

Chain of command

*The military system of the Dutch East India Company
1655-1663*

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Foreword

Cleaning up the last few footnotes of my thesis, adding the last few illustrations, and slowly starting to consider whom I had to thank for all this, the first thought that occurred to me was that in the first place I had to thank everyone around me for their patience with this project. From the day I consider this thesis project to have really started off, we are one-and-a-half years down the line. If we take Umberto Eco's word for it, who in his *How to write a thesis* stated that anywhere between six months and three years is acceptable for writing a master's thesis (and added the sound advice that, if one was unable to finish it within that time, one might consider just copying someone else's), I am of course right on schedule. Nonetheless, I am very aware that many of the people around me would have hoped for this thesis to have been finished rather sooner. I can only be thankful that in spite of this, everyone kept on having faith in the whole venture, even when I had lost this faith myself for a while.

My advisors' patience was probably tested most by the delays. Particularly with Femme Gaastra, however, I never noticed the slightest hint of annoyance with this, and was all the while aided not only with advice and comments but also insight into unpublished articles and his personal notes on the *Generale Eis*. Leonard Blussé, who spent part of this time abroad but closely followed the progress of my thesis even on the other side of the Atlantic, was more openly annoyed with the slack pace with which the whole thing proceeded, but always combined his remarks to that effect with extensive comments and advice on the content of the thesis, thus inspiring some resolve to finally finish it, and also greatly contributing to the final result. I can only hope that they now consider this final result to have been worth the wait.

For this final result I am also greatly indebted to Geoffrey Parker, whose book *The Military Revolution* inspired the initial idea for this thesis, and with whom I was subsequently privileged to study for three months at Ohio State University. The entire entire setup and method for this thesis came into being there, and his tutorial on VOC warfare was extremely inspiring and profoundly influenced the way in which I look at my topic.

Furthermore I wish to thank my parents, not only for their patience with, and faith in the project, but also for indefinitely lending me their laptop when mine broke down in the middle of my archival research (I'm done with it, I'll give it back), proofreading several chapters, and supplying me with the tools to make this thesis look as it does now. Studying together with Bram, Jonathan, Maaïke and Romkje made writing the whole thing a lot more pleasant. The bet with Melanie over who would finish his or her thesis first, might have been finally won by her, but definitely sped up the final stretch. And finally I wish to thank my brother James, who, as a preliminary graduation gift, is currently aiding me in turning this thesis into what will hopefully become the coolest web-resource on VOC-history so far.

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I

An undecided battle

Since the Dutch colonial era came to an end in the '40s of the last century, relatively little attention has been given to the warfare of the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company, henceforth VOC) by Dutch historians. Whereas, during the colonial era, the military history of the Dutch overseas was always a popular source of epic stories about the Dutch, heroically defeating the English and Portuguese, as well as occasionally fighting it out with nuisance local powers on distant shores, this form of history writing became somewhat unfashionable in the postwar years. Historians of Dutch overseas expansion subsequently turned their attention to other aspects of the colonial past, such as its economic system, or the interaction between the Dutch and local cultures. Along with nationalist, congratulatory accounts of the glorious Dutch colonial past, the VOC's military history quietly left through the back door.¹

Whereas historians of the Dutch colonial past grew less interested in the military aspects of their subject, this was, however, certainly not the case for the historical profession as a whole. In the course of the last few decades, the military exploits of Europeans overseas have once again become a hot topic within several realms of history.

One of these realms is the world-historical debate. Seeking to explain why the West became so rich and powerful in relation to the rest of the world, many authors suspect that part of the answers they are looking for are to be found in the military balance between East and West, and by implication, the military aspects of European expansion overseas. These authors, usually specialists in European history, have typically described the military history of European expansion as an exponent of developments that took place in Europe in the course of the early modern period. Advances in military technology, such as the development of good and cheap artillery, developments in fortification, the armed sailing vessel as well as advancements in the realm of strategy, tactics and logistics, are seen as defining for the European military performance abroad. These developments are claimed to also have given the European powers a decisive edge in warfare against non-European powers. It was therefore of great importance in tilting the global balance of power in favour of Europe, and thus both a result of and a factor in the "Rise of the West."

¹ An excellent brief introduction into the VOC's historiography is Jur van Goor, 'De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in de historiografie' in: Gerrit Knaap en Ger Teitler eds., *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, verhandelingen KITLV, 197 (Leiden 2002), 9-34.

Although the notion that certain early modern Western military innovations gave Europe an edge from the 16th century onwards goes back a long time,² it has once again become an issue of debate since the appearance of Geoffrey Parker's 1988 work *The Military Revolution: Military innovation and the Rise of the West 1500-1800*. This study claims that the various changes in weapons technology, strategy and logistics that took place in the course of the Early Modern period, amounted to a Military Revolution.³ With the advent of European colonialism, so the argument proceeds, various aspects of this Military Revolution were subsequently exported beyond the boundaries of Europe with the advent of European colonialism, and in various ways aided the Europeans in bringing 35% of the world under their sphere of influence before 1800.

In a similar vein, military historian Jeremy Black states in his introduction of *War in the Early Modern World 1450-1815*, that, regardless of the limited impact of European colonialism up to the 18th century, the most important fact is that Europe was able to project its power, in however modest proportions, onto the rest of the world, and not the other way around. He concludes a paragraph, with the telling title "the Rise of the West", as follows: "The Europeans remoulded the world, creating new political, economic, demographic, religious and cultural spaces and links that still greatly affect the world in which we live."⁴

On the other side of the spectrum, we find various authors from the realm of non-western history and historical anthropology, who look at the history of European colonial war in a wholly different light. These authors seek to create a counterbalance for what in their eyes is a one-sided and overly complacent view on the military encounters between East and West. They credit the various Asian powers with rich military traditions as well as a proficiency in tactics and strategies that, however different from the European ones, often matched the latter.⁵ In the case of South East Asia, authors have emphasized the early date at which various indigenous states got hold of guns and gunmakers, the alacrity with which the local military cultures incorporated the new military gadgets and strategies of their adversaries, the very relative relevance of western military tactics in jungle

2 An early example of the 'world-historical' approach which attributes western success to military innovations is Carlo M. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empire* (New York 1965).

3 The term 'Military Revolution' was originally coined by Michael Roberts in 1955, but Parker took it back out of the drawer and extended its meaning to include developments in logistics, finances, siege warfare and fleets, whereas Roberts had mostly concentrated on tactics, army size and the impact of war on society. Geoffrey Parker *The Military Revolution: Military innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge 2000), 1-3.

4 Jeremy Black, 'introduction' in: Black ed., *War in the early modern world, 1450-1815* (London 1999), 4.

5 Among these are Kolff and Gommans, who, writing about the Indian subcontinent, note that the developments in cavalry in the northern plains were of such a nature that a Military Revolution, with its emphasis on gunpowder and infantry, is an irrelevant concept that perhaps holds explanatory value for Europe, but is simply not applicable to, for one, India. This means that one cannot state that India had somehow 'missed out' on a development; it was merely doing something else, which, however, worked just as well. Gommans, Jos and Dirk H.A. Kolff, 'introduction' in: Gommans and Kolff eds., *Warfare and weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, Oxford in India Readings (Oxford/New Delhi 2001).

warfare, and the fact that the Dutch copied military innovations from the various Asian states just as well as the other way around. In this way, they attempt to give Asia its own autonomous military history, which in their eyes has long been ignored or misinterpreted.⁶

Whereas some authors simply make clear that the Asian side of the story is too often overlooked,⁷ others are bent on proving that the West's complacent view on its own military prowess is wholly unjustified. Thus we find Ricklefs and Charney, who counter arguments such as those of Cipolla and Parker by claiming that Javanese cannon and fortresses were of the same standard as European ones, and that the slight advantages that the Europeans had were always rapidly copied by the various local powers.⁸ Some authors go quite far in their claims: Sudjoko, for example, first points out that Southeast Asian shipbuilding traditions were both older and richer than European ones, and accounts for the development of a technological gap as follows (and please note that he is talking about the 17th century): "[I]here then, was how the technological gap opened between Holland and Indonesia. By forcibly thwarting the attempts of the militarily weaker party to advance, by destroying its political and economic power, and by stultifying its status into that of servitude, the gap was immeasurably widened."⁹

All in all, the military side of European overseas expansion, in which the VOC figured as the most aggressive player of the 17th century, stirs the emotions within the historical profession. It is therefore all the more surprising that the subject has remained thoroughly understudied, and all but ignored by historians of the Dutch colonial past. Only recently has this started to change: it was only in 1999 that, in his inaugural lecture as special professor in the history of Asian-European relations, Leonard Blussé made a case for reinstating the VOC as a diplomatic and political actor.¹⁰ A few years later, in 2002, an edited volume about the VOC's role in war and diplomacy appeared.¹¹ While still far from formulating a new coherent vision on VOC warfare, this book brought the military side of the VOC under the attention in its own right once again.

6 Michael W. Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300-1900* (Leiden 2004); M.C. Ricklefs, *War, Culture and the Economy in Java, 1677-1726* (Sydney 1993); Anthony Reid, *Europe and Southeast Asia: the military balance* (Townsville 1982); Sudjoko, *Ancient Indonesian technology: Ship building and fire arms production around the sixteenth century*, Aspects of Indonesian archaeology 7 (1981).

7 Gommans and Kolff, op. cit; Anthony Reid, *The Military balance*; most of Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare*.

8 Ricklefs, *War, Culture and the Economy*, 129pp, 223pp; Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare*, C4.

9 Sudjoko, *Ancient Indonesian Technology*, 11. The book as a whole, however, is somewhat confusing, as Sudjoko also remarks that looking at the Dutch-Indonesian encounter as some sort of arms race is completely unfruitful. Comp. *ibid.*, 14, 25.

10 Leonard Blussé, *Tussen geveinsde vrunden en verklaarde vijanden*, lecture presented at Leiden University, 8 januari 1999 (Amsterdam 1999).

11 Gerrit Knaap en Ger Teitler eds., *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, verhandelingen KITLV, 197 (Leiden 2002).

The problems of the current discourse

This renewed interest in the political and military aspects of VOC history from a VOC perspective is a refreshing development. Not only do the bold claims made by various scholars on the matter also deserve serious scholarly attention from VOC specialists; also, the perspectives that many of the scholars treated above take on the matter are far from unproblematic, and do no justice to the complicated nature that the wars waged by the VOC had.

The main problem of many works on the subject is that they disregard the very specific character of the VOC's possessions in Asia. Both fall into the trap of incorporating the VOC into a discourse which pretty much describes the world as a sort of total war between "the West" and "the rest." World historians often name the military exploits of the VOC in one breath with the conquest of the Americas and the defence of Europe against the Ottomans, as if the breaking of the siege of Vienna and the expeditions in the Moluccas were part of the same development. The tone of the debate, which takes military developments as a starting point and subsequent conflict as a given, inevitably creates the suggestion that colonialism was an ongoing European military campaign against all other people of the world, which, when the smoke cleared after some 250 years, turned out to have been successful. Even when the authors explicitly state that this was not what was afoot (as both Parker and Black do), the questions they ask and their mode of analysis forces their arguments into that direction.

The 'Asian apologists', on the other hand, do more or less the same, albeit in a 'mirrored' fashion. They seek to counter the bold claims of the above-mentioned authors by entering the same mental framework. When the eurocentric school claims that the Europeans were more successful because they had better cannon, fortresses, ships and tactics, these authors feel it their duty to point out that various Asian states had gunpowder and good ships too, as well as to claim that Southeast Asian fortress building was in no way inferior to European fortifications and that the armies of the various local powers learned to fire volleys with surprising speed. In this way the notion of a sort of arms race between the West and the East is merely confirmed. The titles of some of these works, like Reid's *Europe and Southeast Asia: the military balance*, make all the more clear that this is indeed the way in which the conflicts between the European Companies and various local powers were perceived.

This East-West dichotomy which pervades this debate has in the past few decades been interpreted by various scholars as being a legacy of the colonialist, 'eurocentric' worldview which developed in the nineteenth century. The ideological construct developing at that time combined perceived western economic success, nationalist ideas, (pseudo)scientific notions of race and inequality between races, as well as an evolutionary, progress-oriented worldview, to form a body of ideas in which the European nations were destined and obliged to help and guide the rest of the world on their path. These ideas have been projected back by historians, onto a time when the various axioms of this worldview simply did not apply yet. Thus, European exceptionalism, "the Rise of

the West”, imperialism, and the whole East-West dichotomy itself, which did not become manifest until the nineteenth century, are now by many scholars considered to have had their origin in early modern times, according to these authors. This mode of analysis certainly also seems to be applicable to the military debate here under consideration.¹²

In only a slightly different form, this same process of ‘projecting back’ can be discerned in the arguments of some of the ‘Asian apologists.’ Here it is not the general notion of western (military) superiority that is projected back, but imperialism’s negative aspects: the conquest, economic abuse and degradation of the colonized peoples of the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which are often uncomplicatedly extended back all the way to Coen’s days. It is this aspect of the perception of colonialism that we perceive when we hear Sudjoko complain that early modern European military superiority was only possible because of a conspiracy, in which the European powers purposefully and structurally withheld knowledge from the Southeast Asian states.

The VOC: a European organisation?

The aim of this thesis is to try and formulate a view of VOC warfare that is ‘internal’ to the VOC. Whereas the world-historical and the historical-anthropological approaches sketched above have led to interesting results, I believe that the general approach they take to early modern colonial warfare does no justice to its complexities. The VOC simply cannot be described as a mere exponent of developments in Europe, nor can it be interpreted in the same terms as the colonialism of the 19th century. After all, when the first Dutch ships rounded the cape in search of spices, the scramble for Africa, the Maxim gun, Social Darwinism, Rudyard Kipling and the Opium Wars all still lay a good 250 years into the future. As to the goals and institutions of the VOC: these are also in no way comparable to the later colonial empires. Nor could they be: the organizational form of the later European empires was deeply rooted in institutions of the modern nation state, which simply did not exist yet. The VOC was not even a state institution. It was a commercial enterprise, which was granted a state Charter, yet was an entirely separate organizational body.

To make clear the implications of this point, we might borrow a small thought experiment from Black, who states that in a way the most important battles were those that didn’t take place.¹³ Black himself gives the example of the complete absence of naval battles between the various Asian land empires and the Portuguese fleets, because the land empires were simply thoroughly uninterested in sea power. In the same vein, we might here state that there was never an open war between any Asian party and the Dutch Republic until 1780.¹⁴ Whereas in the nineteenth century, the Parlia-

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London 1978, many reprints); James Blaut, *The Colonizer’s model of the world: geographical diffusionism and eurocentric history* (New York 1993).

¹³ Jeremy Black, ‘introduction’ in: Black ed., *War in the early modern world*, 6-7.

¹⁴ In this year the Dutch navy came to the aid of the VOC against the Buginese to prevent the Company’s demise, and even in this case it is doubtful whether we can see this as a war between the Buginese and the Dutch Re-

ments in Europe had a direct influence over, say, the Aceh War, British war efforts in North Africa, or French campaigns in Indochina, the influence that the governmental bodies of the Dutch Republic had in Asia had to go through the VOC and was therefore by definition extremely limited. This VOC was an entirely separate organisation, which, during the first few decades of its existence, developed into an institution of which a good part of the venture wholly took place in Asia, and which was moved by different considerations. Seen in this light, the fact that the VOC was always nominally acting as a representative of the Estates-General, became increasingly hollow in the course of the 17th century. There therefore *were no wars between the Dutch Republic and any Asian power in early modern times*. There certainly were Europeans fighting in the east in VOC service, but the decisions as to where and whom they were going to fight were usually made in Batavia, by officials that served causes completely different from those of the rulers of the Dutch Republic.

All this made the VOC into a unique institution. It had its own nature, which was defined by the world in which it operated, the organisational form that it had, the goals that it set for itself, and the people that were involved in it. The East-West dichotomy, insofar as it is valid in the early modern period, is in this respect not always a useful analytical tool with regard to it. The VOC cannot be interpreted as a purely European party, and therefore to a large degree eludes notions of a European-Asian military balance, or an exported European military revolution. In order to do justice to the complex body that the VOC was and the forms of warfare in which it was involved, we will have to throw all these notions overboard and look at it in all its specifics.

Towards a new coherent picture of VOC warfare

In 1979, Michael Howard published a small booklet called *War in European History*. However humble in volume, this book did something very interesting: it simply made an inventory of the different kinds of warfare that had existed in the course of the history of Europe, from medieval times all the way up to the Cold War, and described them in their relation to the society that ‘made’ these kinds of war, in terms of economy, culture, politics and technology. While never explicitly stating so, Howard attempted to show how all these forms of warfare were actually a product or an inalienable part of the society from which they came. By implication, the form of a society led to its own specific kind of warfare.

Howard himself dedicates one chapter to what he calls the ‘Wars of the Traders’¹⁵, working from the perspective of the European states in early modern times. In this chapter, he describes the early European trade colonialism as being part of a set of developments which also includes piracy in the Atlantic and the European seas, and the often violent mercantilist attempts to get a “bigger part of the pie” in Europe itself. Trade leads to wealth, wealth leads to military strength, and mili-

public.

15 Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford 1979), C3.

tary strength leads to state power, so the various European states reasoned according to Howard. Whether this wealth came from Baltic grain, fine spices from the Indies or silver from South America was of secondary importance.

Looking from the perspective of the Dutch Republic, this interpretation certainly seems to hold for with regard to the colonial venture. Our VOC, after all, was originally a state initiative: although various smaller Dutch companies had already sailed to the Indies, it was on the initiative of *landsadvocaat* Oldenbarneveldt that these smaller companies were united into the Dutch East India Company. It was on his initiative that this united Company was given a monopoly in all trade east of the Cape, in order to create *masse de manoeuvre* against other European parties, hopefully getting hold of part of the pie, particularly at the cost of the Spanish and Portuguese with whom the Dutch Republic was at war. If this damage against the Iberian powers happened to become military as well as economical, this was of course all the better in the eyes of the rulers of the United Provinces. Furthermore, in the first twenty-five years of the VOC's existence, piracy and trade were really part of the same continuum for it in quite a direct manner: the tremendous investments it made in the East were largely covered by privateering against other European powers, and its military actions were sponsored by the state, in the form of money, cannon and even a number of ships.¹⁶

Written from the perspective of the European states, Howard's interpretation therefore makes perfect sense. However, there is also another side to the story. For, whereas the VOC was a state initiative, it was certainly not a state institution, and Oldenbarneveldt's motives for the founding of the VOC did not necessarily correspond with the commercial aims of the people calling the shots within this new organisation. The VOC, after all, was a trading company, ruled by a board of directors, and owned by stockholders. Its primary aim, therefore, was profit, not military conquest or power, and it needs no further argumentation that war is usually a very expensive undertaking. With this in mind, the VOC and the smaller companies that were its predecessors (the *voorcompagnieën*) first sought a state of coexistence with the Portuguese in the Indies. The *voorcompagnieën* had tried out all kinds of alternate routes to the Indies so as not to cross the monopoly that the Portuguese claimed for themselves all too openly. The VOC continued this policy, for one by sending out Henry Hudson to find a northwest passage to the Indies in 1609. The Dutch had actually not expected the Portuguese to adopt so aggressive a stance towards them. They had come to the Indies looking for spices to buy, not for Portuguese to smoke out.¹⁷

In the course of the first decades of its existence, however, we see the nature of the VOC change quite rapidly. As the Portuguese greeted the intruders upon their self-proclaimed monopoly with an evident lack of enthusiasm, it soon came to armed conflict between the two. Whereas the first VOC

16 Victor Enthoven, 'Van steunpilaar tot blok aan het been: De VOC en de Unie' in: Knaap en Teitler eds., *Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 35-58.

17 Leonard Blussé and George Winius, 'The origin and rhythm of Dutch aggression against the Estado da India, 1601-1661' in: T.R. de Souza ed., *Indo-Portuguese History: old issues, new questions* (Delhi 1984), 73-83.

fleet and the earlier pre-VOC fleets had been lightly armed, various incidents made the Company change its attitude rapidly. When the news of a serious incident between a Dutch fleet under Van Heemskerck and the Portuguese reached the Netherlands, the Gentlemen XVII apparently decided to let go of their evasive strategy. The second fleet left the Netherlands heavily armed and with orders to attack the Portuguese wherever they could.¹⁸ Apparently, the incident with Van Heemskerck fleet had been the last straw. Although an explicitly aggressive strategy had certainly not been the initial idea, the VOC saw no option but to resort to it, only 1½ years after its founding.

This shift of strategy can be seen as being the first of a whole range of changes in the nature of the Company that occurred over the first few decades of its existence. The war against the Portuguese led to the conquest of territory, which subsequently had to be defended, if only to keep the Portuguese from moving back in. As the company and its possessions grew rapidly, its orchestration from Amsterdam grew more and more problematic, until in 1609 it was deemed expedient to send a Governor-General to Asia. In 1619, the plan to create a permanent *rendezvous* in Asia was carried out with the founding of Batavia. Initially no more than a couple of warehouses, Batavia soon grew into a veritable capital in the East, a centre of power ruled by a Governor-General and his Council.¹⁹

The development of this new political centre in the East obviously had its repercussions on how the Company was run. Whereas the Gentlemen XVII, the board of directors back in the Netherlands, were still nominally in charge of the whole venture (surprisingly enough, the renewed Charter of 1623 was not updated to reflect any of the changes in the structure and situation of the Company at all), in practice we see more of a negotiation model between the Governor-General and Council (*de Hooge Regering*) and the directors. In many cases the tail ended up wagging the dog: strong Governors-General like Jan Pieterszoon Coen or Antonio van Diemen were typically able to largely impose their vision on the Directors, and were therefore far more determining in plotting the Company's policies in Asia than they were. In addition, the goals and policies of the *Hooge Regering* did not necessarily coincide with those of the Dutch Republic. A particularly clear example of the latter is the period 1640-1644, when the VOC attempted to continue its war against the Portuguese at all costs, in spite of a peace treaty between Portugal (now no longer part of the Spanish Empire) and the Dutch Republic. Whereas the Dutch Republic badly needed an ally against the Spanish, the VOC was concerned that peace with the Portuguese would ruin its market strategy, and continued its wars with the Portuguese empire for another four years, in spite of repeated attempts by the Republic to make it stop.

18 J.A. Somers, *De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor* (Rotterdam 2001), 54pp.

19 Somers, *De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor*; Femme Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company: expansion and decline* (Zutphen 2003), C2.

In this manner, the VOC had become a very strange organisation: whereas back in the Netherlands it was a trading company, on the Asian side it increasingly had the nature of an autonomous political entity. It had its own government in Batavia, its own body of diplomats, its own allies, its own military means: a state of sorts. It was, however, a political entity which looked nothing like any other state form.

Synopsis

A master's thesis is obviously not the place to try and come to a comprehensive vision of the character of the wars waged by the Chartered Companies or the VOC. This thesis will therefore limit itself to one aspect of the Company which, in my eyes, did give the VOC an edge over both its European and Asian adversaries: its logistical and informational network and command structure. A lot of attention has gone out to this network in terms of trade and marketing strategies in the past few decades: this thesis will look at the same network in terms of politics and military strategies.

In order to make an analysis of this network more meaningful, the thesis will start off by giving a general picture of the political functioning of the Company, the way in which its functioning had developed in the first few decades of its existence, as well as the various military means it had at its disposal and their significance. It will mostly do this on the basis of the discourse so far, and on some topics will also try and give some insight into the debate on these matters.

This general introduction will be followed by a chapter watching the logistical and informational network in action for the years 1655-1663, which saw some of the most intense campaigns the VOC ever fought. After an introduction of the general logistical and political network of the VOC, we will follow both material, soldiers, strategies and decisions travelling all the way up and down this network, from the meeting of the directors in the Republic to the battlefields in Asia and vice versa.

A thesis on warfare, however, wouldn't be complete without also getting to the actual battlefield, and the final chapter will therefore fill in the blanks left by the preceding part by not merely looking at the networks which facilitated the VOC's warfare, but descending to the actual battlefields. In six case studies, the warfare to which this entire network eventually led will be looked upon from up close.

II

The wars of the Company

This chapter will analyse some of the VOC's military aspects. It will first sketch some 'structural' traits of the VOC relevant to its warfare, such as its financial system and its political culture as compared to many local societies, and its motives for getting involved in military conflict. It will then go on to make a short inventory of the military resources that the VOC had at its disposal, and briefly touch upon various discussions regarding the use and value of these resources.

Capital

The first thing we might note when looking at the system of the VOC as a state, is the financial structure that lay beneath it. In the previous chapter, we have already quoted Howard, who describes how for the European state, wealth was a means to an end. This end was the upkeep of armies, which grew increasingly large and costly in the course of the seventeenth century. In order to be able to play the vicious game of European politics, the entire state apparatus of the various European powers was bent on keeping these huge armies fed and moving, innovating the tax system and developing new financial institution in order to be able to do so. Around the turn of the 17th century, we might say that the states of Europe had truly turned into war machines, pumping virtually all of their resources into the upkeep of their armies.²⁰ Thus, wealth led to power. For the VOC, however, one might say that it was exactly the other way around: the aim was wealth (through trade), and power was increasingly the means to achieve this.

As noted above, the VOC apparently started off as an enterprise with very limited military ambitions, but the escalating situation with the Portuguese soon changed this. A strategy of confrontation and pushing out was substituted for one of evasion and coexistence: the VOC fleets actively looked for Portuguese fleets on their way to the Indies in order to attack them, the Company tried to oust the Portuguese from various regions, and drew up exclusive contracts with the various local rulers in order to exclude the Portuguese from the trade. This latter practice was very successful and very soon developed into something of a market strategy: as early as 1609, the directors declared the attainment of a complete monopoly in fine spices from the Moluccas to be one of the Company's goals.

This shift in the market strategy only increased in the following years, and can be said to have reached new heights when Jan Pieterszoon Coen became Governor-General in 1619. Coen is the person traditionally credited with transforming the Company into a warmongering trade empire. In his letters to the Netherlands, he indefatigably insisted on the need for more troops, ships and

²⁰ Parker, *The Military Revolution*, 61-74.

cannon for the VOC to hold its own in Asia. In the field, apart from establishing the long-sought *rendezvous* by conquering Jakarta on the prince of Bantam, he made his contribution to the attainment of the spice monopoly by violently enforcing the observation of the various contracts between the Moluccas' local rulers and the Company. In order to get a foothold in the China trade, he attacked Macao, the Portuguese gateway to China, and when that failed, contented himself with blockading it periodically. All in all, violence, in the form of militarily driving out competitors, blockading their harbors, as well as using violence to force monopolies and favourable trading conditions upon local rulers, very soon became accepted instruments to influence the market and enhance profit for the VOC.²¹

As profit was ultimately the Company's yardstick, force had to remain profitable. Particularly the directors in patria were not planning to invest all of the revenue into weapons and soldiers. When they had no choice but to do so, as in the first years of the Company's existence, they immediately ran into trouble, witness the revolt of the Company's stockholders in 1623. In his article on the cost of warfare, Femme Gaastra follows the way in which the directors would have reasoned, by wondering whether the VOC's military expenditures were a *sensible investment*. His estimates of the military expenditure in comparison to the total 'debit' side of the VOC balance sheet, show that for the European side of the Company, military spending came down to about one fifth of total spending, and for the Asian, about one third.²² This stands in stark contrast to the percentages reaching up to 90% that European states spent on their military in early modern times.²³ "Victory, whatever the cost," seemingly the attitude of many European heads of state in these days, was a phrase which would have been cause for either hilarity or nightmares with the directors of the VOC.

Political structure and culture

In his lecture *Tussen geveinsde vrunden en verklaarde vijanden*, Blussé recalls the solemn yet festive occasion that took place on the 24th of September 1691 in Fortress Batavia. On this day Joannes Camphuys, who had been the Governor General of the Company for the past seven-and-a-half years, transferred the keys of the fortress to his successor, Willem van Outhoorn.

The solemn ceremony centered itself around a long table in the main hall of the fortress. Seated at the head of the table were the old Governor General and his successor. On the long sides of the table, the entire civic body of the city of Batavia was present: first the members of the Council of the Indies, then the judges, the police force, harbor masters, tax administrators, and so it went on. The entire upper class of Batavia was present, but those who were no part of the civic institutions

21 Niels Steensgaard, 'The Dutch East India Company as an institutional innovation' in: Maurice Aymar ed., *Dutch capitalism and world capitalism* (Cambridge 1977), 235-258.

22 Femme Gaastra, 'Sware continuerende lasten en groten omneslagh: kosten van de oorlogvoering van de VOC' in: *Oorlog en diplomatie*, 81-104.

23 Parker, *Military Revolution*, 62.

had to content themselves with a standing place. Speeches full of bad jokes and grave words were held by the old and the new Governor, and finally, Camphuys presented the keys to the city and the castle to his successor.

In addition to the pomp of the city of Batavia, also present was a guest from somewhat further away: an ambassador from the emperor of Ethiopia, who happened to be in Batavia at the time. While the Batavian upper class, standing around him, tried to look as distinguished as possible, the Ethiopian ambassador observed the ceremony taking place at the far end of the table with disbelief. He shook his head and expressed his amazement to the person standing next to him: "In my country, this would not pass so easily, but it would have cost thousands of lives, before someone could have acquired this high position!"²⁴

Our Ethiopian ambassador, so surprised about the peaceful way in which the power over the entire Company was transferred, witnessed the fifteenth 'changing of the guard', and the eleventh time that this took place in fortress Batavia. Quite a few things had changed in the political form of the Company since its founding.

