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## Struggling for Brazil

*Dutch, Portuguese and Spaniards in the 1640 Naval Battle of Paraíba*

Susana Münch Miranda and João Paulo Salvado

Between two and three in the afternoon on 12 January 1640, Admiral Willem Corneliszoon Loos signalled to the Dutch fleet on the Brazilian coast off Paraíba to attack the Luso-Spanish armada dispatched by King Philip IV to recapture Pernambuco.<sup>1</sup> Thus started the first of the four confrontations between 12 and 17 January that became known as the 1640 Naval Battle of Paraíba. On both sides, the numbers of ships and men involved were considerable. The armada under Fernando Mascarenhas, Count of Torre, comprised 66 ships and 5,000 infantry soldiers, and was undoubtedly the largest fleet the Spanish monarchy had ever assembled in Brazilian waters. The Dutch in turn had 41 vessels and 2,800 men. From a military perspective, the battle was inconclusive since neither fleet was able to destroy the other. In the end, however, the Dutch fleet was able to drive away the armada and the *status quo ante bellum* consequently prevailed, with the north-eastern shores of Brazil remaining in Dutch hands. Not surprisingly, this outcome was seen as a victory and depicted as such by the Dutch painter Frans Post in the four engravings dedicated to this episode.<sup>2</sup> For the Luso-Spanish, on the other hand, the battle was clearly perceived as a defeat since the armada's ultimate goal of recapturing Pernambuco was not achieved.

Over the years the 1640 naval battle has attracted the attention of several historians, including F.A. Varnhagen, H. Wätjen and J.C. Warnsinck, who

1 The prefix 'Luso' means 'Portuguese', after the Roman province of Lusitania, approximately corresponding to modern Portugal.

2 The four engravings are included in C. Barlaeus, *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia et alibi gestarum, sub praefectura illustrissimi comitis I. Mauritii, Nassoviae, etc.* (Amsterdam 1647). Hereafter, we use the following edition, *História dos feitos recentemente praticados durante oito anos no Brasil e noutras partes sob o governo do illustrissimo João Maurício conde de Nassau, etc.* (Rio de Janeiro 1940).

made extensive use of Dutch sources.<sup>3</sup> By combining the Dutch and Portuguese accounts, C.R. Boxer and, more recently, M.J. Guedes shed new light on the episode.<sup>4</sup> The Portuguese material to which Boxer drew attention included the original papers of Fernando Mascarenhas, the commander in-chief of the armada, although Boxer was not able to make extensive use of them. These papers are gathered in four voluminous codices and record events concerning the armada between April 1638 and October 1640. Written in Portuguese and Spanish, they comprise various documents, including correspondence exchanged between Fernando Mascarenhas and King Philip IV, the Count-Duke of Olivares (his favourite minister, or *valido*), the Councils of Portugal and Castile and the high officers of the armada, as well as instructions, reports, and minutes of meetings of the Council of Captains. The codices are currently held in Brazilian and Portuguese archives and were first published in 2001 and 2002.<sup>5</sup>

The documents in these codices constitute the bedrock of this article which focuses on the armada leaders' perceptions of their opponent during their sojourn in Brazil, a topic still insufficiently explored in the literature. Given the goal of the expedition, gathering information on the Dutch military and naval power was crucial for defining a strategy to oust them from Pernambuco. How did the armada leaders acquire intelligence? How reliable was it when cross-checked against other sources, and to what extent did the outcome of the battle depend on it?

This paper comprises three parts. The first one places the armada in the political context of the Dutch Republic being at odds with the Spanish monarchy and analyses the chain of events from the outfitting of the ships in Iberia until their arrival off the coast of Pernambuco in January 1639. The second part covers the ten months preceding the battle and examines the steps taken by the military commanders of the armada to gather intelligence

3 F.A. Varnhagen, *História das Lutas com os Holandeses no Brazil* (Lisbon 1872). Varnhagen and other Portuguese-speaking historians used Dutch sources gathered in the nineteenth century by Brazilian diplomats. Some of these were translated and published, including the letters written by Johan Maurits von Nassau-Siegen as published as 'Cartas Nassovianas, 1637-1646' in: *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico e Geográfico Pernambucano*, vol. X, 56, 23-52; XII, 69, 533-555. H. Wätjen, *Das holländische Kolonialreich in Brasilien. Ein Kapitel aus der Kolonialgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (The Hague and Gotha 1921), later translated into Portuguese and published as *O Domínio Colonial Holandês no Brasil* (São Paulo 1938); J.C.M. Warnsinck, 'Een mislukte aanslag op Nederlandsch Brazilië, *Van vlootvoogden en Zeeslagen* (Amsterdam 1940) 129-159.

