fifty years of age with a wife and six children to support.¹⁵ At this age, García Conde lacked enthusiasm for the exhausting and exceptionally dangerous lifestyle of chasing insurgent forces that required weeks and months spent in the saddle with bivouacs on rough ground, uncomfortable nights, and arms at the ready. A younger man with a strong constitution, these same conditions seemed to energize Iturbide who accepted brutal conditions and seldom if ever avoided a fight and pursuit of the rebel *gavillas* (gangs). García Conde had been posted to New Spain in 1789 and served for years in sedentary garrison duties while he petitioned for high offices. With the outbreak of the Hidalgo Revolt in 1810, like other officers he perceived new possibilities to achieve promotions and higher pay. In 1813, he became Comandante General of the Province of Valladolid, one of the most proinsurgent and violence-torn jurisdictions in New Spain. It had become a chronic and bloody fighting ground, defended tenaciously by both sides and often without quarter for almost the entire decade between 1810 and 1821. In the city of Valladolid, almost like an island cut off and short of basic provisions and supplies, García Conde experienced the full impact of war-driven poverty, famine, hardship, and resulting disease epidemics. These were the allies and accompaniments of “la guerra desoladora” (destroying war). He lamented the mindless bloodshed that beset New Spain, characterizing the country as “un señorito malerido” (a sick play boy). He had come to hate the insurgent war cry of “Viva María Santísima de Guadalupe, y mueran los gachupines” (death

en la Tierra Caliente de dicha Provincia en campaña con la División del Sr. Castillo y Bustamante, in *The Papers of Agustín de Iturbide*, Library of Congress (LC), Washington, D.C., Ms. 15,338, Roll 1.

14. Regimiento de Dragones de Puebla, Relación por antigüedad de los oficiales, sargentos, y cadetes, 2 May, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 901. García Conde commenced his army career in Spain as a cadet in the Reales Guardias Españolas in 1772, accepted transfer to New Spain in 1789 where he served in the Dragoon Regiment of México, and was promoted to the rank of brigadier on February 6, 1812. Throughout the war, García Conde was one of the major commanders on the royalist side.

15. See Viceroy José de Iturrigaray to Minister of War José Antonio Caballero, no. 1247, 8 May, 1807, AGN:CV, Serie 1, vol. 234.

to the Spaniards).¹⁶ Like many royalists, García Conde looked to “the indefatigable Iturbide” to bring an end to the insurgency, and he reminded Brigadier Félix Calleja as he assumed office as viceroy in March 1813 that “. . . nothing can fully reward this brave officer whose victories are innumerable.”¹⁷

Iturbide and the Theory and Practice of Effective Counterinsurgency, 1812–1814

Beginning his military career as a militia officer with conventional training in the European-style warfare of the epoch, Iturbide emerged as an expert practitioner in the application of harsh counterinsurgency warfare, chasing bands (*gavillas*) of guerrilla-bandits, and conducting sieges of insurgent fortifications. In addition to his militia training, he possessed the strong character, determination, and commitment to fight against a widespread rural uprising. He was knowledgeable about the rugged geography of New Spain, and like many of his royalist military colleagues, introduced the effective but brutal techniques and questionable morality of an efficient counterinsurgency commander. Iturbide’s system depended upon the use of a strong disciplined offensive force that employed the superior fire power available to the royalist. Iturbide favored mobility made possible by the use of cavalry and dragoons that were needed to deal with the mounted insurgent forces. In many respects, Iturbide possessed the characteristics of a natural counterinsurgent who at times appeared over-bold and even reckless in his enthusiasm to pursue rebel forces, track them down, and destroy them and their fortified bases. He used mobility, speed, determination, and his power to conduct speedy trials in which the preordained outcome produced exemplary public executions by firing squad of the insurgent *corifeos* or *cabecillas* (the ring leaders) and many of their armed supporters. The royalists used derogatory labels to describe the insurgent chiefs to denigrate their legitimacy and to dismiss their patriotic connections with the ideas and programs of Hidalgo, José María Morelos, or the juntas that emerged to replace them. The royalist commanders viewed the insurgent leaders and their followers literally as evil criminals of the lowest order who were unworthy of any compassion or understanding. In their propaganda, thinking, and behavior, the royalists, including Iturbide, sought to dehumanize their enemies. They adopted a defensive mentality

16. Diego Garía Conde to Viceroy Félix Calleja, México, 5 January, 1814, AGN:OG, vol. 903.

17. García Conde to Viceroy Calleja, 17 March, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 900. In this dispatch, García Conde congratulated Calleja upon his accession to the viceregency.

focused upon totally eliminating those depraved and treacherous elements who rose up and revolted with criminal intent and refused to follow any of the accepted rules of conventional warfare. These same royalist defenders in New Spain seldom made the comparison with the metropolis where the Spanish guerrilleros used similar methods against the much hated French invaders.

In the minds of the criollo and peninsular officers of New Spain, the fact that most insurgents were of mestizo, mulatto, indigenous, or other mixed-race castas, sharpened already derogatory views. They neglected to note that most of the provincial militia foot soldiers, dragoons, and cavalrymen often conscripted by compulsion to fight on the counterinsurgent side, had, in general, almost exactly the same appearance and background as the insurgents. As the war dragged on, much to the detriment of the soldiers of the army of New Spain and of the over 11,000 European *expedicionarios* dispatched to Mexico from Spain, these troops were drawn into the exhausting morass of what was a classic guerrilla versus counterinsurgent struggle—an amorphous conflict that had no obvious end.¹⁸ For men who lacked immunity to yellow fever, malaria, and other tropical diseases, extremely high death rates among the less acclimatized European elements must have made some soldiers and officers wonder about their theories of racial superiority.

Early in the war, the royalist army defeated the poorly equipped, untrained, and overconfident rebel masses on the battlefields of Las Cruces, Aculco, and Puente de Calderón near Guadalajara. Their response to deter the advantages held by the royalist side was to fall back upon defensive works, fortifications on islands situated in lakes and marshy areas, mountain peaks, or hideouts in deep barrancas.¹⁹ Of equal importance, they adopted guerrilla techniques that came to them naturally—attacking convoys, unprotected travelers, haciendas, and smaller communities. The royalists had no alternative other than to fortify their towns and cities, mobilize the male population, establish internal passports, and implement other methods designed to defend against insurgent raiders.

At the same time as the Battle of Puente de Calderón that crushed

18. See Christon I. Archer, "En busca de una victoria definitiva: el ejército realista en Nueva España, 1810-1821," in Marta Terán and José Antonio Serrano Ortega, eds., *Las Guerras de Independencia en la América Española* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán; La Universidad Michoacana; y INAH, 2002), 423-438; "Soldados en la escena continental: los expedicionarios españoles y la guerra de la Nueva España," in Juan Ortiz Escamilla, ed., *Fuerzas Militares en Iberoamérica: Siglos XVIII y XIX* (México: El Colegio de México; El Colegio de Michoacán; y La Universidad Veracruzana, 2005), 139-156.

19. See, for example, Christon I. Archer, "The Indian Insurgents of Mezcala Island on the Lake Chapala Front, 1812-1816," in Susan Schroeder, ed., *Native Resistance and the Pax Colonial in New Spain* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 84-128.

Hidalgo's forces, in January 1812, Iturbide began to write his detailed *Diario Militar*, beginning with a description of his convalescence from a dangerous fever that he contracted in the Tierra Caliente of Valladolid province during his service with the royalist division of Brigadier Joaquín del Castillo y Bustamante.²⁰ In addition to his military avocation, Castillo y Bustamante was a wealthy merchant of the Consulado of Veracruz who in 1800 purchased the post as colonel of the Regimiento de Infantería Provincial de Tres Villas (Jalapa, Orizaba, and Córdoba). During the Independence War, he held several senior military-political posts in Tlaxacala and Jalapa.²¹ Having served with Castillo y Bustamante, who was a most useful contact, in early January 1812, Iturbide left Valladolid to join Brigadier Félix Calleja's Ejército del Centro, then at Izúcar guarding against the coalescence of a powerful insurgent force led by José María Morelos and other insurgent chiefs.

A little later, Iturbide received a special assignment to Mexico City as commander of the guard of General Félix Calleja's wife, Doña María Francesca de la Gandara de Calleja. Soon assigned to the town of Maravatío, Iturbide joined the Batallón Mixto, a cavalry and infantry unit that included a detachment from Tula that he was to command. He greeted his friends and "compañeros de armas" and met with General Calleja whom he described thenceforth as "el hombre grande." He visited with his old friend, Francisco Rendón who had been Intendant of Zacatecas until his temporary imprisonment by the insurgents. After having regained his freedom when the royalists reoccupied the city of Guadalajara, Rendón served as the intendant of the royalist Army of the Center. Accompanying Rendón was his wife Margarita who Iturbide knew quite well; he visited frequently with their small children. He saw many friends in different units whom he had not encountered since the war began, including Bernardo Villamil whose wife Iturbide described as being in a delicate condition due to her advanced state of pregnancy. At Maravatío, he received his new assignment to serve under Brigadier García Conde's command. Although he respected "este benemérito jefe,"

20. *Diario Militar particular de D. Agustín de Iturbide y Aramburu*, in *The Papers of Agustín de Iturbide*, Library of Congress (LC), Washington, D.C., Ms. 15,338, Reel 1.