Above it was already recalled how the Company developed a 'political' body in Asia, as well as its own capital in Asia, in the first few decades of its existence. The development of these institutions in Asia had not been foreseen when the Company was founded; neither can they be said to have come forth from a masterplan made in the Netherlands, either by the Estates-General or by the directors of the VOC. Rather, we see all these institutions developing as a historical result of interactions between the directors, whose first priority was trade and profit, and the people working for the Company in Asia, who looked at the Company through different glasses.

The decision to found a *rendezvous* and send a Governor-General to the East was originally inspired on several reports by Cornelis Matelieff, who, having been the admiral of the third fleet to sail out after the founding of the VOC, returned to Europe frustrated about the fact that every admiral going east was merely responsible for his own fleet, which yielded a very divided and impermanent management of affairs. A plan to send a director of all things related to trade eastward (a Director-General) was deemed unsatisfactory by him: what the Company really needed was someone in charge of the whole Asian venture, right there on the ground in Asia. By making his plans known to various parties, among whom Hugo de Groot (the advocate of the VOC) and Oldenbarneveldt himself, he managed to get the directors to resolve on the first of September 1609, that a Governor-General would be sent East, who would, in cooperation with a Council of the Indies, function as a spider in the web with regard to the Asian side of the VOC. Also part of Matelieff's suggestions after his return, was the plan for the *rendezvous*. This plan, as has been recalled above, was realised

24 Francois Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* (Dordrecht 1724-26), vol IVa, 320. Originally found in Leonard Blussé, *Tussen geveinsde vrunden en verklaarde vijanden*, 18.

only in 1619, when Jan Pieterszoon Coen deliberately escalated a conflict with the English and Bantamese in order to conquer Jakarta and found the long-sought *rendezvous*.

What had not been part of anyone's plans back in Europe, however, was the alacrity with which Coen tried to turn this *rendezvous* into a state capital. Coen apparently wanted to transform Batavia into a veritable city republic, as he claimed jurisdiction over the entire area between Cheribon and Bantam, all the way from Batavia (on the north coast) to the south coast, on the basis of 'conquest in a just war'. Coen had effectively carved out a state on Java: a state based on a European political system, which legitimized itself on the basis of European legal notions, but which was situated in Asia, and was ruled from Asia as well.²⁵

Of course, the jurisdiction of the Governor-General and Council did not limit itself to Batavia and surroundings: all matters with regard to the administration of the other Asian possessions of the VOC were communicated to patria through Batavia. Each of the six members of the Council was responsible for the communication with a few of the various *gouvernementen* (governmental districts) and factories.²⁶ This system, which took shape in the first decades of the 17th century, thus constituted a very effective and well-organised government of the VOC's Asian possessions. Whereas clearly based on a European tradition of government, it was adapted to the huge Asian world in which the VOC was active, and formed a 'state' which was to a large degree independent of the directors back in the Netherlands.

This made the VOC's Asian possessions a very interesting phenomenon: we cannot simply regard it as the exponent of a European power. Neither, however, can we see it as an Asian state. The Dutch Republic might not have had much influence on Batavian politics; however, the laws and traditions by which Batavia was ruled, the way in which the administration justified and conducted wars, and the way in which it perceived itself and its neighbours was thoroughly European. It was this European political culture that gave 'the Kingdom of Jakarta', as Batavia was often called, a very unique role in Asian politics, war and diplomacy.

This European political culture gave the VOC characteristics which were relatively uncommon in the Asian world in which it operated. In the first place, as our Ethiopian ambassador noted to his amazement, it was a remarkably stable system, compared to the state systems with which it interacted. In the political system of the Javanese state, Batavia's next door neighbour, as well as most other Southeast Asian polities, the most important characteristic of a leader was his prestige, obtained by, for one, prowess in battle and the number of subjects one had. This latter trait, in which the King's divine right to rule was not a given but had to be obtained by showing one's worth (in battle or otherwise), made the Southeast Asian state form remarkably unstable. Close kin of the ruler would without exception use their prestige to try and conquer the throne for themselves, or

25 Somers, *Volkenrechtelijke actor*, C7.

26 Gaastra, *Dutch East India Company*, 66pp.

start their own *mandala*. Wars of succession were not an exception that only occurred in case of a dynastic crisis: they were an accepted and normal part of the political process.²⁷ The Malabar coast, then, consisted of four kingdoms and many smaller polities ruled by lesser nobles, which were also taken up in unabating rivalry. The four larger kingdoms all pretended to be the true heirs to a legendary kingdom which had once unified all of the Coast, and acted accordingly. Regions changed hands all the time, and dynastic trouble were the rule rather than the exception.²⁸ In the Moghul Empire, the divine right to rule also had to be seized, and the approaching death of any Moghul always hailed a dynastic war between the various members of the royal family that could realistically covet the throne. Durable as the Moghul Empire was, this did not provide for a very continuous administration. In the Moluccas, the political process was defined by rivalling villages and clusters of villages, raiding each other for heads and captives.²⁹ Looking at the world in which the VOC operated from this perspective, the amazement of our Ethiopian ambassador becomes quite understandable. Although certain other state forms in Asia, like the Tokugawa Shogunate, were remarkably stable, continuous and well-organised, the VOC system, in which power was transferred to an appointed candidate after a set term, was unique, and would have been very unusual in Europe too. It made the VOC political system very stable and continuous. This political stability was further reinforced by a factor which is at first sight not political: its political institutions resided in artillery fortresses, which were for all practical purposes unconquerable to any local power, as will be discussed in detail below.³⁰ For these reasons, the VOC had a very long breath in Asian politics. Another characteristic of VOC's orchestration in Asia was the division of competence in its organisation. Valentijn, in the anecdote with which this paragraph started, already noted that the entire upper class of Batavia was present, but that only the people exerting a public function were allowed a seat at the table. The political system which took shape had its various functions, and, at least in the 17th century, these functions were not manned by an elite but by people who had the competence for that particular function.³¹

A final important characteristic of the VOC's Asian institutions was its administration. Very early on in the history of the VOC, a system developed in which practically all information relevant to the functioning of the Company was relayed to Batavia. Whereas the fact that all the outposts were

27 Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian perspectives* (Cornell, rev. ed. Of 1999), C1, C2; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce*, vol. 1., *The lands below the winds*, (Yale 1988), 120pp; Ricklefs, *War culture and the economy*, C1.

28 M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *De vestiging der Nederlanders ter kust Malabar*, Verhandelingen van het KITLV 4 (The Hague 1943), C1, C2. The book appeared under her maiden name, M.A.P. Roelofs.

29 Gerrit Knaap, 'Kora kora en kruitdamp: De VOC in oorlog en vrede in Ambon' in: *Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 257-282.

30 Geoffrey Parker, 'The artillery fortress as an engine of European overseas expansion' in: Parker, *Success is never final: empire war and faith in early modern Europe* (New York 2002), 192-221.; Kees Zandvliet, 'Vestingbouw in de Oost' in: *Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 151-180.

31 Holden Furber, *Rival empires of trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Oxford 1976), 308pp.

required to keep Batavia up to date (as well as send all their goods there instead of sending them off to the Dutch Republic directly) of course took up a lot of resources in terms of shipping and manpower, the benefits outweighed the costs by far.³² Back in Batavia, people were opening all these letters that were shipped to them across half the globe. They assessed, plotted and planned, mobilizing Ambonese allies to fight Portuguese enemies half the world away, recalling armies from one place to have them fight elsewhere months later. This enormous administrative system which the VOC developed, in which news, financial transactions, prices, the number of personnel, the political situation and everything was sent to a central 'information hub', gave the VOC an extremely well-documented bigger picture of the things going on in Asia, with regard to trade, politics and warfare.

War with whom? And why?

Above it has already been recalled how the VOC started off as a Company with limited military ambitions.³³ It tried to coexist with the Portuguese and avoided them as much as possible. Only when the animosity between the Portuguese and Dutch rapidly escalated within the first years of the Dutch overseas adventure, did the VOC adopt a strategy which was meant to harm the Portuguese colonial enterprise as much as possible. Van Heemskerck's fleet and subsequent expeditions were given orders to that purpose, and were armed for the occasion. The first battles that the VOC fought in the East were with the Portuguese, and the first successful territorial conquest it made was a Portuguese fortress: fort Victoria on Ambon, in 1605. At the same time, the Spaniards were also creeping into Southeast Asia from the Philippines. The first military activities of the VOC were therefore triggered by rivalry between Europeans, and were directed against Europeans.

This escalation and military build-up, while directed against another European power, of course also had its effects on the interaction between the VOC and local societies, and the VOC's role in Asian politics. In the course of the 16th century, the Portuguese had bound many Asian societies to them, which were of course immediately implicated in the rivalry. The pretty much open war that developed between the VOC and the *Estado da India*, was from the start also fought by setting people up against the other party, making people promise not to trade with other Europeans, and putting each other in a bad light. In addition, from a very early stage the VOC also tried to keep the Portuguese from buying spices in the Moluccas by simply fortifying the islands, which of course had its implications on the local population. The VOC's 1608 attempt under Verhoeff to build a fortress in the Banda islands, which led to serious trouble with the local population because it did not wish to be compromised in these European rivalries, is a case in point. This form of violence, which was

32 M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, 'Hoe rationeel was de VOC?' in: *Economisch- en Sociaal-Historisch Jaarboek*, vol. 45 (1982), 182-183.

33 See p. 8.

directed against other European parties, but was also conducted by proxy, could be considered the first form of violence that the Dutch used, and the rivalry with other Europeans would remain the most important motive for resorting to violence throughout the 17th century.

The exclusive contracts that the VOC's minions in the East were already enforcing upon local societies in order to rival the Portuguese, soon awakened the idea that this trade could be even more profitable if the VOC could enforce a complete monopoly. What had in the first instance been an attempt to stay alive and acquire a place in the spice trade, very soon developed into a market strategy. Not only should the enemy Portuguese and Spaniards be forced out of the spice trade in the Moluccas: the Makassarese, Arab and Chinese traders should stay out as well. The aspiration to a complete spice monopoly was official VOC policy from 1609 onwards, as has been described above, and the VOC did not shun violence and territorial conquest in order to achieve this. Coen's 1621 massacre and deportation of the population of Banda and subsequent territorial claim over the islands, which he repopulated with freeburghers and slaves, might be seen in this light, as might the readiness with which Coen escalated a conflict with the Bantamese and the English in order to obtain territory for the long-sought *rendezvous*.³⁴

In this way, violence became a legitimate tool to influence the market. This form of violence did not limit itself to the Spice Islands in the first decades of the 17th century: the VOC learned from the Portuguese and also started using violence on other Asian parties to improve its trading position in other places. This violence, however, was always a means to an end. Whereas in the relatively undeveloped Moluccas, the VOC's leaders knew they could get away with a very violent disposition towards the local population in order to achieve trade goals, it had to behave differently towards other parties. It was hardly a viable option to make the Japanese Shogun, the Chinese Emperor, or the Moghul Emperor all too angry with the VOC. Whereas the various Europeans Companies had a maritime hegemony in the Indian Ocean which, for one, the Moghul Empire did not even bother to compete with,³⁵ the trade interests that the VOC and other Companies had on land, in their undefended factories in the city of Surat, could easily be disrupted by the Moghul authorities, which in case of trouble formed a counterbalance for the European power at sea. In spite of this balance, in some instances the VOC still managed to put its maritime hegemony to good use against the Moghuls as well. After a trade conflict over tin had escalated in Surat, the VOC in 1648 decided to put a blockade before the Moghul port city. This blockade brought all trade grinding to a halt, and ultimately led to a compromise between the VOC and the Moghul authorities.³⁶

34 Somers, *Volkenrechtelijke actor*, C9.

35 This was not in the first instance because it was impossible: the Moghul Empire was a agriculturally based land Empire and could really not be bothered by all these traders at the fringes of the empire; it therefore did not feel any need to fight for a maritime hegemony in the Indian Ocean. Yet another battle that did not take place.

36 Hans van Santen, 'Shah Jahan wore glasses: remarks on the impact of the Dutch East India Company on Northern India and some suggestions for further research' in: Jos Gommans and Om Prakash eds., *Circumambulations in South Asian history: essays in honour of Dirk H.A. Kolff* (Leiden 2003), 47-68, there 49-52.

Finally, the VOC became involved in local Asian politics and warfare in some of the areas in which it was operating. Whereas it often had, in the first instance, its own motives to get involved in wars between Asian parties, the circumstances often ran away with the VOC, up to the point where it was into Asian politics up to its neck. The clearest example is probably the various wars of succession on Java. There, the VOC got involved in dynastic wars more or less against its will, as it had no interest in conquering Java but was mainly concerned with keeping the island politically and economically stable. The city of Batavia was entirely dependent on rice and lumber from the central regions of Java, and an ongoing war of attrition in these same central regions might have had disastrous effects for Batavia. The VOC's attempts to stabilize the island, by giving military support to what in their eyes was the 'legitimate' candidate, sucked them ever deeper into Javanese politics and gave them control over an ever growing portion of the Javanese coastal areas, which had not at all been their aim in the first place. On the basis of this view of the Javanese wars of succession, F. Gaastra feels it is justified to call the VOC a 'reluctant imperialist', at least for the case of Java.³⁷

Military hardware and personnel

Ships

The VOC, as has been stated above, started off as a commercial and maritime enterprise. The original setup was simple: sail a fleet to Asia, buy spices, sail back, sell spices at the highest possible profit, and equip another fleet to do the same. By implication, VOC warfare started off as being naval.

Although the pre-VOC fleets as well as the first VOC fleet did not have explicit military goals, they certainly did go armed. In Europe, trade was also quite a violent activity in these times. Merchant ships trading within Europe always went armed, as piracy was rife and market competition was practiced by coercion and violence as often as not.³⁸ The Dutch fleets sailing to Asia not only had to be prepared for what might await them on the other side of the Cape: they might run into trouble with Spanish fleets before they had even left European waters.

Once in Asia, their military preparations did not turn out to be wholly unjustified either. In an article on the violent nature of Asian society, Ricklefs turns the usual argumentation around and states that if the VOC wanted to get anything at all done in Asia, it had no choice but to use violence. The Asian societies it encountered were no more peaceful than what it was used to back home.³⁹ The first Dutch fleet rounding the Cape, in 1595 under the leadership of De Houtman, found itself

³⁷ Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 60pp; Ricklefs, *War Culture and the Economy*; H.T. Colenbrander, *Koloniale Geschiedenis*, vol 2. (The Hague 1925).

³⁸ Jan Glete 'Warfare at sea' in: Black, *War in the Early Modern World*, 25-52; Howard, *War in European History*, C4.

³⁹ Merle Ricklefs, 'De VOC en de gewelddadige wereld van het moderne Azië' in: *Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 355-378.

in a naval battle with the Bantamese off the coast of Java, after a trade conflict and mutual suspicions between the Bantamese and De Houtman got out of hand. A naval battle ensued, which the Dutch, by the use of their cannon, managed to win.⁴⁰

In the literature there is some discussion about whether Asian societies were at all interested in naval warfare: we can say that at least some certainly were, witness the maritime power projection of the Makassere and Achinese, or the naval wars between Korea and Japan. However, there does not seem to be any doubt that European warships were superior to anything they encountered in Asia. Two centuries of intense naval warfare on the seas of Europe had led to technological innovations which had no counterpart in other parts of the world. "Sails and guns" had in steps been substituted for "oars and warriors", dramatically increasing the damage that a given number of sailors could potentially inflict. The East Indiaman, which was a relatively low, long and manoeuvrable gun platform, yet at the same time could do excellent service as a merchant vessel, was an exponent of these developments. In practice, it turned out that Asian war fleets could not match the standard of these European ships. Here, then, was one of the innovations of the Military Revolution that could be exported, and which did give Europeans an edge over Asian adversaries.⁴¹

The centralization of the VOC administration in Asia, as well as the increasing number of ships that the VOC had operating in Asian waters,⁴² led to what many authors describe as a maritime hegemony of the VOC, as early as halfway into the 17th century.⁴³ The VOC ruled supreme at sea, both with respect to other European colonial powers and towards the Asian societies it encountered. The VOC put this maritime military hegemony to good use, for one by blockading Goa from 1636 onwards in order to disrupt the Portuguese enterprise throughout the Indian Ocean, for another by blockading Suratte in order to enforce different trade terms, as has been described above. In addition, this maritime hegemony also had its political effects on the VOC's neighbours, particularly in the island world of the Indonesian Archipelago. The maritime hegemony resulted in the Javanese Mataram state slowly losing control over its overseas areas, and thus interrupted its state formation process. It also gave the VOC the power to keep the Mataram state from hiring mercenaries from overseas. As, in the explosive and dynamic political system of the Mataram state, the *prajurit*, i.e. the professional warriors from the noble classes of Javanese society, were prone to change sides

40 Houtman describes the Bantamese as having some cannon but not using them very convincingly. Cornelis de Houtman, *De Eerste Schipvaart der Hollandsche Natie naar Oost-Indien* etc. (facsimile reprint of 1971), 49.

41 Glete 'warfare at sea', in: *War in the early modern world*; Parker, *Military revolution*, C3; Cipolla, *Ships guns and sails*, C2.

42 The 'lijsten van de navale macht' which the government in Batavia sent to the directors at least once a year, lists all the VOC's vessels and their whereabouts, and is thus a pretty good indicator of the development of the VOC's naval power. To give a very rough impression: the VOC had a total of 62 ships in Asia in 1625. This number had increased to 83 by 1636. Then in 1656 it had increased to 105, and by 1662 it reached 130. VOC 1084, fol. 201-202; VOC 1122, fol. 331; VOC 1221, fol. 85; VOC 1238, fol. 493. By the 1650s, the lists explicitly include the categories 'ships bound for Patria' and 'ships that have been or will be laid off.' These have not been included in these numbers.

43 Anthony Reid, *Europe and Southeast Asia: the military balance* (North Queensland 1982), 6-7.

and therefore very unreliable, the Javanese leaders always preferred to hire Buginese or Balinese mercenaries. With the advent of Dutch maritime hegemony, however, this supply was at the mercy of the VOC. Thus, the ability of the Susuhunan to wage war was considerably hampered by the fact that the VOC ruled the waves.⁴⁴

Soldiers

The VOC limited itself to ship-based weapons for only a very short while. The third VOC fleet, which left in 1605 under Cornelis Matelieff, brought with it 200 soldiers. As the ships' cannon were operated by sailors, these soldiers were sent along purely for land warfare, i.e. the conquest and occupation of Portuguese forts. In August 1606, the Gentlemen XVII made sending soldiers along the normal policy, by resolving that every large VOC ship should have 50 soldiers on board, and the smaller yachts 10. These troops it used mainly to man the various fortifications it was by now conquering or building in the Moluccas: by 1609, it had a total of 590 soldiers garrisoning a total of 7 fortified positions.⁴⁵

It was directly after the conquest of Jakatra and the founding of the *rendezvous* that Jan Pieterszoon Coen also took the initiative of founding a land army. He requested that 700 soldiers and 300 sailors be sent to Batavia "not just to preserve this place, but to keep safe a good portion of the surrounding land and to keep the neighbouring kingdoms in check."⁴⁶ Coen was apparently taking to heart that Bantam feared "no Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutchmen or Englishmen, but only Mataram. From the latter [...] no-one can flee, but for the others we have the whole mountain range at our disposal: they cannot pursue us there with their ships."⁴⁷

From this time onwards, the number of soldiers the VOC sent east steadily increased. In the years after 1642, when Antonio van Diemen had just made a great number of conquests on the Portuguese which all needed to be guarded, about 1000 soldiers were sent eastwards each year. The total number of soldiers would increase up to what must have approached 10.000 by the end of the 17th century.⁴⁸ Pieter van Dam wrote at the end of the 17th century that 8200 soldiers should suffice for the Company's aims in Asia, in what appears to be a suggestion for cutting back on costs.⁴⁹

44 Charney, *Southeast Asian warfare*, 130.

45 D. de Iongh, *Het Krijgswezen onder de Oostindische Compagnie* (The Hague 1950), 31-37.

46 The 300 sailors, Coen goes on to explain, would be used for forming a small fleet with which to trade locally (the earliest beginnings of the intra-Asian trade network?) and with which to frustrate the trade to Portuguese Malacca. Colenbrander, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen: bescheiden omtrent zijn verblijf in Indie*, I (Den Haag 1919), 580.

47 Colenbrander, *Coen*, I, 119.

48 Van Dam goes on to state that making an accurate calculation is almost impossible, as is actually doing something useful with it, since soldiers are always under way, dying, deserting etc., and information takes such a long time to go to and fro between the various settlements, Batavia and patria. Thus, Van Dam claims, the Directors in the Netherlands can never accurately anticipate the number of soldiers they need to recruit. Pieter Van Dam, F.W. Stapel ed. *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, III (The Hague 1927-1954), 309-319.

49 Ibid., 320.

Whereas the Gentlemen XVII thought these 10.000 soldiers to be a financial burden already, to the modern observer it will seem incredible that the VOC reached its military achievements with such a small number of soldiers, particularly if we take into account that the VOC's military activities were spread out across pretty much half the globe. If the sources tell us that the Susuhunan of the Mataram state brought tens of thousands of people under the walls of Batavia in his 1629 attack on the city, or that the total number of *nayars*, people from the warrior caste on the Malabar coast, was at the time estimated to be one and a half million,⁵⁰ it seems improbable that the VOC, with so limited a number of soldiers, spread out over so enormous an area, would have made any difference at all in Asian warfare. How is this possible? Was the VOC soldier so much better than his Asian counterpart?

Of course, the VOC, in addition to its European soldiers, had its mercenaries, its locally recruited soldiers and its allies, which will be discussed below. There has, however, certainly been some discussion about the quality and training of the VOC soldier. Various scholars have indeed brought forward that the military tradition from which the VOC 'soldier' sprang, as well as his training, made him into something qualitatively different from the 'warriors' he would be encountering on the field of battle.⁵¹ The VOC soldier was a drilled and disciplined product of the Military Revolution, and the tactics he was taught to use, a product of military innovations made back in Europe, gave him a decisive edge over his Asian counterpart, so the argument goes.

Other authors, however, give a wholly different view of the VOC soldier, and suggest he was of abominable quality. For one, they point to their backgrounds. A decision to go and join the VOC as a soldier was usually a measure of last resort.⁵² Wages in the armies of the VOC and those of the Dutch Republic were comparable.⁵³ As boarding a VOC-vessel as a soldier usually meant that one would not be coming back (only one in three VOC employees made it back to Europe, and for soldiers the chances were even slighter)⁵⁴, we can only conclude that the army of the Republic was the more attractive of the two, and to actually sign up as a VOC soldier one really had to be a desperate soul. Van Gelder wishes to nuance this, by pointing out that in early modern times being a desperado was not at all equivalent with being a good-for-nothing bum. The various wars that raged through Europe (and particularly Germany, where three out of four VOC soldiers came from) in early modern times, as well as various other social and economic developments, made life harsh

50 This according to Van Rheede, in his *Memorie van Overgave*. Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 14.

51 E.g. Willem Rummelink, 'De worsteling om Java', in: Gerrit Knaap en Ger Teitler, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie: Tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, verhandelingen KITLV, 197 (Leiden 2002), 337-354, there 338-341.

52 Remco Raben, 'Het Aziatisch legioen: huurlingen, bondgenoten en reservisten in het geweer voor de VOC' in: *De VOC: tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 181-208, there 183.

53 J.R. Bruijn, F. Gaastra and I Schöffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries*, I (Den Haag 1987) 149-151.

54 Gaastra, *Dutch East India Company*, 77. However, not all of the people who did not come back were dead. Some decided to stay in the East as freeburghers, or went for a VOC career in the East.

and unpredictable, and the chance of someone ‘dropping out’ was simply very real in the early modern world. In other words: the people signing up for VOC service might have been a bunch of outcasts and beggars, but this did not mean they were criminals and bums. There is, in his eyes, no reason to assume that these people would have made bad soldiers.⁵⁵

Regardless of the quality of the soldiers, all kinds of tropical diseases, as well as the different climate in general, took their toll on the Europeans arriving in Batavia. Van Dam remarks how in 1684, out of the 1500 soldiers residing in Batavia, only one quarter was fit for any kind of combat duty: all the others were laid low by diseases or fatigue due to the climate.⁵⁶

As to discipline and training, very little research has as yet been done, and we still mainly rely on De Iongh’s 1950 booklet, as well as some brief passages in Kuyper’s study on artillery.⁵⁷ If we have to take De Iongh’s word for it, the training of the VOC soldier did not amount to much. Training was limited to a parade that occurred every two weeks. There was no training in jungle warfare whatsoever. As the salary was low, and the VOC managed to make it even lower by all kinds of rules (for one, the soldiers had to buy their clothes and equipment from the VOC), most of the soldiers sustained themselves with all kinds of side-jobs; many soldiers went ahead and worked full time in some non-military function, paid one of their comrades to do their guard duty, and bribed their superiors to look the other way. Guard duty, we get the impression from De Iongh, seems to have been the only work the soldiers really had, anyway.⁵⁸ Nicolauss de Graaff, however, in his *Oost-Indische Spiegel*, tells us that soldiers were already drilled on board the ships every now and again, if circumstances permitted.⁵⁹ On arrival in Batavia, the soldiers would be assigned to one of the four bastions, where they would receive training for two months before being assigned to another post.⁶⁰ What this training looked like seems to be unknown. We may at any rate assume that the soldiers were trained in the use of muskets and arquebuses, as well as the use of the pike, which still had an important role in the battlefield operations of the 17th century. They were also certainly trained in the firing of volleys.

This volley fire in itself is also a point of debate. This European innovation in the use of infantry consisted of having the infantry stand in rows, usually three: the first row would fire a volley, while the other rows would be busy reloading their muskets. After firing, the front row would move to the back, and the other rows would make a step forward. This mechanical ballet of soldiers revolutionized field warfare in Europe, and is seen as one of the spearheads of the innovations of the Military Revolution. Various authors, however, wonder whether this really gave European troops

55 Roelof van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur: Duitsers in dienst van de VOC 1600-1800* (Nijmegen 1997), 57pp.

56 Van Dam, *Beschrijvinge*, III, 312.

57 De Iongh, *Krijgswezen*; F.W.H. Kuypers, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Artillerie, vanaf de vroegste tijden tot op beden* (Nijmegen 1870-1874), vol. III, 238pp.

58 De Iongh, *Krijgswezen*, 79-87.

59 Nicolaus De Graaff, *Oost-Indische Spiegel, behelsende eene beschrijving vande stad Batavia* (Den Haag 1930), 30.

60 Van Gelder, *Oost-Indisch Avontuur*, 179.

a tactical advantage *outside* Europe. Standing in lines and firing volleys might work very well in the open field, but VOC warfare also consisted of penal expeditions in jungles, where volley fire would be wholly useless.⁶¹

Be that as it may: the Javanese, for one, were at least somewhat impressed, as they started copying this tactic. All these European innovations were not so ‘essentially different’ that they could not be copied. Ricklefs shows this for the wars on Java. Here the *prajurit* also came in possession of more and more firearms, both by local production and by way of the lively trade in firearms that had developed throughout Asia. (After all, the Dutch were not the only people with firearms.) They also started training in the firing of volleys, and became increasingly successful by the end of the 17th century.⁶²

In the end, the current knowledge about the quality, equipments and tactics of VOC infantry, as well as the value of these tactics within the circumstances, and against the kind of adversaries that the VOC soldiers had to fight, does not warrant any comprehensive conclusions on the matter. Perhaps the Europeans did manage to keep an advantage over many of their Asian adversaries in terms of discipline, training and equipment. It seems unlikely, however, that this technological and tactical gap, in this pre-Industrial Revolution world, and with such a numerical disadvantage, would ever have been so great as to hold great explanatory value with regard to the VOC’s military success in general.

Local troops

The first non-European troops ever to be incorporated into the VOC forces were 70 Japanese samurai, recruited as early as 1612. The head of the Hirado factory wasn’t the first European to decide to make use of the fighting skills of the Japanese, as the Portuguese and Spaniards had done so before. More Japanese were hired since, until the Tokugawa regime forbade the practice in 1621.⁶³ They were the only ones for a while: in the first decades of the VOC’s activities, mutual trust and understanding between the VOC and various local societies was as yet not of such a nature that it would be conceivable that Asians would fight with or for the Company.⁶⁴

Only after the founding of Batavia did other non-Europeans slowly become involved in the VOC’s military efforts. The first of these groups were the ‘Mardijkers’, which is a derivative of the Malay word ‘merdeka’, meaning free. The Mardijkers, in other words, were ‘the free people.’ It was somewhat of a container term, as people from various backgrounds were considered to be Mardijkers: at first they were mostly prisoners of war of an Asian background, who had been fighting for the Portuguese. As the early VOC conquests of the Portuguese brought ever more of these fighters,

61 E.g. De Iongh, *Krijgswezen onder VOC*, 114pp.

62 Ricklefs, *War Culture and the economy*, 222pp.

63 De Iongh, *Krijgswezen*, 61.

64 Ibid., 68-69.

usually Christian converts from the Indian subcontinent, under the control of the VOC, and allowed them to settle in and around Batavia, they started forming a distinct social group there. It was but a small step for the VOC also to include these ex-soldiers in the defence of the city as a separate *schutterij* (civil militia), and as soon as their role of soldiers took shape, they were also hired for military expeditions. The early Mardijkers were thus effectively people who had already served as military personnel for the Portuguese, but had switched employers.

