Felipe de Rábago y Terán commanded two presidios in Texas in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. His first captaincy was at San Francisco Xavier de Gigedo near the present-day town of Rockdale, where he assumed authority in early December 1751; his second was at San Luis de las Amarillas just outside modern-day Menard, where he arrived on September 30, 1760. During the nine-year interval between these postings, Rábago became the most notorious of all presidio commanders in Spanish colonial Texas. Indeed, for nearly eight of those years, following his possible involvement at San Xavier in the murder of a Franciscan priest

"New Light on Felipe de Rábago y Terán" by Donald E. Chipman and Luis López Elizondo from *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Vol. CXL, No. 2, October, 2007. Used with permission of the Texas State Historical Association. The full version of this article with notes available in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* III (October 2007): 161–181.
and a tailor from San Antonio, he was either under house arrest at Presidio Santa Rosa María del Sacramento in Coahuila or incarcerated in the public jail of the adjoining town. The circumstances that prompted the release and reassignment of a person of such questionable reputation to the largest military garrison in Texas are little short of remarkable.

The full story of Rábago, however, has not been told because historians, including the primary author of this article, who have written about Rábago have not had the benefit of documentation that has recently surfaced. Luis López Elizondo, an independent researcher and historian in Múzquiz, Coahuila, and Jerome Farrell, a British citizen and seven-times-removed nephew of Rábago, both have uncovered and generously shared new material relative to the captain’s tainted career in Texas. The fresh evidence provided by these two researchers and Robert S. Weddle, the author of a recent book, makes this article possible.

Seldom do historians get the opportunity to set the record straight by correcting their own words in print. That we are occasionally able to do so reminds us that history is an ever changing discipline that must be revised in the light of new evidence, from which flows new conclusions.

During the late 1740s, Franciscan priests of the missionary college of Querétaro spearheaded efforts to found religious outposts some 130 miles northeast of San Antonio on the San Gabriel River. By July 1749, three missions collectively known as San Xavier sought to address the spiritual needs of Tonkawas, Akokisas, Bidais, Deadoses, and Cocos. Lacking, however, was a military garrison to provide protection against marauding Lipan Apaches. This lack of security encouraged desertions on the part of the neophytes and hampered religious proselytization by the friars.

To remedy the situation, on March 11, 1751, the viceroy of New Spain formally appointed Felipe de Rábago y Terán as captain of a not yet established presidio on the San Gabriel River. It is worth noting that Rábago’s command had previously been approved at the court of Ferdinand VI on March 6, 1750. Don Felipe’s specific orders included the recruitment of a maximum of fifty soldiers, as well as a number of civilian settlers to support the missionary enterprise.

Why Rábago? This is a question that has not been adequately addressed until now, but it will hardly surprise anyone to learn that family connections figured importantly in his appointment. Don Felipe was born on May 12, 1722, in the small mountain village of Tresabuela in Cantabrian province, northern Spain. He was the sixth and youngest offspring of Felipe de Rábago y Terán and Lorenza Roiz Fernández. Those familiar with modern Spanish surname conventions might surmise that this child would be named Felipe de Rábago (y) Roiz. Instead, he was given the exact surname of his father. While a bit unusual, it was far from rare in earlier times when surname usage varied considerably among brothers and sisters.

Capt. Felipe de Rábago, to distinguish him from his father with the same surname, benefited from a long line of ancestors associated with the town of Tresabuela. The senior Rábago and his father were both aldermen in the area’s city council. Both are also listed as “hidalgo” in local census returns—meaning they were members of the lowest rung of Spanish nobility.
Don Felipe’s grandfather and great grandfather were likewise vecinos (citizens) of Tresabuela. More important, a branch of the family in Tresabuela included the famous Jesuit priest Francisco de Rabago y Noriega who became the confessor of King Ferdinand VI (1746–1759). In the mid-1700s fray Francisco, probably a distant cousin of don Felipe, wielded considerable political influence at the Spanish court.

Captain Rabago also had family connections in Mexico City. His eldest brother, José de Rabago, was a knight of Santiago and chief accountant of the Royal Mint. The captain, himself, had acquired substantial wealth in trade between Mexico City and Zacatecas. A combination of family connections and personal wealth made Rabago a seemingly ideal appointment as commander of a presidio in a poor, distant province on the northern frontier of New Spain. However, family background and money did not guarantee character, which was singularly lacking in the young captain. As for judgment, during his first command in Texas, Governor Jacinto de Barrios y Jáuregui (1751–1759) cryptically remarked of Rabago that he possessed less of it than money.

Since Rabago was especially enjoined to cooperate with the Franciscan priests in Christianizing and Hispanicizing Indians at the mission sites on the San Gabriel River, his performance to that end would be extraordinarily lax. En route to his command, he made extended stopovers in Monclova and San Antonio. At those locales he made it clear that he had already developed an intense dislike for mission padres.

In accord with his instruction to enlist as many as fifty soldiers and a few settlers for his command, Rabago recruited Juan José Ceballos, a tailor in San Antonio. Soon after, the young captain began intimate relations with Ceballos’s wife, a liaison that continued on the march to the missions. At the Cibolo River, the cuckolded husband protested the captain’s conduct and found himself in chains, charged with threatening the commander of the expedition.