21. AGN, *Infidencias*, vol. 30. In 1810, Castillo y Bustamante had been Prior of the Real Tribunal del Consulado de Veracruz. In a Royal Order of February 24, 1810, he received permission to return to Spain in order to join the Estado Mayor of the army of Castilla la Vieja based at Santander. The conflict in New Spain altered this plan and prevented him from returning to the Peninsula. In 1820, the people of Jalapa attempted to indict him under the Constitution of 1812 for destroying liberty. See Viceroy Conde de Venadito to the Ministro de Real Hacienda, no. 1101, 31 July, 1820, Archivo General de las Indias, Sección de Méjico, legajo 2420. On the question of Castillo's political machinations at Jalapa, see Faustino de Capetillo to José Dávila, Jalapa, 6 July, 1820, AGN:OG, vol. 266.

he expressed considerable sorrow that he had not been assigned to serve with the main force of the royalist Army of the Center.²²

It is interesting that even at this early stage, Iturbide knew or had connections through acquaintanceship with so many of the powerful commanders of the royalist army—and he rapidly expanded his circle of friends and contacts. Beginning in early February, García Conde appointed him to command a division that included a regular army battalion of the regular army Infantry Regiment of the Corona, two squadrons of the Provincial Dragoon Regiment of Puebla, the Batallón Mixto (mixed infantry and cavalry), and the Cuerpo de Caballería (cavalry unit) de la Frontera from Nuevo Santander. On February 12, Iturbide commanded a mixed infantry and cavalry force during a seventeen-and-a-half hour march during which they rested only an hour and a half on a mission to surprise the insurgent leader Albino García. He was said to be at the pueblo of Amole with a force of 4,000 men. Attacking at 2:30 A.M., the royalists killed some insurgents and the cavalry pursued the rebels for over a league and a half. Considering the soldiers' exhaustion following such a long march, Iturbide expressed admiration at their courage and determination. In the operation, the royalists surprised the enemy and suffered only one casualty—a sergeant who received a minor wound.²³ Finally, on June 4 Iturbide, now in command of a small escort division of only 170 troops guarding a silver shipment, surprised and captured the insurgent chief Albino García, his brother Francisco, some rebel soldiers, and a drummer from the Provincial Dragoon Regiment of Puebla named Pineda who some time before had deserted and gained some fame among the insurgents. Iturbide and his troops then spent twenty-one hours in the saddle marching their prisoners with the convoy to Celaya—arriving at 5:30 P.M. on June 5. On June 8, Albino García, his brother, the drummer, and the other insurgents were shot by firing squad.²⁴ Iturbide continued his mission escorting the silver convoy and correspondence for the viceroy, stopping at Querétaro where they rested for three days before continuing toward Mexico City. Once again, the convoy came under attack at Calpulalpa, this time by the insurgent bands of the notorious rebels Chito Villagran and Padre Correa. The soldiers defeated the rebels and captured two cannons, a few muskets, and other edged weapons. Iturbide then went on ahead with the dispatches arriving in the capital on the nineteenth and

22. *Diario Militar*, entries for January 21–23, 1812, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Microfilm, Reel 1.

23. *Ibid.*, entry for February 12, 1812.

24. *Ibid.*, entries for June 4–8, 1812. See also Francisco Osorno, *El insurgente Albino García*, (México: Editorial "Mexico Nuevo," 1940), 193–209; and William Spence Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico*, 20–21.

the convoy on June 22.²⁵ For his efforts, Iturbide continued his rapid rise in rank, winning a promotion to lieutenant colonel.²⁶

During 1812 and 1813, Iturbide operated throughout the Bajío provinces against small insurgent bands that seldom dared to confront the better armed and disciplined royalist troops. Using speed and endurance to march considerable distances, the royalists employed surprise to attack insurgent bands at night with combined forces of cavalry, dragoons, and mounted infantrymen. Some of the rebels possessed a few old firearms, and they attempted with mixed success to manufacture muskets (sometimes made out of wood), swords, and cannons (also made out of wood)—gilding them with silver to make the artillery pieces appear at a distance to be made of burnished metal.²⁷ The difficulty for the royalists was that they could not occupy every town or village on a permanent basis and at the same time maintain units available to chase down the small insurgent forces that they described as criminal bandits. Iturbide ordered that captured rebel prisoners caught with arms in their hands during and after skirmishes were to be interrogated in a cursory manner and then shot by firing squad. His forces attacked the insurgents continuously, moved rapidly, set up ambushes in villages, divided and subdivided their forces, and then coalesced again to attack a target village or district from all directions so as to overpower and to confound the insurgents.²⁸

In many of the towns and villages of the Bajío, the curas (curates), *presbíteros*, doctors, and some landowners exerted political control over their communities and sided openly or secretly with the insurgency. Their leadership appeared to focus on regional or even district issues, and there were few references in their correspondence to any of the more important questions relating to larger matters such as autonomy or independence for New Spain. With raids against and interdiction of normal commercial routes, after several years of this type of warfare involving royalist pursuit and dispersal attacks, the state of general belligerency appeared to blot out the memory of why the fighting continued to take place. Royalist forces led by Iturbide and other royalist commanders dashed from place to place, destroying property, confiscating anything

25. *Ibid.*, entries for June 9–24, 1812.

26. Relación de méritos y servicios del Teniente Coronel, Don Agustín de Iturbide, Silao, 31 de August, 1812, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

27. Iturbide to García Conde, Hacienda de San Nicolás, July 27, 1812, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 2.

28. For an excellent analysis of the royalist military-political strategies from 1813–1815, see Brian R. Hamnett, “Royalist Counterinsurgency and the Continuity of Rebellion: Guanajuato and Michoacán, 1813–1820,” 24–41.

of value, and punishing severely those who appeared capable of exerting intellectual and political leadership. On both sides, propaganda, destruction of property, and threats replaced any possibility for meaningful dialogue. Iturbide wrote to suspect curas who were beyond his control, threatening them and demanding they support the legitimate government. He insisted the insurgent chiefs attracted new adherents through lies, calumnies, and promises designed to attract the very gullible. They created preposterous stories that Morelos had entered Mexico City or would do so in a short time, that the insurgent Rayón brothers were in Querétaro, or that Jose María Liceaga and Dr. José María Cos had occupied Guanajuato and Irapuato and José Sixto Verduzco was in Valladolid. The insurgents totally debunked the value of royalist pardons and spread false rumors of secret executions to silence those who had received official amnesties.

For his part, Iturbide argued that, in general, the insurgent threat was really quite limited. In the absence of any royalist forces, they were able to influence and to regain some control over the populace, but the number of rebels actually available for armed service in most districts of the Bajío provinces seldom exceeded 300 to 700 poorly trained and badly equipped fighters. They lacked muskets and their few primitive cannons that were light enough to be carried two to a mule were much too small and inaccurate to cause major damage. Iturbide argued that in his opinion, “. . . one-hundred soldiers who deserved the name could pass through districts such as Yurira, Salvatierra, and Salamanca without any danger of receiving damage.”²⁹ However, for the security of the towns and rural districts, he advocated the establishment of small garrisons in the towns backed by district flying divisions of about 500 troops to protect against the danger of newly coalesced insurgent bands.

Energetic suppression of insurgent fortifications and harsh persecution of their badly armed soldiers brought Iturbide many battlefield successes that drew the applause of senior army officers and even of the viceroys. His assault on the rebel fortress on the Isla de Liceaga in Lake Cuisio overcame what at first appearance was an unassailable strong point.³⁰ Guarded by a strong stone wall, a palisade woven of thorny branches, deep ditches, and a garrison of about 200 men with 8 cannons, the defenders exhibited high morale and a strong will to resist. However, while his troops constructed rafts and assembled canoes, Iturbide employed psychological warfare to inculcate a spirit of “terror pánico” among the defenders. On approaching the island from different sides at 2:00 A.M. on September 9, the royalist soldiers yelled, “Let’s go,

29. *Ibid.*

30. Iturbide Venegas, Irapuato, 14 October, 1812, AGN: OG, vol. 426.

our comrades are already inside; Let's go, Let's go we want to get inside; Long live Fernando VII; Long live Spain; Death to all who refuse to surrender; death at this moment!" The invaders carried large stones that were to be thrown when the rebels fired their cannons so as to create a diversionary splash that would confuse their aim.³¹ When the attack came on October 31, 1812, the rebel defenses collapsed and all of the defenders either surrendered or died except a few who managed to swim to shore. Iturbide paraded his captives, including the insurgent commander, Padre Juan José Ramírez,³² and his officers, including Pablo Nelson known among the rebels as El Angloamericano. Later at Irapuato, all of the rebel prisoners were shot by firing squad.