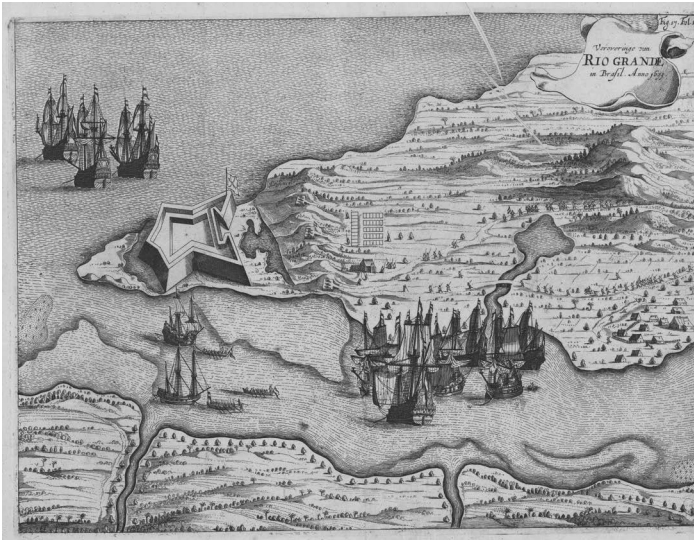
4 C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624-1654* (Oxford 1957); M.J. Guedes, *História Naval Brasileira*, vol. II, part 1A (Rio de Janeiro 1990).

5 J.P. Salvado and S. Münch Miranda (eds.), *Cartas do 1.º Conde da Torre*, 4 vols. (Lisbon 2001-2002) (hereafter CCT).

and prepare for the confrontation. The third part follows the events taking place from November 1639, when the armada set sail from Bahia aiming to recover Pernambuco, until its dispersal and ultimate failure in early 1640.

### Third Luso-Spanish armada for the restoration of Pernambuco

In 1630, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) occupied Olinda, the seat of Pernambuco, the richest sugar producing area in north-east Brazil, as part of its plan to extend the war against Spain into the Atlantic. Alarmed by the news, King Philip IV, who also ruled over Portugal through a dynastic union, immediately sent an armada to reconquer Olinda. In May 1631, Admiral Antonio de Oquendo left Lisbon with instructions to wrest Pernambuco from Dutch control and then to head for Havana to escort the Spanish Treasure Fleet. As this armada failed to fulfil its main mission, a second fleet was dispatched in 1635. By then, however, the Dutch had further strengthened their position in the north-east of Brazil by taking Itamaracá, Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte, while also successfully establishing new territorial bases in Aruba and Curaçao and thus threatening the Spanish Silver Fleet's route in the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup>



*The conquest of the Rio Grande in Brazil, 1633. Anonymous engraving, c. 1650. Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*

6 H. den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen 1994).

This second armada also failed in its attempt to oust the Dutch from Pernambuco, thus forcing Madrid to organise a third expedition in late 1635. The appointment of this armada's commander-in-chief became protracted and occupied the royal court throughout 1636 and 1637. This time, the Count-Duke of Olivares sought greater commitment from Portugal and insisted that the command should be given to a Portuguese nobleman.<sup>7</sup> Fernando Mascarenhas, a former governor of Ceuta and Tangiers, was eventually appointed governor-general of Brazil and given supreme command of a combined Luso-Spanish armada.<sup>8</sup> The armada actually consisted of two fleets, a Portuguese and a Spanish one, with each fleet's ships being outfitted in Lisbon and Cadiz respectively.

The first few months of 1638 saw intense activity in the Portuguese royal shipyard in Lisbon, where 23 ships were being equipped under the Count of Torre's supervision. The fleet's departure was systematically delayed by difficulties in food and armament provisioning, as well as in recruiting seamen and soldiers.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish fleet also had to deal with several contingencies in Cadiz, and these delayed its setting sail for Lisbon, where the armada was supposed to assemble before heading for Brazil.