On reaching the San Xavier missions, Rabago stated that his instructions from the viceroy required one of the missionaries there to serve as chaplain of the new garrison. Appointed in that capacity by his religious superior in San Antonio was fray Miguel Pinilla of Mission Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. Pinilla then sought to end the illicit affair between Rabago and Ceballos’s wife by asking the former to send the woman back to San Antonio. Instead of complying with the chaplain’s request, Rabago apparently blamed the maltreated husband for forcing the issue. He had Ceballos shackled against the wall of his cell, placed a cot before him, and ravished the man’s wife in his presence.

By late December 1751, Rabago had selected a site for Presidio San Xavier de Gigedo and had begun construction of the garrison. During Christmas Eve festivities, he learned that Ceballos had broken free of his fetters and fled to Mission Candelaria where he sought refuge in its chapel. On the following day, Rabago rode his horse into the chapel, apprehended the unfortunate Ceballos, returned him to confinement, and cuffed him about for good measure.

Fray Pinilla was outraged, pointing out that on Christmas—one of the most scared days of the Christian calendar—Rabago had brazenly violated an ecclesiastical sanctuary. The chaplain demanded that Ceballos be returned to the mission and that Rabago apologize for

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his actions. On December 27, Rábago returned the unfortunate settler but offered no apology. From that day forward, Pinilla and Rábago would be locked in a contest of wills. And it would not end well.

Both men complained about each other in letters written to officials in Béjar. Captain Rábago asked that fray Pinilla be removed as chaplain. The request was denied by his superior. Fray Pinilla joined fellow priests at San Xavier in drafting a litany of complaints about unsympathetic governors and troublesome civilians in Texas who had repeatedly undermined their efforts and those of their former co-religionists to save the souls of Indian neophytes. They nevertheless charged that all “impostures,” “craftiness,” and “machinations” of past administrators and settlers had been “outdone by the malice of this man [Rábago].”

With their captain as role model, soldiers at the presidio, most of whom were separated from their families, began intimate relations with Indian women at the three missions. In the words of historian fray Juan Agustín Morfi, “the neophytes saw themselves deprived of their wives and daughters by the soldiers, oppressed by excessive labor, insulted every moment of the day, and denied the right to voice their misfortune.”

Some of the more Christianized Indian women sought expiation of their carnal sins in the confessional, and as a result evidence mounted of gross misconduct by soldiers at the presidio. On February 19, 1752, an astonished Rábago and his entire command found themselves excommunicated by decree of fray Miguel Pinilla. This initially served only to worsen animosities between the chaplain and the presidials. The latter reacted by tearing up the decree and burning it. But on reflection, the soldiers soon worried about the fate of their souls. One by one they begged forgiveness, and by March 1, 1752, all had received sacramental penance, granted by fray José Ganzábal.

When first apprised of the situation at San Xavier, authorities in Mexico City expressed serious concerns over the ban. The military adviser to the viceroy voiced sympathy for poor ignorant soldiers stationed 430 leagues from the capital. He thought their irreverence did not deserve “the ultimate knife and penalty of the church.” The viceroy’s legal adviser opined that if the mission Indians learned the severity of the penalty, which carried the certainty of Spaniards burning in their version of hell, they would think “the captain crazy and might kill him.”

This incident of excommunication passed, but it left bitter resentments in its wake, especially with Rábago and the soldiers. Then in late spring 1752, perhaps the most infamous, certainly the most controversial, double controversy in Texas colonial history occurred at one of the San Xavier missions. The victims were fray José Ganzábal and the luckless tailor Juan José Ceballos. It appears that the prime target, chaplain Miguel Pinilla, escaped death because of where he was seated at a table during the men’s evening meal and darkness that perhaps spoiled the aim of assassins.

At just before nine o’clock on the night of May 11, 1752, Ceballos and the two priests sat down for supper at Mission Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. The former Béjar tailor had been granted permanent refuge at the mission after Rábago returned him there on the previous December 27.
And it will be remembered that both priests had been involved with the excommunication of the captain and soldiers of the presidio. The night was warm, and the door of a small cell had been opened to catch a cooling breeze. A single candle lighted the interior of the cubicle. Ceballos was seated with his back to the portal; to his right sat fray Ganzábal; while opposite Ceballos and farthest from the door was fray Pinilla.

The quiet of the evening was shattered by the blast of a Spanish musket, its charge penetrating Ceballos’s chest cavity and killing him instantly. Fray Ganzábal grabbed the candle, rushed to the door of the cell, and peered into the darkness. At that very instant a Coco Indian arrow struck the padre in the left armpit and penetrated his heart. As the mortally wounded priest sank to the floor, the candle blew out, pitching the cubicle into darkness. A second shot fired from a musket failed to find fray Pinilla, its intended victim.

There followed almost eight years of charges and countercharges. The extensive legal record, as presented by the prosecution and defense, is filled with contradictory testimony and evidence. The documentation also contains some of the more arcane Spanish one is likely to encounter in reading eighteenth-century materials. Deriving accurate translations of the proceedings has been greatly facilitated by Luis López Elizondo.