With battlefield exploits such as these and his well-developed patronage connections, on April 29, 1813, Viceroy Calleja appointed Iturbide as Colonel of the Provincial Infantry Regiment of Celaya and Commandant General of Guanajuato and of the Bajío Provinces.³³ Although this recognition pleased Iturbide, he preferred purely military duties and did not look forward to dealing with an important political-administrative office that required tact and diplomatic skills to deal with the elite of Guanajuato. He complained to Field Marshall José de la Cruz that he had been transformed from the commander of an army division to a new role as "commander general of mules." Iturbide had great respect for Cruz whom he addressed in his letters as "Carísimo General, Amigo y Dueño de mi particular aprecio." From the outset, Iturbide also knew that he had bitter enemies—particularly among some of the *gachupines* (European Spanish officers) who wanted him out of office. Although he knew that these people would celebrate his loss of an entire silver convoy, he boasted that in seven shipments, the rebels had not managed to steal a single mule load.³⁴ Nevertheless, for all of the minor clashes since May 1812, including the attack on Isla de Liceaga, in exchange for hundreds of insurgent deaths, only seven royalist soldiers died in action.³⁵

In 1813, the army division assigned to the province of Guanajuato was sufficient in size to protect the city and to keep the fragmented in-

31. Instrucción de lo que los comandantes de balsas y canoas deben executar para el asalto de la Isla Liceaga la noche del 31 de octubre de 1812, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 1.

32. Lucas Alamán called the commander José Mariano Ramírez. See Alamán, *Historia de México*, vol. 3, 355.

33. Iturbide to Calleja, 28 May, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426. Iturbide learned of his promotion from the *Gazeta de México*, and reported that even a month after the actual promotion, he had not received the official dispatches.

34. Iturbide to Cruz, October 4, 1813, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 2.

35. Iturbide to García Conde, Hacienda de San Nicolas, July 27, 1812, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 1.

surgent bands from coalescing to undertake larger operations. The units assigned to Guanajuato were the second battalion of the Regiment of the Crown, a battalion of the *Regimiento Mixto* (infantry and cavalry), the Cavalry Corps of Nuevo Santander, and four light battlefield artillery pieces. As the chief officer of the Guanajuato Division, Iturbide was to command all of these units, and he held the authority to raise new militia forces as might be required. In the broader context, Iturbide was to work on a regional basis to coordinate military operations with the Comandante General of Nueva Galicia and the military commanders of Querétaro, Valladolid, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas. The principal objective of the division was to keep the roads open and to disperse any insurgent forces that entered the jurisdiction or formed locally. His duties included the protection of agriculture, commerce, and the mining industry. The second objective was to provide escort forces for convoys north to the Provincias Internas and south to Querétaro. Iturbide's instructions were to dispatch large convoys rather than small ones—an order given for efficiency, but one that gave the army commanders opportunities to manipulate trade and to direct special fees and bribes for their own personal benefit.³⁶ Iturbide was able to state that he had organized the military defenses and garrisons of all the major towns of the Bajío, and he bragged that he would announce the final expulsion of all insurgent bands within six months. However, he petitioned for 800 to 1,000 additional troops and 500 to 600 muskets that would be paid for by the towns. He required an effective rapid deployment force and worried that without this additional assistance, the insurgent bands would continue to enter his jurisdiction.³⁷

Iturbide's instructions outlined the regulations for the dispersal of property and items of value recovered following military actions. First, 25 percent of the value of commercial items was to be distributed to the soldiers and the other 75 percent returned to the legitimate owners who had eight days to present themselves and to make claims. If no one claimed the goods or other property recovered after this time, everything was to be sold at public auction with the proceeds deposited in the treasury of the division. If no legitimate claimant came forward, the value of unclaimed stolen property that had been in insurgent hands for three days or more was to be distributed among the soldiers. Stolen goods that had been in rebel hands for fewer than three days were to be returned to their legitimate owners if such persons could be identified.³⁸

36. Instrucción para la División de la Provincia de Guanajuato al Comandante de la Batallón de Celaya, Don Agustín de Iturbide, México, 27 April, 1813.

37. Iturbide to Calleja, Irapuato, 28 May, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

38. Ibid.

As was obvious from these regulations, questions relating to stolen property opened many possibilities for corruption and led to angry claims by property owners who felt that they had been deprived of proper avenues to seek restitution of their property.

Notwithstanding Iturbide's successful efforts to gain respect and friendship among army officers, he expressed little understanding for the royalist-civilian sector of the population, and as for the insurgents, his hatred for their cause was palpable. His heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations were successful to a certain point in driving out committed insurgents, but rampaging troops often caused significant property damage and disrupted farming and livestock—with the soldiers often requisitioning animals and crops for their own use and consumption. In the view of the central regime and his superiors in the royalist army, Iturbide's successes in curbing the insurgents in the Guanajuato region during 1813 and his application of counterinsurgency operations were major successes. Brigadier José de la Cruz, Comandante General of Nueva Galicia, recommended Iturbide without reservation as an officer who had served in more than forty wartime actions and throughout his military career illustrated “. . . his talent, disposition for command, energy, constantly accredited patriotism, military bearing, knowledge, and capacity for independent command.”³⁹ Cruz pointed out that even though Iturbide had lost much of his fortune in the war, he had given generously to support the treasury.

In 1813, the movement of José María Morelos and many insurgent chiefs against Valladolid province and city forced Viceroy Venegas to move the royalist army divisions commanded by Iturbide and Pedro Celestino Negrete from Guanajuato and Nueva Galicia to provide reinforcements. Brigadier García Conde praised “el infatigable Iturbide” who seemed to be everywhere taking on the insurgents. He led the force that expelled the insurgent Luciano Navarrete from Zacapo and then captured the fort of Juajilla. Brigadier García Conde concluded, “There is no way to reward this gallant officer whose victories are innumerable.”⁴⁰ Once again having distinguished himself in combat, Iturbide returned to Guanajuato following meetings with Viceroy Calleja in Mexico City to discuss the final pacification of Guanajuato province.⁴¹

Although Guanajuato appeared somewhat more tranquil during 1813 than either Valladolid or Nueva Galicia, the breakdown of law and order

39. José de la Cruz to Venegas, Guadalajara, 24 January, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 149.

40. Diego García Conde, Comandante General de Valladolid to Calleja, 17 de marzo de 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 900.

41. José de la Cruz to Venegas, Guadalajara, 6 February, 1813; Cruz to Venegas, 26 February, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 149; and *el Diario Militar de D. Agustín de Iturbide y Aramburu*, 1812-1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

exposed everyone in the country to the immorality, criminality, and other evils of war. However, on May 8, Iturbide wrote to Mariscal del Campo José de la Cruz, informing him that the day before he had returned to Celaya from Querétaro escorting a convoy from Valladolid, he awoke at 2:00 A.M. in the morning having heard some commotion nearby. He discovered that all of the soldiers of the Provincial Cavalry Corps of Nueva Santander who had served as escorts for the convoy were up and moving about. Many had saddled their horses and packed their saddlebags with the obvious intention of fleeing northward to Nueva Santander. Iturbide aroused the guards and ordered the cavalymen who were caught red handed in the act of desertion to be jailed. At first he intended to impose severe exemplary punishments. In questioning the prisoners, he learned that the reason for their sudden action was that Governor José Joaquín de Arredondo of Nueva Santander had ordered his men to sack the property of their families and to confiscate their oxen. Next, Arredondo imposed new taxes as high as ten or even twenty pesos monthly to support the military forces of the northern region. The soldiers could not afford such taxes and lamented that their families labored with zeal and honor during difficult times while their men were away serving in the royalist army. Iturbide learned shortly after that what really vexed and horrified the cavalymen of Nueva Santander was information from home that contained shocking revelations that soldiers serving Arredondo “. . . had committed atrocious acts that stained the honor of their women.”⁴² Some said that if they had not felt so much respect for Iturbide, even before they learned this terrible news, they would have deserted to protect their loved ones. Rather than imposing punishments for attempted desertion, Iturbide recognized the strong character of these cavalymen and instead arranged to award them temporary leave by squadrons to visit home.⁴³

Although Iturbide acted responsibly in this case and sorted out a difficult situation, at other times he behaved more like a common thug than a senior royalist officer responsible for the maintenance of public tranquility and good government. On August 1, 1813, for example, he departed from Guanajuato in command of a convoy escorting a shipment of silver belonging to the royal treasury destined for Mexico City. As was normal for the times, a strong detachment of mounted troops guarded the silver shipment and the travelers who accompanied the convoy. From Silao, the convoy proceeded to the Hacienda de Cuevas where Iturbide announced they would spend the night. He ordered the soldiers to take straw and hay for the animals without accounting for the amounts used or offering to pay the hacienda mayordomo. Iturbide ordered or at least

42. Iturbide to José de la Cruz, Celaya, May 8, 1813, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Roll 1.

43. Iturbide to Calleja, San Miguel El Grande, 4 June, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

permitted the soldiers, muleteers, and travelers to remove anything they wanted from the houses and barns. Before long, these activities became little more than pure vandalism as they destroyed furniture and then burned it outdoors to make light. Writing about the damage, the hacendado, Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Otero of the Provincial Battalion of Guanajuato complained bitterly that the revelers “. . . assaulted a beautiful and costly vineyard and garden, tied their horses to the grape vines, and what is more painful they committed equal offenses against the houses and huts of the poor servants and renters of the hacienda.”⁴⁴ When Otero heard that Iturbide planned an overnight stop at his hacienda, he went there to welcome him formally and instead witnessed the results of the mayhem caused by the men of the convoy. For his part, Iturbide received him in a “gruff and severe manner.”⁴⁵ Otero expressed well-founded shock at the level of the damage and destruction to his property. He wondered why Iturbide permitted such an outrage as if he was “. . . a traitor, rebel, or a declared and obstinate insurgent.” The next day, Otero had his mayordomo present a bill to Iturbide who answered: “The King pays nothing!”⁴⁶ Although it is difficult to fathom Iturbide’s behavior in the trashing of the Hacienda de Cuevas, it seems likely from this behavior that he held some sort of grudge against Otero.