While the Spanish monarchy was organising this armada, Dutch Brazil had time to consolidate further. On 23 January 1637 Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, who was appointed Governor-, Captain-, and Admiral-general of Dutch Brazil, arrived in Recife. He went on to incorporate other territories into the WIC so that, by 1638, its jurisdiction ranged from the São Francisco River in the south to Ceará in the north. The success of these endeavours encouraged the governor to attempt to seize Salvador, which was considered the key for complete control over Portuguese America. In April 1638, 30 ships carrying 3,600 soldiers and 1,000 Indians besieged Salvador, but the city resisted and the siege was lifted in late May.<sup>10</sup> By the time this news reached Madrid, the war was clearly starting to spread across Brazil and steps were taken to speed up the outfitting of the third armada.

In Lisbon, the Count of Torre received instructions to depart immediately. The Portuguese fleet was told to head for the island of Santiago (Cape Verde) and await the arrival of the Spanish fleet. Once the two fleets were

7 The more experienced Spanish admirals, Antonio de Oquendo and Lopo de Hoces, were also mobilised to command another armada to be sent to the North Sea. This was defeated at Downs on 21 October 1639. See J.H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven 1986) 548-550.

8 CCT, vol. I, 477.

9 CCT, vol. II, 39-45.

10 Wätjen, *O domínio*, 96, 142-143, 160-163; Boxer, *The Dutch*, 68-69, 87.

united, they were to head straight for Recife and put the city under attack. Despite the pressure exerted by Philip IV, the Portuguese fleet did not set sail until early September. The fleet comprised galleons and other smaller vessels carrying nearly 5,000 men. However, the urgency surrounding its departure meant it was insufficiently fitted out.<sup>11</sup>

The voyage was ill-fated, with nearly 400 of the crew and soldiers dying of malaria and 1,200 falling ill during the three weeks that the fleet was anchored off the island of Santiago.<sup>12</sup> The Spanish fleet finally arrived at Santiago on 5 November, from where the combined armada of 38 vessels set sail.<sup>13</sup> However, men on board continued to die. By the time the fleet reached the coastal waters of Recife in early January 1639, an official report stated almost 1,200 men to be dead and 900 ill. The toll that crossing the Atlantic took also included five stray or lost ships and insufficient or rotten provisions. Given the seriousness of the situation, Fernando Mascarenhas concluded that the conditions were not right for attacking Recife immediately. Against the advice of his senior officers, he decided to proceed to Salvador to recover from the misfortunes of the voyage and, on 17 January, the armada anchored in the Bay of All Saints.<sup>14</sup> Over the following months, the Luso-Spanish in Salvador and the Dutch in Recife prepared for battle, while also striving to gather intelligence on their opponent's plans.

## Recife and Salvador: preparing for battle

The arrival of the armada off Recife was not a complete surprise for the government of Dutch Brazil. The States-General and WIC had known at least since 1637 that Philip IV was preparing a third expedition to recapture Pernambuco. According to rumours, the Luso-Spanish were assembling a fleet of numerous warships with between 11,000 and 12,000 troops. Apprehensive at the prospect of a military confrontation of such scale, Johan Maurits informed the *Heeren XIX* (the governing body of the WIC) as early as July 1638 that he needed a permanent army of 7,000 men.<sup>15</sup> Yet by the time the armada surged, Dutch Brazil was at its weakest and reliant on 3,230 soldiers, 23 vessels and 930 sailors for its defence.<sup>16</sup> Reinforcements did not arrive

<sup>11</sup> Guedes, *História Naval*, 237-241.

<sup>12</sup> *CCT*, vol. IV, 56-59.

<sup>13</sup> Boxer refers to 46 vessels (*The Dutch*, 89).

<sup>14</sup> *CCT*, vol. I 139, 157; 203-205; *Idem* vol. IV, 79-89.

<sup>15</sup> Boxer, *The Dutch*, 86; Wätjen, *O domínio*, 163.

<sup>16</sup> Guedes, *História Naval*, 256-257.

until March 1639, in the form of seven ships and 1,200 men under the command of Krzysztof Arciszewski.<sup>17</sup>

Over the following months, the Count of Nassau-Siegen focused on organising the naval and terrestrial defence of New Holland, while also seeking to monitor his opponent's activities. Yachts were routinely dispatched to cruise off Bahia for that purpose. The Dutch were thus able to obtain updated news by capturing Luso-Brazilian fishermen or intercepting caravels carrying correspondence to the royal court and, as we shall see, these actions provided Johan Maurits in May 1639 with some valuable information.