Given the circumstances that surround the murders at Mission Candelaria, the question of the complicity of Captain Rábago, charged as he was to provide security for the mission outposts, quickly arose. His illicit relations with Ceballos’s wife and his rough handling of her husband, as well as his heated disputes with fray Pinilla, provided ample motive for his involvement in foul play. However, he was not one of the assassins. On the fateful night of the murders and at the precise moment of their occurrence, Rábago had an ironclad alibi. Roused from bed at the presidio on hearing the loud reports of firearms, the captain gathered a few men, mounted a horse, and dashed off to Mission Candelaria. There he discovered the bodies of Ceballos and Ganzábal.

On May 15 Rábago sent an account of the murders to the viceroy. Recognizing that he might well be held responsible if soldiers under his command were the perpetrators, the captain placed full complicity on the Coco Indians. In doing so, he stressed the intractable nature of these natives and their refusal to accept conversion to “our holy faith.” The presidio captain, in a self-serving manner, insisted that only the clatter of his horse's hooves and his prompt response had kept the Cocos from killing all of the priests and their neophytes. The darkness of night, however, had prevented him from immediately pursuing the evildoers. He next contended that these very Indians, who belonged to a nation infamous for the commission of murder and robbery, had many years ago been responsible for the death of Capt. Domingo Ramón at La Bahía del Espíritu Santo. Lastly, Rábago begged permission from the viceroy to wage a war of extermination against the Cocos. The request was denied, but the possible involvement of these Indians in the slaying of Ceballos and Ganzábal is highly questionable.

Ten days before the assassinations, the Coco Indians had deserted Mission Candelaria en masse. On May 1 two Cocos entered the presidio armed with bows and arrows. Rábago ordered the Indians seized, disarmed, and beaten. Fearing further reprisals, the Indians fled to
the countryside on that very night. Rábago claimed that he sent out soldiers to track the Indians and return them to the mission, but the troopers failed to find any of them.

Prior to their exodus, the Cocos also had good reasons to dislike Juan José Ceballos. The Candelaria resident came upon a member of the nation who without authorization had killed a cow at the mission and was in the process of skinning it. Ceballos castigated the Indian and tried to seize the meat for proper distribution and apportionment. The Coco then engaged in a heated dispute with the tailor and called on fellow Indians to assist him in resisting the seizure. A crowd soon gathered around Ceballos, setting off a melee of shouting, shoving, and protesting natives. To defend himself, Ceballos struck one of the Indians a strong blow with the handle of his knife. Far from settling the matter, this blow led to still more Indians descending on the lone Spaniard. To control them, Ceballos fired his musket, and the ball struck the thigh of a Coco chieftain. This temporarily quieted the Indians, and the dispute passed without further violence. Nevertheless, this incident added fuel to reports of misbehavior among the Cocos, and it increased their dislike for the missionaries and their permanent resident, Ceballos.

Other suspects in the double murder were five soldiers at the presidio and their Indian ally, Andrés—a young Hispanicized Indian of the Sayopín nation. Andrés and his Christianized wife, Luisa, had been joined in marriage by fray José Ganzábal at Mission Candelaria. The young bride, however, soon caught the lustful eye of Martín Gutiérrez, a soldier at the presidio. With the concurrence of Andrés, Gutiérrez arranged for sexual favors from Luisa in exchange for a horse loaned to her husband for “three moons.”

It seems that this unholy arrangement was revealed to fray Ganzábal in the confessional. Whether the priest broke the seal of penitential secrecy is uncertain, but it is likely that fray Ganzábal strongly rebuked Luisa for her infidelity. She in turn probably informed her husband and Gutiérrez that Ganzábal was aware of their arrangement. What is absolutely certain, as revealed in the inquest to the murders, is that Gutiérrez became a prime suspect in the double slayings of May 11, 1752.

The only alleged eyewitness account of the murders came from the Sayopín Indian Andrés, employed at Mission Candelaria as a ditchdigger. He placed the blame on Martín Gutiérrez, Tomás Yruegas, Joseph Miguel de Sosa, Manuel Carrillo, Juan José Sánchez (alias Marín), and eventually himself. While hunting turkeys on the afternoon of May 11, Andrés encountered the five presidials along Brushy Creek, a source of water for the missions and the garrison. Two of the men were armed with muskets; the other two, with bows and arrows. The bows and arrows appear to have been the very weapons that had been seized by Captain Rábago at the presidio on May 1.

When Andrés came upon the soldiers, they lay in ambush, hoping to kill fray Pinilla as he walked to his favorite fishing hole. Their plans changed when the padre failed to appear. The men then decided to wait until nightfall. Under the cover of darkness, they would have a good opportunity to kill the two priests and Ceballos at Mission Candelaria. The soldiers then invited Andrés, who had far greater familiarity with bow and arrow, as well as his own reasons to dislike fray Ganzábal, to join them, and he agreed to do so.
The soldiers, disguised as Indians under skins of buffalo and deer, approached the mission at dusk. Andrés and four Spaniards remained hidden in a small creek bottom, while Gutiérrez crept forward as scout. Through the open door of a small room, he observed that the three men had just sat down to eat. Gutiérrez then returned to his companions and informed them that the time for action was at hand. According to Andrés, Gutiérrez fired the fatal ball into the back of Ceballos; and as fray Ganzábal rushed to the door of the cubicle and peered into the night, the Indian himself let the arrow that pierced the padre's heart. Fearful of disclosure if they took time to seek out fray Pinilla, the assassins may have fired the second shot into the air or into the darkened cell. Andrés, soon mounted on horseback and accompanied by his wife, set out immediately for San Antonio; the soldiers returned to the presidio.