In addition to his provincial militia rank and military experience, Otero was the son of a wealthy Guanajuato mine-owning family and likely the wrong person to abuse even by a commander as powerful as Iturbide. Otero felt that he had no alternative other than to appeal directly to Viceroy Calleja for justice. He had served as a combat officer under Calleja at the battles of Puente de Calderón, under Brigadier Miguel de Emparán at Lomas del Maguey at Zitácuaro; and under Brigadier Joaquín del Castillo y Bustamante at Acuicho and Zipimé. Of even greater importance, Otero stated that his family had paid over one million pesos to the royal treasury in taxes on silver (*Diezmos* and *Señorajes*). Moreover, he had given a donation of 20,000 pesos to support the war against France and another 15,000 pesos in December 1812.⁴⁷ Otero pointed out that this vile behavior trampled

. . . a patriot who defends the just cause and serves his sovereign, who has abandoned his home, his wife and children, all of his comforts, and who has suffered the loss of 300,000 pesos on his haciendas that the enemy insurgents have robbed and sacked.⁴⁸

44. Pedro Otero to Viceroy Calleja, Guanajuato, 12 August, 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

Though Otero admitted openly that he feared the vengeful anger of Señor Iturbide, he had no alternative other than to make a formal complaint to Viceroy Calleja.

As might be expected, Iturbide refuted all of Otero's charges—defending himself and his actions in the matter with expected defensive vigor. He described the furniture in the house at the hacienda as absolutely wretched and dirty with broken tables, benches, and no available writing desks. He noted that the room assigned to Lieutenant Colonel Francisco de Orrantia did not have a chair and that “. . . the *petaquillas* (small leather trunks) and chests served for seats and table.”⁴⁹ Iturbide pointed out that if there was no furniture, how could it be broken? He went on to make the basest sort of comments about Otero, insinuating without any evidence whatsoever that he was a person of dubious loyalty. Considering Otero's family background, his military service, and his proven record of strong loyalty to the Spanish crown, Iturbide's remarks simply served to draw attention to his own aggressive, haughty, and rather irrational behavior. Although Calleja did not appear to intervene directly in the dispute, he cannot have been impressed by this affair. Indeed, as will be seen, Iturbide came under growing criticisms and complaints from Guanajuato. Even in 1813, Viceroy Calleja must have developed suspicions about Iturbide who time and again proved his worth in battle against the insurgents, but on other occasions, exhibited characteristics that damaged the royalist cause.

In part, the incidents of Iturbide's heavy-handed and violent behavior reflected his broader fear that the war against the insurgents had become an endemic struggle with no obvious end. The emergence of many armed insurgent bands theoretically loosely connected to a mostly illusory Junta Revolucionaria left royalist commanders with no central target to attack. They faced the arduous, exhausting, and thankless task of chasing small rebel formations that coalesced or dispersed according to the pressure exerted by the counterinsurgency side. In Guanajuato and the surrounding provinces, if pressured by royalist forces, insurgent fighters could simply lay low in rugged terrain or conceal their weapons to appear as innocent campesinos tending to their milpas. The presence of their women and children helped to present the illusion if not the reality that they were peaceful noncombatants. Since the royalist militia forces in rural areas were part-time soldiers with their own occupation, when they stood down or moved away to patrol other districts, the insurgents simply returned to their small scale or larger scale raids upon royalist haciendas, pueblos, and ranchos. In the latter part of 1814, Iturbide issued orders for the arrest and incarceration of several hundred

49. Iturbide to Calleja, Salamanca, 24 October 1813, AGN:OG, vol. 426.

women in the regions of Irapuato and Guanajuato, most of whom were most likely the wives and family members of insurgents rather than actual combatants.⁵⁰ In theory, this appeared to be a good means of attacking the insurgency, but as might be expected, Iturbide and others had to face a succession of charges of abusing noncombatant women.

In the ongoing exchange of threats on the propaganda side of the guerrilla-style war, on December 31, 1814, Iturbide received a copy of an order of the Junta Revolucionaria published by "Cabecilla" Presbítero Torres that authorized the burning of all royalist haciendas and settlements in the jurisdiction of Irapuato and Celaya within five leagues of loyal pueblos. The purpose was to prevent the movement of provisions into those royalist communities with the goal of driving the population out of the region. Iturbide responded to this challenge with a draconian *bando* (edict) of his own directed to all of the communities and territories under his command. He stated that if the bandidos (referring to the insurgents) continued and actually introduced their "barbarous plan," he would execute by firing squads the women of the *cabecillas* (the insurgent chiefs) who were his prisoners in the jails of Guanajuato and Irapuato. Furthermore, he threatened to destroy all of the towns that the insurgents called their own and where they sheltered and gave assistance to their noncombatant population.⁵¹ Fortunately, notwithstanding this threat, Brian Hamnett is correct in his comment that no evidence exists that Iturbide actually moved forward with a program to execute the wives and female relatives of the insurgent chiefs.⁵² Nevertheless, he introduced new measures to separate the royalist pueblos from contact with the insurgents, introducing orders that the haciendas and ranchos on the frontier with insurgent territories must immediately remove all animals from the front line of contact, remove or burn seed crops, and burn off all pastures for three to four leagues. All persons found in this no-man's-land separating the two belligerent sides were to be killed. After four years and four months of war and continuing insurgent efforts to burn royalist haciendas, Iturbide declared that this enemy deserved absolutely no kindness or consideration.⁵³

The insurgent threats and Iturbide's responses during the latter part of 1814 illustrate a general hardening of attitudes and the deep enmity between the two sides of a conflict that dragged on with no apparent victor in sight. Iturbide's "General Instruction to be Observed by the

50. Brian R. Hamnett, "Royalist Counterinsurgency and the Continuity of Rebellion: Guanajuato and Michoacán, 1813-1820," 29-30.

51. Iturbide to Calleja, December 31, 1814, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Reel 1.

52. Brian R. Hamnett, "Royalist Counterinsurgency and the Continuity of Rebellion: Guanajuato and Michoacán, 1813-1820," 29-30.

53. Iturbide to Calleja, Salamanca, no. 327, 30 December, 1814, AGN: OG, vol. 430.

Commanders of Patriotic Patrols (*Partidas*) that Must Work on the Perimeter of Their Respective Places,” of November 1, 1814,⁵⁴ illustrated a high level of hostility toward the enemy and fear about the people’s loyalty. The Instruction ordered that armed parties must not include freight mules or tax collectors. In the event that the comandante militar of the pueblo asked the commander of the *partida* to solicit provisions, the additional individuals dispatched were to be armed and incorporated into the patrol. These persons were not to leave the *partida* without official permission from the comandante. They were forbidden to move sheep or other livestock without having made prior arrangements with the sellers. All horses and mules were to be removed and none left even for the use of the *curas* and *vicarios* (vicars). However, if the curas, administrators, and mayordomos of the haciendas were judged to be in need of these animals in order to perform their duty, the number of horses necessary to complete the task would be left behind. All animals judged to be too thin or otherwise incapable were to be killed with an edged weapon so that none would fall into the hands of the insurgents. All forges and saltpeter factories were to be destroyed without exception. All *herreros* (blacksmiths), *plateros* (silversmiths), *cobeteros*, (fireworks makers), and *fundidores* (smelter and foundry workers) were to live in the towns according to the wishes of the comandantes. However, the towns of their residence had to be guarded by soldiers and each individual was to present himself to the comandante once every three days. The penalty for fleeing without permission was severe—capital punishment. A complete census was to be kept of all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty years of age—or older if men were still strong and robust. Finally, all residents were obliged under the threat of severe penalties to denounce any of their neighbors who had gone over to the insurgents. The comandante was to maintain a complete census of anyone who was absent from his jurisdiction.⁵⁵

The General Instruction included a section on the investigation or interrogation of individuals that stated that each suspect should be examined individually. However, this rule varied regarding the questioning of young boys who could be examined either by themselves or with another boy. Iturbide noted the interrogation of boys could be successful simply by offers of money or threats of whippings or execution that usually made them tell everything they knew. The key information

54. Reglamento ó Instrucción General para la observancia de los Comandantes de Partidas Patrióticas que han de obrar en la Circunferencia de sus Respectives Lugares. Agustín de Iturbide, 1 November, 1814, AGN:OG, vol. 403.