In Bahia, meanwhile, the Count of Torre had almost no information on the Dutch forces and their movements, particularly in the first few months of 1639. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Fernando Mascarenhas dispatched captain André Vidal de Negreiros to the hinterland of Pernambuco in early May. The instructions given to Vidal on the goals of his mission were very clear. By drawing on feelings of solidarity among Luso-Brazilians, he was to find out more about the opponent's plans, its troop numbers (including Indians) and distribution across the forts, new fortifications built in recent months and the ships it possessed. He was also instructed to gather information about the availability of supplies in Recife and in the field, including the number of cattle, as this was decisive for provisioning the infantry that Mascarenhas planned to disembark for the land attack. Vidal was told to send weekly reports to Salvador and to stay in hiding in the hinterland until the armada arrived.<sup>18</sup> Fortunately for the Count of Torre, Vidal's departure coincided with the arrival of captain João de Magalhães, who provided the first and much needed updated news on the Dutch.

Following a decision by the former governor of Brazil, João de Magalhães had been living undercover in Pernambuco for several months. He had been dispatched to Dutch territory, probably in December 1638, with instructions to await the arrival of the armada, which by then was expected to attack Recife immediately. Realising that this project had failed, he returned to Salvador, but not before gathering information on the military and naval power of the Dutch. Upon his return in mid-May, he reported how "the enemy was fortified across the marina and in many villages and sugar mills".<sup>19</sup> Magalhães was not far from the truth in his account as the de-

17 CTT, vol. II 214. Eight ships and 1,200 men according to Boxer (*The Dutch*, 90) and 1,600 men according to Wätjen, *O domínio*, 164-165.

18 CCT, vol. II, 321-323.

19 CCT, vol. II, 214.

fensive complex of Dutch Brazil encompassed 24 forts, villages and fortified sugar mills, each with a military garrison.<sup>20</sup> According to Magalhães, the Dutch had 5,500 soldiers distributed across this defensive system. Among these he highlighted the contingent of 1,500 men stationed at the strategic defence location of Serinhaém (south of Recife). Magalhães' assessment did not include Arciszewski's reinforcements, which, he stated, comprised only 400 men. Thus Dutch Brazil had for its defence a total of 5,900 soldiers, excluding Amerindians and African troops.<sup>21</sup>

The estimate by Magalhães differed from the 3,230 soldiers reported to the WIC by Johan Maurits in February that year, but was close to Barlaeus' assessment of around 5,600 for the same period. It is not easy to explain this discrepancy, although the governor of New Holland probably used restrictive criteria and so counted only the soldiers physically fit for combat. The information provided by Magalhães nevertheless strengthened the notion that comparable numbers of soldiers had to be mobilised for terrestrial fighting. Regarding the naval power of the Dutch, Magalhães' testimony matches the information conveyed by the other available sources, namely thirty ships, including the seven vessels brought by Arciszewski.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the value of the news brought by Magalhães, André Vidal continued on his mission because the Count of Torre needed a permanent set of eyes and ears in Dutch territory. With a few other men, therefore, Vidal travelled by boat to Porto Calvo (Alagoas). This mission initially resulted in the capture of two Dutchmen, who were sent back to Bahia in the same boat. From these prisoners, the Count of Torre learned that Johan Maurits was preparing to dispatch a fleet, although its mission was uncertain. Three weeks later, a report from Vidal dated 1 June confirmed that Admiral Willem Loos had left Recife with 20 vessels and 700 men.<sup>23</sup> By then, the Luso-Spanish had realised what the fleet was seeking to achieve. A group of fishermen captured off Salvador had informed the Dutch that the armada's strength had been diminished as several galleons were careening off the island of Itaparica (Bay of All Saints). Johan Maurits immediately took this opportunity to further weaken his opponent's naval power by dispatching the aforementioned fleet, which also comprised eight fire-ships, in May to set light to the beached and, therefore, vulnerable galleons.<sup>24</sup>