Although Rábago persisted in his claims that the Coco Indians were the actual assassins, there are good reasons to question his assertion. First, it is generally accepted that the Cocos had little or no experience with Spanish firearms, nor did they have access to them. If that was indeed the case, how did they acquire Spanish muskets, how did they learn to load these weapons, and how did they learn to fire at least one of them with accuracy? Second, by Rábago's own admission, his soldiers could not find any of the Coco Indians after they had fled the mission ten days prior to the murders. Finally, there is the eyewitness account of the Indian Andrés who would soon confess that he had shot the arrow that pierced fray Ganzábal's heart.

It took Andrés and his wife Luisa several days to reach Béjar. Shortly after their arrival, they were summoned to testify in an investigation into the double murders, conducted by Captain Toribio de Urrutia. Initially, Andrés claimed that he and Luisa had left Mission Candelaria two days prior to the slayings. Luisa, in her deposition, identified herself with the aid of a translator as a member of the Orejón (Orejón) nation and supported her husband's testimony. According to her, she and Andrés shared food and drank chocolate with the two priests, leaving them in good health (sano) before setting out on foot for San Antonio. Later, the couple came upon other Indians who had caught two horses. Andrés bargained for one of the mounts, which they then rode to Béjar.

Unfamiliar with Spanish legal proceedings, Andrés apparently entraped himself by giving precise testimony relating to the murders, including the names of five Spanish co-assassins. He also related that Ceballos had been shot with a musket and that Ganzábal had been felled by an arrow. When asked how he knew this, since he claimed to have departed Mission Candelaria two days prior to the murders, Andrés then confessed that he had killed the priest.

There was no admission of guilt by the accused soldiers, and certainly none from Capt. Felipe de Rábago. Nonetheless, Spanish officials initially concluded that overwhelming circumstantial evidence pointed to their complicity. The six of them were removed from the San Xavier presidio and in late 1752 sent off to house arrest at Presidio Santa Rosa María del Sacramento in Coahuila, or in some cases to incarceration in cells at the nearby town. Remarkably, Rábago, although under a legal cloud, received orders to take control (posesión) of the Sacramento presidio. And, he managed to gain custody of Andrés and Luisa, who remained under his control for the better part of eight years!
A successor of Felipe de Rábago as captain of the San Xavier presidio was Pedro de Rábago y Terán, then governor of Coahuila and captain of Presidio Santa Rosa in Monclova. Historians have consistently labeled this man as don Felipe’s uncle—no doubt because of the similarity of their names, and because don Pedro was a considerably older man. The relationship between the two men is now affirmed to have been nephew/uncle, but as commonly believed don Felipe’s father did not have a brother named Pedro.

Shortly after Felipe de Rábago and the five accused soldier-assassins began their confinement in Coahuila, deteriorating conditions at the San Xavier missions doomed the entire enterprise. The ranks of the six Franciscans assigned to the area had temporarily shrunk to just one—murder and a death from natural causes reduced their number to four; of those remaining, three were summoned to San Antonio to report on the deaths of Ganzábal and Ceballos. Although three priests were soon dispatched to San Xavier to bolster the mission undertaking there, lack of rainfall in 1753 caused the San Gabriel River to recede into stagnant pools. Both soldiers and padres sought permission from the viceroy to relocate the missions and the presidio to a more favorable location, but two years of petitions failed to garner official sanction to abandon the site.

In late summer 1755, the padres and captain of the presidio acted on their own and moved all operations at San Xavier to the banks of the San Marcos River. That venture quickly failed, in large part because of an epidemic that struck the two relocated missions. It is generally believed that this contagion also claimed the life of Pedro de Rábago. Instead, there is reliable evidence that he died at his post in Monclova in March 1756.

Following the death of Pedro de Rábago, all remaining assets on the San Marcos River were moved south to the Guadalupe in that same year. At this locale, two missions and a presidio enjoyed a brief existence. They, however, were so close to San Antonio’s five missions and its presidio that their continuation made little sense. Presidio San Xavier de Gigedo ceased to exist when its soldiers and equipment were moved to Béxar. Within two years all remnants of this garrison were relocated to a new presidio with a different name on the San Saba River. These events would figure tangentially in the eventual return of Felipe de Rábago y Terán to the Texas scene. The remaining missions on the Guadalupe River would also help Rábago gain his freedom but not for another three years.

Near the end of the San Xavier enterprise, in 1754 fray Alonso Giraldo de Terreros founded the first Franciscan mission for Eastern Apache Indians to the west of Presidio San Juan Bautista. Less than a year later, the Apache neophytes rebelled, burned the mission, and fled en masse. Undaunted, the Franciscans insisted that the mission had failed because it was located too far south from the center of Apachería.