55. *Ibid.*, Articles 2 to 12.

needed was to identify which men of the community were absent and serving with the insurgents, and who in the community possessed horses, mares, mules, and even if they were not insurgents, where they had hidden or placed them. The same methods could be used to identify blacksmiths and silversmiths who might not have admitted their trades. Finally, Iturbide referred interrogators to his order of October 29, 1813, issued at Hacienda de Villachuato stating “. . . families that may follow the fortunes and footsteps of their insurgent husbands and fathers, were to be arrested and conducted to the General headquarters of the province and later to suffer confiscation of their possessions and the burning of their houses. All confiscated goods and possessions were to be delivered to the *comandante* of the pueblo who was to arrange a public sale. If the sum collected was relatively small, Iturbide ordered that the total should be distributed among the troops of the garrison.⁵⁶

Summing up the results of his operations during October 1814, Iturbide informed Calleja that he was most pleased to announce that the Ejército del Norte that he commanded had not had a man wounded or killed, had killed 136 insurgents, and had executed another eighty-one. The major actions in this month had taken place at Puruándiro and La Piedra against insurgents belonging to the *gavillas* of el Presbítero José Antonio Torres, Navarrete, and Saénz—three “corrupted” clergymen. They had seduced a large number of naïve people who would pay the price for their foolishness.⁵⁷ In November, Iturbide had been ordered to send recruits to fill vacancies in the Provincial Dragoon Regiment of the Prince, but this effort had not gone as well as he expected. The men from the countryside who were dexterous in the management of horses from San Pedro Piedragordo and Pénjamo districts were either already serving with the insurgents or those who were not had fled as soon as the royalist troops showed up. However, he was able to send twenty-four to twenty-six replacements. He decided not to send militiamen from the Dragoon Companies of León and San Fernando to reinforce the Regiment of the Prince since these patriots served with pleasure and the regiment was known for its chronic low morale. Iturbide noted that Colonel Francisco de Orrantia had been very successful in pursuing and crushing rebels—killing about one-hundred of them in skirmishes at Villa de San Felipe and Dolores.⁵⁸ Also in November 1814, Iturbide met at La Piedad with Brigadier Pedro Celestino Negrete of Nueva Galicia to work out an accord that would permit effective communication and cooper-

56. *Ibid.*, Articles 16 and 17.

57. Iturbide to Calleja, no. 257, 4 November, 1814, AGN:OG, vol. 430.

58. Iturbide to Calleja, no. 306, 25 November 1814, AGN:OG, vol. 430.

ation between the two jurisdictions designed to eliminate the principal rebel *gavilla* led by el Presbítero Torres.⁵⁹

Iturbide and the Trials of Counterinsurgency Warfare, 1815–1820

During the first months of 1815, Iturbide and Viceroy Calleja discussed the continuing crisis in the province of Guanajuato and in the neighboring provinces where the fragmented insurgency kept alive a low level of warfare that prevented economic recovery and forced the royalists to maintain an extensive system of regional and district mobilizations. In a dispatch dated April 2, 1815, Iturbide agreed with Calleja that they both wanted to see the renewal of mining, agriculture, commerce, and industry, but at present, it was impossible to achieve these goals. Showing some frustration, Iturbide stated that he had to dedicate his full attention to two tasks—eliminating the insurgents and organizing the monthly convoy from San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato to Querétaro and the capital. He dispatched Colonel Francisco de Orrantia with a strong division to attack rebel forces to the north and west along the borders of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, and Nueva Galicia. However, in the south, southeast, and southwest, Iturbide lacked sufficient troops to contain the growing bands that moved from Valladolid and Nueva Galicia into Guanajuato province.⁶⁰

Quite clearly, Iturbide confronted the age-old difficulties of counterinsurgency forces drawn from conventional armies that lacked the numbers or the organization to fight popular insurgencies that for the sake of survival adopted guerrilla warfare techniques and deployed many small bands (*gavillas*). In his thinking and correspondence, Iturbide grappled with how to develop responses to the threats—once again formulating some ideas that before long would produce a significant backlash from the civilian population and threaten both his career and reputation. In letters to Calleja written in Silao and Irapuato during June 1815, Iturbide outlined the problems and suggested solutions. He began by identifying the curas who lived in places defended by the royalist forces and took orders from the Junta Revolucionaria also called the *Supremo Congreso*. They preached in favor of rebellion, collected tithes (*diezmos*) for the rebel chiefs, celebrated their holidays, and mourned their lost dead. Iturbide said that these priests had to be removed. With the goal

59. Acuerdo o combinación formada por el Brigadier D. Pedro Celestino Negrete y Coronel D. Agustín de Iturbide contra la principal *gavilla* del rebelde Presbítero Torres, *La Piedad*, 29 November, 1814, AGN:OG, vol. 161.

60. Iturbide to Calleja, Querétaro, no. 370, 2 April, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 430. See also Alamán, *Historia de México*, 4, 298–299.

of finding a way to achieve the pacification of the region, he argued correctly that the rebels lacked the organization, discipline, or training to stand up to an army of even halfway disciplined troops of good order and morale. He stated that the rebels “. . . lay waste to the country, destroy, and assassinate” and then flee pursuing troops and move into some other jurisdiction. To solve this difficulty, Iturbide proposed that the civilian royalist population must abandon their many small pueblos and *rancherías* (settlements) where they lived beyond army supervision. He said an immense number of *rancherías* in the mountainous and forested regions of his jurisdiction must be destroyed. Those people who rejected this plan and continued to live outside of the royalist system would be declared rebels subject to sentences as forced laborers by the army comandantes. In Iturbide's opinion this new system would unite the people and place them under the control of loyal curas and parsons.⁶¹

Just over a week later, Iturbide returned to his theme in a confidential letter written in Irapuato following an expedition into Valladolid province that took him to Puruándiro, Cuenco, Santa Clara, Cocupao, Guauiqueo, and other small communities before stopping to rest at Pátzcuaro. At the same time, Colonel Orrantía led a column that visited Zintzunzán and other towns on his march to Uruapan.⁶² Once again, Iturbide repeated his desire to remove ecclesiastics from regions and districts subject to insurgent incursions. He found the province of Valladolid to be thoroughly infected and following the orders of the rebel Congreso—even to the degree that local royalist commanders scandalously showed it some respect. In all of the small towns visited by Iturbide and Orrantía, the clerics fled before their arrival and they found only one priest in Pátzcuaro.⁶³ To make matters worse, on June 23, 1815, Calleja informed Iturbide that a royalist force commanded by Captain Márquez operating in the region between San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas had been defeated by a rebel force with the loss of 118 royalist soldiers. The rebel chiefs Fernando Rosas and Ortiz had reoccupied Dolores, and Calleja wanted Orrantía's division to root them out.⁶⁴

During the summer of 1815, Iturbide worked to establish a broad coalition of royalist forces to prevent the piecemeal destruction of provinces that lacked sufficient force to combat effective guerrilla-style warfare. On July 25, 1815, Iturbide met with Field Marshall José de la Cruz at Arandas, east of Guadalajara, to establish more effective cooperation between the provinces of Nueva Galicia, Guanajuato, San Luis

61. Iturbide to Calleja, Silao, 20 June, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 431.

62. Iturbide to Calleja, Reservado, no. 452, 28 June, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 431.

63. Ibid.

64. Calleja to Iturbide, 23 June, 1815, AGBN:OG, vol. 431.

Potosí, and Zacatecas. This represented a new effort to deal with border zones between royalist military jurisdictions in which the insurgents took advantage of the borders to move back and forth from one province to another—at times escaping from harrowing pursuits by more powerful royalist forces that stopped abruptly at the frontier of their provincial jurisdiction. This was particularly the case with Guanajuato where the insurgent bands of Rosas, Ortiz, Rozales, and Moreno gained advantage of the border zones.⁶⁵ A new problem had also presented itself with two rebel fortresses at Chilapa and, in particular, Zacapu, Michoacán, situated in rugged locations that would require amphibious assaults involving a large royalist force.⁶⁶

In recognition that the royalist side needed to contemplate significantly reorganizing and rethinking of its strategies and tactics, on September 1, 1815, Viceroy Calleja appointed Iturbide to a new and important post as Comandante General of the Army of the North. He was to decide on a new system that would eliminate the continuing problems with insurgent fortresses and to obtain more effective results from his new army of 5,716 troops deployed in three divisions garrisoned at Acámbaro, Valladolid, and Guanajuato. The general strategy adopted was to focus first upon destroying the rebel *gavillas* and second assaulting the fortifications at Cóporo, Chimilpa, and Zacapu. The idea was that once the royalist forces broke up the mobile *gavillas*, the forts alone would not be capable of controlling a large territory.⁶⁷ However, Iturbide's new command produced noticeable strains as each subordinate jurisdiction struggled to obtain additional troops. Colonel Francisco de Orrantía resigned his military command at Guanajuato stating that he lacked sufficient troops to do the job. He complained that there were too many rebel *gavillas* to chase, insufficient resources to maintain the troops, and a shortage of maize available in the royalist towns. Iturbide denied these complaints, stating that the insurgents numbered only a ninth of their estimated total in 1813. As for the maize supply, there had been a good harvest in León, Penjamo, Silao, Irapuato, Valle de Santiago, and Yuriria. He had taken special steps to ship sufficient maize to Guanajuato and San Miguel el Grande. Annoyed by Orrantía's behavior, he rejected his claim that there was a shortage of money to purchase maize, stating that ever since 1813 the funds available had increased.⁶⁸

65. Acuerdo celebrado en Arandas hoy en día de 22 julio 1815 entre José de la Cruz y Agustín de Iturbide, Arandas, AGN:OG, vol. 431.