To the Mardijker community were soon added people from other backgrounds as well. It was not uncommon that slaves, who were part of Batavian society, converted to Christianity, and were subsequently manumitted. Many of these decided to stay in or around Batavia, and these were also counted among the Mardijkers, and also contributed to the pool of military labour from which the VOC made use.⁶⁵ Many mestizos were also considered to be Mardijkers. Thus, the term Mardijkers slowly shifted in meaning to become a general name for Christian free non-Europeans living in or around Batavia. The VOC was capable of mobilizing a few hundred soldiers from this pool to supplement its European forces in the first few decades of the 17th century.⁶⁶

The Mardijkers did not long remain the only pool of military labour in the vicinity of Batavia for the VOC to make use of. The city, as a centre of economic activity as well as the base of what was perceived by many to be a powerful state, attracted all kinds of groups who settled in the surrounding area: a development which actually had the active support of the Company, as it wanted the lands around Batavia (referred to as the *Ommelanden*, literally: the surrounding lands) to be cultivated. Some of these groups also consisted of freed slaves but were not considered to be Mardijkers (for one, because they were not Christians); other groups apparently just showed up and settled there. The VOC encouraged the division of all these people into groups, as that provided for more control and insight. These groups, or 'nations', as the VOC called them, would also appear on the battle field as such, under the banner of their nation. Whereas the VOC did supply them with weapons in times of war, they did not train these people in European warfare. We should not consider the soldiers from the *Ommelanden* to be preliminary sepoys. Each nation fought in its own way.⁶⁷

This wide array of groups would change all the time, as certain groups came into being, and other groups dissolved or merged. In the period up to 1663, when this system was still somewhat in its infant stages (in fact, the first 'kampongs', camps, for these groups were installed by the VOC in 1663), the most significant groups drawn from the *Ommelanden*, beside the Mardijkers, were the Bandanese and Ambonese. Other groups, among whom the Balinese, were certainly already living in the *Ommelanden*, but they are not mentioned in any documents on military matters until the 1660s. It is

65 In fact, this stood in the tradition of the 'original' Mardijkers, as many of the Portuguese Asian soldiers were in fact liberated slaves. The VOC thus simply tagged along on a practice which had already been usual in the Portuguese empire. Raben, 'Het Aziatisch legioen', 187.

66 Longh, *Krijgswezen*, 62-64.

67 Longh, *Krijgswezen*, 66.

possible that they might have fought for the VOC before those times, but only then did they have a captain assigned to them and only from then onwards are they traceable as separate groups.

As to the Bandanese: these had ended up in the *Ommelanden* after Coen's campaign on the Banda islands. Coen had taken several hundred captives and decided to bring these to Batavia in order to populate the city and surrounding area. Whereas this group was initially in a position approaching slavery, it slowly but steadily emancipated, until in the 1630's it got its own political bodies and captain, and was incorporated into the defence system. They always remained a rather small group and 'merged' with the Butonnesse in later times.

The Ambonese had come to Batavia in the wake of the Ambonese wars, fought between 1624 and 1658, and briefly touched upon above. In 1656, a group of Ambonese warriors who had been fighting for the VOC, under the leadership of Radja Tahalela, went along to Batavia with a returning VOC fleet, and took up residence in the *Ommelanden*. From that time onwards, they remained an important group in the VOC's wars, both on Java and during expeditions.

The worth and role of these 'indigenous' troops, drawn from the *Ommelanden*, has been seen in various ways. Raben, for one, describes these groups as the VOC's version of the peasant levies with which the Javanese kings reinforced their armies. A Javanese army had a professional core of *prajurit*, supplemented with vast numbers of peasants, and the VOC came to a very similar system, with European troops as the professional core and the various groups from the areas around Batavia as the peasants. It is my impression that this qualification of the VOC's indigenous troops to some degree does injustice to their background and military worth. The peasant levies of the Javanese armies were hardly ever used for actual fighting, as they were considered to be very unreliable, and were mainly present to do things of a logistical nature.⁶⁸ The groups in service of the VOC, however, did actually fight, and did well at it too. As we have seen, both the Ambonese and the *Mardijkers* had actually been soldiers/warriors before taking up residence in the *Ommelanden*, and are therefore not the VOC counterpart of peasants forced to do service in an army. In later times, when Balinese, Butonnesse, Javanese and other groups had also become part of the pool of military labour from the *Ommelanden*, the Javanese were considered to be the least martial and reliable of all of them. Therefore, I believe that to consider these armies also to consist of a professional core supplemented with 'peasants' is an underestimation of the military value of the 'Asian legion'.⁶⁹

On the other hand, we should not overestimate the importance of the soldiers from the *Ommelanden* during the 17th century. It was only by the end of the century, after the Butonnesse and Balinese had been incorporated into the system, after Makassar had been defeated, and with the onset of the wars on Java, that the VOC's reliance on this pool of military labour really became important. As, in this later period, the centre of gravity of the VOC's military activities swung back from the

⁶⁸ Charney, *Southeast Asian warfare*, C9.

⁶⁹ Remco Raben, 'Het Aziatisch legioen', 181-208.

Indian subcontinent to the Archipelago, the use of these troops became both more logical and more profitable. Up until 1663, the VOC did make use of lots of local troops, but these were usually allies instead of 'local soldiers.'

A final, rather interesting consideration is what Pieter van Dam writes about the local soldiers that the VOC made use of. In the current literature, the local soldiers are considered to have been essential to VOC military success, as they were cheaper, they did not have to be brought in from the other side of the world, and their proficiency in local forms of warfare was an invaluable asset in the VOC's military efforts. At the end of the 17th century, however, Van Dam wrote that the *Hooge Reggering* would rather see more European troops! Not only were these more reliable; using Europeans also prevented the diffusion of European tactics to the enemy, and, as Van Dam calculates, would be *cheaper*. I will not reproduce the entire calculation here, but since European soldiers only get paid half the year and have to buy their equipment and clothes from the Company, they are in the end cheaper than local soldiers, even though the latter officially get half the wage of their European colleagues, so Van Dam argues. He therefore recommends hiring a lot more Europeans than the 8200 which, according to his own calculations, were necessary.⁷⁰ This contemporary observation which Van Dam based on the opinions of Governor General and council, and which flies right in the face of the current historical opinion on the value of local troops, leaves the reader puzzled and pondering. After all, who are we to doubt his word in this matter?

Allies

In the period that is under consideration in this thesis, allies were of much greater importance than the VOC's few hundred local soldiers. In the above paragraphs, we have already come across various examples of how the VOC made allies, and used existing hostilities and antagonisms to achieve its aims. It actively sought local help in conflicts, as in the case of the blockade Goa from 1636 onwards. Governor General Van Diemen had a mind to definitively finish off the Portuguese headquarters in the East, but did not feel like conquering it and having to bother with ruling this very unprofitable city itself. It therefore sent an embassy under Johan van Twist to the court of the Indian state of Bijapur, at the time the most powerful state south of the Moghul Empire. The treaty which was the result of this mission gives a wonderful insight into the way in which the VOC tried to do politics. As the VOC was seeking to consolidate its interests on the Malabar Coast and Ceylon, it wanted to do away with the Portuguese on the west coast of India for good. The articles of the treaty come down to the following: the VOC would block the harbour (using its naval superiority, doing what it was best at), thus disrupting the flow of reinforcements to Goa, and the flow of information throughout the Portuguese empire. At the same time, the raja of Bijapur, who was ill-disposed towards the Portuguese and claimed sovereignty over the area surrounding Goa, would

⁷⁰ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, I, 324-326.

attack the city by land and conquer it. The VOC would back up this attack by landing an army. All the while, the blockading fleet would be supplied from Wingurla, a Bijapur port town. In the end, the raja would be handed the sovereignty over the city.⁷¹ Thus the VOC had made a deal which would work to the benefit of both the Company and the Bijapur Empire. The Company did not have to bother to provide a land army strong enough to conquer Goa, neither did it have to bother to conquer and occupy the town.⁷²

In other cases, allies were practically handed to the Company on a platter, before the VOC even knew it needed them. A case in point is the call for help that the VOC received from the Raja Singha, the raja of Kandy, the mid-Ceylonese kingdom, in 1637. Here, the exact opposite of the situation with regard to Goa seems to have developed. The VOC had just started an extensive military campaign against the Portuguese strongholds along the west coast of the Indian subcontinent, but it would appear that Ceylon as yet had no place in these plans. An invitation to drive out the Portuguese from the Raja Singha, who was increasingly isolated by Portuguese strongholds along the coast, and felt increasingly frustrated with this fact, seems to have changed the VOC's mind.

Another famous case of an ally simply presenting himself is the story of Arung Palakka, the Buginese leader who, after a failed rebellion against his Makassarese overlords, simply appeared in Batavia and offered his services. As the Makassarese state was at that time the last remaining rivaling sea power in the Archipelago, with which the VOC had already been at war in 1660, this was once again a case in which both parties apparently saw their mutual benefit. After his failed rebellion, and aware of the struggle between the VOC and the Makassarese state, Arung Palakka saw a perfect party in the VOC to help him regain his lost honour and position. After the VOC had made use of Arung Palakka and his warriors on several other expeditions, these finally got their revenge in 1666, when the VOC once again went to war with the Makassarese. The VOC merely provided ship transport for the various Buginese and Butonnesse groups joining the Company's war against Makassar. After one of the most intense wars the VOC fought in the 17th century, the Makassarese state was defeated, the VOC was rid of its competitor, various Bugi and Butonnesse groups were rid of an unwanted overlord, and Arung Palakka had his honour back.

Whereas the number of troops that the VOC could attract from the *Ommelanden* in these times was limited to several hundreds, the above alliances usually involved much larger armies. The Bijapurian state, like the Moghul Empire, was a thoroughly military organisation, and in the seventeenth cen-

71 J.E. Heeres ed., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neederlando-Indicum: verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten, van privilegebrieven aan hen verleend enz.*, II (The Hague, 1931), CXXII, Kust van Malabaar [sic], maart 1637, 294-297.

72 In the end, the Raja did not live up to his end of the bargain. An attack from the Moghul Empire was expected, while at the same time the Portuguese pressured the raja of Bijapur to end his relations with the Dutch (for one, by seizing some merchant vessels). The land attack therefore never came. The VOC then contented itself with structurally blocking the Goa harbour, until it reached a peace agreement with the Portuguese in 1644. D.C. Varma, *History of Bijapur* (New Delhi 1974), 59-60.

tury, high nobles commonly had standing armies of 5000 horsemen alone, which in times of war could be supplemented by considerable infantry peasant levies.⁷³ This gives us some impression of the kind of army that would have appeared before the walls of Goa, had the attack actually taken place. The various Buginese and Butonese groups which had joined Speelman's fleet in the course of his campaign against Makassar, at a certain moment numbered 10.000 warriors, whereas disease left only 250 European soldiers able to fight at the time.⁷⁴ The fact that the Company, through its political role and diplomatic efforts, got these kinds of armies to fight for its causes, illustrates the fact that in many cases, politics might have been far more instrumental for the VOC winning its wars, than military superiority.

Fortresses

As we have seen, many of the innovations of the Military Revolution could not be exported, or looked completely different outside Europe. However, some specifically European military innovations, like the warship, did *not* lose relevance in Asia. Another one of these was European fortress design.

Back in Europe, as a response to the advent of artillery, the design of fortresses had evolved from the form which we would associate with a medieval castle, to an almost scientific design by the end of the 16th century. High, massive stone walls, an easy and grateful target for artillery, were gradually replaced with lower, sloping earthen walls covered with a layer of stone, which absorbed the shock of an impact and would not collapse. The simple rectangular castle designs with round corner pavilions of the early renaissance were gradually replaced by ever more complicated geometrical designs, which did not leave a single angle where the defending artillery could not reach. Whereas at the end of the 15th century, no city wall or fort could withstand the onslaught of the artillery trains brought along by the armies of those European states that could afford them, the 16th century saw the evolution of a defensive answer to the development of artillery. By the dawn of the 17th century, these defensive innovations had advanced to such a point that taking a city or a fortress could no longer be achieved by artillery bombardment, but (once again) involved laying siege to a city, starving it rather than taking it by force.⁷⁵

At the beginning of this 17th century, the Netherlands were the *avant-garde* of artillery fortress design. The wars with Spain had given the Dutch quite some experience with these fortresses, and had also moved the rulers of the newborn Dutch Republic to invest in training and study of fortress building at Dutch universities. The Dutch Republic had become a centre of expertise on

⁷³ D.C. Varma, *History of Bijapur*, 236pp.

⁷⁴ De Iongh, 108.

⁷⁵ Parker, 'Artillery fortress', 196pp.

the matter. Designers like Simon Stevin became the European authority on fortress design, and engineers came to the Dutch Republic from across Europe to learn the secrets of the trade.⁷⁶

As European rivalry in the Asian waters started, an arms race with regard to fortifications immediately took off. The greatest threat for European settlements in Asia, invariably placed along the coast or a river mouth, was artillery bombardment from other Europeans' sailing vessels. The appearance of Dutch and English ships in Asian waters was therefore a good incentive for the Iberian powers to seriously review the defences of their settlements. Until then, their defences would mainly have had to protect their settlements from land attacks by Asian powers, and were therefore of cheaper designs, with vertical walls and often round corner pavilions. The prospect of European ships, armed with several dozens of cannon each, appearing before the walls of these fortresses on the seaside, made the Portuguese and Spaniards invest in updating their fortifications and founding more cannon.⁷⁷

The Company, meanwhile, also built its settlements with an eye on possible attack by other European parties. The fortress that the Europeans built on Banda, as discussed above, was the first fortress actually built instead of conquered by the VOC, and its aim of defending the islands against other European parties is clear in its design, which, although humble in setup, follows the European state of the art with regard to fortress building. Batavia, initially defended with some cannon on the two reinforced warehouses that were there before Coen conquered the area for the Company, was defended with a provisional system of moles and bastions, until a huge and costly fortress was built in the years between 1631 and 1639, designed to withstand any European attack. As, in the years following 1636, the Company conquered various Portuguese fortresses, it usually deemed the existing defences insufficient. It would make the fortresses smaller so that it needed fewer soldiers to defend them, and also updated the defences to the European standard of the time. While in Europe, fortress building had become a highly scientific and specialized profession, the VOC did not hire such specialists for its fortresses: the designs were made by the city architects of larger VOC settlements such as Cape Town, Batavia or Colombo. These made use of the methods and handbooks that had been developed by Simon Stevin and his contemporaries, which provided standardized plans for fortresses. These merely needed to be adapted to local circumstances.⁷⁸

These fortresses, while designed for European forms of warfare, also proved highly effective against local powers. In the entire history of the VOC, only two fortresses were ever conquered by a non-European party: Fort Zeelandia on Formosa, facing a professional Chinese army, 25.000 strong, had the flaw of having a hill overlooking the fortress, defended by only a small redoubt. After a siege of nine months, this small redoubt was taken, bringing the inner fortress both in

⁷⁶ Zandvliet, 'fortenbouw', 155.

⁷⁷ Parker, 'Artillery fortress', 203pp.

⁷⁸ Zandvliet, 'fortenbouw', 156-157.



Illustration 1: the defences around Batavia in the 1660s. In the actual city we see Batavia Castle with its four bastions. The area around the city houses an elaborate system of smaller forts and redoubts to protect the city from attack by both land and sea.

sight and in range of Chinese artillery. Zeelandia surrendered one week later. The other fort the VOC lost to a non-European party was a small fort called Rembang on Java, taken in 1741, after its commander had lost his mind, was facing a mutiny of his own troops and simply surrendered the place to the Javanese.⁷⁹ These, however, were the notable exceptions, and much more representative of the worth of European defences are perhaps the 1628 and 1629 attacks of Mataram armies against the provisional yet European-style defences of Batavia. Although in the first year, Mataram brought 10.000 men under the walls of Batavia, and at least double that number the next year, the city held out. In practice we see that it was already quite extraordinary for an Asian power to even attack a European artillery fortress: most did not even bother to try.

The fact that European-style fortresses turned out to be virtually unconquerable had far-reaching implications for the functioning of the Company as a whole. Firstly: it was an essential element in the longevity, the permanence of the VOC discussed above. Whereas VOC fortresses were usually citadels, with the better part of the city outside their walls, the warehouses and the administration were always inside the fortress. Thus, the VOC's political institutions, chain of command, trade and flow of information could not be permanently disrupted or destroyed by any local power. This 'physical' aspect of the VOC's permanence and its political aspect mutually reinforced each other. Secondly, VOC fortresses were also an important factor in the VOC's maritime hegemony, as for-

79 Rummelink, 'De worsteling om Java', 341-342.

tresses did not only protect a settlement or city, but could also control a sea-lane or serve as a base of operation for fleets. In the course of the early seventeenth century, we see that the VOC grew interested in certain geostrategical goals. We see this exemplified in the fact that one of the main reasons for conquering the Malabar coast was to make sure that no other European power would use it as a base of operations from where to conquer Ceylon.⁸⁰ Another example is the protracted siege of *A Famosa*, the huge Portuguese fortress in Malakka, from 1636 to 1641. The VOC dedicated an enormous amount of resources to the siege of this fortress, not just to get hold of the trade there, but because *A Famosa* controlled the Malakka Strait. As fortress Batavia already controlled the Java Strait, this was essentially an attempt to monopolize access to the South Chinese Sea from the west.⁸¹ In this manner, seaboard European artillery fortresses combined with superior warships, gave the VOC its maritime hegemony over local powers, and increasingly over other European parties as well.

There has been ample discussion on the quality of European fortresses compared to local fortresses, and how the latter changed in the light of the arrival of Europeans. Particularly for the case of Southeast Asia, opinions on the matter vary enormously, as some hold it that fortress-building was virtually non-existent in Southeast Asia, where notions of territory were of less importance, and only made its first hesitating steps in response to European methods of war.⁸² Other authors, however, do not only claim that there was in fact a tradition of fortress building in Southeast Asia, but that these fortresses were in no way inferior to European ones.⁸³ The latter statement is absolutely not borne out by the facts, as the evidence of these same authors brings to the fore that Southeast Asian fortresses were usually square buildings, more often made out of wood than out of stone. We also need to consider the fact that whereas Rembang was the only fortress the VOC ever lost to a Southeast Asian party, the Javanese Wars saw the conquest of dozens of Javanese fortresses by VOC troops. The fact that the authors making these claims never make any argued comparison and only talk about Southeast Asian forts, suggests that their idea of European fortress building is somewhat underinformed.

Be all of this as it may: there is no doubt that the arrival of Europeans was indeed answered by Asian initiatives in the field of fortifications. The most famous case of how Asian fortifications were influenced by innovations from Europe, is to be found in the Japanese civil wars. Here, various European innovations in the field of warfare were copied and even surpassed, among which fortress building. When cannon, both imported and locally produced, started playing an increasingly important role in these wars around 1580, this soon triggered a response in fortress build-

80 K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch* (Bombay 1931), 3.

81 George Winius, 'Luso-Nederlandse rivaliteit in Azië' in: *De VOC: tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 105-130, there 118-119.

82 Reid, *Military balance*, 1; Parker, 'Artillery fortress', 213.

83 Ricklefs, *War culture and the Economy*, 129pp; Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare*, C4.

ing, just as it had done in Europe. The resulting fortresses, such as Kumamoto and Osaka castle, showed a striking resemblance with European artillery fortresses: they had sloping walls, and the outlay of the walls was designed to leave no dead angles and provide flanking fire. Nonetheless it is uncertain whether these innovations were directly copied from European examples: it is as likely that the Japanese, confronted with the same problems posed by the rise of artillery (which the Japanese *did* copy from the Portuguese)⁸⁴ came up with very similar solutions.⁸⁵

In other cases, European influence on the defences of Asian powers was a lot more direct, the most telling case probably being the defences of Makassar. Being the capital and harbour of Gowa, the main rivalling sea power as well as biggest trade competitor to the VOC in the Archipelago, Makassar housed various trade diasporas from all over Asia, as well as English, Danes and a large number of Portuguese. Europeans were involved in aiding and advising the king with regard to his defences: a Dutch travel account of 1632 tells us how the king's ordnance was managed by an Englishman who had converted to Islam.⁸⁶ Apparently already expecting trouble with the VOC, the resident Portuguese and the king thought it in their mutual benefit to aid each other in building up the city's defences. In the 1630s, a European-style fortress called Sombaopu was erected at the capital, which in the following decades was supplemented with a system of redoubts, and eventually the city's entire coastline was sealed off by a brick wall, eleven kilometres long. When it finally came to blows with the VOC in the 1660s, a good portion of the artillery that defended the city was operated by Portuguese, as Wouter Schouten informs us in his account of the events.⁸⁷

These Makassarese defences, born out of the cooperation of various parties which saw a common enemy in the Dutch, was one of the greatest military challenges that the VOC ever faced. When in 1666 the VOC decided to launch another expedition against the kingdom, the commander Cornelis Speelman was specifically instructed to limit the use of European soldiers and have the allies do all the fighting, as well as not to directly attack the capital but to limit himself to raiding the coast in several locations.⁸⁸ The Company was apparently afraid to directly confront the Makassarese defences. When the ranks of Speelman's allies grew and he decided to go against the capital on his own initiative in the beginning of 1667, the fleet wasted all its ammunition upon the defences without any result. A long siege ensued, which ultimately lasted for a good 2½ years. Only through sapping did Speelman's troops eventually breach the walls of the fortress.⁸⁹

84 Paul Varley, 'Warfare in Japan' in: Black, *War in the early modern world*, 66-67.

85 Parker, 'Artillery fortress', 216.

86 Travel account of Seyger van Rechteren, quoted in Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, III, *a century of advance* (Chicago 1993), 1444.

87 Wouter Schouten (Michael Breet and Marijke Barent van Haeften eds.), *De Oostindische voyagie van Wouter Schouten* (Zutphen 2003, originally published in 1676), 87.

88 Leonard Andaya, 'De militaire alliantie tussen de VOC en de Buginezen' in: *De VOC: tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 283-308, there 286.

89 Ibid., 303-304.

Artillery and artillerists

As the first VOC fleets entered the Asian waters, back in Europe people were still in the process of perfecting the various uses that artillery could have. Whereas, in the sixteenth century, it had proven its worth in tearing down or defending fortifications, as well as war at sea, the effective use of field artillery in an open battle was only developed in the first decades of the 17th century. At the time, artillerists as yet had no place in European military traditions and hierarchy, and therefore had a somewhat eccentric place in the military chain of command. They were not considered soldiers, but rather, as Howard puts it, ‘witchdoctors’, exercising their voodoo with their strange machines. It was only in the 1650s that the French army made the first attempt to really incorporate artillerists in the military structures.⁹⁰

This state of the art with regard to artillery in Europe is reflected in the ways in which the VOC used it. As we have already seen, much of the military strength of the VOC came from its ability to deploy artillery from ships, and defend its fortifications with it. In a trade empire which was mainly oriented upon the sea, these two uses of artillery were of even greater importance than in Europe. Also, like in Europe, deploying artillery was a profession which had nothing to do with soldiering. Shipboard artillery was not operated by the VOC’s soldiers but by the sailors, some of whom were specialized *boschschieters* (bus firers), under the command of a constable-major. The land-based artillerists defending the various fortresses were recruited from among these sailors: whereas a soldier signed up as such back in the Republic, artillerists only became artillerists once in the East, and from the point of view of the soldiers were ‘witchdoctors’ as much as their colleagues back in Europe. The quality of VOC soldiers, as has been discussed above, is subject to some discussion, but it would at any rate seem that these VOC artillerists stood in very high esteem. Because of their high quality, they were very much sought after by other companies, and for that reason they deserted quite often.⁹¹

While extremely useful against fortifications as well as for defence, the use of artillery in open battles and skirmishes seems to have been very limited in this period. Even in Europe, the use of field artillery as had as yet to be perfected. The kinds of wars the VOC waged in the period under study rarely involved sending expeditions inland at any rate, and insofar as they did, these were usually small-scale penal or scouting expeditions against relatively weak or unorganised adversaries: kinds of war which brought with them their own problems, but which hardly involved trains of field artillery.⁹² Cannon were often brought along, but their military value seems to have consisted mainly of the shock effect that their noise and indiscriminate destruction brought about against adversar-

90 Parker, *Military Revolution*, 23-24; Howard, *War in European History*, C4.

91 Kuypers, III, 237-239.

92 For examples of these kinds of expeditions, see De Jongh, 114pp, and Albrecht Herport (S.P. L’Honoré Naber, ed.), *Reise nach Java, Formosa, Vorder-Indien und Ceylon* (Den Haag 1930, originally published 1669).

ies who had little or no experience with firearms.⁹³ Their worth, in that respect, was psychological rather than tactical. Nonetheless we find instances in which cannon were effectively used in open battles. In most of these instances they were loaded with scrap, which was very effective against adversaries not wearing any kind of body armour.

Cannon, however, were far from rare in the Indian Ocean world. Gun founding might have been an art at which some societies were better than others, but it certainly was not an art which only the Europeans had mastered, or kept secret for that matter. Some Asian rulers would seem to have obtained guns by way of Arab traders early in the 16th century, the Moghul armies were famous for their artillery, cannon founders from the Ottoman Empire were in service of the Achinese sultan in the 1560s and Chinese and Japanese residents in various places also seem to have produced cannon locally in the 16th century. Subsequently, European competition in 17th century Asia caused rapid proliferation of both the possession of cannon and the art of making them: the English, finding that European firearms were rather in demand in Asia, saw no problem in selling them there, particularly in areas where the Dutch were active. The Makassarese locally produced their own cannon by the first decade of the 17th century, in all probability learning from the Portuguese. Mataram, the Javanese state, was making its first attempts at gunfounding in the 1650s.⁹⁴

Having a lot of guns is one thing; putting them to good use is quite another. Although these guns were in some cases also deployed for the defence of fortifications (as in the case of Makassar), the eagerness with which particularly Southeast Asian rulers tried to obtain firearms also seems to have had a more psychological motive. In Southeast Asian cultures, weapons in general were considered to have a supernatural aspect (that which O.W. Wolters called *soul stuff*), contributing to victory not only in the practical sense of the word, but also making victory more likely by bringing their supernatural power to the field of battle. Cannon were perceived as having a great amount of this supernatural power, and for this reason it was important to have as many guns as possible, and the larger the better. For this reason, Southeast Asian rulers were particularly keen on founding large guns, and tried to lay their hands on as many pieces as possible, even if these weapons were not really useable in practice or when they did not have the appropriate ammunition for them.⁹⁵ Today the huge 'holy cannon' in Banten (Bantam) and Jakarta still bear witness to this fondness of large guns. An inventory of the various guns present at the *kraton* of Surakarta also shows this, as well as the complete lack of uniformity of the guns with which the Javanese court was defended: the cannon can be identified as being of Dutch, Javanese, English and Portuguese origin, and hardly two pieces are the same. In addition, the remarks in Dutch sources on the ill use of cannon (such as overload-

93 Reid, *Military balance*, 4-5; Charney, *Southeast Asian warfare*, C4 For a telling example of the unpractical nature yet huge psychological effect of cannon in these kinds of wars, once again see Herport, *Reise*, 44pp.

94 Reid, *Military balance*, 3-4.

95 Charney, 63.

ing and bad aiming) are too numerous to attribute merely to a general disdain of the enemy.⁹⁶ It therefore seems plausible that, although many Southeast Asian states built up impressive arsenals of artillery in the 16th and 17th centuries, the types of warfare in which these states were involved, as well as the perceived role of artillery in warfare, did not really give it a clear practical application in Southeast Asian warfare, which in turn did not facilitate the development of standardization and professionalism in its use. The same, however, might to a lesser degree be said of the VOC for this period: where artillery was used from fortresses and ships, its use was clear, but out in the field, its role was often no more than psychological.

Gunpowder

The extensive reliance on artillery and firearms made gunpowder the lifeblood of the Company's defences. Each Company ship leaving from the Dutch Republic was equipped with up to 10.000 pounds of it.⁹⁷ This was not just meant for the defence of the ship: the demand for gunpowder in Asia was also supplied from the reserves that the fleets took with them: when the ship arrived in Batavia, the authorities there simply redistributed the gunpowder in the way they saw fit.

This practice explains why gunpowder is so notably lacking from the *Generale Eijs*,⁹⁸ the 'shopping list' of goods that were needed in Asia, sent along with the fleets returning to Europe. Whereas in these requests from Asia, page after page is filled with weapons and ammunition (pistols, balls of various sizes, sword blades), gunpowder is nowhere to be found. While undoubtedly a much simpler system for the Company, it is a pity for the researcher nowadays, as it makes it very hard to reconstruct how much gunpowder was actually 'consumed.'

Another thing, however, is quite clear: as soon as the Company got a foothold in Asia, it did not feel like being wholly dependent on the supply lines from Europe. As early as October 1615, Governor General Reynst requested "a good quantity of gunpowder for the fortresses, and people who can make powder themselves."⁹⁹ Only a few years later, Coen urged the Gentlemen XVII to do the same: "Please don't fail to also send some powder makers, as we hope to obtain plenty of saltpetre from the [Coromandel] coast; neither fail to send us powder until Your Honours are certain that we will be able to get by out here."¹⁰⁰ At the time that Coen wrote these words to the Gentlemen XVII, two powder mills were already active on Ambon, and Coen was already building a third one

96 K.C. Crucq, 'De kanonnen in den Kraton te Soerakarta' in: TBG 77, 93-110.

97 C.O. van der Meij, 'De VOC onder de wapenen' in: J.P. Puype and Marco van der Hoeven, *Het arsenaal van de wereld: Nederlandse wapenhandel in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam 1993), 50. According to Pieter van Dam, I, 643, it was, as of 1656, procedure to equip the large galleons with 7.000 pounds, and smaller vessels with 3.000.

98 VOC-Archives, 13427 and further.

99 W.Ph. Coolhaas ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der VOC*, I (Den Haag 1960), 56. This is a quote from what is considered to be a forerunner of the *Generale Eijs*, and is, as far as I have been able to determine, the only time that it contained a request for powder.