Dovetailing with the Franciscans’ continuing desire to establish another mission for the Apaches were reports of mineral wealth near the Pedernales, Llano, and San Saba Rivers, northwest of San Antonio. Three reconnaissance expeditions to the region in the mid-1750s served only to confirm the existence of an enormous mound of hematite. The last of these explorations in 1756, however, brought back information gleaned from Apaches who alleged that a mountain of silver lay just a few days’ journey to the north.

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So, a combination of religious zeal and the lure of wealth served as a powerful magnet that motivated Spaniards to move a mission on the Guadalupe River to a site about four miles east of modern-day Menard. This second Franciscan mission for the Apaches would end in tragedy and death on March 16, 1758. Mounted enemies of the Apaches, including hundreds of Taovayas (Wichitas), Comanches, Bidas, Tejas, and Tonkawas, descended on Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá, killing two priests and eight civilians and soldiers, as well as burning all buildings to the ground. Nevertheless, the destruction of this mission and the Spanish punitive expedition to the Red River that followed in 1759 also served to free Felipe de Rábago y Terán.

Just how the Red River campaign of Diego Ortiz Parrilla and its aftermath helped resurrect the career of Felipe de Rábago has never been clearly understood until now. Thanks to a new book by Robert S. Weddle, with translations by Carol Lipscomb, the interconnectedness of these events becomes crystal clear. While in Spain in 1979, Bob Weddle, arguably the dean of Texas colonial historians, found a diary of the Ortiz Parrilla expedition in a Madrid library. Weddle photocopied the holographic account, brought it to Texas, and filed it away in his personal library for two decades. But he did not dismiss it from his thoughts. While editing entries and planning others for the New Handbook of Texas with Chipman, he mentioned the diary. It so happened that Carol Lipscomb, a doctoral student in history at the University of North Texas, had begun a dissertation topic that addressed the relationship of Comanche Indians with Spaniards during the colonial, Mexican, and revolutionary periods of Texas history. Weddle, when apprised of her work, generously loaned the photocopied diary to Lipscomb, who translated it into English and used it as a primary source in her dissertation. This subsequently led to a major collaborative effort by the two, resulting in a 2007 publication.

In After the Massacre, the author points out that among Texas historians it is a well-accepted article of faith that the 1759 Red River campaign of Col. Diego Ortiz Parrilla ended in a complete rout of Spanish troops and the abandonment of several pieces of artillery. The origins of those conclusions, as Weddle persuasively argues, may be initially traced to the writings of Antonio Bonilla in 1772 and their continuation in the later works of fray Juan Agustín Morfi, Hubert H. Bancroft, William E. Dunn, and Lesley Byrd Simpson.

The campaign diary of Juan Ángel de Oyarzún casts a very different light on the actual events of the 1759 Red River campaign. Weddle questions whether the battle can even be judged a Spanish defeat at all. Rather, it probably moved the Taovayas and other Wichita groups to begin peace initiatives with the Spaniards. True, Spanish losses were significant, but the Indians suffered greater ones. And finally, there is no evidence of the Indians immediately celebrating victory—rather, there followed weeping and wailing for their killed and injured. How, then, has the historical record been distorted for so long?

Weddle carefully traces the origins of what he labels the “bad press” given the Ortiz Parrilla campaign to none other than the malicious and slanderous undertakings of Felipe de Rábago y Terán! Bitter over his nearly eight years of confinement in Coahuila, seething over his former garrison being incorporated into that of San Sabá, and determined to use any means possible to obtain his freedom, Rábago was apparently undeterred by a single scruple. He had to destroy Ortiz Parrilla’s reputation to resurrect his own. His first priority, however, was to get out of jail;
his second was to travel to Mexico City and gain an audience with the viceroy; his third was to clear himself and those accused with him of complicity in the San Xavier murders; and his fourth was to use his considerable personal wealth and possibly family influence to be restored to command in Texas—this time as Ortiz Parrilla’s successor at the San Sabá presidio.

Ortiz Parrilla’s difficulties with the Red River campaign of 1759 had begun when he tried to recruit soldiers for the venture. Initially, Ortiz Parrilla asked for aid from presidios in northern Mexico in 1758, but it was denied because those garrisons feared for their own safety. However, a brazen attack by Indians of the north on the San Sabá horse herd on March 30, 1759, resulting in the death of nineteen soldier-herdsmen and the loss of nearly 700 horses and pack mules, brought extreme pressure from Mexico City on garrison commanders in northern New Spain. This forced them reluctantly to give up members of their troop. With aid from some of these presidios, including Santa Rosa María del Sacramento in Coahuila, Ortiz Parrilla finally assembled a force of more than five hundred men. These included presidials, militiamen, Indian auxiliaries from Mexico, mission Indians, and Apaches.

After the pitched battle on the Red River, Ortiz Parrilla and his troop returned to San Sabá on October 25, 1759. Within days the commander summoned his officers and sought to persuade them to launch a new campaign against all Indians who were friendly toward or allied with the Taovayas and other Wichitas. For a variety of reasons, including approaching winter weather and the scarcity of forage for the horses, the officers demurred. Disappointed, Ortiz Parrilla appointed an officer in charge at San Sabá and led the bulk of his recruits to San Antonio where they were disbanded.