66. Iturbide to Calleja, no. 490, Irapuato, 12 August, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 431.

67. Puntos que deben tenerse presentes para decidir el sistema general que convenga observarse en el Ejército del Norte, Agustín de Iturbide, Irapuato, 1 September, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 431.

68. Iturbide to Calleja, no. 651, 21 December, 1815, AGN:OG, vol. 432.

The Fall and Rise of Agustín de Iturbide, 1816–1821

Iturbide's sudden fall from favor and removal from his command as Comandante General of the Army of the North was sent in a dispatch from Viceroy Calleja on April 4, 1816, ordering Iturbide to Mexico City immediately to answer to the charges of various individuals. He surrendered his command to Colonel José de Castro who arrived at Salvatierra on April 14, 1816.⁶⁹ Word of Iturbide's removal soon became public and provoked several anonymous writers to comment, as well as some defenders of Iturbide who felt that the comandante general was the victim of a campaign launched in a letter of January 6, 1815, by the Cura y Juez Eclesiástico of Guanajuato, Dr. Antonio Labarrieta, protesting the inhumanity of Iturbide's threat to imprison women and children.⁷⁰ As we have seen in this study, Iturbide had been locking up women since at least 1813–1814, and one may wonder why Labarrieta brought up the matter so late. In another letter to the public circulated by an anonymous writer who described himself as “. . . a loyal servant of Your Excellency, addressed to Félix María de Cayeta (sic), he charged that Iturbide had taken over the commerce of Guanajuato and other towns and intercepted the mail of the Bajío and of Valladolid.⁷¹ Labarrieta made other charges against Iturbide—that he destroyed commerce through the monopolization and manipulation of convoys,⁷² disrupted the mining industry, permitted his troops to be insubordinate, and through his tough and uncompromising policies, created many new insurgents. Labarrieta concluded that the entire province had been annihilated and left “without agriculture, commerce, and mining.”⁷³ As Jaime E. Rodríguez O. has concluded from his recent research, the evidence against

69. Calleja to Iturbide, 4 April, 1816; and Iturbide to Calleja, no. 901, 14 April, 1816, AGN: OG, vol. 434.

70. William Spence Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), 29. See also “Informe del Dr. D. Antonio Lavarrieta, cura de la ciudad de Guanajuato, sobre la conducta que observó Iturbide siendo comandante general del Bagío,” in Vicente Rocafuerte, *Bosquejo ligerísimo de la Revolución de Méjico desde el Grito de Iguala hasta la proclamación imperial de Iturbide* (México: Luz María y Miguel Angel Porrúa, 1984), 31.

71. Carta de un fiel servidor de V.E. a Félix María de Cayeta (Calleja), n.d., 1816, LC, Papers of Iturbide, ms. 15,338, Reel 1.

72. Lucas Alamán supported this claim made by Lavarrieta with information that in 1814, Iturbide had introduced a convoy containing mercury and other equipment for the mining industry that he sold for “plata pasta,” and that like other army commanders, he manipulated the convoy system to his advantage. See Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México*, vol. 4, 42.

73. “Informe del Dr. D. Antonio Lavarrieta, cura de la ciudad de Guanajuato,” in Vicente Rocafuerte, *Bosquejo ligerísimo de la Revolución de Méjico desde el Grito de Iguala hasta la proclamación imperial de Iturbide*, 37–38.

Iturbide for his cruelties against insurgent noncombatants and for a variety of corrupt practices is significant, but he was not prosecuted.⁷⁴ Even in the matter of Iturbide's commercial dealings, the Auditor de Guerra Miguel Bataller found that as a provincial militia commander and not a regular line officer, nothing need stop him from engaging in business as a professional merchant.⁷⁵ Combining hearsay evidence that lacked credible witnesses, possible testimony that was difficult or impossible to gather in wartime conditions, and the tendency of the regime to describe more serious crimes as mere peccadilloes by commanders who supported the cause of the King, Iturbide escaped a formal investigation or trial and was able to continue his military career.

In defense of Iturbide, Lieutenant Colonel Manuel de Yruela Zamora, comandante of the Rural Battalion of Salamanca, attacked Cura Labarrieta for wishing to tarnish ". . . the brilliant civil, political, and military conduct of Agustín de Iturbide."⁷⁶ With the exception of Colonel José de Castro, Colonel Francisco Orrantía, and Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Monsalve, Labarrieta had characterized the rest of the Army of the North as "ignorant" and "insubordinate." This included all of the commanders of garrisons, divisions, and detachments, all officers, and all of the soldiers. Yruela expressed outrage at this blanket condemnation of soldiers accustomed to receiving public eulogies and tribute for performing their tasks so well. He censured Labarrieta for wielding his "poisoned pen" to issue "an inflammatory, malignant, and deceptive criminal libel" against Iturbide.⁷⁷

For his own part and as would be expected, Iturbide launched a strong rebuttal and defense against Labarrieta's "libelous" charges. First, he stated that Cura Labarrieta should not be taken seriously because he was well-known for his corrupt habits, for the acrimony that characterized him, for his restless and disturbing disposition, and "for his known deviation in political opinions."⁷⁸ The last remark was obviously meant to plant the idea that Labarrieta favored the insurgent side. Iturbide listed the charges raised by Labarrieta, beginning first with the unjust imprisonment of a militia captain and a priest, the women of Pénjamo whom he had jailed without formal charges, and at Guanajuato, with ordering the women and children of rebels to follow their husband and father. Sec-

74. Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "Nosotros somos los verdaderos españoles: La Revolución gáditana en Nueva España, 1808-1824," chapter 8, forthcoming book.

75. Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México*, vol. 4, 449-450.

76. "Letter of Manuel de Yruela Zamora to Iturbide, Salamanca, 21 September, 1816, Papers of Iturbide, ms. 15338, Reel 1."

77. *Ibid.*

78. Iturbide to Viceroy Juan Ruíz de Apodaca, n.d. 1816, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 1.

ond, he had been charged with destroying the agriculture and commerce of the region by sacking the haciendas not only of loyal subjects but also of distinguished individuals such as the Conde de Pérez Gálvez, retired Lieutenants Colonel Pedro Otero, and Francisco Crespo Gil. He was said to have burned haciendas and given a very bad example to the rebel side. Iturbide added the charges that he had destroyed commerce by monopolizing it and also the mining industry by purchasing silver at low prices, detaining convoys, and charging whatever he wanted in fees.⁷⁹

Labarrieta's third charge related to Iturbide's policy of "no conciliation" with the insurgent side that served to create more insurgents than had been destroyed with weapons of war.⁸⁰ According to Labarrieta, this policy outraged the cabildos of León, Silao, and Irapuato. Lacking cooperation, Iturbide removed the Conde de Pérez Gálvez and Colonel José de Castro from command in León and Guanajuato and also Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Guizarnotegui from Celaya. The fourth charge was that Iturbide failed to maintain discipline and subordination among the troops of his command. The towns had spent a great deal of money to support the troops yet they looked emaciated. Labarrieta had contacted Brigadier José de la Cruz and the Bishops of Guadalajara and Valladolid on this matter.⁸¹ Finally, Labarrieta noted four matters that must have outraged Iturbide: First, the soldiers lacked a solid foundation of knowledge regarding the laws of Christ. Second, he blamed Iturbide for the large loss of life in the garrison of Valencia on the past August 25 when the rebels attacked. Labarrieta stated that this was because Iturbide had previously moved a large part of the garrison. Third, Iturbide resold maize that he purchased for 2 reales per *fanega* for 2 pesos per fanega. Fourth, Iturbide used his young adjutant named Captain González as his confidant, fellow intriguer, and intimidator. To conclude, Labarrieta said that he did not hate Iturbide but that his love for the people obliged him to speak the truth.⁸²