100 Quoted from Kuypers, *Geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 207pp.

in Batavia. It would seem that these powder mills, however, fell into disuse in the following decades. For the time being, the VOC remained dependent on the supply of gunpowder from Europe.

Renewed attempts to start up serious gunpowder production in Asia only took place from 1655 onwards. The first mill, opened in that year and powered by buffaloes, was apparently meant as a way to have prisoners of war do something useful. Only one year later, the mill was upgraded to be water-powered. The resulting mill was capable of producing 12.000 pounds of powder per month. It was structurally enlarged and enhanced, until a series of accidents led to the decision of splitting the mill into two smaller mills. In the end, the gunpowder making efforts led to a monthly production capacity of 30.000 pounds per month in Batavia alone by 1662. Added up to the mills in Pulicat, Colombo and on the Coromandel coast (the latter of which was good for 10.000 pounds per month), this made the VOC self-sufficient in its demand for gunpowder.¹⁰¹

The decision to make gunpowder locally instead of shipping all of it over from the Dutch Republic was so logical that it is surprising that large-scale production only got going in the 1650s. The three ingredients of gunpowder, which consists of 10% charcoal, 75% saltpetre and 15% sulphur, were not exactly hard to come by in Asia. Charcoal, obviously, was not a problem anywhere. Sulphur was found in some amounts in the Archipelago, for one in the Banda islands.¹⁰² Saltpetre, a crystalline substance which is the product of fermentation processes (in a nutshell, it was made from leaving manure or bird's excrement ferment for a while), could be made pretty much anywhere; warmer climates actually made saltpetre production easier, and led to a product of higher quality than the saltpetre produced in Europe.¹⁰³

This latter fact led to one interesting development: whereas in almost all respects, the Company in Asia was heavily dependent on military supplies from the Republic, for the case of gunpowder the tables were reversed in the course of the 17th century. In the first decades of the century, the Dutch demand for saltpetre was almost wholly supplied from the Baltic States. When, however, these regions were hit by the onslaught of the Thirty Years war from 1627 onwards, this source of saltpetre dried up. At the same time, the Company was building up its contacts along the East Coast of India: first it invested in the Coromandel Coast, and then it opened its first permanent factory in Bengal in 1634.¹⁰⁴ This was the region where the English EIC bought its saltpetre, and the VOC also started buying impressive amounts there, not only for its own gunpowder production,

101 Kuypers, *Geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 207; *Generale Missiven*, I, 139pp, 358pp, 471.

102 VOC-Archives, 1246, fol 904-905.

103 In the process of making saltpetre, all kinds of nitrates form in the substance. Some of these are highly hygroscopic, which would cause the eventual gunpowder to go damp much easier. (One percent of water is enough to make gunpowder utterly useless.) Calcium nitrate is the most hygroscopic and therefore most undesirable of these; saltpetereers would rather see potassium nitrate in their saltpetre, and in the course of the 16th century various purifying methods were developed. Saltpetre produced in warm regions was much richer in potassium nitrate and contained less calcium nitrate. Bert S. Hall, *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe: Gunpowder, technology and tactics* (Baltimore, MA, 1997), 77-79.

104 For the ins and outs of the saltpetre trade in Bengal: see Pieter Van Dam, book 2, vol. II, 13.

but mainly for export to the Dutch Republic. In the years 1658-1660, for example, a total of four fleets brought 2.2 million pounds of saltpetre to the Dutch Republic: amounts of the same order of magnitude as the imports from the Baltic some fifty years earlier.¹⁰⁵ As in the same years, the Company was slowly becoming self-reliant with respect to gunpowder, it was in this case the Dutch Republic which was militarily dependent on the Company instead of the other way around.

The art of making gunpowder, like the art of making guns, was hardly a secret in Asia. Neither could it have been: after all, gunpowder was originally a Chinese invention. However, as in the case of guns, this didn't mean it was easy, and some mastered it better than others. The basic recipe for gunpowder is simple enough: grind 5 cups of saltpetre, 1 cup of sulphur and 2/3s of a cup of charcoal into powder, put in a big bowl and stir for a long time. Nonetheless, there was a lot of room for improvement within this rather simple basic principle. The importance of the quality of the saltpetre has been briefly discussed above, and even the higher quality saltpetre obtained in Asia needed to be purified for the best result.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the grain of the powder made a lot of difference. In the 16th century, the development of the practice of making the powder wet and then having it dry in corns had meant a vast improvement: the resulting 'corned powder' burned more regularly, predictably and fiercely, and was significantly less hygroscopic than the original uncorned variety which, being a powder as fine as flower, had a much larger surface area. Lumps of charcoal in gunpowder could make it highly unpredictable, suddenly burning much faster or slower, which made aiming almost impossible and brought with it the risk of the gun blowing up. Having regularly ground basic ingredients and grains of a particular size was therefore of great importance for having good gunpowder.¹⁰⁷ It was for a good reason that Coen and Reynst asked for specialists to be sent over.

Although it is impossible to reconstruct what virtues and flaws the various kinds of gunpowder produced by local societies had (whereas metal guns survive the centuries and might be subjected to research nowadays, gunpowder does not), the sources do tell us that European gunpowder was considered to be of a particularly high quality, and, although gunpowder had been around for the entire 16th century, various local societies sought to copy the European ways of producing it. In

105 N.A. 1.04.02, 1221, fol. 84; 1225, fol. 136; 1229, fol. 136; 1230, fol. 65, being the 'summaries of loaded goods' of each of the fleets. Respective amounts of saltpeter: 625.275 pounds, 388.688 pounds, 908.973 pounds and 257.850 pounds. In many cases the amount of saltpeter being shipped comes second only to the amount of pepper. In one case it is even larger. As saltpetre does not seem to play a very large role in current discourse on the VOC, this might be one of the most underexposed goods the VOC shipped to Europe. Information and statistics on the saltpetre from the Baltic states comes from: Michiel de Jong, *Staat van Oorlog: wapenbedrijf en militaire hervorming in de republiek der verenigde nederlanden, 1585-1621* (Hilversum 2005), 206pp. Amounts of saltpetre shipped to Europe from the Baltic states varied between nothing and some 1.5 million pounds per year, with the notable exception of 1620-1621, when the war with Spain was about to resume and the Republic imported a good 9 million pounds within two years.

106 Van der Meij, 'De VOC onder de wapenen', 50.

107 Hall, *Weapons and Warfare*, C3; Jack Kelly, *Gunpowder: a history of the explosive that changed the world* (London 2004), C4. Although the latter book is popular history, it is good fun, well-researched and actually the most insightful book on the subject I've read.

1662, the *Hooge Regeering* informed the directors back home of the fact that, only two years after their water-powered mill had been completed, a mill built along exactly the same lines had been erected in Makassar. Someone had apparently been paying close attention to the VOC's gunpowder making efforts.¹⁰⁸ The Mataram state had learned the art of making gunpowder from the Malakka Portuguese in 1624.¹⁰⁹ However, they were evidently unhappy with the product of their efforts, as until the beginning of the 18th century, Batavia kept on getting requests from the court for some professional advice on gunpowder production. The *Hoge Regering*, of course, knew better than to honour these requests.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to make an inventory of various aspects of the VOC relevant to the way in which it waged war. It has done so in the hope that these aspects would combine to form a certain system which could function as a framework to the case-study still to follow.

Looking at the purely military aspects of this system, we might distinguish between two particular 'realms' of VOC warfare: a maritime realm and a land-based realm. To the maritime realm we may count naval warfare, but also the various fortified VOC settlements, which were invariably built along the coast. The synergy of superior warships and the use of artillery fortresses gave the VOC a certain military superiority in this maritime realm, both *vis-à-vis* other Europeans and local societies. Although non-military factors are certainly important in this maritime superiority as well, it cannot be considered separately from European military innovation. The galleon and the artillery fortress were indeed exponents of European military developments, transposed to an Asian context, which irrefutably contributed to the VOC's success. For the land-based realm, on the other hand, notions of military superiority hold far smaller explanatory value. The limited resources with which the VOC had to make do in its vast area of operation, as well as the very relative relevance of European innovations with regard to infantry and land warfare in its Asian context, pretty much limited the VOC's military superiority to one cannon shot inland.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, this chapter has aimed to show how the influence of factors which are not in the first instance military were at least as important to the VOC's military success as military factors in the strict sense of the word. The wider context of the VOC's military actions, consisting of its goals, its political culture, its perceived role in Asia and its organisation, were strongly defining for the conflicts in which the VOC got itself involved, and the way in which it handled these. The latter of these, the organization, will be the topic of the following chapters.

108 *Generale Missiven*, I, 397.

109 Crucq, 'Soerakarta', 95.

110 Charney, *South East Asian warfare*, 58-60.

III

From patria to Asia

“Don’t mention the war!”

- *Faulty Towers*

This chapter will form the first part of an analysis of one particularly interesting and warlike episode of VOC-history, starting with the end of the Anglo-Dutch War, of which news reached Asia by the beginning of 1655, and ending with the ceasing of hostilities between the Portuguese and the VOC after the conquest of Cochin in 1663. This period saw several of the most intense wars the VOC ever fought, including various campaigns against the Portuguese on the Indian subcontinent in a final bid to drive them from Asia, the first war against Makassar, and the loss of Fort Zeelandia on Formosa.

The analysis made in this particular chapter will limit itself to the first step in the operational, logistical and political aspects of the VOC’s military system: the connection between the Netherlands and the East. Firstly, it will look at the logistics of the supply chain: the way in which patria supplied Batavia with soldiers and material to wage war. Secondly, it will look at the political interaction between patria and Asia, the division of competence, and the way in which decisions in Europe took their effect in Asia.

Introduction: the decision-making process and the rhythm of the return fleet

The life-line between the VOC’s possessions in the East and the Netherlands was constituted by the return fleets which sailed to and fro between the various Dutch VOC ports and Batavia all year round. In the first few decades of the VOC’s existence, the ships usually left the Netherlands in two large clusters: one around December/January and one in April/May, known as the Christmas and Easter fleets. Later on, as the VOC’s trading network in Asia grew to include India, China and Japan, it became increasingly important for the Christmas fleet to arrive in Asia in time to profit from the winds caused by the summer monsoon, which started in June and died down in the course of September. In these months, these winds facilitated an easy sailing trip for the connecting trade routes from Batavia to the East (India) and the North (China and Japan). The VOC Christmas fleet could in theory make it to Batavia before the end of the summer monsoon, but would miss it in case of any delay, which occurred as often as not. This risk prompted the introduction of an additional fleet in the course of the ‘30s: the Fair Fleet, named after the traditional September fair. This fleet would leave in the course of September or in early October, and would therefore be more than in time for the connection with the Asian trade network.

It must here be remarked that the division into three separate fleets, made by the VOC at the time, should not necessarily be interpreted as three large fleets of, say, seven ships each, sailing to Asia in

convoy. Each of the 'fleets' would leave from several ports, and would often leave in the course of a few weeks instead of at one moment. The arrival dates of the ships in Batavia in the period here considered also indicate that the ships would hardly ever sail in convoys: ships from a single fleet would often arrive in the course of more than one month. We might state the Easter fleet of 1663 as an example: the fourteen ships of this fleet left between the 1st of April and the 24th of May. On the 1st of April two ships left together, on the 16th of April three ships, on the 11th of May two more ships left simultaneously: all the remaining ships set sail all by themselves. The fastest of the ships arrived in Batavia as early as the 16th of September 1663; most of the ships arrived in the course of November and December; the last ship would finally arrive in February '64.¹¹¹

In the first two decades of the existence of the VOC, vessels in the East would simply sail back as soon as their cargo holds were full. The resumption of the war between Spain and the Netherlands, however, prompted the Gentlemen XVII to resolve that the return fleets should always sail in convoy. The fact that these return fleets were loaded with valuable goods made them a far more interesting target for privateers and pirates than the outgoing ships, which made sailing in convoy all the more necessary. The entire infrastructure which existed in order to have the return ships arrive home safely (cruising Admiralty ships on the North Sea, secret orders being sent to the Cape for all incoming fleets, a system of secret signals) goes to illustrate the importance and vulnerability of these return vessels.¹¹²

The return vessels from Batavia to the Netherlands very soon developed into an annual fleet. On the one hand, the Gentlemen XVII wanted all the return vessels to arrive between April and October with an eye on having the auction before winter. On the other hand, the vessels in Batavia had to await the arrival of ships from the outer posts, as well as the entire hustle of the loading of the fleet, before returning to the Netherlands. This very soon led to a system in which the ships would set out from Batavia somewhere between late November and late January. This was slightly too late to the tastes of the directors, as ships departing later than halfway into December might well arrive after the winter auction, which would necessitate another auction and drive down prices at the first one. Repeated resolutions by the Gentlemen XVII to have the bulk of the return fleet depart before the 15th of December (allowing for a few late ships, *naschepen*, in the following month) came to nothing: as several governors-general felt their duty to point out, with varying degrees of subtlety, this was simply unfeasible, and a forced attempt to achieve it would do the Company more harm than good.¹¹³

As to the outgoing vessels: the fact that these left from the Republic virtually all year round, does not at all render meaningless the division into three separate fleets made by the directors at the

111 D.A.S., II, 142-144.

112 Van Dam, 1.II, 12-45.

113 Maatsuiker, quite tactfully, in 1661: *Generale Missiven*, III, 314. Van Goens, less tactfully, in 1681: Van Dam, 3, 496-499.

time. In fact, early on in the existence of the VOC a very clear rhythm to the functioning of the outgoing and returning fleets developed. This rhythm was determined by the prevailing winds over the Indian Ocean caused by the monsoon, the functioning of the Company's administrative and decision-making system in the Netherlands, and the specific trade conditions on either side of the globe.

Ideally, the return fleet from Batavia would have largely arrived in the Dutch ports by October. This would prompt the autumn meeting of the directors, the main purpose of which was organising the autumn auction of goods. Before the departure of the Christmas fleet two months later, however, the directors took care of various other matters, such as the *Eisen van Retouren*, setting the amount of trade goods to be sent from Batavia for the auction of the following year. In addition, the directors also took care of the *Generale Eis* in the autumn meeting. This *Generale Eis* was basically the 'shopping list' of the government in Batavia, and contained requests for weapons, trade goods and provisions, ranging from bacon to rooftiles, from currency to cannonballs. As the various VOC-chambers, each of which was responsible for fulfilling part of the *Generale Eis*, kept stockpiles of the goods usually requested, taking care of the *Generale Eis* did not take too much time and could be largely settled before the departure of the Christmas fleet, allowing for the remaining materials and currency to be sent over with the Easter fleet.¹¹⁴

By the period here under consideration, the amount of paperwork sent over from the Indies for the attention of the Dutch branch of the Company had become so vast that it could no longer all be taken care of by the meeting of the directors. For this reason, a specific commission had been called into life in 1649, the purpose of which was to examine the papers in detail: the *Haags Besogne*. This commission took the general letter from the Indies as its starting point, and on the basis of this would read all the paperwork related to each of the regions where the VOC was active. As a part of this work, it would also examine all the resolutions made by the Governor-General and his council. On the basis of this in-depth study of the papers, the commission could subsequently make suggestions to the directors.

After the autumn meeting of the directors, which could last for up to two months, the *Haags Besogne* usually came together in early spring, as soon as weather conditions allowed. Its tasks or working routine were not in any way fixed: it would make *ad hoc* suggestions on the basis of the information in the papers from Asia, or take over some of the work which the meeting of the directors simply hadn't gotten around to. A thing that in practice did become part of their routine was the examination of the overview of the Company's naval power in the Indies, which was sent over from Batavia

114 Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC: de financiële en commerciële politiek bij de bewindhebbers, 1672-1702* (Zutphen 1989), 49pp; Van Dam, *Beschrijvinge*, 1.1, 260pp; VOC-Archives, 103, 104, 105.

annually. On the basis of this, it would make a suggestion to the directors pertaining to the number of ships to be built on the Company's shipyards.¹¹⁵

Once the *Haags Besogne* had finished its deliberations in the course of spring, the directors would once again meet. In these spring meetings, the second point on the agenda - the most important one, as the first point would invariably concern the credentials of the directors that came to the meeting - would be to read and discuss the report of the *Haags Besogne*, and make decisions on the basis of it. These decisions would range from resolutions about trade, warfare and politics in Asia to the number of ships to be built. The spring meeting would also be the moment to resolve upon the number of cruising vessels that the Gentlemen XVII would request the Admiralty sent out to the North Sea to meet and protect the return fleets. In addition, this meeting would usually be the scene of a great lot of accounting. In the period here under consideration, the meeting of the Gentlemen XVII attempted to strengthen its grip on the various Chambers, and made resolution after resolution obliging the Chambers to account for the amount of artillery they had in stock, the number of people and material that had been sent off in the past year, and more such things, thus giving the general meeting insight into the functioning of each of the separate chambers. It also increasingly specified the way in which ships had to be built, the things that the various Chambers were or were not allowed to do, and all in all shortened the leash on which it kept the various Chambers significantly.

Thus the directors would ideally meet twice a year. In a long autumn meeting they would organise the auction, decide upon the number of ships, soldiers and armament to be sent off in the next year, and respond to any news that required immediate action; then, in a shorter spring meeting, they would discuss the Asian situation in more detail, do a lot of reckoning and accounting, decide upon the protection measures for the return fleets, and usually also resolve upon the number of ships to be built.

In the period here under consideration, this rhythm was followed almost perfectly in practice. This stands in stark contrast to the preceding years; from July 1652 to July 1656, the directors had met a total of fifteen times, almost twice as much as would have been usual. In many cases these were 'half meetings,' with only 8 representatives present instead of the full 17.¹¹⁶ This construction was often resorted to when a decision couldn't await the full meeting. The emergencies that prompted the directors to come together outside their usual schedule in this period were virtually all connected with the First Anglo-Dutch War going on at the time, which not only required all kinds of protective measures for the return fleets, but in which the VOC was also an active party, as it had leased several ships to the Estates-General for the war effort. Although the period from 1655

115 Van Dam, 1.I, 309pp.

116 For the principle of a meeting of the 'halve XVII', see Van Dam, 1.I, 268-269. As in these half meetings the Zeeland and Amsterdam Chambers were usually dominant, the smaller chambers did not agree with this practice and it was officially abandoned in 1660.



Illustration 2: VOC-soldiers embarking at the Montelbaanstoren in Amsterdam. On the left we see a company of soldiers armed with muskets standing on the quay. From this quay on the Oudeschans, the soldiers would be brought to the East Indiamen lying before Texel in small vessels, such as the two waiting in this drawing. Ludolf Backhuysen, pen drawing, ca. 1685.

onwards was of course no less warlike for the Company, the various wars which it waged in Asia were beyond the direct control of the directors. Only once in the entire period under study here did an event in Asia prompt the directors to officially meet outside their usual schedule: the news of the ‘shameful fall’ of fort Zeelandia on Taiwan was cause for an emergency meeting in December 1662, and occupied the directors for two weeks.¹¹⁷

Providing the supplies: soldiers, ships and armament

As has been described above, the decisions regarding the supply were all taken care of in the autumn meeting of the Gentlemen XVII under a single point on the agenda, concerning ‘the number of personnel, ships, cash, trade goods and provisions that shall be sent to Batavia by the respective Chambers.’ The resolution on this point typically started with stating the number of personnel to be sent, usually (but certainly not always) followed by the ratio of soldiers and sailors. For example, on August 22, 1658, the meeting resolved to send 3970 heads east, of which 3/5 would be sailors and 2/5 soldiers. This would be followed by a list of all the ships to be sent over in that

¹¹⁷ VOC Archive, Resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, 11-23 December 1663, nr. 105, 313pp.

Year		Resolved	Departed	Arrived
1656-1657	Sailors	2160	1132	2373
	Soldiers	1440	540	1168
	Other	-	40	61
	Total	3600	4213	3918
1657-1658	Sailors	-	361	2015
	Soldiers	-	118	1032
	Other	-	10	122
	Total	3600	3628	3169
1658-1659	Sailors	2382	2684	2509
	Soldiers	1588	1289	1136
	Other	-	60	50
	Total	3970	4033	3695
1659-1660	Sailors	-	1814	2150
	Soldiers	-	916	1005
	Other	-	37	175
	Total	4020	4163	3952
1660-1661	Sailors	2406	2944	2736
	Soldiers	1604	1550	1207
	Other	-	102	94
	Total	4010	4674	4128
1661-1662	Sailors	2133	2618	2298
	Soldiers	1067	1640	1303
	Other	-	94	91
	Total	3200+1400	4385	3692
1662-1663	Sailors	-	2112	1954
	Soldiers	-	1328	1227
	Other	-	92	122
	Total	2895	3532	3303

Table 1: Number of personnel resolved upon by the meeting of the directors, number actually sent, and number that actually arrived in Batavia (on the same ships, so not necessarily in the same year). Years run from August to and including July. Ships with other destinations (Ceylon, Coromandel or Pulicat) not included. For sources and way of compilation, see appendix.

year, and a specification of the amount of personnel each of them was to carry. With regard to the *Generale Eis*, the meeting usually limited itself to stating that the request ‘had been approved and would be fulfilled,’ although sometimes we find a remark on bringing down some of the requested amounts.

On the basis of this resolution, each of the Chambers would subsequently have recruiting sessions, which were held on fixed days several times a year.¹¹⁸ After recruitment it could take up to several months before the new soldier or sailor would actually set sail, and in order to live through the in-

¹¹⁸ As these sessions were only held several times a year, but new recruits arrived in the various VOC towns from a large part of north-western Europe, particularly Germany, throughout the year, an entire unofficial system of crimps and brokers developed. For details regarding the mustering of soldiers see Van Gelder, *Het Oostindisch avontuur*, 129pp; *D.A.S.*, I, 149pp.

tervening time, he could obtain a *transportbrief*, effectively an advance payment which would have to be paid off later. At departure the crew would subsequently be armed: according to a 1614 source, the soldiers would receive a musket, ‘forquetstok’ (a sort of bipod), helmet, sabre and bandoleer, and the sailors a musket and a sabre.¹¹⁹

Table 1 shows the numbers of sailors and soldiers upon which the directors resolved for the years 1656-1663, the number actually sent, and the number that actually arrived. For the period here under consideration, the VOC got off to a good start: in the years 1653-1655 the directors had sent out 3000 soldiers more than in the three years before. This combined with the fact that the Great Ambonese War, essentially a conflict over the clove-producing areas of the Archipelago with the Makassarese, was finally won by 1655 (although skirmishes would continue until 1658), gave the Company a free hand to swing the focus of its military activities fully towards the Portuguese presence on the Indian subcontinent. “Now there is a good force at hand in order to undertake something noteworthy,” wrote a thankful Governor-General Maatsuiker in the general letter to the Netherlands on the 12th of July 1655. He had every reason to be thankful at this particular moment, as nine months earlier the directors had resolved to send at least 5090 heads east in the coming year, preferably more, if room on the ships permitted. Of these, some 2000 would have been soldiers, several hundreds more than usual.¹²⁰

If we look at table 1, we see that in this period the number of personnel sent over does not quite match up to the great numbers of e.g. 1654, although the numbers are significantly higher than in the period before 1652.¹²¹ Although it is not possible to make adequate estimations of the total number of military personnel for this period, it seems clear nonetheless that the numbers of troops sent in the years 1653-1655 must have meant a significant military build-up, bringing the total amount of military resources that the Company had to a higher level. This level was not raised much further in the period here under study, but to sustain the increased volume of the armies, more soldiers than before were necessary. For this reason, the Gentlemen XVII structurally resolved upon sending around 4000 sailors and soldiers each year, and the various Chambers stuck to these numbers resolved upon strikingly accurately (although the soldier/sailor ratio does vary quite a bit). The years 1656-1657 and 1660-1661 are notable exceptions; with regard to the former it must be remarked that the directors resolved that should room on the ships permit, the Chambers had a free hand to embark more people. Apparently this advice was taken to heart.

119 J.R. Bruijn en J. Lucassen eds, *Op de schepen der oost-Indische Compagnie: vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu* (Groningen 1980), 57n.

120 VOC-archives, Resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, 2 October 1654, 103, p. 503-504. As for the following months D.A.S. hardly ever lists the size of crews, I was unable to determine how many were actually sent, and how many of these were soldiers. The resolution of the directors does not specify the ratio of soldiers and sailors, but we might assume the 2/5 against 3/5 ratio that seems to have been most common in this period.

121 Comp. with tables in *D.A.S.*, I, 144, 156.

The numbers of 1661-1662 are quite a story in themselves: in the autumn of 1661 the Gentlemen XVII resolved upon sending 3200 people eastward, on 15 ships. In the end, however, at least 4385 people embarked onto a total of 21 ships in the following year. This difference is to be explained by a fleet of 6 ships which set sail in April 1662. The mission of this fleet, under the command of Hubert de Laïresse, was to attack the Portuguese in Mozambique. We will look in vain for any reference to the equipment of this fleet in the resolutions of the XVII, either in the autumn meeting of '61 or the spring meeting of '62.¹²² More on this fleet is to be found in the political section of this chapter.

Not everyone stepping on board of a VOC-vessel in the Netherlands would make it to Batavia. In the period here under study, 91% of the people embarking would actually make it to Batavia; the remaining 9% disappeared somewhere along the way. Of this 9%, the great majority died. The cramped and unhygienic circumstances on board, as well as the lack of fresh food, took their toll on both the physical and mental state of the crew. Scurvy and dysentery were usually rampant, as were illnesses related with heat and lack of water. Typhoid fever sometimes broke out. Desperation and insanity also frequently took hold of new soldiers and sailors, in some cases ending in suicide. All in all the outgoing trip was no picnic: for many of the soldiers who eventually arrived in Batavia, the first stop was not the barracks but the hospital.¹²³

About 20% of the people who never arrived in Batavia, however, had taken their leave somewhere along the way. Most of these disembarked at the Cape, where in this period virtually all ships made a stopover to take in supplies and make repairs. In the entire period under study here, 1325 people left their ship at the Cape colony. Many of these were too ill to continue the trip, and would be admitted to the Cape hospital to recover or to die there. However, included in the numbers of those disembarking were also deserters, and one gets the impression that all kinds of 'deliberate' shuffling around with personnel also occurred at the Cape. In any case the death rate of those disembarking at the Cape cannot have been that high, as 1325 people disembarked at the Cape, but 974 actually came on board there in the period here under study, leaving only a very small 'net loss.' The bulk of those embarking at the Cape, then, had either recovered from a disease and were now re-embarking on another ship to go to Batavia after all, or were deliberately transferred from one ship to another.

Another risk of people taking an early leave of their ship was constituted by unplanned stopovers in places that were not VOC-property. Although the directors had taken resolution after resolution in attempts to limit these unplanned stopovers to an absolute minimum, storms or other unforeseen circumstances often forced ships to call in, for example, England or the Capeveridian Islands. For some employees, who had come to realise that by signing up they had gotten a little more than

122 VOC-Archives, *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, 1239, 1365pp.

123 Bruin en Lucassen eds., *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 81-98; Gelder, *Oost-Indisch Avontuur*, 173.

Product	eenheid	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
Entire melee weapons									
Swords, straight and curved	piece	1000	1000	1500	1100	1000	800	2000	2000
Sabres for the soldiers	piece			500	1500				
Long pikes	piece	1000				300		500	
Half pikes	piece	1000				200		200	
Half ship pikes	piece	500				200		200	
Long ship pikes	piece	500				200		200	
Halberds	piece				40	30			10
Bare pikemen's weapons	piece				25	30		40	
Boarding axes	piece		100						100
Pardesans	piece				300				
Pieces and accessories									
Blades, all kinds	piece	850	250		600	200	65	100	750
Knobs, all kinds	piece		2000	200	1225	600			600
Common armature for the pikes, assorted	piece						1000		
'Spaen' (thin wood) for scabbards	bushel	60		60	100	40			
Scabbard lockets ('Oorijzers')	piece	500		1000	2000	1000	1000	2000	1000
carrying belts for swords or sabres	piece		800			1000			
Armor									
Morion helmets	piece		100	100	50	30		800	

Table 2: *melee weapons and armor as requested for a certain year in the Generale Eis. For details see appendix.*

Product	unit	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
Complete firearms									
Carbines (with their belts and hooks)	piece	50	50	100					
Muskets	piece				1800	400			
Light muskets	piece		1000	1000					
'Kalibers' muskets with bandoleers	piece			300	400	200			
Long flintlock firearms ('Snaphaanroers')	piece		100	300	200	100	50	300	150
Firearms for the officers	piece						70		
Bandoleer-arquebuses, with accessories	piece				50	800	100		
Arquebuses with accessories	piece		100		200		50	150	50
Flintlock pistols with holsters (for cavalry)	piece		35	100	40			100	50
Parts and accessories									
Flintlock stones	piece	2000	3000	10000	5000	5000		10000	10000
Firestones (for arquebuses)	piece	500	1500	1000	3000	5000	1000	4000	2000
Bandoleers for muskets	piece	200			1400			1000	
Powder measures	piece		5000		6000	1000	3000	10000	
stampers tot muskets	piece			2000					500
Ramrods of ashwood or walnut	piece		300	1000			50		
Ramrods for long flintlock firearms	piece				500				500
Holsters for arquebuses	piece		200						
Ammunition bags	piece		500				150	100	
Carbine hooks	piece			100					
Walnut planks for making stocks	piece			20				100	50
Belts for ammunition bags	piece				200	200			
Belts and hooks for carbines	piece				100				
Armature for repairing muskets	piece			2000	40				
(Production of) ammunition									
Long bullet molds for muskets, assorted	piece		50		40				100
Bullet molds for arquebuses, assorted	piece				300				100
'Bullet biters' and pincers	piece		50						100
Round pincers	piece								50
'Hamerslag' (scrap/grapeshot)	piece?								500

Table 3: *firearms, parts of firearms, ammunition and tools for ammunition as requested in the Generale Eis. For details see appendix.*

they had bargained for, this was their chance to take off; when calling at an English port, there was the additional risk of personnel on shore leave being pressganged into the crew of another ship. D.A.S. lists some episodes from VOC-history in which so many men deserted on unplanned stopovers that ships ran into trouble, but the problem seems to have been quite limited in our period. Over the entire seven year period, there are only 19 documented deserters in either England or the Capeverdian islands. As the death rate on the outbound voyages was also pretty much the lowest in VOC-history in these years, and only one outbound ship was wrecked,¹²⁴ these were indeed very untroublesome times with regard to personnel for the Company.