On reaching Béxar, Ortiz Parrilla must have been exasperated by rumors that had surfaced about the performance of his command during the recent campaign. As Weddle points out, a good bit of the problem may initially be attributed to the commander’s own doing. Two days after the battle, Ortiz Parrilla sent Indian runners to San Antonio with a report of it. The resulting garbled account of the engagement and its aftermath, which was put in writing by fray Mariano de los Dolores and forwarded to Presidio San Juan Bautista, greatly exaggerated the extent of the colonel’s losses. Specifically, it was reported that a bloody battle had been fought in a deep wood, and resumed later on a plain, which resulted in “the impossibility of counting the dead because so many men had fled.” The friar concluded by writing, “The evident danger consists of losing this province.”

The Oyarzún diary confirms that soldiers from Santa Rosa María del Sacramento were recruited for the Red River campaign and discharged at San Antonio to return there. With them came a sense that both San Sabá and San Antonio were threatened by Indians stirred to anger by the Red River campaign. Regardless of how this information reached Felipe de Rábago, whether from Presidio San Juan Bautista or from the returning presidials, he used the somewhat panicky aftermath of the Ortiz Parrilla expedition to gain his freedom.

Rábago took action to that end in late 1759. Posted in his behalf by Gabriel Gutiérrez de Terán, likely a relative, was a 4,000 peso bond (fianza). This permitted Rábago to leave confinement and travel to Mexico City for an audience with the viceroy. In his deposition, Rábago complained of the grave afflictions and illnesses that he had suffered while incarcerated. He especially lashed
out at the proceedings, which had asserted his complicity in the homicides at Mission Candelaria—when in fact the Coco Indians had been the actual perpetrators.

Rábago also alleged unfairness in the 1752 inquests into the homicides, especially the inquest conducted in San Antonio by Capt. Toribio Urrutia. He contended that ample evidence of his own innocence had been ignored, because his Franciscan enemies had pressured Urrutia into accepting suborned testimony against him and the five soldiers. The incarcerated captain was particularly outraged over the badgering of Andrés, which resulted in his perjuring himself by confessing that he had killed fray Ganzábal. As mentioned earlier, Andrés had remained in close proximity with Rábago for some eight years, and it just so happened that prior to don Felipe's deposition, the Sayopín Indian had conveniently recanted his confession.

In placing the blame for the homicides on the Coco Indians, Rábago obviously had the distinct advantage of there being no Indians present to defend themselves. He then sought to prove that Andrés and the five soldier-suspects could not possibly be the actual perpetrators. All had alibis that placed them either in the company of other Spaniards at the time of the homicides, or they were verified to have been some distance away from the crime scene at around 9 P.M. on May 11, 1752—making it impossible for them to have been culpable. Accordingly, in the same proceeding that allowed Rábago to leave confinement and travel to Mexico City, he set forth a strong argument for dismissal of all charges against the other suspects. That he was completely successful may stretch the credulity of readers, but in freeing himself and the others, Rábago would later tarnish the reputation of Diego Ortiz Parrilla, a competent military commander and presidio captain.

There is little doubt that Ortiz Parrilla saw his Red River campaign as a success, accomplished against tremendous odds. However, panic had ensued at Béxar, based in large part on the misconstrued message carried there by Indian runners. Priests in San Antonio asked that additional soldiers be immediately assigned to San Antonio de Béxar to protect against a feared attack by "the barbarous enemy nations of the North . . . recently offended and castigated by our arms."

Ortiz Parrilla sought to defend his performance in the Red River campaign by sending lengthy reports to the viceroy in Mexico City. In them he accurately described the situation in Texas. Its presidios had soldiers of poor quality, its security was threatened by increasing foreign influence on the northern tribes from the French and English, and its settlers faced new dangers from the Indians' access to firearms. He also asked that he be retained as commander of Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas, arguing that he was best able to deal with the dire circumstances that faced the province. It was not to be. While Ortiz Parrilla relied on letters and reports to Mexico City, Felipe de Rábago gained the ear of the viceroy.

On June 7, 1760, Interim Viceroy Francisco Caxigal de la Vega handed down a definitive sentence in response to Felipe de Rabago's deposition of the previous year. Three of the accused—Felipe de Rábago, Tomás Yruegas, and the Indian Andrés—received a most welcome verdict of innocence.

In response to recommendations made by the fiscal (legal adviser to the viceroy), "to the end of establishing the veracity and certitude of the depositions made by the Indian Andrés and
his wife," the viceroy concluded it was not possible "that the said Indian could have been implicated in the deaths." After encountering the soldiers along Las Ánimas Creek on the very day of the murders, Andrés and his wife "then slept that same night farther on at the place called Garrapatas [ticks]." Therefore, this "makes null and void the charges" against him.

As to the confession of Andrés, supported by his wife's testimony, that he had fired the arrow that killed fray José de Ganzábal, the viceroy unleashed a torrent of invective against those who had interrogated them. "The fervor [pasión] with which the judges proceeded, pressuring the accused by extraordinary means into making a confession, grilling them with accusatory questions, and committing the grave offense of trying to pressure the witnesses in changing their testimonies to suit themselves—the truth of which is made manifest in the judicial charges instituted . . . , which have resulted in plenary charges." The viceroy concluded by stating categorically "that the true perpetrators had been Coco Indians."