First assembling all of these charges in order to respond to each one, one can only imagine how Iturbide felt. Known for his temper and his no nonsense approach to problems, he had no alternative other than to respond to these career-threatening accusations of crimes and misdemeanors. Characteristically, he immediately impugned Labarrieta's loyalty for holding rebel sympathies and described his "malice" and "perversity." He dismissed Labarrieta's final charge saying that his adjutant was much too young and inexperienced to handle such work. To put

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

Labarrieta's indictment into context, he stated that he had the full support of the Calbildo Eclesiástico of Valladolid and the clergy of Salamanca presided over by Dr. José Zenon who distinguished himself in favor of the royalist cause.⁸³ Iturbide lamented that Cura Labarrieta had reduced him from a man of education and distinguished origins into "un monstruo de maldad." Iturbide knew that Labarrieta spread stories that he intrigued to have Brigadier Ciriaco de Llano removed from the Army of the North and Brigadier Diego García Conde from the governorship of Guanajuato. In fact, Llano had been promoted to become the political and military governor of Puebla. For his part, Brigadier García Conde recognized him as having supported him in his career.⁸⁴

Turning to Labarrieta's major charges, Iturbide began with the house arrest or actual imprisonment of the rebel women. He responded that this had been Calleja's policy, and he simply continued the same approach. After all, the "philanthropic sentiments" of Labarrieta did not take into consideration that these women were, in fact, committed rebels! Moreover, these people had not received from the royalists the treatment meted out by Hidalgo, who in both Guanajuato and Valladolid, simply executed his opponents. Iturbide recognized that he could not change these women immediately, and he was content to keep them from committing crimes while at the same time attracting them to the "partido de la razón" (the royalist side). He stated that he had been successful with 180 of the women and only 8 of them remained in jail. The others had been released as long as they agreed to live in places defended by the royalist government.⁸⁵ Regarding the accusation of ruining agriculture, Iturbide took special exception to such an unjust and false premise because he had worked to organize the haciendas and to put them in a state capable of self-defense. He had explained in his instructions to the hacendados that their fields and crops could be damaged by as few as three to four *pícaros* (rogues) who would flee when troops showed up. He was pleased to say that none of the haciendas had been burned or sacked since he organized local forces and proper training for the hacienda workers. Among the haciendas named was the Hacienda de Cuevas that belonged to Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Otero, which Iturbide had damaged quite severely during the visit of his convoy.⁸⁶

Iturbide rejected out of hand the charges that he had interfered with or in any way damaged commerce. Although certain restrictions were

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

necessary when the army guarded merchant convoys, he denied exerting any influence that would work to his personal advantage. He was equally insistent that the royalist forces were in better shape than they had been previously and pointed out the constant battlefield victories. Both the regular line infantry units and the militia realistas had improved with training and experience—as well as expanding in total numbers available for duty. Concerning Labarrieta's consultation with Brigadier José de la Cruz and the Bishop of Guadalajara, Iturbide saw no reason why the Cura of Guanajuato and three or four opponents of the constituted authorities should have been able to make charges and spread them through the kingdom. These were nothing more than "examples of the uncivil and slanderous representations" that with "great infamy, vile and horrible malignity" they sent on to the viceroy. These were strange charges that Iturbide viewed as designed to obtain his destruction. On the one side, these people described him as "immoral, scandalous, and indulgent, and on the other side "as hypocritical, cruel, and despotic."⁸⁷

Until the matter was settled, Iturbide retained his colonelcy of the Infantry Regiment of Celaya—a post he would maintain throughout his time of tribulation. In the light of Labarrieta's charges, additional investigations of Iturbide's tenure in command at Guanajuato would be undertaken. At one point in November 1816, this led to a careful appraisal to establish if Iturbide's military knowledge and education appeared "very limited for a general who commands two vast provinces."⁸⁸ In Mexico City, on September 18, 1816, Viceroy Calleja turned over command of New Spain to his successor Juan Ruíz de Apodaca. Calleja discussed the complaints against Iturbide with Apodaca and also reported the details to the imperial government. He noted that four months previously he had ordered Iturbide to the capital to answer the charges. Rather than criticizing Iturbide, Calleja informed his successor that it was rare for military chiefs not to receive "complaints and demands" to the degree that he doubted that a single commander would remain in office if all were acted upon. He told Apodaca that he had made frequent requests to the imperial government for officers who had the virtues necessary to free him ". . . from the embarrassments and grief I have suffered." Calleja complained that an officer apropos for commanding a division for his valor and capability in combat, "often lacked the talents required in civil government and politics." Or, such officers became mixed up in

87. Ibid.

88. Examen analítico del memorial que el Dr. D. Antonio de Labarrieta, cura de Guanajuato, dirigió al Exmo. Señor Virrey contra la conducta del Señor D. Agustín de Iturbide, Salvatierra, November 3, 1816, LC, Papers of Iturbide, Ms. 15338, Reel 1.

business and commerce that led to all sorts of charges and imputations directed against the government.⁸⁹ Calleja also expressed great optimism about the improvements that he perceived in the state of the rebellion in New Spain. The large insurgent armies had disappeared, and in their place, small dispersed rebel or bandit gangs remained. Calleja had introduced amnesty programs to resettle these people, and only the most obstinate fighters remained in isolated mountainous locations, in forests and barrancas, and in the region of Lake Chapala.

Calleja was equally pleased that the imperial government had agreed to send 8,000 additional expeditionary soldiers to New Spain—an army sufficiently large to put a definitive end to the rebellion. Unfortunately for the royalists, Spain could not afford to send so many troops and only the Regimiento de Infantería Expedicionario de Zaragoza actually arrived. Viceroy Apodaca would soon learn the realities of New Spain—which, in fact, were not nearly as positive militarily as Calleja believed. After five years of debilitating struggle, exhaustion had begun to replace optimism and the guerrilla-insurgent bands did not disappear. Although royalist criollo officers such as Agustín de Iturbide truly hated the insurgents, before very long they would join forces. It is ironic that Calleja who understood New Spain better than most Spanish viceroys warned the imperial government as he departed for the Peninsula, “. . . one must never lose sight of the predisposition of colonies to cast off their dependence upon the mother country at the moment that the opportunity presents itself.”⁹⁰

Unfortunately for Iturbide, the dispute with Cura Labrarrieta dragged on and left an indelible stain that affected his career and his morale. Although, Iturbide retained his command of the Provincial Regiment of Celaya from 1816 to 1821, he lived with his family in Mexico City and on a hacienda near Chalco away from major military commissions or assignments. In Guanajuato, Colonel Cristóbal Ordoñez became Comandante General of the Bajío, and Viceroy Apodaca reassigned the various military units of Iturbide’s Army of the North. Although some historians, including Lucas Alamán, have identified a general reduction of the insurgency’s intensity, many regions remained under insurgent control and the royalists entered them only in force and for relatively short forays. In late June 1817, the Division of the Bajío suffered a defeat at the hands of the interventionist force of Francisco Javier Mina during which Ordoñez died on the battlefield.⁹¹

89. Calleja to the Marqués de Campo Sagrado, México, 6 September, 1816, Archivo General de las Indias, Seville, Sección de México, legajo 1322. See also William Spence Robertson, *Iturbide of Mexico*, 42–43.

90. *Ibid.*

91. Apodaca to Pascual de Liñán, 3 July, 1817, AGN:OG, vol. 487.

In general, despite the strength on paper of the royalist army, the years of active duty exacted a toll on the health of many officers and soldiers. Many senior commanders reported a major loss of morale and of what they described as “military attributes.” This continued through 1818 and 1819 with increased desertion by soldiers and even officers who fled their duties without official documentation.⁹² In the meantime, the chronic centers of deeply entrenched insurgency, such as the Province of Veracruz and the south of the country toward Acapulco, presented difficulties for the royalist army. Even where the royalist army defeated rebel fortifications such as Fuerte San Gregorio, the authorities were uncertain about what to do with the increasing numbers of prisoners. Most received automatic sentences to six years forced labor in presidios, but the construction of new facilities did not keep pace with numbers. The Sub-Inspector General of the army, Pascual de Liñán, proposed that prisoners captured at San Gregorio should be assigned to work in the mines, with the owners responsible for their maintenance.⁹³ At Veracruz, Liñán commissioned the young and dynamic Captain Antonio López de Santa Anna to resettle communities abandoned during the war to house-paradoned former rebels.⁹⁴

Although 1820 brought the restoration of the Spanish Constitution and excitement in New Spain about its ramifications, this news had relatively little impact upon the state of the insurgency. Although Viceroy Apodaca, now known by his new title as the Viceroy Conde de Venadito, made many efforts to reincorporate the insurgents through amnesties and other blandishments, the hard rebel core in the south of the country that fought under leaders such as Vicente Guerrero showed no enthusiasm for putting down their arms. As a result, Venadito turned to the scourge of the insurgents, Agustín de Iturbide, who by this point appeared to harbor ideas that were not altogether in line with the Spanish constitutional system. On November 14, 1820, Viceroy Venadito named Iturbide, still Colonel of the Provincial Infantry Regiment of Celaya, to take immediate charge of military operations in the region of the south toward Acapulco.⁹⁵ By signing Iturbide’s orders and restoring him to command, the viceroy unleashed a catalyst force that would turn New Spain upside down and in the process set the country on a new path.