As soldiers arrived in Batavia fully armed, the High Government did not have to separately order weapons for them. The weapons and parts we find listed in the *Generale Eis* would therefore only have been used to repair and replace weapons, as well as arm the Asian legion and the Batavia civil militia. (Members of the latter, unlike their Dutch counterparts, did not have to buy their own armament but could borrow it from the Batavia armoury when the need arose.) The lists also contained a considerable amount of particularly finely made and richly decorated weapons. These were not meant for the actual defence of the VOC's possessions: their mentioning in the lists is sometimes followed by "for the officers", but much more often by: "*tot schenkinge*", meaning that the weapons were intended to make diplomatic gifts of.

The *Generale Eis* was subdivided into several categories: currency, trade goods, provisions etcetera. Batavia's master artisans also filed requests for goods that they needed. Thus we find paragraphs such as "for the bookbinders" or "for the masons." Many of these categories have some relevance to warfare, and categories shifted or changed names quite easily (among others "for the sword-makers", which in some years was one category together with "for the armoury") I have therefore chosen to rigidly limit my analysis to the two categories most directly connected with warfare: the category "for the armoury" and "for the constable-major." The most significant goods in either category are listed in tables 2 through 4.

Looking at the tables, one will note how much of the *Generale Eis* does not consist of actual weapons, but of parts. In the actual *Generale Eis*, this becomes even clearer. The goods that I have chosen to highlight here, obscure the fact that in the actual *Eis* one is hard-pressed to find complete weapons at all: the list is dominated by all kinds of nails, rivets and screws, as well as metal thread of different kinds, tools, glue; even gold to guild weapons with. Most obvious is the example of drums, so essential in modern 17th-century warfare: each year, between 20 and 50 entire drums were ordered, alongside several hundreds of snares, drum-skins, lines and other parts: enough material to repair or assemble about ten times as many. In the course of the first thirty years of Batavia as 'capital' of the Company, an artisan's quarter had been set up in the city, and a list by

124 The *Sloterdijk* was wrecked at Cape Verde in June 1662, while trying to catch up with the expedition to Mozambique in which it was supposed to participate.

Pieter van Dam made at the end of the century informs us that by then a considerable number of people was actually engaged in the refitting, repair, assembly and production of weapons. The constable-major had 73 people permanently in his service, among whom 4 smiths and one *draaijer*, all with their own servants, as well as professional bus-firers. The head of the armoury also had several dozens of people working for him, among whom 27 sword-makers, a silversmith (presumably to decorate gift weapons), several bandoleer-makers and gunstock-makers, all with their own servants. Furthermore there was a master-powdermaker with 15 employees (a trade which developed in Batavia in the period 1656-1663, as described in the previous chapter), and 30 smiths. With regard to the latter, Van Dam remarks: 'In the past there was a head of the gunfoundry, but as for many a year there has neither been a gunfoundry, nor has any gun been made, this function now resorts under the head of the smiths and copper-smiths.'¹²⁵ This past that Van Dam referred to was in fact the period here under study: in 1654 the gunfoundry, which had been in existence for quite some time, was moved to a new location, somewhere more out of sight, to keep the local non-European population from getting too much insight into the art of gunmaking. Included in the *Generale Eis* of 1656, we also find the request for 'two gun-founding apprentices, young lads who know their trade,' and in 1657, another 'three or four' were ordered. (In our eyes perhaps slightly awkwardly, the *Generale Eis* ordered people and books right alongside barrels of nails.)¹²⁶

By the end of the period here under study, the Governor-General and Council also informed patria that they were experimenting with having plate iron, cannonballs, 'long ammunition' and nails being produced and sent over from the Coromandel coast, "so as to lower the pressure on the fatherland." The samples being sent over were all excellent and cheap, the letter informs patria, so more will be ordered.¹²⁷

Over the years 1656-1663, all kinds of new categories sprang up in the *Generale Eis*, suggesting an increasing attention to and organisation of the defences. From 1657 onwards, the categories 'for the gunfounders' and 'for the powdermakers' are structurally to be found in the lists, in which dozens of drills, kettles, scales, sieves and other tools are to be found. In 1656, the constable-major ordered the 'artillerybooks' by Joseph Furttenbach, referring to *Architectura Martialis*, published in 1630, and the works on fortification by Mathias Dögen, which will refer to the book *L'architecture militaire moderne, ou Fortification*, published in 1648. In addition, measuring instruments were ordered for the building of fortresses. From 1661 onwards, we also find a category "For the building and upkeep of the fortifications and strongholds", which contains hundreds of tools, mostly shovels and mason tools, yearly from then onwards.

125 Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, book 3, 172-208, quote on the smiths 200-201.

126 Kuypers, *geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 209.

127 General letter of 26 dec. 1662, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 431.

Product	unit	1656	1657	1658	1659	1660	1661	1662	1663
Ammunition									
Bar shot and chain shot, assorted	piece	2000	14000	48000	44000		16000	11000	10000
Round shot, small (1 to 16 pounds)	Piece		16000	88000	48800	24000	24000	22000	4000
Round shot, large (18 pound or more)	Piece		7000	37000	11400				
'Baskogels'	Piece				2000				
Grenades, all kinds	Piece	10500	450						
Hand grenades	Piece	n.s.	4500	4000		6000	2000	3000	2000
Chain shot	Barrel						12		
'Hollants lont' (fuse rope)	Case						150		
Scrap for the cannon	Barrel							6	
Accessories									
Entire bars(?)	Piece	12	10						
Copper powderhorns, 12 to 24 pounds	Piece		300						
Ramrods, assorted, all calibres	Piece		492						
Powder lanterns	Piece		100						
Assorted powder funnels	Piece		36					36	
Powder horns (large and small)	Piece				200	300		400	
Wooden powder horns, all calibres	Piece							168	
Tools for weapons and ammunition									
Musket bullet molds	Piece				48	24			
Bullet molds for small firearms	Piece				48				
Drills (to drill the cannon)	Piece				240	24	200		
Files (all kinds)	Piece				228	144	72		
Wood graters	Piece				24				
Drills (for the drilling of muzzles)	Piece					72			

Table 4. *Ammunition, accessories and tools for weapons in the Generale Eijs, category for the constable-major/artillery.*

The fulfilment of the *Generale Eijs* was often problematic, as requested goods were not sent and goods that were not needed were in fact sent over. In spite of an increasing number of measures to monitor and streamline the fulfilment of the *Eijs*, irregularities kept on occurring and particularly the smaller chambers seem to have been hard-pressed to fulfil their part of the demands. Armament and ammunition were no exceptions: throughout the period here under study, we find requests repeated, often with added commentary such as “did not come in, very urgent”, “already demanded last year”, or “under no circumstances to be forgotten.” In 1650 an irritated constable-major simply limited his request to “everything that was ordered last year but has not come in,” in 1656 we find a two-page list of weapons under the somewhat unusual heading: “demands from the fatherland already made in 1654.” In a series of lists which compare the *Eijs* with the goods actually loaded in the Netherlands and unloaded in Batavia (as all kind of stuff also disappeared along the way), we find entire pages of armament and ammunition of which too much, or too little, was sent. However, it is striking that for the armoury, the list of surpluses is usually longer than the list of

shortages, suggesting that when it came to armament, the Chambers rather rounded their numbers upwards than downwards.¹²⁸

Indeed, the directors might have been careful on their spending, but this caution certainly did not extend itself to the purchase of armament, either in amount or quality. As Van Dam informs us, with regard to the purchase of weapons, not the price, nor even the best buy, but the highest quality was paramount. The Chambers were required to keep sample weapons of the material they sent east, newly available models were examined by a delegate of the directors and discussed in the meeting of the XVII, and the Chambers were not allowed to buy guns that deviated from the standards set by the XVII. All in all little expense seems to have been spared to ensure both high quality and uniformity of the weapons, and in this matter the meeting of the directors seems to have kept the Chambers on an even tighter leash than in other matters.¹²⁹ Even where large deviations from the *Eis* do occur, this doesn't seem to be the result of economy measures, but rather of compensation for the slow communication between patria and Batavia. As it had become practice in Batavia to simply request again any goods that had not arrived in time, the directors, in their deliberations concerning the *Eis*, would subtract from the *Eis* all the goods that were presumably still underway.¹³⁰ Although no reference to the content of these deliberations is to be found in resolutions, it stands to reason that this was afoot in e.g. '59, when the amounts listed in the constable-major's request for ammunition were nearly cut in half by the directors. Just the year before, Batavia had ordered a staggering 173.000 cannonballs and grenades, several times more than usual. The directors did not cut down on this request and at least *tried* to fulfil it. How successful they were is hard to tell, as the lists comparing the various administrations are missing for 1658, but at any rate they were apparently not fast enough to the tastes of the government in Batavia. When the next year another large amount was requested, it was presumably decided that the amount still underway would probably do, and the amounts were lowered. Batavia's hunger for ammunition was indeed appeased by the amount that arrived in the end, as the next year's request for ammunition was once again quite modest.

The constable-major might order any number of cannonballs he wanted, but the two things he needed to actually fire these, i.e. gunpowder and guns, are notably absent from the *Eis* in the period here under study. Not a single cannon was ordered from Batavia in the entire period.

Although a seven-year stretch without any guns being ordered was admittedly unusual (browsing through the *Eis* of earlier years, one does occasionally come across a few), it is not as absurd as it

128 Van Dam, 1.II, 104; VOC-Archive, 13476-13481. The latter compare the requests with the specifications of the goods loaded onto the ships for the period here. 1658 and 1661 are missing. The deviations from the requests on the basis of the decisions made by the XVII were also noted in the margins of 13473, used for the tables here.

129 Van Dam, 1.II, 639pp. For an example of the setting of standards, influence of the directors and examination of arms, see the resolutions of the meeting of the XVII of April 28 1659.

130 Van Dam, 1.II, 104pp.

	Metal	Iron
Batavia (including surrounding redoubts and bulwarks)	91	207
Moluccas	23	80
Ambon	14	124
Banda	4	117
Solor	6	32
Taiwan	36	107
Malacca	38	14
Coromandel	18	23
Colombo	52	95
Galle	36	21
Total	318	820

Guns not in use: 437

Table 5: list of the Company's guns, 1656. For details see appendix

seems in the first instance. As described in the previous chapter, gunpowder was treated as a bulk good, which the government in the East simply took from the ships, and which did not need to be accounted for. Surprisingly enough, it was the same story with guns. These were not ordered; Batavia simply took what it needed. The only guns that were ordered were models that were not used on board ships.¹³¹

This way of dealing with the most expensive and most important type of weapon the VOC had, will strike the contemporary observer as implausibly easy-going of the otherwise so bureaucratic and precise Company administration. Whereas every bandoleer and every barrel of nails was assigned to a Chamber, noted down when loaded, and accounted for in the general meeting, there was no such administrative system for artillery. In 1653, the directors had resolved that from then on, each of the Chambers should include the amount of artillery they had in stock in their reports, but this accountability went no further than the Dutch warehouses: as soon as a VOC-ship cleared the harbour, the cannon on board also cleared the Company's administration. Batavia did not have to report on the number of cannon it had taken from the ships or their current employment, and counts of the Company's artillery were held rarely and irregularly.¹³²

The slightly unusual position that artillery and gunpowder took in the Company's supply system, may be assumed to be a legacy of the early days of the Company, when the first fortresses the VOC conquered were indeed supplied with ship's cannon and gunpowder. As the Company's possessions grew, this system continued working in a satisfactory way, and turned from practice into

¹³¹ In fact, in 1655, the *Eis* requests a total of 16 mortars, varying in calibre from 6 to 21 *duim*, and 1500-4000 shells of each calibre, as well as 50 light *princestuckgens* firing 3 or 4 pounds (perhaps "tot schenckagie?") and 50 *steenstukken*.

¹³² VOC-archive, 103, Resolutions of the XVII, May 24 1653.

policy. In the course of the 17th century, the meeting of the XVII adapted the standard number of cannon with which outbound ships were equipped to the political situation in both Europe and Asia, and included in the considerations was the number of cannon that the servants in the East would probably lift off the ships. In some instances, such as the year 1672 when the outbound ships had to fear both French and English vessels, requests were sent along to only lift off the ships what was absolutely necessary. In the course of the 17th century, the standard amount of cannon for the heaviest category of ships varied from 28 to 38 guns, the guns on average also being of a much heavier calibre in times of war.¹³³

With some 16 ships departing for the East yearly, each carrying several dozens of guns, artillery was not in short supply in the East. In fact, the counts that were held every few years, usually listed a surplus.¹³⁴ A count held in 1656 (see table 5), in addition to listing 318 metal and 820 iron guns on the various VOC fortifications, also mentions 437 guns in Batavia that are not in active use, and are put up on squares, stocked away in warehouses etcetera. These 437 guns include broken pieces and guns of an outlandish design for which the Company did not have the appropriate ammunition and which were probably not meant for defence purposes anyway (the list mentions some Cambodian guns, for instance), but also mortars and regular artillery which was perfectly useable, but for which there was apparently no direct need at the time.

Accordingly, the purpose of Batavia's gun foundry was not to provide for more firepower, but rather to provide the Company's armies with specific kinds of artillery. The VOC vessels were equipped with heavy yet unwieldy naval guns which could also do excellent service for the defence of fortresses, but were less suitable as field artillery. The guns that we actually find ordered in the *Generale Eis* in an earlier period were usually guns of a very light calibre, or mortars. The gun foundry in Batavia was also specifically set up to cast smaller pieces; the heavier ones were amply provided by the ships.¹³⁵

Finally, the ships that continually went back and forth between the Republic and Batavia merit some attention here. As described above, the decisions regarding the building of new ships were usually taken in the spring meeting, on the basis of the report of the *Haags Besogne*. We accordingly hardly ever find the number of ships to be built as a separate point on the agenda: in most cases resolutions on this matter are to be found among the deliberations of the report of the *Haags Besogne* in spring; in other cases they were simply *ad hoc* decisions, taken either in spring or autumn. In the period here under consideration, the number of ships to be built varied enormously from year to year; in 1659, for instance, the resolutions of neither meeting give evidence of the building of any ships being commissioned; then, in 1660, it was decided in the spring meeting to build four

133 Van Dam, 1.I, 505-511.

134 Van Dam, 1.I, 511, citing 1686 as his example; Kuypers, *Geschiedenis der artillerie*, III, 253, citing 1699 as his example.

135 Van der Meij, 'De VOC onder de wapenen', 50.

large East-Indiamen, and in the autumn meeting four more fluteships. In addition, the Amsterdam chamber had announced in spring that it had bought two fluteships, bringing the total of acquired or commissioned ships to ten.

Most of the ships being commissioned in this period were either square sterned East-Indiamen or fluteships. On their outward voyage, the former were mainly “passenger ships”, transporting the Company’s personnel to the East. Not only were the holds full of soldiers; the ships also took many more sailors than were really necessary to operate the ship. Many of these would stay in the East and serve aboard vessels active in the intra-Asian trade. The return ship could subsequently make it back to the Netherlands with a greatly reduced crew and its hold full of trade goods instead of people. The cargo holds of the smaller fluteships, then, would mainly be filled with goods on the outward voyage: the cannonballs, tools, and weapons, but also bricks, shipbuilding wood and trade goods, requested in the *Generale Eis*. These fluteships, being smaller but more durable and requiring relatively little personnel to operate, were also deemed very suitable for the intra-Asian trade by the government in Batavia, and were therefore often simply kept when they came in from the Netherlands. However, as the directors in the Netherlands were not pleased to have to build new fluteships for every outward bound fleet, they very soon started requesting that fluteships be included in the return fleets as well.¹³⁶

Decisions on the building of ships meant planning ahead, as it took more than a year from the day of the resolution to get a ship seaworthy. If, for example, the decision to build an East-Indiaman was taken in the spring of 1659, wood was bought straight away; this would then have to leach for six months. Only by November or December could the keel be laid down, and from then it took another three months in the yards to complete the vessel. The completed ships, then, would usually set sail with the next Fair Fleet, almost 1 ½ years after their construction had been decided upon. This timing was convenient, as the ships coming in from Batavia with the return fleet would arrive roughly at that time, but were often late and in any case needed to be unloaded, repaired and loaded again, often only being ready for another round by winter or spring. The new ships, therefore, came right on time to sail with the Fair Fleet, for which no or few ships would have been available otherwise.¹³⁷

It was with good reason that this resolution was part of the task of the *Haags Besogne*, which included in its considerations not only the list of naval power, but the entire situation in the East. The system seems to have worked very well. In D.A.S., it is remarked that this planning ahead was certainly in good hands with Gentlemen XVII, and the shipbuilding business is described as a “well-oiled machine.”¹³⁸ However, there were always eventualities which could not be planned for.

136 D.A.S., I, 23-25, 40.

137 Ibid., 24-25.

138 Ibid., 27.

One of these was obviously shipwreck. In the resolutions of the XVII we often find ships which have not arrived back yet already scheduled for the *equipage* of the following year. It was of course possible that these ships would not arrive back at all, which would ruin the entire planning for the year. If overdue ships were therefore included in the *equipage*, this was usually done with the aside that “should any kind of calamity have befallen this ship, which God forbid”, one of the Chambers (usually Amsterdam) would be allowed to buy replacing ships. Indeed, every once in a while we find the Amsterdam Chamber informing the spring meeting of the XVII that they have bought ships, so as to be able to complete the *equipage*.

Another instance in which the directors couldn't wait for their ships for 1 ½ years, was a military campaign. The fleet of six ships that sailed for Mozambique in the spring of 1662 is a case in point. As the directors could not simply conjure up eight ships on top of the usual *equipage*, there was nothing for it but to buy them. Indeed, four of the six ships which constituted this war fleet had been bought just before; the other two ships were fresh off the Company's shipyards.¹³⁹ Another example is the first large direct fleet to Ceylon, which had set sail a year earlier, on the 11th of April 1661. All five yachts of this fleet had been bought just before.¹⁴⁰

Communication, administration and secrecy

As has been described earlier, one cannot pinpoint where in the organisation the responsibility with regard to warfare and politics lay. Technically, the Gentlemen XVII had the final responsibility, and all decisions of the Governor-General and Council were subject to their scrutiny. Then again, the Governor-General and Council had been called into existence for a good reason; it was impracticable to rule the VOC's possessions all the way from the Dutch Republic. In the end, therefore, policy did not come from any particular source, but developed in the interaction between Batavia and the Netherlands. Where the centre of gravity in this interaction lay, entirely depended on the political situation in Asia as well as the character of the person actually taking up the seat of the Governor-General.

The Governor-General of our period, Johan Maatsuiker, was later described by Pieter van Dam as “having fulfilled his task to the greatest contentment of his overlords and masters.”¹⁴¹ It is easy to see why the Gentlemen XVII were so content with him: under his Governor-Generalship, which lasted from 1652 to 1678 and was the longest period any Governor-General spent in office,

139 Their commissioning, however, is nowhere to be found in the resolutions, suggesting that perhaps they had expressly been built for war-purposes and had therefore been kept out of the resolutions. In that case the directors had indeed reckoned with some naval action against the Portuguese earlier on.

140 This is another instance of an impressive fleet, with a clear military purpose if the soldier/sailor ratio of the one ships of which this has been preserved is representative for the other ships (The *Wassende Maan* had 107 sailors against 139 soldiers), which is completely invisible in the resolutions of the XVII. The fleet had a total of 1325 on board. More on this in the section on politics below.

141 Van Dam, book III, 20.

the VOC did consistently well. Maatsuiker was both willing and able to use violence to protect the Company's interests, but did not have the hawkish and self-righteous characteristics of some of his predecessors and successors. He was no Coen or Van Goens: it is striking how often he left decisions at the discretion of the Gentlemen XVII. The smaller decisions that he left to patria, regarding, for one, the reduction in size of fortresses or the administrative redivision of the Coromandel coast,¹⁴² were not actually discussed in the meeting of the XVII: the *Haags Besogne* already resolved on these kinds of issues and formulated the answer in its draft general letter, which then only had to be approved by the spring meeting and was usually included in the final letter virtually unchanged. Also striking about the general letters under Maatsuiker is his apparent insistence on giving patria as much insight into Asian politics as possible. In spite of several promises to the directors to keep the letters short, the general letters of this period often contain page-long passages on the dynastic wars in the Moghul Empire or political developments in and around Makassar, even where these had only second-hand relevance to the interests of the Company. Thus, even patria had access to a great amount of up-to-date information on the political developments in Asia. To what degree either the *Haags Besogne* or the directors actually *appreciated* this wealth of information is unclear, as there is little evidence of this kind of news actually being discussed in the meetings of either.

The *Generale Missiven* from the Governor General and Council Batavia to the directors and vice versa, were the most important means of communication between patria and Batavia. This communication was asymmetrical in the same way that the fleets were; as ships left from the Netherlands to Batavia practically all year round, the Gentlemen XVII were also capable of sending off letters throughout the year. Usually one or two letters were sent during each meeting. As the return fleets from Batavia, on the other hand, only sailed between late November and February, this also limited the possibility of sending letters to the Netherlands to this period. A general letter was usually sent somewhere in December, followed by another one a good month later. In effect, therefore, news was saved up over an entire year, and the Gentlemen XVII were informed of all this in two long letters. In cases of very important news, the VOC sometimes sent off letters with English ships that left from the region throughout the year, with the sensitive news in coding. This was done, for example, to inform the XVII of the conquest of Colombo in 1656, and Coxinga's attack in 1661.¹⁴³ In a single instance in the period here under study, Batavia sent off a fluteship outside the normal shipping season to bring news to patria: on the 22nd of April 1662, the *Spreunw* set sail from Batavia to inform the XVII that fort Zeelandia on Formosa had fallen.¹⁴⁴

Reading through the resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII, one gets the impression that the directors were indeed a bunch of clerks rather than a political body. The bulk of the resolutions concerned

142 For examples of Maatsuiker leaving decisions to the XVII: see *Generale Missiven*, III, 93pp, 225pp.

143 Letters of July 31 1656 and July 29 1661, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 82pp, 372pp.

144 *Generale Missiven*, III, 393.

balances, inter-Chamber business, relations with the Estates-General, costs, prices and alike. The various military campaigns or the political situation in Asia were hardly ever a topic of debate at all. If Asia was mentioned, this often concerned candidacies for vacant functions or the competence of the employees there, rather than the military campaigns or the threats posed by local rulers. A point on the agenda of the spring meeting of 1656 concerning the campaigns on Ceylon was a notable exception, and the actual goal of this point is telling indeed: in the previous meeting it had been brought forward that the garrisons and field armies on Ceylon were much too expensive, and apparently some of the Chambers were of the opinion that for this reason the campaign should be abandoned. The resolutions of the 1662 autumn meeting ramble on for pages on the pros and cons of open trade on Ceylon and the South Indian Coast, completely disregarding the war going on there; one of the most intensive campaigns the VOC ever fought. If we go by these resolutions, it has every appearance that the Gentlemen XVII perceived their task to be limited to the wellbeing of the European side of the Company and the fiscal policy, leaving political matters in the capable hands of the personnel in Asia.¹⁴⁵

However: appearances can deceive. The events in the period here under study strongly suggest that during the meetings of the XVII, a host of things was decided that did not make it to the resolutions as we can read them today. Above it was already mentioned how war fleets were sent out in 1661 and 1662, which simply did not show up in the resolutions. The 1661 fleet to Ceylon, which left on the 11th of April, had already been announced to Batavia in a letter from the XVII, dated January 7, which was subsequently brought to Batavia by the *Nieuwenhove*, arriving in Batavia on the 10th of August. This letter informed Batavia that peace talks between the Republic and Portugal were making headway, and that it was therefore imperative that all possible damage should be inflicted on the Portuguese before this would be made impossible by the peace. For this purpose, six ships manned with 1500 heads would be sent directly to Ceylon, to definitively decide the war in the Company's favour there.¹⁴⁶ If we are to believe the resolutions, however, the Gentlemen XVII were not even convened on the 7th of January, when the letter was signed. Neither is this letter included in the book of outgoing letters of the XVII.¹⁴⁷ The letter that was apparently never sent if we go by the Dutch Company administration, did however arrive in Batavia on the 10th of August, and the

145 Curiously enough, the same goes for the various papers of the *Haags Besogne*, i.e. the *Haags Verbaal* and concepts for the general letter to Batavia. Whereas this commission had the explicit function of examining the situation in Asia, the war against the Portuguese is hardly treated here at all, and a same care with words is used when things like the building of fortifications are discussed. *Haags verbaal*, VOC 4455, for the years 1661 and 1662.

146 Willem Martin Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckert van Goens: krijgsman, commissaris en regent in dienst der VOC, 1657-1662* (unpublished 1995), C12.

147 VOC-Archives, outgoing letterbooks of the Gentlemen XVII and the Chamber of Amsterdam, 318.

fleet that it promised was in fact bought, manned and sent by April, before the Gentlemen XVII reconvened for their spring meeting on the unusually late date of the 2nd of May.¹⁴⁸

Similar curiosities surround the fleet to Mozambique which departed in the third week of April 1662. Nothing regarding the equipment of this fleet is to be found in the resolutions of the spring meeting, which had lasted from the 27th to the 31st of March, or the previous meeting, being the autumn meeting of 1661. In fact in the latter meeting all kinds of preparations for the peace were already decided upon, such as designing new instructions for the outgoing fleets, striking all the clauses about inflicting as much damage as possible on the Portuguese. However, the XVII would obviously have been the organ to commission this fleet, and indeed, in the *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, we find various letters that Huibert de Laresse, the commander of the fleet, sent to inform the XVII of the progress of the mission, in which he expresses his hope that “our design, God willing, shall be attained.” The letters make abundantly clear that the Gentlemen XVII had indeed commissioned this expedition.¹⁴⁹

All in all, these years seem to show a pattern of decisions on warfare structurally being kept out of the Company’s Dutch paperwork. We only find these decisions and letters in the archives in the second instance, when the news of their results is starting to come back to the Netherlands through the general letter and the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*. Why this was done will not be found in the archives, but the first thing that obviously comes to mind is fear of espionage by other European nations, particularly the Portuguese. The resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII as well as the letter books were kept in several copies (each of the Chambers had a copy of both), and many VOC-employees must have had access to them. Fear of espionage would not have been wholly unjustified, as in this period the Republic was visited by Portuguese embassy after Portuguese embassy, in attempts to restore the peace between the two nations. The arrest of two citizens of The Hague in March 1651 on the accusation of spying for the Portuguese goes to illustrate that these embassies were cultivating more activities than just negotiating with the Estates-General.¹⁵⁰ As retaining

148 The general letter to Batavia which was sent by this meeting on the 7th of May 1661 does not make any mention of the fleet either. The sections on Ceylon and Coromandel once again completely ignore the war going on there, and talk about the future profitability of these regions and Van Goens’ fortification plan, where the letter tactfully talks about defending the island against ‘a possible European enemy.’ The actual word ‘Portuguese’ is completely avoided, and only used once with reference to religion, as there are ‘Popish Portuguese priests’ active in the area. One day earlier, the meeting had sent a letter overland to the Western Quarters, expressing its hope for news from the Western Quarters. This letter *does* in fact state that all possible damage should be inflicted upon the Portuguese, as peace is approaching. The letter states that the directors are careful with the pen here, as the overland route is not very secure. “Other letters”, however, will have informed the various governors of more details. These admirably vague statements are of course not elaborated anywhere in the letter book, and it stands to reason that these ‘other letters’ refer to the one sent to Batavia with the *Nieuwenhove*, and the letters and orders sent with the expedition fleet to Ceylon. Letters in VOC-archives 318, 280pp, 299pp.

149 VOC-Archives, *Overgekomen brieven en papieren*, 1239, 1365pp.

150 Cornelis van de Haar, *De diplomatieke betrekkingen tussen de Republiek en Portugal 1640-1661* (Groningen 1961), 129.

the Asian empire was one of the first concerns of the Portuguese in their negotiations with the Estates-General, we must also assume that they would have had a keen interest in finding out the plans that the VOC had for those regions. It would seem that the VOC took every precaution not to let them find out.

All in all, only recurring issues such as the number of soldiers to be sent to Batavia made it to the resolutions; decisions regarding military campaigns and grand strategies were kept out of the paperwork. To what degree these things were entrusted to the paper at all remains unclear: we know that the Gentlemen XVII also had secret resolutions which were kept in separate books, but these have only survived for the late 18th century. The content and extent of the secret resolutions for our period can therefore only be guessed. In the end one can only conclude that the resolutions hardly tell us anything about the level of involvement of the Gentlemen XVII in matters of war.

Calling the shots: political interaction

This fear of espionage in Europe brings us to the point where any analysis of the political interaction between patria and the Asian possessions must begin: European politics. The VOC was a Dutch Company, falling under Dutch law, officially acting in the name of the Estates-General in matters of politics and war, and dependent on the Republic for the extensions of its Charter. This meant that treaties between the Republic and other European nations officially extended to the VOC's empire in the East, and that European politics had a strong influence on what happened on the other side of the Cape.