The viceroy next addressed the alleged complicity of Felipe de Rábago: "[Since] Captain don Felipe de Rábago had been accused by circumstantial evidence and without plenary proof in the charges, this ought not to have resulted in either capital or corporal punishment of him." Continuing, the viceroy stated: "One does not find fundamental reasons why the said captain should not be exonerated of guilt, which has the effect of releasing him from incarceration, under the surety provided by don Gabriel Gutiérrez de Terán."

Finally, the viceroy summarily dismissed charges against the accused soldiers, stating:

When one has considered all of the evidence that has mounted against the esteemed accused, as it manifests itself, not only were they not complicitous, but also that they could not have committed [the murders] at the mission Candelaria at that hour and time in which the deaths occurred, given the distance [from the mission] that they found themselves and in which they remained at the time, there can be no doubt that justice requires definitive absolution of crimes, with the conclusion that no further charges of the aforementioned homicides be made against Captain Rábago, Sergeant Sosa, Yruegas, and the Indian Andrés.

That Felipe de Rábago emerged with a clean slate from this legal proceeding, there can be no doubt. Viceroy Caxigal de la Vega ordered that he be released from prison and "rightfully absolved of all offenses, charges, damages, and loss of reputation as used against him." Furthermore, he was to "be restored to the employee of his majesty and transferred to the Río de San Sabá where command of his company shall be handed over to him."

Reinstating Felipe de Rábago to his "former" command was an exercise in tortuous reasoning on the part of the viceroy and his advisers, since Presidio San Xavier de Gijedo had ceased to exist some time ago. As mentioned, all remnants of it had been incorporated into the garrison on the San Saba River. Appointing Rábago to command at San Luis de las Amarillas meant removing its captain, Diego Ortiz Parrilla. When the colonel learned of Caxigal de la Vega's verdict, he was in Mexico City; and he immediately sought an audience with the viceroy.

Because he had expected to remain in command at San Sabá, Ortiz Parrilla failed to take along his personal belongings when he set out for the capital. Unfortunately, he would never again see those possessions. But this was minor compared to the potential loss of his
reputation and blow to his pride. Refusing to beg, he informed Viceroy Caxigal that he lamented “the conditions to which this resolution reduced me.” Caxigal was sympathetic, and he told Ortiz Parrilla that he would order Rábago to do what was right in the matter.

In compliance with the viceroy’s orders, Rábago paid a visit to Ortiz Parrilla’s residence on the following day. The newly appointed captain offered to look after Ortiz Parrilla’s personal effects at San Sabá as though they were his own, but it was an empty promise. In the words of Robert S. Weddle: “The seasoned military commander . . . succumbed to the blandishments of an inveterate con man. As for Rábago, he soon would be on the frontier, out of the viceroy’s reach, as well as Ortiz Parrilla’s.”

Felipe de Rábago was not content with his restored reputation and appointment as commander of the largest military garrison in Texas. He not only failed to look after Ortiz Parrilla’s personal effects, as he had promised to do, but launched a “smear campaign” aimed at destroying the reputation of his predecessor in command. Weddle offers convincing arguments of Rábago’s success in the latter. He also points to Antonio de Bonilla’s historical summary of the Texas province to 1772 as the first to articulate this impression, as well as present a distorted view of the Red River campaign.

Rábago arrived at the San Sabá presidio in late September 1760 and completed two troop inspections before the end of the following month. Assembled before him was a total force of ninety-seven men. Two of his senior officers were absent in San Antonio, but the remaining troopers were all well equipped with arms and tack. Most of the soldiers also had multiple mounts, likewise reflecting well on Ortiz Parrilla’s former command. This was in stark contrast to a similar inspection conducted six years into Rábago’s captaincy. At that time, the San Sabá commander recorded ninety-nine presidials. His commissioned and noncommissioned officers numbered sixteen. The remaining eighty-three soldiers ranged from those with five years and several months of experience to ten with none. Their ages varied from fifty-eight to twenty-one. Rábago noted that most of his troopers lacked food, clothing, and arms.

Overall, Rábago’s second command in Texas drew heated opposition from the friars in the province, who continued to hold him responsible for the death of one of their own at San Xavier—never mind that the official verdict of the viceroy had affirmed the former captain’s innocence. Nonetheless, Rábago’s apparent enthusiasm for promoting missions for the Lipan Apaches left the friars somewhat puzzled. One of his harshest critics, Fray Juan Agustin Morfi, opined that his actions were perhaps an attempt “to eradicate the perverse memory of his conduct, or . . . because he wished to make amends to religion for the damages he had occasioned as a result of his previous scandals.”

On reflection, Morfi probably gave too much credit to Rábago. His weakening of the San Sabá presidio by drawing off troops to guard two satellite missions for Lipan Apaches, which he founded without authorization on the upper Nueces River in present-day Real County, underscores his bad judgment. He chose to believe that the Lipans were sincere in their quest for Christianization, when ample evidence suggested otherwise. The Apaches were almost exclusively interested in using the Spanish to protect them from their powerful and hated enemies, the Comanches and Táovayas. However perfidious the Apaches were in using this approach, it was
not at all different from the Spaniards who were skilled in playing off one Indian group against another—a constant from the conquest of Mexico to the end of the Spanish colonial era in the Americas.