20 Barlaeus, *História dos Feitos*, 146.

21 CCT, vol. I, 373.

22 CCT, vol. II 213-215; Boxer, *The Dutch*, 91; Guedes, *História Naval*, 263.

23 Barlaeus mentions 18 ships, *História dos Feitos*, 166.

24 CCT, vol. I, 261 and 266.



*Portrait of Johan Maurits van Nassau Siegen. Design drawing of an engraving by Cornelis van Dalen (II), based on a painting of Govert Flinck, 1658.*

*Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*

For the Luso-Spanish commanders, Vidal's news could not have been more opportune. Vigilance over the Bay of Salvador was immediately strengthened, thus removing any chance of a surprise attack by the Dutch. Although such an attack did not ultimately take place, the Dutch fleet captured a caravel while cruising off the Bay of All Saints. As well as carrying sugar crates, this caravel was also taking letters from the Count of Torre and other high officers to Philip IV and Count-duke Olivares. From this correspondence, the Count of Nassau-Siegen obtained detailed news about the Luso-Spanish military and naval contingents and discovered that 7,000 reinforcements from the Azores were expected. This information was immediately conveyed to the *Heeren XIX*, while Johan Maurits once again availed himself of the opportunity to call for reinforcements.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Barleus, *História dos Feitos*, 166; Guedes, *História Naval*, 263.

At Bahia, in the meantime, all that remained to be done was to finish outfitting the armada. Intense preparations were underway in late 1639 in an effort to resolve various problems. The departure was repeatedly delayed, however, by a lack of funds, raw materials and intermediate goods to outfit the ships, as well as by insufficient food supplies. The reinforcements from the Azores, comprising 18 ships, as well as armaments, ammunition and supplies, arrived in October 1639. However, only 1,120 men, instead of the promised 7,000, arrived, and that must have disappointed Mascarenhas.<sup>26</sup> By that time, the galleons had finally been careened and the field artillery prepared, while the Count of Torre also managed to freight 36 merchant ships engaged in the sugar trade to transport the infantry.

As the departure date approached, Captain António Filipe Camarão and his Amerindian troops were sent to the hinterland of Pernambuco with instructions to take up positions on the ground so as to put pressure on the Dutch as soon as the infantry landed. The Luso-Spanish strategy for reconquering Pernambuco was twofold: firstly, a field campaign, whereby infantrymen would disembark and march on Recife so as to confine the Dutch to the main fortifications and cut the city off from inland food supplies, while secondly the armada was instructed to destroy the Dutch fleet and lay siege to Recife.<sup>27</sup> Setting this two-pronged plan in motion proved, however, to be a very difficult task.

## Naval battle of 1640

The armada finally set sail from Bahia on 21 November 1639, comprising 87 vessels with nearly 5,000 infantry soldiers and 12 artillery pieces for the land attack. Although the human contingent was considerably larger if we include the crew and the soldiers reserved for the ships, Mascarenhas' papers do not confirm the rumour circulating in Recife in November that year that 11,000 soldiers were on board.<sup>28</sup> Difficulties arose from the outset. The north-eastern monsoon was setting in, the convoy was too numerous, the ships had different sailing capabilities and some of them were overloaded with sugar and dyewood, while insufficient provisions meant a campaign would have to be short.

<sup>26</sup> CCT, vol. III, 38-41.

<sup>27</sup> CCT, vol. I, 308-309 and 318-327.

<sup>28</sup> J.H.D. Pereira, 'A batalha naval de 1640: e outras peripécias da guerra holandesa no Brasil' in: *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, 58/1 (1895) 1-58, 2.

Since the north-eastern monsoon impeded direct navigation to Recife, the ships made for the open sea in order to bypass the winds (*volta do largo*). This delayed the voyage and dispersed the vessels, forcing the armada to cast anchor in Alagoas (some 250 kilometres south of Recife) on 16 December to wait for the stray ships. While in Alagoas, Torre's commanders gathered fresh intelligence on the opponent's latest movements. They were told by the locals (*moradores*) that the Dutch were gathering soldiers and Indians in the fortifications closer to Recife. They had "1,000 men in Pau-Amarelo, 1,000 in Candelária, 500 in Nazaré [Cape of Santo Agostinho]; as for Paraíba, the forts were almost empty, while the fort in Cabedelo was well entrenched and their garrison reinforced". The strengthening of these outposts' defence was part of the strategy conceived by Johan Maurits following the news that the Luso-Spanish were planning to disembark troops near Recife. Moreover, 400 Dutch and 100 Indians commanded by Major Mansfeld were stationed at a recently built fortress "with a moat, trenches and stockade without artillery", four or five miles from the port of Alagoas. The *moradores* complained of the "great tyranny" to which they were subjected by the Dutch and showed the commanders of the armada "legs and hands burnt by butter and olive oil" as reprisal for their having provided food supplies to the guerrilla fighters of Vidal and Camarão. Since Mansfeld had also drained their food supplies and diverted them to Recife, the locals urged the Count of Torre to take over this Dutch stronghold. Although military action was considered, it was dismissed by Torre's senior officers on the grounds that "the four hundred well entrenched men and led by such a commander as Major Mansfeld would hardly surrender in three days". Moreover, such an attack would delay the main operation, while allocating men to that mission could turn the "warfare eternal as in Flanders".<sup>29</sup>