In the first two chapters, the complexities that this fact brought along were already touched upon. In the first few years after the Company's founding, the interests, as well as the enemies, of the Republic and the Company were virtually the same, and at any rate the political and military dimensions of what was in essence a trading company were still insignificant. However, as the VOC increasingly became a military and political actor, and started using violence as a tool to influence the trade, the plot rapidly thickened. This became very pertinent, for one, when Portugal broke away from the Spanish Empire and concluded a peace agreement with the Republic in 1641. This treaty was officially also binding for the VOC, but did not at all coincide with its market strategy of driving out the Portuguese and attaining a monopoly position. The Company did everything it could to postpone the peace, so as to be able to make more conquests in Southern India.¹⁵¹ The period here under study, as I hope will become clear in the coming paragraphs, saw similar complications.

With England, the Dutch Republic was at peace in 1656. The First Anglo-Dutch Sea War, mainly a conflict over trade hegemony sparked off by the English Navigation Act of 1651, had been concluded by the treaty of Westminster in 1654. However, neither the war nor the treaty had removed

¹⁵¹ Also see above, page 10.

the root of hostilities, i.e. the commercial rivalry between the two nations, which would remain at an uneasy peace until, in 1665, open war broke out again.

This uneasy peace and ongoing commercial rivalry extended beyond the line as well. Rivalry in the colonies, particularly the West Indies, would be an important cause of the Second Anglo-Dutch War. In the East Indies, no open hostilities actually broke out in the years here under consideration, and the Companies nominally stuck to the peace in Europe. Nonetheless, both the English and the Dutch East India Company certainly probed into the grey area between commercial competition and acts of war. The continuing English trade with Bantam, the kingdom to the west of Batavia with which the Company had an on-and-off war throughout the 1650s and 1660s, annoyed the government in Batavia greatly. Repeated English attempts to run through a VOC blockade before the harbour of Bantam in 1657, and, worse still, a similar English action at the Goa blockade in that same year, seriously tried Maatsuiker's patience.¹⁵² The Dutch Company, in its turn, was also taking measures which hardly seem consistent with a peaceful disposition towards the English, for one by signing a treaty with Aceh on October 5th 1659 which gave the VOC the right to keep the English away from the Achinese coast, by force if necessary. The English, of course, kept on coming anyway, and Maatsuiker, somewhat disappointed, informed the directors that he was not going to use violence, "knowing what is at stake for Your Honours in this matter."¹⁵³

An even bolder action against the English was taken on Ceylon by Van Goens, on his own initiative. Van Goens was leading the military campaign against the Portuguese in India, when in July 1660, without any orders from either patria or Batavia, he suddenly marched on the cities of Cottiar and Trincomalee, which at the time did not have a Portuguese presence and were owned by the Raja Singha, the ruler of central Kandy Kingdom. Van Goens explained himself by stating how he had gotten wind of English plans to establish posts there and get hold of part of the cinnamon trade. Van Goens, who was trying to obtain a complete cinnamon monopoly and had already vented his dislike for the English ships in the area previously, had decided to beat them to the punch. This brought with it the risk of greatly angering the Raja Singha, and in any case reduced the number of troops Van Goens would be able to throw against the Portuguese, as the new conquests would have to be garrisoned. Even angrier than the Raja Singha, however, was Maatsuiker, who thought that Van Goens' action had been reckless and premature.¹⁵⁴

All in all, the peace to which the English and the Dutch East India Companies were bound was quite at odds with the trading ambitions and notions of monopoly that formed the prime motivation for the actions of both Companies. Perhaps there was no open war, but the disposition of the two companies toward one another was certainly hostile and suspicious. In this case, the tension

152 Letter of 17th of December 1659, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 147pp.

153 Letter of 16th of December, in: *Generale Missiven*, III, 257. Treaty in *Corpus Diplomaticum*, CXXXVIII.

154 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8, C9.

between peace and commercial rivalry in Asia was mirrored by developments in Europe, where commercial rivalry was also the cause of mutual animosity. Indeed, European and Asian politics mutually influenced each other here, as developments in the colonial realm would be an important part of the *casus belli* in 1665.

With regard to the Portuguese, on the other hand, the VOC did not need to show any restraint at all. By the start of the period here under study, Portugal and the Dutch Republic had officially been at war for five years. A ten year truce between Portugal and the Republic, which had been put into effect on the 12th of June 1641, had actually collapsed before its expiration. A revolt in Brazil against the Dutch rulers, which had begun almost the moment the open war had come to an end, and at times received hardly concealed support from Portugal, had increasingly soured the atmosphere between the two nations, until negotiations between them collapsed in the course of 1649. Open hostilities in the West Indies had already resumed, when, on the 25th of March 1651, the Estates-General decided to break off negotiations with the Portuguese ambassador. Preparations for a seaway in Europe were made, an admiralty fleet to Brazil was supposed to come to the aid of the Dutch West India Company, and the VOC was allowed, indeed encouraged, to resume hostilities with the Portuguese. Before however the Dutch Republic or the VOC undertook anything noteworthy against the Portuguese, the war with England broke out. This war took up all the military resources of the Dutch Republic, and enabled the Portuguese to retake the colonies in Brazil, which were definitively lost to the Republic.¹⁵⁵

Once the treaty of Westminster had ended the war with England, it became clear that the Portuguese conquest of Brazil had changed the political balance between Portugal and the Netherlands. In the negotiations up to 1651, the various Portuguese ambassadors had always tried to trade off concessions on Brazil, where the WIC was in a precarious position, with promises regarding the East Indies, where the VOC was far stronger than the *Estado da India Oriental*. Now that Brazil was lost to the Dutch, this pattern was broken. The Dutch Republic no longer needed to show any scruples in Europe or Asia to protect its interests in Brazil. While preparations for a sea war in Europe were underway, the Estates-General once again encouraged the VOC to undertake action against the Portuguese.¹⁵⁶

This time, the VOC hardly needed any encouragement. As already mentioned, the XVII, in their autumn meeting of 1654, had decided to send out 5090 heads in the coming year. Now that the war with England was over, the directors were confident that their outward fleets would be safer, the lack of manpower about which Maatsuiker was complaining could now be solved, and something could finally be undertaken against the Portuguese. The large injection of manpower coin-

155 Resolution of the Estates-General, 29th of March 1651, mentioned in V/d. Haar, *Diplomatieke betrekkingen*, 130; Henk den Heijer, *De Geschiedenis van de WIC* (Zutphen 1994), 49-54.

156 V/d Haar, *Diplomatieke betrekkingen*, 143.

cided with the Ambonese Wars being practically won by 1655. Suddenly the Company had a great amount of military resources at its disposal to throw against the Portuguese in India, and it was quite ready to deploy them. Before the encouragement of the Estates-General could have possibly reached Batavia, Maatsuiker could announce to patria that he would soon send out a fleet of 12 to 14 ships under the command of Gerard Hulft to confront the Portuguese on Ceylon. He acted accordingly a month later, sending out a fleet with 1200 soldiers.¹⁵⁷

Only adding to the sense that the time had come to act against the Portuguese, was the *Vertoog* of Rijckloff van Goens. Having had a true lightning career in Asia, Van Goens had arrived back in patria as commander of the return fleet in September 1655. He had requested repatriation, officially to be able to see his son. We might however also suspect some of his motives to be of a more ambitious nature: repatriation enabled Van Goens to directly inform the directors of his ideas on how the Company should be run. He had taken some time out on his way to the Netherlands to entrust these ideas to paper, and his honourable discharge from Company service by the meeting of the XVII on the 2nd of November 1655 enabled him to present the *Hoogmogende Heren* with the result of his writings.

In this report, Van Goens had something to say about practically every region where the VOC was active, but if we would have to summarize the whole report into one slogan, it would be something like: “War cannot be avoided; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others.” The Portuguese and the English, according to Van Goens, were jealous of the Company’s possessions and would take whatever the Company would let them. Worse still, “those insidious snakes” the Moors (a name which he generically applied to Makassarese, Muslim traders in South-India, rajas in the Western Quarters and all other Muslims), were bent on eradicating the Company throughout Asia, not only because of the trade but also from religious motives. If the Company was to hold its own in Asia, so Van Goens reasoned, it needed to be able to make a fist. The Spice Islands should be equipped with larger garrisons to keep Makassar at bay, the Portuguese should be beaten out of Ceylon, Diu and Macao (which could be done within two years, Van Goens expected), and the Company should no longer allow the Moors in Coromandel to play around with them, and use force there in order to inspire some respect for the Company again:

“It is not unknown to me to what little degree the Company’s current state will allow war all around, and with God as my witness, I would never advise it except in times of crisis. One cannot overlook that war is an unjust exercise and a clear and important ground for God’s anger with mankind, as one man beats and punishes the other at his will. But rationally observing the present troublesome situation of the Company, I dare state that Your Honours will have no

157 *Generale Missiven*, III, 3; Colenbrander, *Koloniale geschiedenis*, II, 158.

choice, and the sooner the better, than to set an example, in order to restore our ruined state. [...] The Moors have been warned often enough, but never did any action follow so far.”¹⁵⁸

It is interesting to note how Van Goens interpreted the situation in Asia not only in terms of profit and trade, but also in terms of a religious clash and a matter of prestige. Here, then, was a high-ranking VOC official with a Conquistador mentality.

Van Goens' plans fell into favour with at least some of the directors: one of the Chambers had put his possible re-employment in Company service on the agenda of the spring meeting of 1656. Interestingly enough, another agenda point brought in for that same meeting was whether the expensive campaigns on Ceylon could not be brought to an end. Apparently, there were some conflicting views on the course the Company should take. At any rate, Van Goens' supporters seem to have won out in the end: he was once again hired by the Company on the 6th of April, and set sail to Batavia with the autumn fleet, in order to execute part of his own great plan.¹⁵⁹ We will just follow him along for the moment, as he will take us straight to the other end of the decision-making process: the battlefields in Asia.

Van Goens arrived in Batavia on the first of July 1657, one month before the annual blockade fleet to Goa would set out. As “commissioner, admiral and commander-in-the-field of the Western Quarters”, he was supposed to set sail with this fleet, to start driving the Portuguese off Ceylon, Diu and the Malabar Coast. He actually stayed in Batavia for another month to read up on the situation, and followed after the blockade fleet with six ships on the 6th of September. He joined the blockade before Goa on the 19th of November, after an unusually long trip, and sailed southwards with four ships on the 10th of December.

Before the renewed outbreak of hostilities, the Dutch had been in possession of two strongholds on Ceylon: Galle and Negombo, and surrounding areas. Between these two cities lay Colombo, which the Company had vainly attempted to conquer during the campaigns of the late 1630s. This, however, had been the first (and last) Portuguese stronghold targeted by Gerard Hulft's campaign, who had arrived before the city in October 1655. A siege had ensued, during which Hulft's 1200 soldiers vainly attempted to conquer the city on its 800 defendants for months. Gerard Hulft himself had been killed during the siege. When the city finally surrendered eight months after the beginning of the siege, only 73 Portuguese soldiers and a few hundred citizens turned out to have survived the unceasing mortar bombing of the months before.¹⁶⁰

158 Rijckloff Volkert van Goens, *Vertoogh wegens den presenten staet van de Generale Nederlantse Geotroijeerde Oost-Indische Comp.* Etc., printed in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal – Land en Volkenkunde* (1856:4), 141-180, there 154-155.

159 This is one of the cases where it becomes quite frustrating that no record survives of discussions between the directors. In the resolutions, the meeting seems one monolithic bloc producing unanimous decisions. Van Goens' private correspondence was later seized by Pieter van Dam, and there is no easy way of telling who was lobbying for Van Goens' plans, and who was against them.

160 Winius 'Luso-Nederlandse rivaliteit', 127.

With the fall of Colombo, the entire west coast of the island had come into possession of the Company, and the Portuguese presence on the island was limited to the area surrounding Jaffanapatnam and Mannar, on the north of the island. This, then, was the region on which Van Goens concentrated his military efforts. The details of his campaigns will be the topic of the next chapter; here it suffices to say that by the 23rd of June 1658, Jaffanapatnam, Mannar and the stronghold of Tuticorin on the Coromandel Coast had all fallen to Van Goens' forces. After a short pause to get things in order on the island, Van Goens continued his campaigns, conquering various Portuguese strongholds on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts.¹⁶¹ His spree of conquests there would only be brought to a temporary halt by the end of 1658, when Van Goens, lying before Cannanore on the Malabar Coast at the time, received word from Batavia that he should immediately cease his campaign and send 500 of his soldiers to Batavia. This time, the enemy there was not Makassar, but "hot fever", which was decimating the garrison there. In order to keep the region safe from possible Makassarese attacks, Maatsuiker had recalled these troops, telling van Goens that the campaigns in the Western Quarters would just have to wait. Van Goens grudgingly complied, and subsequently spent his time putting things in order on Ceylon.¹⁶²

In the meantime, it became clear that Van Goens' assertive personality and strong ideas on how the Company should be run, led to trouble with his functioning within the Company hierarchy. Very soon after his arrival on Ceylon, he got into conflict with Governor Van der Meijden. The task of a VOC commissioner was always of a temporary nature, and therefore he had no fixed place within the Company hierarchy. Ideally, he would of course cooperate with local VOC officials to get the task done. Van Goens, however, was very dominant *vis-à-vis* Van der Meijden from the very start, causing a conflict of competence between the two, which was further reinforced by the personal disliking the two seem to have taken to one another from day one. Van Goens overruled Van der Meijden in decisions on the garrisons of Ceylonese cities, as he needed the troops for his own campaigns, and also suggested that his conquests on the north of Ceylon would fall under the

161 This and much of the following is based on Ottow, *Rijckloff Volkert van Goens: krijgsman, commissaris en regent in dienst der VOC, 1657-1662* (unpublished 1995). This is such a curious book that it merits some attention here. Ottow had written his dissertation on the diplomatic career of Van Goens up to 1655, and this dissertation appeared in print in 1954. Apparently he remained interested in the topic, as in the course of his life he wrote a 'sequel' to his 1954 dissertation, about Van Goens' work as a commissioner in the Western Quarters. For this book, however, he did not manage to find a publisher. Reading the work it is not hard to see why: the book is a fascinatingly old-fashioned hagiography of national hero Van Goens, which on the basis of its style, source-base, method and point, one would expect to date back to the 1940s rather than to 1995. The only copy of the book publicly available is therefore a stencilled manuscript in the Royal Library in The Hague.

It is a pity that the distribution of the book remains so very limited. The book, although old-fashioned, is an incredibly thorough source study on the correspondence between Van Goens, Batavia and patria. For the better part of the work, Ottow limited himself to sifting through the thousands of pages of correspondence between Van Goens and other parties, and summarizing these letters, rendering the jungle of documents related to Van Goens very accessible and thus opening up an episode of VOC history which has received too little attention so far.

162 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C4; *Generale Missiven*, III, 212.

direction of the Coromandel Coast, and not under the governorship of Ceylon. In various letters, Van Goens claimed that this made more sense from an administrative point of view, but the fact that he held Laurens Pit, governor of the Coromandel Coast, in much higher personal esteem than Van der Meijden, would also seem to have played a role in this suggestion.¹⁶³

The disagreements between the two gentlemen were soon taken to the higher authorities by Van Goens, who on the 7th of July 1658, during his brief stay on Ceylon, sent a report to Batavia in which he accused Van der Meijden of being incapable and miserly. These kinds of formulations about Van der Meijden were repeated in many subsequent letters. Things finally came to a head in 1659. On the 14th of April, the fortress of Quilon, one of Van Goens' conquests on the Malabar Coast, had been evacuated by Van der Meijden, as a combined attack by the local ruler and the Portuguese was expected, which the small garrison would not be able to withstand. Van Goens, who was on Ceylon at the time, but had not been consulted on the matter, was outraged when he heard of the evacuation. Mutual accusations now reached such a level that both gentlemen uttered their willingness to come to Batavia to explain themselves and clear their name. In the end it was Van der Meijden who went to Batavia for a formal hearing, provisionally leaving the governorship of Ceylon in the hands of Van Goens. Van der Meijden arrived in Batavia on the 13th of June 1660, and by the 24th of August it was clear to the *Hooge Regeering* that Van Goens' accusations were completely unbased. On the 29th of October he was on his way back to Ceylon.¹⁶⁴

In the meantime, the atmosphere between Van Goens and Batavia had also steadily soured for a host of other reasons. Although the *Hooge Regeering* was impressed with the conquests Van Goens had made in such little time, the letters from Batavia also show an increasing tiredness with his attitude. Van Goens kept on bombarding Batavia with all kinds of far-reaching and often unrealistic plans, like the demolition of the fortress in Jaffnapatnam in order to replace it with four smaller forts, the addition of northern Ceylon to the Coromandel governorship, a plan to turn Colombo into the "perfect harbour" by sinking off three or four old ships in front of it (whereas patria wanted the fortress torn down as it was hard to defend and not useful as a harbour), and an ambitious long-term plan of building fortresses all around the island. Van Goens would hardly ever take no for an answer, and after receiving a negative response from Batavia, would simply request to reconsider, insisting that his plans were really sound. At least as worrying to Maatsuiker and his Council was the fact that Van Goens often took decisions completely on his own initiative, and only informed Batavia as soon as the deed was done. Above, the attack on Trincomalee and Cottiar was already mentioned; another case in point is constituted by the thousands of Portuguese prisoners made with the conquest of Jaffnapatnam and Mannar. These needed to be sent back to Europe: Van Goens had sent many of them up to Batavia without prior correspondence, which

163 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 35pp, 62pp.

164 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C9.

caused huge trouble there. Furthermore, Van Goens' had promoted various people to high-ranking positions and had raised their salary accordingly, which was really the prerogative of Batavia, expressing his hope that they would endorse his nominations afterwards. In a letter written August 28th, 1659, an indignant Maatsuiker refused these nominations in phrasings that dangerously stretched the rules of politeness.¹⁶⁵

Maatsuiker faithfully informed the directors of his various considerations regarding Ceylon and Van Goens in his extremely complete general letters, often citing both Van Goens' opinion and his own. In the general letter of January 17th 1658, for one, Maatsuiker informs the directors of Van Goens' plans to build new fortresses, notably in Madure on Ceylon, and advises against this, as it might anger the local nayak. In the same letter, he explains the controversy surrounding the division between Ceylon and Coromandel. He advises against Van Goens' plan, and instead suggests evacuating Paliacatte and making Coromandel a directorship, explicitly leaving the final decision up to the directors. Although Maatsuiker's general style is rather polite, we also notice how he is quite discontented with Van Goens, explaining to the directors how for one the prisoner-issue got him into serious trouble. Similar complaints in the general letter would continue throughout the period here under study.¹⁶⁶

Van Goens however, also had the means to communicate with patria. Like the Cape Colony, the Western Quarters regularly corresponded with patria directly. Looking at a map of the VOC Charter area it is not hard to see why: for most VOC posts, corresponding through Batavia made perfect sense not only from an organisational but also from a logistic point of view. For the Cape Colony this was obviously not the case, as practically all ships headed for Batavia stopped there anyway. The Western Quarters, in this respect, were a somewhat ambiguous case. Communication to and from the Western Quarters was already often done by an overland route, instead of through Batavia; although not very secure, as many letters never arrived, the overland route was usually worth a shot, as it was much faster. We therefore often find information for the Western Quarters sent two times: through Batavia in the general letter, and in a direct overland letter. In their 1657 spring meeting, the Gentlemen XVII contemplated sending the *Eis van Retouren* to the Western Quarters overland from then on. Just after the end of our period of study ships sailing directly to and from Ceylon became usual as well. Although the Western Quarters officially had the same status as all the other VOC posts, their geographical position thus gave them a slightly exceptional position within the VOC command structure.

This aspect of the Western Quarters was handily exploited by Van Goens, who was assertive enough to start making use of the overland route as a private channel of communication with patria. This direct communication started innocently enough: in a letter sent on the 8th of Febru-

165 Ibid., C4, C6.

166 *Generale Missiven*, III, 224-227. For other examples see 299, 378.

ary 1660, he mainly directly updated patria on the situation and his accomplishments as a commissioner, and requested that free citizens be sent to Ceylon, as he was planning to turn it into a settler colony. This plan he had previously suggested to Batavia and it had the full support of Maatsuiker. He did add that as far as he was concerned, the settlers could be sent directly to Ceylon, without bothering to sail via Batavia. Once again, looking at the world map this seems reasonable, but we might also imagine that Van Goens making direct requests to patria, which could subsequently be fulfilled without Batavia's involvement, were a precedent not at all to the liking of Maatsuiker.¹⁶⁷

Soon, Van Goens was shaping precedents which were a lot more dangerous still. On the 31st of July that same year, just after his conquest of Cottiar and Trincomalee, he decided to inform both patria and Batavia of this by letter at the same time, explaining and defending his decision directly to patria instead of leaving this to Maatsuiker, as would have been usual. Worse still, in the same letter to patria, he disputed several decisions taken earlier by Maatsuiker, trying to convince his friends in the XVII of the good sense of his plans for the division of Ceylon and Coromandel, and the new fortress plan for Jaffnapatnam. A direct letter to patria on the 3rd of February 1661, then, left nothing to interpretation: Van Goens wrote to the directors that he had noted how his actions were not always appreciated by Batavia, but that he acted in good faith, and that Batavia apparently blamed him for his vigour rather than for any weakness.¹⁶⁸ Van Goens was exploiting the geographical position of Ceylon to go right over the head of his superior Maatsuiker, short-circuiting the chain of command. This required quite some guts, as copies of his letters to patria were always sent to Maatsuiker. Although not quite escalating a conflict with Batavia or operating outside all control, Van Goens was certainly violating the rules of the game, self-righteously believing that it was in everyone's best interest if he pursued his own agenda.

In Van Goens' case, his character, combined with his geographical location and his apparent powerful friends in the Netherlands, led to a situation where the central guidance from Batavia became less self-evident. It would appear that Van Goens deliberately created this situation to have his way. In other cases, however, circumstances, big distances and bad communication simply prevented the power structure from functioning optimally. This, for one, was the case with the failed attack on Macao in the first months of 1661. Attacking Macao, the Portuguese gateway to the China trade, had been high on everyone's agenda for a long time. It had been one of the spearheads of Van Goens' 1655 *Vertoog*. Maatsuiker had also been keen to undertake something against Macao for a while: in January 1658, he wrote to the directors that it would be desirable to drive the Portuguese from Macao as soon as possible, as the English were also trading there now.¹⁶⁹ The various other

167 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8.

168 Letters summarized in Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), C8, 209pp.

169 General letter of 6th of January 1658, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 199.

campaigns, the epidemic in Ambon, and, not unimportantly, an expected invasion of Formosa by Coxinga, however, prevented him from equipping a sufficient fleet for this purpose.

It is interesting to note Maatsuiker's laconic attitude with respect to an attack by Coxinga. In his letter of December 1659, he wrote how they were once again expecting an imminent invasion, but then added how they had expected this attack for years, and it simply never happened.¹⁷⁰ On the 10th of March 1660, however, a panicked governor Coyet sent out a junk against the northern monsoon, specifically to inform Batavia that he was expecting an attack by the 27th of March. Maatsuiker, receiving the letter on the 4th of April, was still not wholly convinced of the severity of the situation, but finally decided to just take Coyet's word for it. By the 23rd of April, he sent out three ships, bringing fifty soldiers, great amounts of ammunition, and the promise of a larger fleet as soon as it could be assembled. This larger fleet, twelve ships with a total of six hundred soldiers on board, was ready to set sail by the 17th of July. Maatsuiker decided to make the best of the situation, and ordered the fleet to sail to Macao and beat the Portuguese out of it, should Coxinga not have landed at Formosa. At least something good would come out of this expedition, as Maatsuiker's plan to rid Macao of Portuguese would finally become reality.¹⁷¹

Things would however turn out entirely differently. Van der Laan, a rather undertaking character who shared with Maatsuiker his disdain for Coyet's panic, did not head straight for Formosa but headed for Macao, apparently to conquer it. The fleet was however hit by two storms, one on the 12th and the 26th of August, which dispersed it and wrecked one of the ships with 128 soldiers on board. Disoriented and not capable of undertaking anything against Macao without the entire fleet assembled, some of the ships made for Macao and waited. In the end, however, too few ships showed up to risk an attack, and the various ships decided to just try and make it to Formosa. As the ships trickled in there in September, Coxinga's attack turned out not to have taken place, but Coyet was so terrified that it would still come, that he overruled Maatsuiker's plan and added most of the fleet's soldiers to the garrisons in and around Taiwan, allowing the ships to continue to other destinations. The attack on Macao therefore never took place, and the city would remain Portuguese until 1999.¹⁷²

Receiving word that the attack on Macao had not taken place, and that Coxinga was nowhere in sight of Taiwan, around the turn of the year, Maatsuiker became positively furious. In the general letter of the 26th of January, the otherwise so business-like Maatsuiker filled several pages venting his anger and disappointment with Coyet, who had once again been wrong about Coxinga and had subsequently kept the fleet before the coast of Taiwan, in contravention of his orders to attack Macao. And now it was too late, Maatsuiker bitterly wrote: Macao had been in a very bad state of

170 Letter of 16th of december 1659, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 277.

171 Blussé, 'De Chinese nachtmerrie: een terugtocht en twee nederlagen' in: *De VOC: tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, 209-238, there 227-228; *Generale Missiven*, III, 358-359.

172 Herport, *Reise*, 33-34; *Generale Missiven*, III, 358-359.

defence, but by now the Portuguese would have gotten wind of the VOC's plans to attack it, and the place would have been properly defended. Meanwhile his valuable soldiers, which would have been very useful elsewhere, were tied up before the coast of Taiwan defending the island against an imaginary enemy. And all because of this unreasonable fear of Coxinga.¹⁷³ Shortly afterwards, however, Coyet's fear turned out not to be so unreasonable at all: on the 29th of July 1661, Maatsuiker sent a coded letter with an English ship, informing patria of the ill tiding that on the 30th of April, Coxinga had landed on Taiwan, and was now laying siege to Fort Zeelandia. Maatsuiker had already sent off a fleet of ten ships carrying some 700 soldiers to come to Taiwan's aid, which had set sail on the 5th of July.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile in Europe, peace talks between the Portuguese and the Dutch were finally making headway. Holland in general and Amsterdam in particular had been lukewarm about the war all along, as it was expensive and bad for business. By 1659, public sentiment in Holland had really turned against the war. Portugal, which now had to fight the Dutch Republic and Spain at the same time, was faring very badly, and the Portuguese embassy to the Republic had received a very free hand from the Portuguese court to establish peace.¹⁷⁵ The ambassadors now approached Johan de Witt, *raadspensionaris* of the province of Holland. They were hoping to turn the anti-war sentiment in the most powerful province of the Republic to their advantage, and were willing to make big concessions to achieve peace. Their hopes proved justified: on the 19th and 20th of October, the States of Holland discussed a draft-treaty which was the result of these negotiations.

At least two trade organisations with their main office in Amsterdam were however less than enthusiastic about the prospect of peace: the Dutch West India Company, and the VOC. Now that the VOC's war machine was finally getting up steam, and the complete expulsion of the Portuguese from Asia slowly became a realistic goal, a peace treaty which was also effective 'beyond the line' would ruin everything that the VOC had been striving for. Before the concept-treaty was even discussed by the States of Holland, the directors wrote a remonstrance to the Estates-General. Being, well, slightly economical with the truth, the remonstrance stated that the VOC had only started the war against the Portuguese under pressure from the Estates-General, and that the added costs of sending more soldiers and ships had put pressure on the dividends the Company was able to pay. These costs had not been compensated for by the conquests made. Their solution to this clearly uncalled for and unprofitable war was therefore all the more surprising: the war should either continue, or the Portuguese should simply cede the places that would reasonably have been conquered

173 General letter of 26th of January 1661, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 359pp.

174 General letter of the 29th of July 1661, in *Generale Missiven*, III, 372pp.

175 The first ambassador of this mission was Telles de Faro. He, however, had laid contact with the Spanish embassy, and when he feared to be found out in June 1659, defected to the Spanish, seeking refuge in the Spanish embassy in The Hague! His secretary, Luis Alvares de Ribeiro, then continued the negotiations. V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 162-163.

by the Company if the war had continued. We might wonder what Portuguese places did *not* fall into that category in the eyes of the directors.¹⁷⁶

Peace with Portugal was, however, not yet endorsed by the entire Estates-General, mainly because of a very successful lobby by the West India Company with the States of Zeeland and Groningen. The West India Company wished restitution of certain regions in Brazil as well as a huge war indemnity. The bickering over this matter, as well as a change of the guard within the ranks of the Portuguese diplomats, soon made clear that the final peace agreement would not come around for a while, if at all.¹⁷⁷

This delay gave the Company a chance to still undertake something in the East. Maatsuiker, however, was juggling too many things at a time to be able to make an extra effort against the Portuguese in India. By the time he was informed of the peace talks in Europe, he was not only short on troops because of Coxinga's threat and the recent epidemic on Ambon; in January 1660, war had also broken out with Makassar. Hostilities had ceased by the end of 1660 again, but no treaty was as yet ratified and a conquered fortress near Makassar was still heavily garrisoned by VOC forces. The only thing Maatsuiker could do was hope with all his heart that peace would not come for another while, as he definitely wanted the Portuguese south-Indian possessions conquered.¹⁷⁸

The hands of the directors in the Netherlands were not thus tied. They might have usually held their hand on the wallet, but found the conquests upon the Portuguese important enough to forego their careful spending for once. Before Maatsuiker had even entrusted his thoughts about the peace to paper, on the other side of the world the directors had decided to send out a fleet with 1500 souls directly to Ceylon, to conquer the remaining Portuguese strongholds on the Malabar Coast. In their letter of the 7th of January 1661, they informed Batavia of the fleet, and insisted that all possible effort should be made, from Batavia as well, to drive the Portuguese from India. This sudden haste of the Gentlemen XVII was mainly inspired by developments in Europe: in April 1660, Charles II of England had been restored to power, and was now conducting negotiations to marry the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. The ties between England and Portugal were thus reinforced, and the English offered their aid in establishing peace between the Republic and Portugal, as their now revalued ally needed this peace very badly. This enforced English mediation helped the peace process back on the rails, much to the dislike of the directors. In addition, there was the fear that part of the dowry would consist of Portuguese colonies. Suddenly seeing the English flag raised over the various places that the VOC was now trying to conquer, was not an attractive prospect to the directors.¹⁷⁹

176 V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 167.

177 V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 168pp

178 Generale Missiven, III, 367, letter of 26th of January 1661. For war on Makassar see next chapter.

179 This fear was later to prove justified to some degree: Bombay, the later headquarters of the English East India Company, came into English hands as part of this dowry.