The collapse of New Spain was swift and quite remarkable—explained

92. See, for example, Pascual de Liñán to Apodaca, no. 61, 12 February, 1818, AGN:OG, vol. 493.

93. José de la Cruz to Liñán, 23 January, 1818; and Liñán to Apodaca, no. 151, 6 March 1818, AGN:OG, vol. 493.

94. Liñán to the Conde de Venadito (Apodaca) no. 19, Veracruz, 21 January, 1819, AGN:OG, vol. 495.

95. Note of Viceroy Venadito, 14 November, 1820, AGN: OG, vol. 494.

in large part by the exhaustion caused by a decade of war and not to anything that Iturbide had accomplished as a would-be savior. He served as a catalyst force with the ability and the connections to unite much of the insurgent-hating senior military command on the royalist side with the equally tough royalist-despising insurgents such as Vicente Guerrero. Below the level of high politics, exhaustion combined with hopes for peace convinced most of the royalists and insurgents of New Spain to embrace the process. Iturbide wrote to his friends such as Pedro Celestino Negrete, contacted Guerrero, and by February 24, 1821, he issued the Plan de Iguala. On March 19, Colonel José Antonio Echávarri wrote a personal note to his friend Lieutenant Colonel Juan Isidro Marrón, speaking of "Our great work," in which on February 28 units from the Regiments of Corona, Murcia, Santo Domingo, Tres Villas, Celaya, Escuadrón del Rey, and pickets of other battalions swore loyalty and their support for independence and religion, and hope that the King or one of his brothers would come to Mexico and the liberty of all in the new Empire. Echavarrí explained, ". . . because Mexicans found themselves in danger of being the spoils of another nation, and of having to continue the destructive war that they endured for eleven years without intermission, and perhaps it would be very difficult to conclude unless they adopted these measures." Echavarrí asked Marrón to meet him at Cutzamala or Huetamo with his troops or by himself.⁹⁶

In Mexico City, Viceroy Venadito wrote immediately to the Spanish Minister of War reporting the rise of a new dangerous caudillo, Colonel Agustín Iturbide, who had served well in the provincial forces since the beginning of the insurrection. He lamented the fact that his first choice for the command of the south toward Acapulco had been Colonel José Gabriel Armijo and Brigadier Melchor Álvarez both of whom excused themselves owing to illness. At that point he moved to Iturbide, ". . . but this perfidious and ungrateful commander, forgetting his duties and abusing the confidence that I placed in him in a most unheard-of way, has raised the banner of a new revolution."⁹⁷ The viceroy did not know that both of his previous choices for the southern command, Armijo and Álvarez, would soon go over to Iturbide and support the Plan de Iguala. To further rub salt into the wound, Iturbide had the audacity to write to the viceroy to explain exactly what he was doing. Venadito immediately convoked a junta de generales to discuss the new threat, but Iturbide had already written to Brigadiers Ciriaco de Llano at Puebla and Domingo

96. José Antonio de Echavarrí to Lieutenant Colonel Juan Isidro Marrón, Teloloapan, 19 March, 1821, AGN:OG, vol. 702.

97. Viceroy Conde de Venadito to the Minister of War, 7 March, 1821, Archivo Militar de Segovia, Spain, Sección de Ultramar, legajo 230.

Luaces at Querétaro. Venadito recognized the danger posed by this new caudillo owing to his exhaustive knowledge of New Spain, his origins as an *bijo del país* (a creole), and the fact that since 1810 he had commanded many military expeditions. Iturbide was “a fearful enemy”—even more for the plans that he announced under which he would attempt to topple the legitimate government and the Spanish Constitution. He had the idea to “. . . seduce many gullible people, and to flatter the interest and ambitions of not a few who aspire to achieve the emancipation of these provinces from the metropolis.”⁹⁸ Without delay, Venadito prepared to dispatch Field Marshal and Sub-Inspector General of the Army, Pascual de Liñán, with 2,000 infantry and 640 cavalry to observe and to contain the spread of the new movement.⁹⁹

Unfortunately for the Spanish side, Venadito was correct about the siren song of Iturbide, who in a short time toppled the existing royalist regimes in Valladolid, the Bajío, Nueva Galicia, and elsewhere. Exhausted by eleven years of conflict, the old order simply crumbled without much fighting and faded away. There were some holdouts such as Brigadier Domingo Estanislao Luaces at Querétaro who attempted to put together a defense and encountered a spiraling downward slide as Viceroy Venadito attempted to withdraw troops, funds, and other resources for the anticipated final battle for Mexico City. Without an effective garrison, Luaces feared that the many amnestied former insurgents might rise up against his government.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, desertion became a major problem when more and more of the soldiers realized that the cause of Spain was dead. For his part, Viceroy Venadito flailed desperately looking for any element that might halt the daily erosion of support and reported announcements from different provinces about soldiers, administrators, and others who wanted to join the royalist side. Venadito expressed surprise when he heard that there was some support in the Bajío provinces for Iturbide. In his opinion, this seemed totally mad since these same people seemed to have forgotten “. . . the rule of a cruel and sanguinary monster that Iturbide was in that country and if given the chance he would be the same now.”¹⁰¹

In many respects, Iturbide and his followers were fortunate that the Spanish regime failed to make the last stand desired by some commanders. Certainly at Querétaro, Brigadier Domingo Luaces and other officers did their best to prepare for a battle collecting firearms, ammunition, and arranging to have uniforms sewn for new recruits. Secret

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Domingo E. Luaces to Venadito, no. 56, March 1, 1821, AGN: OG, vol. 513.

101. Venadito to Antonio Linares, March 19, 1821, AGN: OG, vol. 513.

agents entered the jurisdiction to spread the news that there would be no attack or violence of any sort from the Mexican side, and when nothing did occur, attitudes began to change. On April 11, Luaces informed Venadito that men were unwilling to serve and officers of the urban artillery unit literally had to pull men from their houses. The same gradual loss of fighting spirit could be seen elsewhere in the province where defensive preparations came to a halt.¹⁰² While he was an active commander, Luaces suffered from a debilitating recurrence of urinary tract ulcers that made it impossible for him to mount a horse or to inspect the fortifications and other defenses.¹⁰³ For Iturbide, the arrival of General Juan O'Donojú who recognized that New Spain was lost, led to the writing of a draft treaty that would recognize an independent Mexican Empire. The Treaty of Córdoba formalized the content of the Plan de Iguala and set procedures for the new government.¹⁰⁴ What remained of the Spanish regime abandoned the capital without a fight. For a time, many who knew Iturbide set aside their deep reservations about his background and what they knew from the past about his character as a comandante of royalist forces.

In 1821 as a civilian political leader and general, Iturbide needed to work closely with some of the moderate, decisive, and clear-thinking officers and administrators such as Pedro Celestino Negrete¹⁰⁵ and Anastacio Bustamante. Another was Luis Quintanar who as Captain General of Valladolid in 1820 was not quite certain about Iturbide's tactics when he had taken up the command of the South. He resisted Iturbide's advance on Valladolid as a rebel, but crossed over to the rebels with 1,400 troops, including 6 companies of the Infantry Regiment of Volunteers of Barcelona.¹⁰⁶ When Quintanar accepted the Plan de Iguala, Iturbide promoted him to the rank of general of division, and from 1822 to 1824, he served as the political chief of Jalisco. Other associates who Iturbide looked up to as men of vision and resolve, such as José de la Cruz, rejected the Plan de Iguala. In spite of Cruz's long association with New

102. Luaces to Venadito, no. 143, 11 April 1821, AGN: OG, vol. 514.

103. Report of Dr. José Sanz, Director y Inspector de Hospitales, Querétaro, 31 March, 1821; and Luaces to Venadito, no. 138, 9 April, 1821, AGN: OG, vol. 514.

104. Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "The Transition from Colony to Nation: New Spain, 1820-1821," in Jaime E. Rodríguez O, ed., *Mexico in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Press, 1994), 122-132.

105. Negrete was exiled from Mexico and died in Bordeaux, France. Lucas Alamán stated that "... he (Negrete) always remained loyal to the interests of Mexico, always desiring the best for the nation." See Lucas Alamán, *Historia de México*, vol. V, 832-833.

106. Conde de Venadito to the Secretario de Estado y de Despacho de la Guerra, Guanabacoa, Cuba, 17 November 1821, AGMS: Ultramar, legajo 224.

Spain, he opted to return to the mother country. As the leader of the quite turbulent new nation, Iturbide failed to rise above his quarrelsome tendencies that earlier in his career so often bogged him down in recriminations and angry denunciations. In a word, he lacked the personality if not the ambition to be an emperor.