While in Alagoas, the Luso-Spanish also gathered fresh information on the Dutch naval power and discovered their strategy of seeking to counter the landing of troops: "From Recife outwards [Count of Nassau-Siegen] has forty ships with the aim of fighting us and from Pau-Amarelo until Candelária, he has a great deal of smaller vessels on hold to thwart our landing".<sup>30</sup> Between November and mid-December, merchant ships had indeed arrived from the Dutch Republic, thus increasing the number of vessels available for battle from 30 to 41.<sup>31</sup>

29 CCT, vol. I 318-324; *Idem*, vol. IV, 222.

30 CCT, vol. IV, 223.

31 Guedes, *História Naval*, 279-280.

The armada resumed its course on Christmas Eve, once again sailing into open sea to bypass the winds. By then it had been reduced to 66 ships because not all the stray ships had made it to Alagoas and ended up either returning to Salvador or heading back to Iberia. Arriving off the coast of Paraíba two weeks later, the vessels then sailed southwards along the coast towards Recife, searching for a safe place to put the infantry ashore. It should be emphasised that the Count of Torre was well aware that the Dutch forts in the northern region of Paraíba were less well-defended, as the *moradores* had informed him in Alagoas. At dawn on 12 January, to the north of Olinda, the armada was spotted by Admiral Loos' fleet when it was trying to launch the amphibian operation and transfer troops to smaller boats. In the meantime the wind changed and started blowing from the south; this thwarted the landing and forced the galleons to look for deeper waters. The first running fight between the two fleets broke out on the afternoon of that day, between Goiana and Cape Branco, followed by confrontations on 13, 14 and 17 January, during which time the ships drifted northwards because of opposing winds and the constant need to reposition for combat.<sup>32</sup> The last of these fights – on 17 January, off Baía Formosa (Rio Grande do Norte) – was also the longest and the most violent. After relentlessly engaging the Luso-Spanish ships in combat, the Dutch fleet was ultimately able to check their naval power and thwart the feared terrestrial offensive. The fate of the Dutch colony was, hence, decided at sea, as Johan Maurits had long realised it would be.<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to assess the material and human losses since official reports differ from eyewitness descriptions of the battle, with the latter stressing the length and violence of the four fights.<sup>34</sup> Official reports from the Dutch side refer to 66 dead, including Admiral Loos, and 82 wounded, as well as to the sinking of a ship (*Geele Sonne*). To our knowledge, no report systematises the losses on the Luso-Spanish side. The scarce data available mention the sinking of a merchant ship and the stranding of the galleon *Chagas*, with the capture of over 200 men, but there is no information on the number of human casualties. At the end of the third day of confrontations, a minute of a Council of Captains meeting mentions “many dead and a great number of injured” and stress the violence of the fights and particularly that of 14 January, by then “the bloodiest and the fiercest”. The enemy’s tenacity was reported to be due to its having orders to “die before letting

32 Guedes, *História Naval*, 280-284.

33 Boxer, *The Dutch*, 94.

34 Barleus, *História dos feitos*, 181-183; *CCT*, vol. I, 344-352.

our troops land”, according to a Dutch prisoner’s testimony.<sup>35</sup> The number of casualties on both sides is likely to have been higher than indicated in the sources and the literature, but cannot be more precisely estimated.