The expedition seemed somewhat ill-starred from the very beginning. The *Nieuwenhove*, which set sail to Batavia with the letter on the 10th of January, immediately ran into trouble. It was back in the Wielingen within a few days, and only set sail again on the 7th of February. The subsequent voyage, however, was quite speedy, and the ship arrived in Batavia with the letter on the 10th of August. A direct voyage to Ceylon with the same news and one hundred soldiers, was however less successful. The *Zeepaard*, which left for Ceylon on the 1st of March, never arrived on Ceylon: incredibly, by mistake of the master, the ship made a quite uneventful and speedy passage, and arrived on the 28th of August... in Batavia.¹⁸⁰

Van Goens therefore learned of the orders and reinforcements the long way around: via Batavia. Maatsuiker and Council, upon receiving the news from Europe, had decided not to send a blockade to Goa that year (the blockade fleet, not having left yet, was slightly late anyway), but instead concentrated all available resources on a final and hopefully decisive campaign on the Malabar Coast. They had immediately sent out the ships *Sluis* and *Rode Leeuw* to Ceylon with 150 soldiers and the news, in the meantime preparing a larger fleet. As preparations for the blockade fleet had already been underway, the fleet was ready remarkably soon: in the first week of September, a total of eight ships, carrying 768 soldiers, set sail to Ceylon. These numbers would probably have been a lot higher had it not been for the soldiers at that moment tied up at Taiwan.

When the ships from Batavia bringing the news arrived in Galle, Van Goens was on the Coromandel Coast, for an inspection round of the Dutch factories there, as well as an attempt to conquer Sao Thomé. The orders from patria had specified that Van der Meijden should take command of the campaign, unless Van Goens was still around in which case he should take command. Van Goens was supposed to finally return to Batavia after his inspection round, thus concluding his commissionership which had by now lasted four years. On the first of September, however, a ship sent from Ceylon came before Sao Thomé, ordering Van Goens to drop what he was doing and immediately return to Ceylon with all available ships and soldiers.¹⁸¹

When Van Goens finally arrived in Colombo on the 3rd of October, bringing a large army of his own veteran soldiers as well as soldiers he had lifted from various Coromandel garrisons, the waters around Ceylon were slowly filling up with VOC vessels. Batavia, having expected some overcrowding in the harbour of Galle, had sent its ships to the north of island, near Cape Coromin. From the West, however, only the galiot *Parkiet* had come in by the end of October. This insignificant ship had not even been part of the expedition fleet, but had left from the Netherlands more than a year

180 D.A.S. II.

181 I have not been able to exactly reconstruct the way in which this news travelled, but as the news only reached Batavia on the 10th of August, this is remarkably quick. It is possible but rather unlikely that the news had travelled with the *Sluis* and the *Rode Leeuw* to Galle, and then on to Sao Thomé, in only 22 days. Nonetheless a series of really speedy voyages seems the only explanation. The only other possibility, an overland letter not included in the outgoing letter book seems even more unlikely as it would have been mentioned in other correspondence and as the directors were loath to send sensitive information overland.

ago. It had still been at the Cape when the *Nieuwenhove* arrived there, and it may be assumed that the news of the imminent actions in southern India prompted it to finally get going. Van Goens, however, was anxious to get started: the northeastern Monsoon was just coming through, hailing the start of the season in which the Portuguese would have to be driven from India. In less than five months, rain, storms and sandbanks before the coast would make campaigning utterly impossible. Van Goens was determined to start his campaign by the end of the first week of November, with or without the expedition fleet that the directors had so painstakingly assembled for him.¹⁸²

Fortunately, in the first few days of November three more ships came in. One of these was the flute *Hilversum*, which had also not been part of the expedition fleet but had strayed for more than a year and was now finding itself near Ceylon in the middle of all the action. And finally, two ships of the expedition fleet came in on the first of November after a seven month voyage: the *Beurs van Amsterdam* and the *Raadhuis*, bringing some 250 soldiers. In spite of the troops being held up at Taiwan and the better part of the expedition fleet from patria still being nowhere in sight, the buildup of ships and troops around Ceylon was now becoming impressive: 21 ships and 6 chaloops, carrying a total of 2139 soldiers, 1550 sailors, 240 Lascars (Singhalese soldiers in Company service), and 180 slaves. Despite Van Goens' worries about the quality of most of these soldiers, this would just have to be sufficient. On the 5th of November, the fleet set sail. Via Tuticorin and Cayalpatnam, where supplies were taken in and negotiations with local rulers were conducted, the fleet set sail to Quilon, which was quick to surrender on the 7th of December. The fleet was now joined by two more ships of the expedition fleet from patria, the *Rijzende Zon* and the *Huis te Snieten*, of which many of the people on board were however sick and weak from the journey.¹⁸³

For the details of this ensuing campaign I will once again have to refer to the next chapter; here it suffices to say that the heavily defended Portuguese city in Cochin was in the end fruitlessly besieged by the VOC, with great loss of life. By March 1662, with the summer monsoon rapidly approaching, it became clear that the fortress would not fall before the start of the rain season, and what was left of the besieging army retreated.

Meanwhile, Formosa had fallen. On the 1st of February 1662, Coyet had surrendered fort Zeelandia, on the condition that he could peacefully evacuate the fortress and return to Batavia. Macao had not been conquered, and now, the other route into the Chinese trade had also been lost to the Company. Back in Europe, things had taken an ill turn for the Company as well. On the 6th of August 1661, a peace treaty between Portugal and the Republic had been signed. Another

182 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 242-252, Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 240pp, D.A.S. II.

183 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 254pp; DAS. The last ship of the expedition fleet, the *Wassende Maan*, had a reasonably speedy voyage to the Cape, and left from after a month, but never shows up in any documents concerning the fights. Its arrival on Ceylon is only registered in June 1662, when the fights were long over. What it did in the meantime is not documented, but as it only left from the Cape in late September, more than a month later than the other ships, it is likely that it was caught up in the Southern Monsoon, could no longer reach India, and had to 'winter' somewhere. Its return to the Cape is not documented in *D.A.S.*, but it seems possible that it ended up there again.

remonstrance by the Company two months earlier, attempting to postpone the date at which this peace would take effect ‘beyond the line’, had proven fruitless. Two months after the signing, the peace would also take effect outside Europe. The news of the peace reached Batavia by the end of April, at about the same time the survivors of the Fort Zeelandia ordeal arrived in Batavia, and the arrival of the news of the failed siege of Cochin. The game finally seemed up for the Company. In spite of the conquest of Ceylon and the complete expulsion of the Portuguese from the Coromandel Coast, we might imagine that many people in the Company ranks would be disappointed: Macao, Diu, Goa, Cochin and Mozambique were all still Portuguese, and Formosa, oh shame, had been definitively lost. Little had come of the masterplan which Van Goens had presented to the directors six years ago, and of which he himself had just miserably failed to realise an important spearhead.¹⁸⁴

The Company had, however, not yet played its last card. The treaty with Portugal had been signed but not yet ratified. The treaty specified that this should be done within three months, i.e. before the 6th of November. Here, however, the process ran into some trouble. England, which had been so instrumental in establishing the peace, very much disliked a clause giving its Dutch rival trade rights in Portuguese ports, and over this point was willing to send the parties back to the negotiation table. Under English pressure, the Portuguese did not ratify the treaty until May 1662. In addition, the state system of the Dutch Republic required that all the separate provinces ratified the treaty, and for the time being, Gelderland, Zeeland and Groningen simply refused to do so. Prestage suspects that the refusal of these provinces was the work of the VOC.¹⁸⁵ Whatever the case, the VOC soon saw enough difficulties emerging around the treaty to decide to just ignore it. For their part, the directors were ignoring the treaty with fervour and enthusiasm. At the same time that Maatsuiker must have been smashing dishes against the wall in Batavia over so much bad news coming in at the same time, the directors were sending out another extra fleet. In the third week of April 1662, a total of six ships carrying at least 1400 souls set sail with orders to drive the Portuguese from Mozambique and then continue to India. Both from the Cape Colony and Batavia, patria had been receiving news of the precarious position of the Portuguese in Mozambique, due to disease and conflict with the local population.¹⁸⁶ This little island was to the Portuguese what the Cape was to the VOC: ships heading for Goa (or increasingly Cochin, as Goa was blockaded all the time and Cochin took over some of the functions of trade and information hub), usually called there. For the Portuguese, this port of call was even more important than the Cape to the VOC, as Goa could only be reached for a few months a year, at the end of the winter monsoon. Many Portuguese ships had to ‘winter’ in Mozambique to await that moment, or sometimes didn’t make

184 Blussé, ‘De Chinese nachtmerrie’, 227-234; V/d Haar, *Betrekkingen*, 176pp.

185 Edgar Prestage, *The diplomatic relations of Portugal with France, England and Holland, 1640-1668* (Watford 1925), 226-227.

186 Generale Missiven, III, 170.

it to Goa in time and were mercilessly blown back to Mozambique. Without this ‘buffer harbour’, the functioning of the Portuguese *carreira da India*, and by implication the entire Portuguese empire, would be seriously disrupted.

This expedition, however, never reached Mozambique, or the Indian coast for that matter. As will be described in the next chapter, the only enemy it had a serious struggle with was the monsoon, and the latter won convincingly. The expedition fleet would eventually make it to Batavia, without having fired a single shot at any Portuguese vessel or stronghold.¹⁸⁷

In Batavia, the news of the postponed peace had immediately been cause for the preparation of another campaign to the west coast of India. In July, upon returning to Batavia and learning of the green light to continue the war against the Portuguese, Van Goens had immediately written a campaign plan. This was somewhat redundant, as the Governor-General and Council were already resolving upon action. The surrender of Fort Zeelandia, however undesirable in itself, had brought a good number of soldiers back to Batavia. Added to the reinforcements that had arrived from patria in the last year and the soldiers of last year’s campaign, the Company was able to once again amass a sufficient force to attempt to conquer Cochin, hopefully Diu, and perhaps even Goa itself. Aware of the precarious position of the Portuguese in Europe, the *Hoge Regering* expected that very few Portuguese reinforcements would have arrived in either Goa or Cochin. Its only worry was that the English might aid in the defence of the various Portuguese stronghold, as it might well be the dowry to Charles II, and therefore their own future colonies, they would be defending. The *Hoge Regering* resolved not to be too careful with the peace with England this time, and already thought up some smart legal arguments with which the fighting forces could later justify violence against the English.¹⁸⁸

Van Goens was once again to take command. However, when the fleet was ready to set sail, he was seriously ill. It was therefore Jacob Hustaert who commanded the fleet of thirteen ships, with a total of 800 European soldiers as well as 134 *Mardijkers*, Ambonese and Bandanese on board, which sailed from Batavia on the 26th of August 1662. When Van Goens had recovered by the 10th of September, he set sail with two ships and orders to lift as many soldiers as possible from the various Ceylonese garrisons before sailing to Cochin and retaking command. He would finally join Hustaert’s fleet on the 14th of November before Cochin, bringing 400 veteran soldiers and 500 *Lascars*. In the meantime, Godske, who had been sent ahead and was now commanding an army of soldiers lifted from the various Malabar garrisons, had also arrived at Cochin with some 500 soldiers. Hustaert had learned that only three frigates had managed to reach Goa that year, and

187 VOC-Archives, Overgekomen brieven en papieren, 1239, 1365pp. For more details see next chapter.

188 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging malabar*, 309-310.

that fear of a VOC attack on Goa had limited reinforcements to Cochin to 100 soldiers and a great amount of ammunition. The English were nowhere to be seen.¹⁸⁹

Considering the rather hopeless situation of the Portuguese in Cochin, the city held out for an admirably long time. The siege really took off as soon as Van Goens arrived in November. Assessing the situation, he immediately abandoned his plan of sending off part of the army to conquer Diu: all his resources would be needed here. After a long siege and various smaller actions in the surrounding area, the Company forces stormed the Cochin fort on the 6th of January 1663. After a bloody fight with heavy losses on both sides, Portuguese commander Sermento, having no expectations of any reinforcements or relief, decided to negotiate a surrender. On the 7th of January, the Portuguese laid down their arms.¹⁹⁰

In Europe, meanwhile, the treaty between Portugal and the Republic had finally been ratified on the 4th of November 1662. The directors, in their extra meeting called together in December that year because of Formosa's fall, also took the opportunity to resolve that the overseas possessions would be informed of the peace overland, and that all clauses in sailing instructions on bringing damage to the Portuguese would be struck. The war was finally over, although the last rearguard skirmishing would continue for a while, at least in Europe. The new Portuguese resident in The Hague, Diogo Lopes Ulhoa, disputed the legitimacy of the conquest of Cochin and Cannanore as soon as he heard of it. The Estates-General, however, would have nothing of it, and insisted that because of Portugal's own attitude, the Company's military actions had been legitimized. Negotiations on this point would drag on into 1666, when the Estates-General proposed that the VOC would retain Cochin and Cannanore, in exchange for which the overdue payment of the Portuguese war indemnity to the Republic would be cancelled. This was unacceptable to Ulhoa. In the end, however, the cities were kept as a guarantee, and would only be returned until the war indemnity was paid off. Portugal, being in no position to pay the indemnity or take measures against this decision, never got its cities back, which was exactly how the Estates-General, not to mention the directors, had wanted it.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to give insight into various aspects of the connection between patria and the Asian side of the Company for the period 1654-1663. I hope this 'case study' has given more substance to some of the statements made in chapter II. What I hope to have shown is that the connection between Europe and the overseas possessions was complicated, and that the Asian

189 Ibid., 320pp.

190 Ibid., 330-338.

191 Prestage, *Diplomatic Relations*, 228-235.

‘empires’ of the various European powers, although tied to Europe, can certainly not be interpreted as extensions of these powers overseas.

This complicated nature, firstly, finds expression in the ‘material’ aspect of this connection. On the one hand, the possessions in the East were dependent on a steady stream of reinforcements, in the form of weapons, ammunition, ships and soldiers, from Europe. On the other hand, the numbers we find in the resolutions and the *Generale Eis* are ridiculously small when looked upon in a European light. Van Goens observed at the first siege of Cochin how incredible it was that he was now laying siege to a city the size of Leiden with 1700 soldiers. He would have been aware that Leiden, almost a century earlier, had withstood a siege laid by 10.000 soldiers, more than the entire Company had, spread out across half the globe, at the time involved in various large campaigns and garrisoning a few dozen strongholds. The VOC’s warfare was, in that respect, of an entirely different nature. Coming back to the statements made in chapter II, I hope this chapter has illustrated in what ways the Military Revolution worked differently outside Europe.

A similar ‘complication’ of the European situation beyond the line can be distinguished in the political interaction. Although not as clear an example as 1641-1644, the period here treated does show that the policy of the VOC cannot be interpreted as a simple continuation of what the Republic was doing in Europe. I hope also to have made clear that saying ‘the Republic was at war with Portugal’ is very different from saying ‘the VOC was fighting the Portuguese in Asia.’ Although many of the conflicts between the two countries had had their origin in the developments overseas, it remains clear that the VOC’s motivation for war was not one and the same with the Republic’s. The VOC was not concerned with the European balance of power, but with profit and monopoly. The various developments in Europe, such as an enforced peace or the looming threat of Portuguese colonies being transferred to the English, were mostly considered a nuisance, and were in a way incompatible with the matters that drove the Company.

Furthermore, I hope this chapter has succeeded in showing the VOC’s information network and command structure in action. In this case-study, we have seen detailed information on local Asian politics travel all the way from the outposts to Batavia and on to patria, and decisions as well as material and soldiers travelling all the way from patria back to these outposts. This has hopefully also made clear the ‘fault-lines’ in this system, in the form of the huge time-lapses and distances, the different perspectives of VOC officials in different places, misunderstandings, circumstances that could not be planned for such as storms, and the personalities of the different people involved in the decision-making process. In spite of all these things, the system seems to have worked very well: the centralized command structure that had come into being in the first decades of the VOC’s existence gave it a serious edge in the wars it had to wage.

IV

Onto the battlefield

This thesis would not be complete without looking at the actual battlefield. One cannot get a grasp of the nature of VOC warfare by only looking at big logistical and political schemes, and I hope that the picture of the nature of VOC warfare will be enhanced by giving some descriptions of the proceedings on the battlefield and the atmosphere of such battles. This chapter will therefore look in more detail at some of the campaigns mentioned in the earlier chapters.

Some of the case studies in this chapter have already been thoroughly researched, usually a long time ago. Back in the introduction, it was told how until the '40s of the last century, the military aspects of Dutch colonial history were often used as a source of epic stories of Dutch heroism. In some cases all I will do is blow the dust off these stories by retelling them, often with very little 'intervention' on my behalf. My aim in doing this, however, is different from that of the original researchers: I am not out to prove how brave these fair and sturdy Batavians battling on distant shores were; rather I hope that the details of these campaigns will add to the picture of the nature of VOC-warfare, and will be seen in a different way in the light of the earlier chapters. Some of the case studies below will however be based on more recent research, or on my own archival research.

Where available, these case studies will be supplemented with details from eye-witness accounts. Interestingly, many of these eye-witnesses were present at more than one battle in the period here under study, which makes their travel accounts *leitmotifs* through the period. The most notable of these are Albrecht Herport and Wouter Schouten, who both merit a short introduction here.

Herport was a young German who had come to Holland to enhance his painting skills, and was subsequently compelled to join the VOC out of a sense of adventure. As he himself phrases it: "Even though I had a wealth of pictures of unknown things and persons at my disposal there, so that I had as it were the entire world to gaze upon, I was nonetheless struck by a great curiosity to see the original thing itself, and to sail to the Indies [...]"¹⁹² So he signed up in VOC-service as a soldier. He got his adventure alright: in addition to partaking in an expedition on Java, he was also present at Formosa as it was attacked by Coxinga, and was one of these soldiers who, arriving back from the Taiwan ordeal, was immediately sent out to lay siege to Cochin.

Wouter Schouten, then, had come to the Indies as a ship's surgeon, 19 years old, driven both by a sense of adventure and the will to put his surgeon's education to practice. He was also to get his fair share; we will find him present at the attack on Makassar, and the first, failed, siege of Cochin.

Before coming to these case studies, a perhaps somewhat superfluous disclaimer: the campaigns treated in this chapter are obviously no more than case studies. The VOC waged many more wars

192 Herport, *Reise*, 7.

in this period than could be comprehensively treated here. Although in my choice of case studies I will try to show several kinds of campaigns, I will still mainly concentrate on the larger campaigns, usually involving a naval expedition. The war with Bantam, the raids in the *Ommelanden* and the measures taken against it will only be mentioned in passing. Small explorations or penal expeditions, which amply took place on Java, Formosa and elsewhere, will not be treated here at all. Although this would have certainly enriched the picture of the nature of VOC warfare that this thesis tries to render, I have here given precedence to the larger campaigns, both to fill in the blanks of the last chapter and, admittedly, because the material on this was richer.¹⁹³

Northern Ceylon: starving Jaffanapatnam

Van Goens, the “commissioner, admiral and commander-in-the-field of the Western Quarters”, arrived in Colombo from the Goa blockade on the 1st of January 1658. As explained in the last chapter, the entire west coast of Ceylon had by now been conquered on the Portuguese. The east coast at this time remained free of European power: here were the harbours of the Raja Singha, king of the Kandy Kingdom. On the north of the island, however, the Portuguese were still in control of Jaffnapatnam and Mannar. Van Goens was here to change that, and to execute his own plans of sweeping the Portuguese entirely out of India and Ceylon.

Whereas Van Goens had left Goa with a fighting force of 800, several of his ships had gone missing and he had arrived before Colombo bringing only 450 soldiers. In order to be able to undertake something against the Portuguese positions in the north, he would therefore need to draw a substantial number of soldiers from the Ceylonese garrisons.¹⁹⁴ The Ceylonese governor Van der Meijden, however, was loath to spare any troops, as he feared an attack from inland Ceylon. Whereas originally the Raja Singha had worked together with the Company to oust the Portuguese, he had soon realised that by aiding the Company against the Portuguese he was just replacing one obnoxious European power with another, and in the past decade relations had steadily worsened. By now, the disposition of the Raja Singha towards the VOC had become whimsical at best, and Van der Meijden was anxious that the king might join the Portuguese in an attempt at reconquering the Dutch settlements. Seeing his garrisons march off to war was therefore not an attractive prospect to the governor.¹⁹⁵

In the council meeting of the 7th of January, Van Goens however managed to overrule Van der Meijden, and the council finally decided that the 450 soldiers brought from Goa would be supple-

193 For some nice examples of such ‘guerilla’ campaigns, see Herport, who went along on several of such campaigns, or De Iongh, who dedicates a chapter to ‘small war.’

194 J. Aalbers, *Rijkloff van Goens: Commissaris en veldoverste der Oost-Indische Compagnie, en zijn arbeidsveld* (Groningen 1916), 138. The main storyline of this paragraph is comes from op. cit, C6; notes only put in where information came from other sources.

195 S. Arasaratnam, ‘De VOC in Ceylon en Coromandel in de 17^e en 18^e eeuw’ in: M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs ed., *De VOC in Azië* (Bussum 1976), 14-63, there 14-25.



Illustration 3: map of Southern India and Northern Ceylon, with the route of Van Goens' campaign schematically drawn in by me.

mented with another 800 European soldiers as well as 300 Lascars from the Ceylonese garrisons. It was now decided to first move against the island of Mannar with the entire force. From there, the army would subsequently move against Jaffanapatnam on the mainland.¹⁹⁶

Circumstances, however, threw the planning upside down before the army could even move north. On the 16th of January, Van Goens received word that the *Naarden*, one of the missing ships of his original fleet, had been found. Its commander, Van der Laan, had felt confident enough to move against the unfortified Portuguese city of Tutucorin on the Coromandel Coast on his own initiative. He had subsequently failed to land and take the city, but with his ship currently had several Portuguese frigates pinned down in the bay there.

Van Goens was thus obliged to first mop up what Van der Laan had started. As Tutucorin was an unfortified city, and Van Goens now had quite an army assembled, this should hardly cause any delay in conquering the remaining Portuguese strongholds on Ceylon. On the 18th of January he sent out four yachts, bringing 146 soldiers, to Tutucorin, to help the *Naarden* seal in the Portuguese ships; the next day, he was able to send out another three small yachts. His own ship, the *Goes*, was ready to depart for Tutucorin on the 21st of January.

Arriving before Tutucorin three days later, Van Goens found that, including his ship, twelve VOC vessels were now before the city, with a total fighting force of 800 men. That same night, the troops were brought onto the small ships, and landed near the city. The next morning Tutucorin was taken practically without a fight. The open city had only 80 Portuguese soldiers defending it. As soon as

196 Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 33-34.

the VOC fleet had taken out the three Portuguese frigates defending the city, the Portuguese force had simply fled.

Taking the city might have been easy; a more complex question was what to do with it afterwards. In a council meeting on the 28th of January, the idea of building and garrisoning a small fortification was rejected; this would merely drain the available fighting force, and the VOC had no interest in Tutucorin, either strategically or with regard to trade. It was therefore decided to send a representative, Jacob van Rhee, to the Nayak of Madura, ruler of the region. Van Rhee was simply to give the city over to him, on the condition that no Portuguese would be allowed back in. Thus, the Company hoped to have driven the Portuguese out, without the burden of having to guard the door themselves afterwards.¹⁹⁷

Having put things in order at Tutucorin, the fleet was ready to continue to Mannar. Missions to the local rulers had meanwhile yielded support to the Company attack on the Portuguese, in the form of small ships suitable for landing, and even warriors. While some ships of the fleet were already ahead, Van Goens was now waiting for these reinforcements, much to his discontent. He felt that his army was strong enough to move against Mannar without these warriors, and he would rather have the advantage of having a full moon during the attack. Just as Van Goens was preparing to depart without the promised reinforcements on the 11th of February, the small ships finally arrived. Van Goens then met up with the other ships at the island of Rammanacoilam (present-day Rameswaran, the westernmost island of Rama's Bridge.) The island of Mannar lay just on the other side of the Strait.

Due to adverse winds, the fleet only arrived before the southcoast of Mannar on the 19th of February, finding that the Portuguese had apparently been aware of the Company's plans. The southern coast was fortified by a trench two miles long, and eight frigates were defending the coastline. As it later turned out, the Portuguese had assembled 700 soldiers for the defence of the island. Landing the Company force on a different part of the island was undesirable: the northwest coast was also well-defended, and the east coast was covered by a fortification on the Ceylonese mainland just across. The troops then, would just have to land on the south coast, as had been planned, but not before the Portuguese ships, the biggest threat to a landing of the army, had been destroyed or taken.

The attack on the Portuguese ships began the next day. Destroying the Portuguese ships, however, proved harder than expected: by the second day of the naval battle, the Company fleet had only destroyed one Portuguese ship, at the cost of several lives on Company side. It was then decided to try and force the landing by a somewhat unusual manoeuvre. In the evening of the 21st, the VOC fleet first pretended to move away from the island, but during the night it returned, and manoeuvred the smaller ships of the fleet right in between the Portuguese ships and the beach, within mus-

197 For this mission to the Nayak see Ottow, *Van Goens* (1995), 41pp; Aalbers, *Van Goens*, 146pp.

provision of rice every day to each soldier, rather than incommode the inhabitants: and finding our forces extremely tired by the long marches, and consequently incapable of engaging with the same advantage with the enemy in case they should be attacked, it was resolved instead of marching up to the head of the river through the sandy ground, to pass the river in boats [...]"¹⁹⁸

The latter part of Baldaeus' description of the march requires some explanation. The city of Jaffanapatnam was on a peninsula going by the same name, only connected to the Ceylonese mainland by a small landbridge on the eastside. The Company army, however, had marched due north, taking the shortest route. This meant that they had to cross the bay (this long and narrow bay was often called the 'salty river', and this is what Baldaeus refers to), which rendered the army vulnerable. When the army arrived before the water after a three days' march, the Portuguese, however, were nowhere to be seen. Although crossing the bay finally took 24 hours, there was no Portuguese attempt to prevent it. Baldaeus tells how the Portuguese had supposed that the Company army was taking the long way around over the land bridge. The Portuguese had therefore moved away from the other side of the water the day before. Apparently the earlier delays of the march had at least been good for something.

The Company army arrived before Jaffanapatnam on the 7th of March, and split up in two forces. Van Goens circumvented the fortress and moved part of the force to the north of the city, Van der Laan attacked from the south. Jaffanapatnam, unlike many other Portuguese cities in Asia, was not walled all around, but had a citadel on the coast, around which the city was built. Van Goens easily took the northern part of the city, which was the smallest and housed fewer strong buildings. Van der Laan, however, had to wage a true city guerrilla on the south side: the Portuguese had barricaded the streets, and were firing from strongly built churches and stone houses. Van der Laan had to use heavy cannon to bring these down and advance. In order to aid in the conquest of the southside of the city, Van Goens came back from the northside with his troops. The efforts there were further helped along by the arrival of the *Salamander* from Mannar, bringing 209 soldiers. These soldiers had come from the *Mars*, another ship that had gone missing from Van Goens' fleet, had somehow ended up on the Maledives, but had finally made it to Colombo. The troops had immediately been sent to Mannar, and from there had arrived at Jaffanapatnam. Van Goens' army now counted 1100 soldiers. With this force, the southern side of the city was finally taken by the 18th of March. This however, still left the fortress in its centre to be conquered.

Jaffanapatnam was one of the strongest fortresses the Portuguese possessed in Asia. It was larger than fortress Batavia, its walls were thick and 30 feet high, and the four corners were all excellent bastions. Climbing these walls or storming the fortress was unfeasible, Van Goens was somewhat low on gunpowder and did not wish to try and breach the walls by bombardment, so there was

198 Philippus Baldaeus, *A true and exact description of the most celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also of the Isle of Ceylon, translated from the High Dutch* (Amsterdam 1672, facsimile reprint New Delhi 1996), 794.