In the first five years of Felipe de Rábago’s command at San Sabá, he spent more than twelve thousand pesos of his own money on provisions, clothing, and livestock for the presidio and the two missions to the south. But even the stone walls of Presidio San Luis de Amarillas, constructed by Rábago, came under siege by Comanches and Taovayas for as long as two months, and “the continuous state of warfare went on for years.”

Rábago’s pleas for assistance from Mexico City fell on deaf ears, especially after the 1763 Peace of Paris when he could no longer play on fears of the French. When the Marqués de Rubi carried out his tour of inspection at San Sabá in August 1767, he noted that the largest military garrison in Texas had been reduced to a “beggarly existence.” He issued a devastating assessment of the presidio by likening its effectiveness against Indian attacks to that of a ship “anchored in mid-Atlantic . . . [to prevent] foreign trade with America.”

Following the Rubi inspection, attacks on San Sabá began anew. Although the Indians were never able to force their way beyond the stone walls of the presidio, they destroyed spring crops in 1768, perhaps contributing to an outbreak of scurvy and a growing mutinous attitude among the presidials.

Without authorization, Rábago left his command and traveled toward Mexico City. Until recently, it has been widely believed that he never reached his destination. But reports of his probable death at San Luis Potosí have proved erroneous. Again, thanks to new documentation provided by Jerome Farrell, something of an amazing paragraph, if not chapter, in the life of Felipe de Rábago has come to light.

In 1768 Rábago became a knight in the Order of Santiago. As mentioned, his brother as head of the Royal Mint in Mexico City had previously been knighted in the same order. It also suggests that his relative in Spain, who was the royal confessor to King Ferdinand VI, might have exerted some influence in don Felipe’s acceptance into knighthood. It was required procedure for all prospective members of Spain’s military orders to submit proof of their worthiness to the title of Caballero. Rábago’s Prueba de Caballero contains his place and date of birth, as well as information on his immediate and extended family.

Finally, because of his familial interest in Felipe de Rábago, Jerome Farrell has unearthed the will of Francisco Fernández de Rábago, a nephew of don Felipe, drawn up in Madrid in September 1801. In it Fernández de Rábago stated that his uncle died in Mexico City in 1770. This will also contains a tantalizing suggestion that Felipe de Rábago left a last testament, perhaps filed away somewhere in a Mexico City archive. Specifically, there is mention of a mayorazgo (entailed estate) set up in Cádiz, close to the church of San Agustin, which remained in the Rábago families for generations. The entailed estate was ordered founded (mandó fundar) by don Felipe de Rábago y Terán. Farrell has confirmed that Rábago, who apparently did not marry and never seemed short of money, sent fifty thousand pesos to his sister, María, in Spain, which she used to establish the Cádiz mayorazgo.
What then is the new light cast on the life and career of Felipe de Rábago y Terán in this article? Thanks to the research of Jerome Farrell, Luis López Elizondo, and Robert Weddle, buttressed by Carol Lipscomb’s translations, we have a better understanding of how such a dissolute person twice received appointment as a presidio commander in Texas in the middle decades of the 1700s. Rábago’s personal wealth and the likelihood of family influence in both Spain and Mexico helped secure his first posting at San Francisco Xavier de Gigedo on the San Gabriel River. Following the double murders committed at a San Xavier mission in May 1752, circumstantial evidence of Rábago’s possible complicity in them led to his removal of command in Texas and extended confinement in Coahuila. But even under a legal cloud for the better part of eight years, during much of that time, Rábago enjoyed the title of captain of the presidio where he was technically under house arrest. Again, this suggests family connections that ameliorated the circumstances of his sentence. And while not previously mentioned, in 1759 when Rábago was able to post bond that would permit him to travel to Mexico City, his incarceration in a public jail may well have resulted from another illicit affair with the wife of a soldier—this time at Santa Rosa María del Sacramento.

The definitive sentence of the viceroy in Mexico City regarding the murders at San Xavier is a remarkable indictment of the officials who had conducted the inquest at Béxar in 1752. This, too, suggests that Rábago had capital with Spanish officials. His reassignment to his “former command” of a presidio that no longer existed is likewise a curious legal conundrum.

The contributions of Weddle and Lipscomb’s book explain how an initially garbled account of the Red River campaign of Ortiz Parrilla served as a springboard for Rábago’s release from jail and his reassignment in Texas. They then document how Rábago cleverly damaged the reputation of his predecessor at San Sabá to his own advantage, as well as how that deliberate smear campaign distorted the actual events of 1759. It is unfortunate that Rábago’s vindictiveness then entered the mainstream of historical writing on the subject where it has remained for far too long. Finally, it is noteworthy that Rábago left his post at San Sabá without permission in 1768 and yet managed to receive appointment as a caballero of the Order of Santiago in that same year.

That said, there is nothing in this new information that suggests a more favorable valedictory on the life and career of Felipe de Rábago—indeed, this new research serves only to further besmirch the man. If he had redeeming qualities, they have failed to emerge from available evidence.