Lacking water and provisions, both fleets headed out on 18 January in search of a safe haven. The Dutch sailed for Rio Grande before returning to Recife, while the armada anchored in the bay of Ceará-Mirim on 20 January. By then, it was clear that the mission to recapture Pernambuco could not be accomplished. The Count of Torre’s priority was to return to Salvador and ensure its defence, fearing a Dutch attack on the poorly defended capital. On the same day, given that the merchant ships that had transported the troops were preparing to return to Portugal, it was decided that part of the infantry would return overland. Besides overcoming a problem of transport capacity, this was also a way to mitigate the scanty supplies available on board.<sup>36</sup> In the meantime, on 21 January, the armada split up. Vega Bazán, general of the Spanish fleet, refused to sail towards Salvador on the grounds that he had received instructions to head for the West Indies and to escort the Spanish Treasure Fleet as soon as the Pernambuco endeavour was over. In his view, it would be months before the ships could be ready to fight the Dutch fleet again. Vega Bazán consequently set sail for Cartagena de Indias, taking with him eight ships.<sup>37</sup>

On 1 February, 1,430 men led by Luís Barbalho Bezerra landed, as planned, in Ceará-Mirim, near the Cape of São Roque. They had been instructed to retreat to Salvador and destabilise the hinterland controlled by the Dutch by deflecting some of the enemy troops’ attention onto themselves. This column was later joined by the contingents led by Vidal and Camarão and that had previously been sent overland to Dutch territory. Over the next three months, the men marched some 1,900 kilometres before reaching Salvador in May. During their retreat, plantations were destroyed and thousands of sugar crates burned, with numerous military casualties.<sup>38</sup> As reprisal for this damage, a Dutch military expedition of 28 ships and 2,500 men ravaged the region around the Bay of All Saints from late April to late May 1640, setting fire to 26 of the 42 sugar mills.<sup>39</sup>

35 CCT, vol. I, 344.

36 CCT, vol. IV, 242.

37 CCT, vol. I, 552-555.

38 CTT, vol. I, 439, 452-455, 481-486, 495-496.

39 Wätjen, *O domínio*, 179; Boxer, *The Dutch*, 97; Guedes, *História Naval*, 291.



*Burning of the sugar mills near Salvador, 1640-1641. Etching by Salamon Savery, based on Frans Jansz. Post, 1645-1647.*

*Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*

Although no assault on Salvador was attempted, the Luso-Brazilians nevertheless organised a defence, overseen by the Count of Torre. This, however, was the final duty he performed as governor-general of Brazil. The disastrous outcome of the armada meant he had long lost the support of Count-duke Olivares and fallen into disgrace. In mid-June, Jorge Mascarenhas, Marquis of Montalvão, arrived at Salvador and immediately took over supreme command of the colony as viceroy, while the Count of Torre was ordered to return to Lisbon, where he was arrested upon arrival.<sup>40</sup> As for the armada, what was left of it dispersed with the return of its main warships to the Iberian Peninsula.

## Conclusion

By putting the attack on Recife on hold after crossing the Atlantic, the Count of Torre lost the advantage of a surprise attack. From then on, in both Bahia and Recife, the two sides concentrated their efforts on organis-

<sup>40</sup> Boxer, *The Dutch*, 97-98; Guedes, *História Naval*, 291-294.

ing the expected naval and terrestrial confrontation, while also acquiring intelligence on the numbers of soldiers and ships mobilised by the opponent. The collected papers of Fernando Mascarenhas provide valuable insight into the measures taken to assess the naval and military power of the Dutch, as well as their results. After a few months of tapping in the dark, the Count of Torre began to receive a regular flow of news on the Dutch through agents secretly dispatched to the Pernambuco hinterland. Drawing on feelings of solidarity among Luso-Brazilians living under Dutch rule, men such as João Magalhães and André Vidal were effective in gathering intelligence, especially on the dispersion of Dutch troops across their coastal strongholds. This was of paramount importance when choosing a safe location for disembarking the troops as a field campaign was key to the Luso-Spanish strategy. If this information is cross-checked against data from Dutch sources, we can see that the Count of Torre and his commanders clearly seem to have obtained reliable intelligence and shaped their plan for attack accordingly. Ultimately, however, the result of the final confrontation did not depend on the availability or quality of the intelligence, but was instead decided on the naval front, where the Dutch proved superior. Although more powerful in terms of men and ships the armada failed to achieve victory at sea and the plan to disembark 5,000 soldiers failed. As a result, the reinstatement of Portugal's sovereignty over Brazil's north-east was delayed until the surrender of Recife in 1654.

## About the authors

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