

## **COMMEMORATIVE SPEECH – 222ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE NAVAL BATTLE OF SAN DIEGO**

Distinguished authorities, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

We gather here today in a place rich with history, overlooking a bay that witnessed—exactly 222 years ago—a most unusual event: the only recorded naval battle on the Pacific coast between a United States brig and a Spanish fort. The Battle of San Diego Bay, fought on March 22, 1803, between Fort Guijarros and the *Lelia Byrd*, was brief, unexpected, and—despite the cannon fire—perhaps one of the most civilized battles of its time.

Because, in truth, that battle was not the beginning of hostility, but the beginning of a long story of respect, cooperation, and friendship between two nations: Spain and the United States.

### **The Spanish Legacy in America**

When we speak of Spain’s legacy in what is now the United States, we are not referring to a fleeting presence or a historical footnote. We are speaking of centuries of exploration, settlements, trails, and names that still echo today: California, Florida, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, San Diego, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, San Antonio...

Spain’s legacy in the United States is like the calcium in a body: invisible, but essential. Though Spain no longer governs these lands, its influence remains alive—in the language, in traditions, in architecture, in values... and yes, in music, in food, and in the noble art of the siesta—though some American sailors have tried, with mixed regulatory success, to import it.

### **A Relationship of Bridges, Not Conflicts**

It’s true there have been moments of friction—such as that day in 1803 when our countrymen fired from the shore and the Americans replied from the deck. But even then, it felt more like a scene from an adventure novel than a real conflict. The *Lelia Byrd* escaped with barely a few cannonballs exchanged, and Fort Guijarros—more adobe than stone—looked much the same afterward as before.

Since then, what has existed between our countries is not battle—but alliance.

Not walls, but bridges.

And what still exists today, thanks to our shared history and mutual respect, is a true and lasting friendship.

### **Rota: A Living Example of Naval Brotherhood**

I speak from personal experience. My previous post was at Naval Station Rota, in southern Spain. A base that, since the 1950s, has been jointly operated by our two nations with exceptional efficiency, professionalism, and mutual understanding. Today, more than

3,000 American citizens live and work there alongside Spanish personnel, in a daily display of cooperation and respect.

Rota is not just a military base—it is a living community, where accents mix, coffees are shared, and mutual lessons are exchanged: how to make a proper Spanish tortilla... or how to host a Texas barbecue without turning it into a fire drill.

We can truly say that Rota is living proof that the history between our nations is not stuck in books—it is written every day, shoulder to shoulder, sailor to sailor.

### **Remembering with Respect, Celebrating with Humor**

Today we commemorate a battle, yes. But we also celebrate the fact that even in tense moments, our nations found a way forward—toward friendship.

And if there is one thing that unites sailors of every flag—besides the sea—it is humor.

As one old Spanish captain used to say: “At sea, we are all brothers... unless there’s only one cup of coffee and five officers onboard.”

To which an American might reply: “That’s why we bring five mugs... and terrible coffee so no one wants it anyway.”

### **In Closing...**

Today we honor those who served in difficult times, those who defended these shores, and those who, afterward, extended their hands in peace.

We remember that true legacy doesn’t vanish—it transforms. It stays in names, in culture, in hearts.

Like the milk that nourishes the bones of a child, what Spain left here didn’t disappear—it became part of the growth.

And the United States, as a nation, has grown with part of that legacy in its foundation.

Let us continue commemorating together, remembering with pride, and looking ahead—knowing that, though our flags are different, they still fly in the same wind.

Thank you.