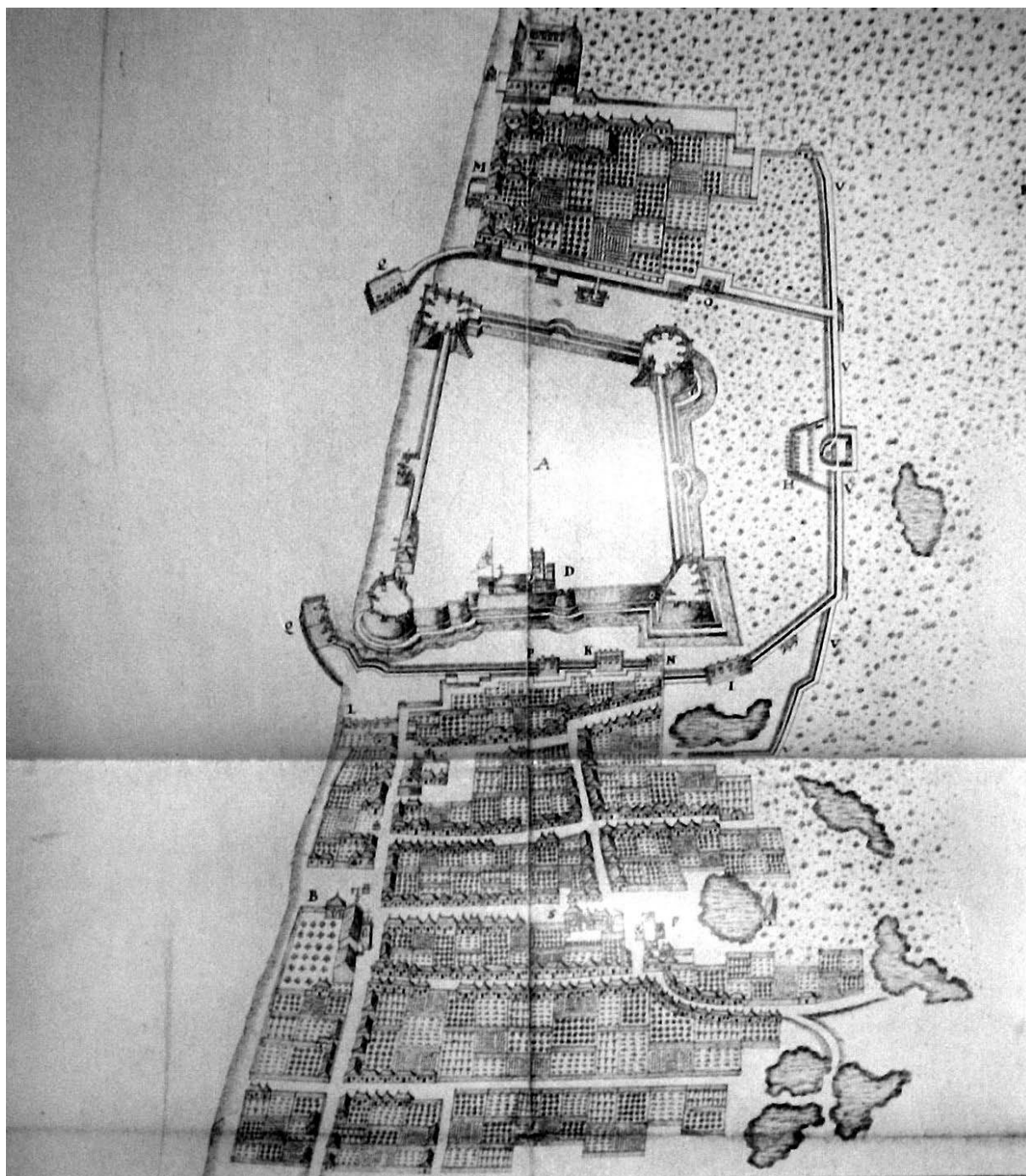


Illustration 5: the fortress and city of Jaffanapatnam.

nothing for it but to begin building siege works and starve the city.¹⁹⁹ Trenches were dug, and under severe Portuguese fire from the fortress, the city was slowly sealed in. Various smaller ships had arrived from Mannar, which also sealed off the city from the sea. By the 30th of March, the siege works had closed in the fortress on all sides.

The Portuguese were also still in possession of a smaller fortress on an island called Kay just before Jaffanapatnam, which was a serious threat to both the ships and the Dutch positions around Jaffanapatnam. Before moving against Jaffanapatnam, Van Goens decided to first take this fortress. On the 19th of April, he bombarded Kay from the surrounding islands and ships. Although the bombardment was far from successful and the Portuguese subsequently refused to surrender, by a stroke of fortune the bombardment had destroyed the water supply inside the fortress. Just as Van Goens, as yet unaware of the destroyed water supply, was preparing to land at the small island and storm the fortress, which would have been a precarious undertaking, thirst made the Portuguese surrender the fortress on the 26th of April.

The siege of Jaffanapatnam, meanwhile, continued. The Portuguese inside the fortress had received the rumour that a Portuguese fleet would be arriving to break the siege, and held out. The Company forces had by now successfully sealed off the city. What the Company troops did not know was that before the arrival of the Company army, many civilians had fled inside the fortress from the city and the surrounding area. Almost 6000 people had been packed into the fortress, and resources were rapidly draining. Portuguese deserters informed Van Goens that an epidemic had also broken out. In the end, all Van Goens therefore had to do was wait it out.

On the 21st of June, a letter arrived from the fortress, requesting a ceasefire and negotiations. The next day, the city officially surrendered. 3500 survivors left the fortress; as many as 2170 people had died during the siege of the last three months. Jaffanapatnam had successfully been starved. The Company army only entered the fortress three days later, fearing the disease that had raged through it. The Portuguese who had survived the siege were either transported to Goa or to Batavia.²⁰⁰

With the fall of Jaffanapatnam, the Portuguese had entirely been driven from Ceylon. The cinnamon trade had now been monopolized. Securing this monopoly against possible future attack, however, would mean the end of several more Portuguese cities in India.

199 Whereas the beginning of March hails the start of the rain season on the Malabar coast, and for one made a campaign in Cochin utterly impossible, as will become clear below, the north of Ceylon, while quite close to Cochin, has a very different climate. Jaffanapatnam is in the dry area of Ceylon, which is in the rain shadow of the Ghats mountain range and the mountains on central Ceylon. The rain season is therefore not nearly as intense there in the summer months, and certainly did not make a siege impossible.

200 For a more detailed description of the Company policy of completely disbanding Portuguese cities and deporting its population, see the political sector of the last chapter, and the paragraphs on the second siege of Cochin below.

Makassar: finding a *modus vivendi* by all means necessary

The last chapter of this thesis attempted to create insight in the logistic and informational network of the VOC, putting a particular emphasis on the contact with patria and Europe. This network is most clearly visible in case of long-distance campaigns, and for this reason the last chapter has to a large degree passed by the various campaigns that the VOC waged “closer to home”, i.e. within the Archipelago. These were usually waged entirely on the initiative of the *Hoge Regering*, and most of the time patria was only informed of them afterwards, making these wars a lot less relevant to the decision-making process as sketched in the last chapter.

Nonetheless, the Company had its fair share of wars within the Archipelago, most notably with its two biggest Asian rivals: Bantam and Makassar. As these have been largely passed over in the last chapter, they will require slightly more introduction than the other campaigns in this chapter. For one, throughout the period here under study, Batavia had an on-and-off war with its closest neighbour, Bantam. In 1656, the sultan of Bantam, ever bent on breaking the trade hegemony of the Company, had taken two Company vessels and set fire to them. This hailed the start of a period when the Dutch structurally blockaded the Bantam harbour, and the Bantamese, in their turn, raided the *Ommelanden* and took as many prisoners as they could. Only by the end of 1659 did things quiet down again.²⁰¹

The conflict with Makassar also had its origins in trade rivalry. Hostilities had started off as early as 1616, with the massacre of 15 Dutch sailors by the Makassarese. This massacre in itself had been a retaliation for several Makassarese nobles being taken hostage by the Company, in order to get the king of Makassar to pay his debts. The fifty years of on-and-off war that were to follow this incident, however, had a deeper-lying cause. The city of Makassar thrived mostly on the trade in spices. In the first half of the 17th century, the power of the Makassarese kingdom was ever growing, and the kingdom coveted a direct control over the spice-producing regions. At the same time, the Company was aspiring to a complete monopoly of these spices. The fact that not only Asian traders, but also Spaniards, English and the Portuguese found a warm welcome in Makassar, was a threat to both the Asian trade and the European spice market of the VOC. Particularly the Portuguese were strongly present in Makassar: their population numbered about 2000, living in their own quarter. They had a great measure of autonomy there, and were very influential with the Makassarese king. For all these reasons, the kingdom of Makassar and the ‘kingdom of Jakarta’ grew to be rivalling powers, very soon after the Company made its first entry into the Archipelago.²⁰²

At the beginning of our period of study, the aforementioned Ambonese wars were largely over. This conflict over the control of the spice-producing regions of the Archipelago had largely been fought out in the Moluccas; in the years 1654-1655, the harbour of Makassar had also been block-

201 Colenbrander, *Koloniale geschiedenis*, 180-181.

202 F. W. Stapel, *Het Bongaais verdrag* (Leiden 1922), 14-17.

aded. As this war was costly and was severely hampering the spice trade, the directors back in the Netherlands were far from enthusiastic about it, and sent orders to Batavia to try and reach an agreement. Such an agreement was reached by Willem van der Beeck, and was confirmed by Batavia on the 2nd of February 1656.²⁰³

This treaty, a rather thin document that left a lot of room for interpretation, was to prove a Trojan horse to the Company. In the *Generale Missiven* of the following years, we find Maatsuiker constantly complaining that the treaty (which he himself had ratified) was way too lenient.²⁰⁴ Particularly clauses six and seven, which specified that the Company and the kingdom of Makassar would not interfere in each other's alliances and conflicts, effectively meant that the Portuguese and the English still had a way into the spice trade. Clause eight *requested* that the king would not send ships to Ambon, and gave the Company the right to seize Makassarese ships trading in the Moluccas. Of course this didn't stop the Makassarese from trying, and the Company's maritime hegemony was not strong enough to make these attempts unprofitable.

Makassar's strength was the biggest check on solving these issues with violence. Even the hawkish *Vertoog* by Van Goens had advised to appease the kingdom, although the appeasement should be combined with larger garrisons in the Moluccas. As everyone within the Company was painfully aware, the Company could ill afford a war with Makassar, which had a large and professional army and by the 1650s was extremely well-fortified. Attempts at settling the differences by negotiation therefore continued.²⁰⁵ The king of Makassar, however, was also aware of his excellent bargaining position, and became ever more provoking in these negotiations. Things finally escalated when on the 27th of April 1659, the negotiator for the Makassarese demanded that the Company should take no action against Ceram, Buru and Amblau, which stood under the protection of Makassar but with which the Company had a conflict. In addition, the Company was to retreat from Menado, and had to admit that its monopoly on the Spice Islands was in contravention of God's law. The Dutch negotiator, Bastinghs, replied that he was in no position to decide on these matters, and went back to Batavia. The *Hoge Regering*, upon hearing of the turn things had taken, decided that the fruitless negotiations had carried on long enough. Politics would just have to be continued by other means.²⁰⁶

The *Hoge Regering* decided to amass troops and ships at Ambon. When the wind turned at the start of the summer monsoon of 1660, the campaign would take off. In the first months of 1660, a total

203 Corpus Diplomaticum, CCXVII, treaty of 28th of December 1655.

204 For example *Generale Missiven*, III, 87-89, 147-148, 215pp. The latter pages are the letter of December 14th, 1658, when Maatsuiker is already contemplating an attack against Makassar, but adds that he will wait, as disease and other campaigns are tying his hands.

205 In February 1657, Dirk Schouten was sent to Makassar to negotiate. He died there, apparently of natural causes. A letter from the King sent back by Schouten's associate gave no reason for optimism with regard to future negotiations. Stapel, *Bongaais Verdrag*, 56-57.

206 Stapel, *Bongaais Verdrag*, 61-63.

of 700 soldiers left from Batavia on several ships, in small groups so as not to draw attention. The rest of the army would have to be formed from the garrisons of Ambon, Banda and the Moluccas.²⁰⁷

On the *Mars*, one of the ships leaving for Ambon, the men that were to lead the expedition also left from Batavia: Johan van Dam, with Johan Truytman as second in command. The instructions for the commanders by the *Hoge Regering* were remarkably precise for an attack that was only going to take place months later. As the VOC force would simply not be strong enough to attack Makassar head on, some kind of subterfuge was needed, and the gentlemen in Batavia had it all worked out. First, the VOC employees that were still present in the Dutch lodge would have to be evacuated in some way. Then, the bulk of the fleet had to sail along the Makassarese coast from south to north, firing at the Makassarese defences as it went, until it would reach the large royal fortress Sombaopu. The goal was to create the impression that a large attack was going to take place on this fortress, which would then lure away the troops from the other strongholds. A small part of the fleet, which should remain out of sight until that time, consisting of smaller vessels and carrying the bulk of the soldiers, would then undertake a surprise attack and take the southernmost fortress, Panakoke. The Company being in possession of a fortress so near the Makassarese court would probably reverse the tables in the negotiations that were to follow.

The *Mars* had arrived on Ambon on the 17th of March. A good five weeks later, by the 29th of April, the army had largely taken shape, and a day of prayer for the success of the expedition was held, even though reinforcements from the Moluccas had not come in yet. Interestingly enough, as with most VOC campaigns, the praying soldiers, sailors and citizens on that 29th of April did not know exactly what they were praying for: neither the sailors or soldiers, nor even the officers that were to take part in the expedition knew where they were going. Only Van Dam and Truytman did. To most observers it must however have been clear that it was not some small-time penal expedition, as the fleet was by now becoming formidable by Company standards: 31 vessels (including small boats), carrying 1200 European soldiers, 1000 sailors and 400 Ambonese: a total of 2600 people. Siege equipment was being produced and brought on board. Finally, two of the ships from the fleet set sail on the 7th of May to obtain additional supplies; the other 29 ships followed on the 12th of May.

In spite of the impressive strength of the army, most of the soldiers on board wouldn't have guessed that the goal of the expedition was Makassar, and had believed that they would be going to the Portuguese possessions on Solor and Timor. When, on the 26th of May, Van Dam finally disclosed the goal of the expedition, there was great surprise among the crews. As Schouten,

207 W.E. van Dam van Isselt, 'Mr. Johan van Dam en zijne tuchtiging van Makassar in 1660', in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlands-Indië* (60: 1906), 1-44, there 9-10. This article forms the basis for this paragraph: footnotes only added for other sources.

who had been working in and around Ambon and was now going along with the expedition, describes:

“This sounded rather incredible to us all. Makassar, after all, was a powerful kingdom, full of combative folk, which, because of its unbreakable power and strong fortresses, despised our nation as a kind of Goliath. They mocked the peace they had made with us and caused trouble to our people on and around Ambon. They regularly attacked us there, as a result of which many of our people had died. The Makassarese even inspired great fear among their mighty neighbours, and many kingdoms, islands and fortifications stood under their control. The kingdom of Makassar itself is equipped with strong castles and many fortresses to repel possible enemies.”²⁰⁸

The fleet came to a halt at Selayar, the island under the westernmost ‘finger’ of Sulawesi, on the 5th of June. The city of Makassar was just to the Northwest. Before the plan that the *Hoge Regering* had spelled out could be put into effect, the three residents of the Dutch lodge needed to be gotten out of there. For this purpose, Van Dam went ahead with the *Mars* and the small flute *Breukelen*. As the Dutch had been continuously trading in Makassar in spite of the differences, the arrival of two Dutch ships before Makassar would hopefully not arouse suspicion. As soon as the ships would have returned and met up with the fleet, which was to slowly advance in the meantime, the attack would take off.²⁰⁹

The two ships left the fleet that same evening, and arrived before Makassar on the morning of the 7th. As was usual, the head merchant and his assistant immediately approached the *Mars* in a boat to welcome the ships and talk business. They would not be leaving the ship again. The third Dutch resident, a simple helper, had however remained in Makassar. The open boat, with which the other two had arrived, was therefore sent back to land with orders to have this helper bring a few chickens to the ships. In the early morning of the next day, the third resident of the lodge also arrived on board. (I don’t know whether he actually brought the chickens.)

Now, the two ships were in principle ready to head back to the fleet lying hidden behind Selayar. Circumstances, however, had inspired Van Dam to make a small change in plans. As the *Mars* and the *Breukelen* had sailed into the bay, they had spotted six Portuguese ships and a small Portuguese junk there, four of which were lying deep in the water and were presumably loaded with trade goods. During the night, before the third VOC employee was back on board, Van Dam had already decided to attack the ships in the morning. Although Van Dam only had two ships at his disposal, one of these was the well-armed flagship of his fleet. He had decided to take the risk.

208 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 92.

209 Interestingly, Schouten does not seem to be aware that the ships only went ahead to evacuate the lodge. He seems to be under the impression that Van Dam was going to do a last attempt at negotiation. Van Dam did no such thing. Schouten *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 94, comp. Van Dam van Isselt, ‘Tuchtiging Makassar’, 15-17.

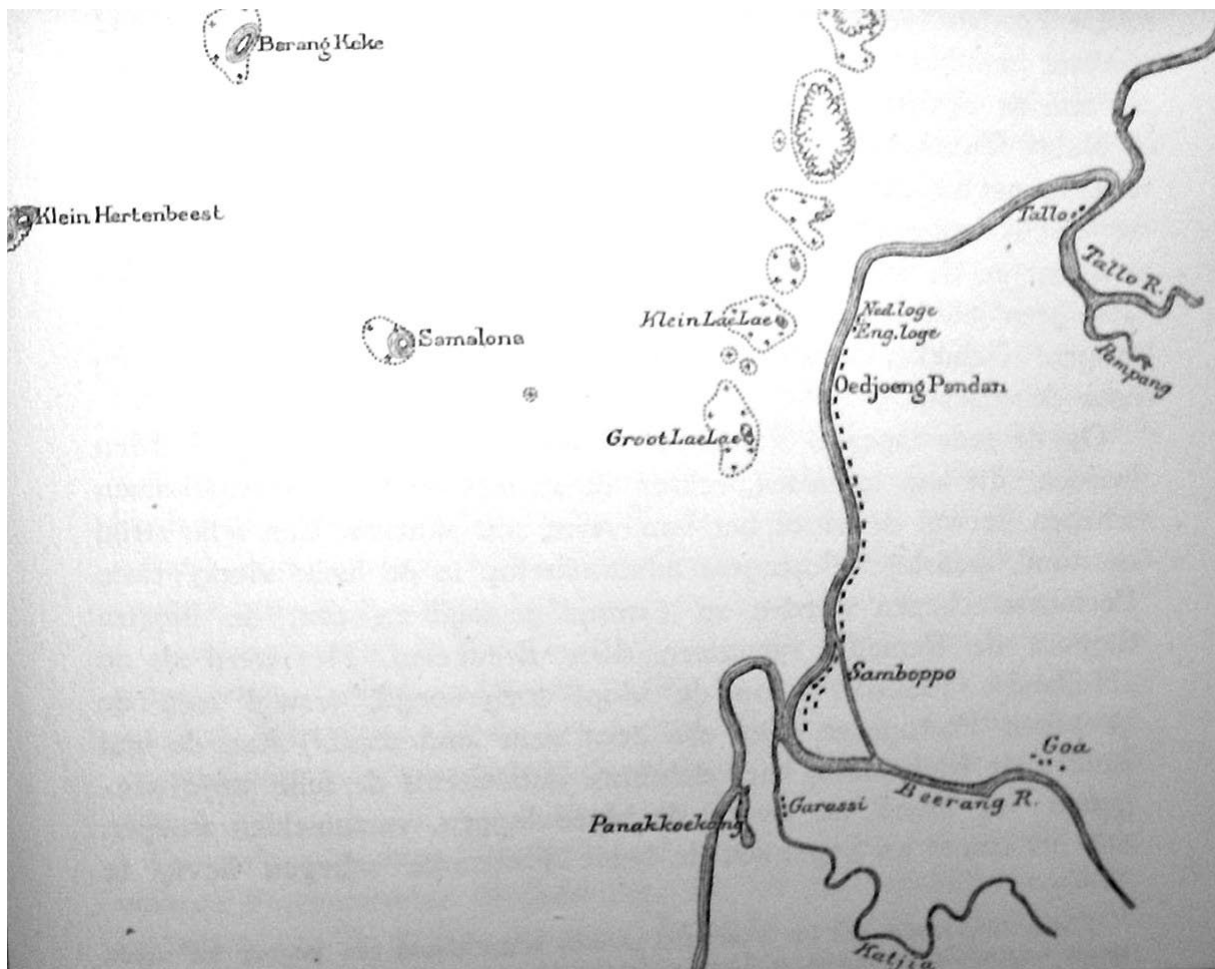


Illustration 6: map of the coastline of Makassar, with the various important fortresses and lodges.

Just after the helper had arrived on the *Mars*, the attack on the Portuguese vessels began. Clearly the Portuguese had been on the alert, as fire was immediately returned. The fleets seemed evenly matched for a while, until, by a stroke of good fortune, the *Mars*, which was in close combat with the Portuguese lead ship, hit its powder chamber and thus destroyed the vessel. Two other Portuguese ships caught on fire soon after, two more were manoeuvred onto the beach. The sixth vessel was entered by the crew of the *Brenkelen* and taken. Its crew was released to Makassar, and as the Makassarese defences also opened fire on the VOC vessels, the ships, now three in number, headed back to the fleet.²¹⁰

This fleet, meanwhile, had waited for two days, and had then set sail for the small coral island of Tanakeke, just slightly to the South of Makassar, as had been pre-arranged. Everything was made ready for battle. Only the Ambonese soldiers, long-time enemies of Makassar who in the course

210 Van Dam van Isselt, 'Tuchtiging Makassar', 16-18.

of time had built up a healthy fear of the kingdom, were not so enthusiastic. As Wouter Schouten describes:

“The Ambonese soldiers who had gone along, brave heroes of war, had acted very courageously when we left Ambon, in the prospect of chasing off a bunch of defenceless blacks on Solor or Timor. Now that they saw that we were going to Makassar to do battle there, they had suddenly become very frightened. We had a company of these heroes on board, of whom the captain ate at the table with our skipper. Earlier, he had been boasting that on this war fleet, he would not eat salted meat until he had fried and eaten the eyes and brains of his bitter enemies, convinced that this concerned a hapless bunch in the woods of Timor. Now this hero nearly collapsed with fright as soon as he even heard Makassar mentioned, imagining nothing but how he would be led to a slaughter there.”²¹¹

On the 11th of June the ships met up, and the entire fleet headed for Makassar. Apparently the Makassarese king was now aware of what was afoot. It is possible that the incident of three days before had made the king suspicious, but the fleet had also been spotted behind Tanakeke by a Makassarese vessel, as Wouter Schouten reports.²¹² At any rate, a Makassarese ship carrying a peace flag now approached the fleet, bringing cloth and gold as an indemnity for earlier damage on the Company. The gifts were accepted and the vessel was sent away. This acceptance of the gifts, however, did not mean any change in plans on Van Dam’s side.

In the morning of the 12th of June, only half a mile south of Makassar, Van Dam and Truytman transferred to a fast yacht, the *Kat*, and the eleven largest and best-armed vessels transferred their soldiers to the other ships. These eleven would be performing the bombardment of the coast. The other ships, among which the *Kat*, would remain out of sight and then attack Panakoke, just as the *Hoge Regering* had ordered five months ago.

The plan worked out just as the *Hoge Regering* had envisioned. The eleven ships sailed up the coast, taking under fire the various fortifications, until in the end they halted to fire at Sombaopu, the fortress that housed the royal palace. Wouter Schouten tells how one of the king’s most beautiful wives, who was right at the king’s side at the time, was killed by a cannonball.²¹³ Many barges and small ships lying on the beach were destroyed by the ship’s bombardment. The Makassarese, meanwhile, returned fire, first from Panakoke, then from various smaller defences, and finally from Sombaopu itself. Wouter Schouten, first having described how the massive bombardment from the ships wreaked havoc upon Makassar, then continues:

211 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 94.

212 Ibid.

213 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 99.

“But for is it wasn’t exactly child’s play either, as the Makassarese and Portuguese had rushed from their quarters to the aid of the king and started firing at us, rather more intensely than from Panakoke. Their heavy cannonballs struck the heart of our fleet, which was battered badly by this. On our ship, the mainstay was shot in two, due to which our mainmast came quite loose. We also got some direct hits on and below the waterline, but the holes were fixed by our carpenters immediately. Thus the enemy cannonballs of twelve, eighteen and twenty-four pounds did a lot of damage to masts, rope and sail, which brought our ships into quite some trouble.”²¹⁴

In spite of the damage done to these eleven ships, the plan was working out. The 4000 Makassarese defending Panakoke, under the impression that the main attack was on Sombaopu, rushed away to defend it. Only a small force remained behind. Then, Van Dam and Truytmans landed their force, well-equipped with siege equipment, at the beach near Panakoke. As Wouter Schouten describes, the small Makassarese force that had been left behind, realising that it was hopelessly outnumbered, decided to just abandon the fortress. However, as they opened the small gate to leave it, a company of VOC pikemen had already arrived near this gate, and stormed in, driving back the Makassarese soldiers, who now started jumping from the walls.

The VOC army now entered Panakoke, bringing in cannon, powder, grenades and other weaponry, and hoisted the Dutch flag over the fortress. Now the troops in Sombaopu finally realised what was happening, and a large Makassarese force made for Panakoke to reconquer it, bringing one siege ladder which Schouten describes as utterly unusable. The VOC troops now loaded their heaviest cannon with scrap and fired at the huge crowd of soldiers below, and threw fire grenades. This treatment created chaos among the Makassarese forces, and soon the Makassarese army went into a disorderly retreat. Van Dam decided to do a sortie; VOC troops pursued the retreating Makassarese until the river Beerang, halfway between Panakoke and Sombaopu. On their way back to Panakoke, the troops set fire to the city, which burned down for a good part.²¹⁵

The eleven ships before Sambaopu, meanwhile, had spotted the Dutch flag raised over Panakoke, and headed further north, particularly in order to bombard the Portuguese quarter of the city. The Portuguese, who were allowed their own defences within Makassar, returned fire. The fleet sailed all the way up to the northernmost fortress along the coast, Ujung Pandan. They carefully avoided hitting the English lodge, which was near there. The fleet then turned around to head back to Panakoke, not foregoing the chance to have another round of bombardment on the Portuguese quarter. The ship on which Wouter Schouten was sailing, however, got stuck in the ropes of the Portuguese admiral ship which Van Dam had blown up on that location four days ago. The Portuguese, noting that the ship was stuck dangerously close to the Portuguese guns, tried to hit it below the waterline in order to sink it. By another incredible stroke of fortune, however, one of the cannonballs appar-

214 Ibid.

215 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 101-102.



Illustration 7: a drawing of the attack on Makassar from Wouter Schouten's travel account. In the background we see the eleven most heavily armed ships bombarding Sombaopu, while in the foreground the smaller vessels land and Company pikemen make their way towards Panakoke.

ently hit the rope in which the rudder of the ship was entangled. The ship came loose and managed to get away and return to Panakoke, which in the next few days would be defended with an extra trench. Only nine Dutch soldiers had died in the entire action.

Thus, on the 12th of June 1660, the VOC, not powerful enough to fight an all-out war with Makassar, had caused it enough harm to be taken seriously as a negotiation partner again. The city was burning, the Portuguese quarter and the royal palace had been severely battered by artillery bombardment, and Panakoke was now flying the Dutch flag. The next day, ambassadors of the king arrived to negotiate. Now, it was the Company which made use of its excellent bargaining position; it simply sent the negotiators back as not being qualified to a sufficient degree. Van Dam subsequently demanded that the king sent a plenipotentiary to Batavia. Until negotiations were concluded, Panakoke would remain occupied as a guarantee. The Makassarese sent Crain Papowa to Batavia as an ambassador. There, a new treaty was reached on the 19th of August.²¹⁶

216 Van Dam van Isselt, 'tuchtiging Makassar', 21-24; Stapel, *Bongaais verdrag*, 66-67; *Corpus Diplomaticum* CCX-LIII, 19th of August 1660.

This new agreement was much more precise, as well as much more severe, than the one agreed upon by Van der Beecke five years earlier. The treaty specified that Makassar would no longer interfere with the Company's business in Menado, Bouton and Ambon, that Makassar was prohibited from sailing on Banda and Ambon, that it would pay an enormous war indemnity which would cover the cost of the entire operation, and, worst of all, that all Portuguese should leave Makassar, and the Company would have open trade there.

This display of power and the resulting treaty had however not changed the deeper-lying causes of the enmity between Makassar and the Company. Although at first the king seems to have been earnest in ousting all the Portuguese from his capital, it soon became evident how important the Portuguese had been to the welfare of Makassar, and the king realised that he was ruining himself. In addition, the king was apparently not expecting the peace to last forever, as he started not only restoring but enhancing his defences before the treaty had even taken effect. When in 1663, rebels against the Makassarese king started taking refuge in Bouton, where Makassar was not allowed to interfere by the terms of the treaty, and Batavia was negotiating with the Bugis who were also in rebellion against Makassar, the atmosphere quickly turned sour. A series of incidents alternated with attempts to restore the peace by negotiation, made clear that it was only a matter of time before war would once again break out. In 1665, the Company evacuated its lodge in Makassar. When by the end of 1666 the *Hoge Regering* suspected that Makassar was planning an attack on Bouton, Ternate and perhaps on Ambon afterwards, the Company once again took recourse to war: an expedition under Speelman was first sent to Bouton and Ternate, and would then have to go to Makassar, not so much to definitively defeat it as to once again flex the VOC's muscles in the hopes of keeping Makassar at bay. As has been described in chapter two, so many local allies joined the fleet that Speelman felt confident to attack Sombaopu. After a siege of the city which lasted for more than two years, the backbone of Makassarese power would finally be broken in 1668.²¹⁷

Quilon and Cochin: a penal expedition and a failed siege

The campaign on the Malabar coast of 1661-1662 did not come out of the clear blue. Long had the Company been interested in this region, first and foremost because of its pepper and cardamom production. As late as the 1660s, the directors of the Company were motivated to certain actions by the hopes of one day achieving a complete pepper monopoly. In addition, in the past few years the general strategy of the Company had been to completely drive the Portuguese from Asia, and the approaching peace made a speedy achievement of this goal all the more pertinent. Thirdly, there was now Ceylon to be thought of. The hugely valuable cinnamon production there needed to be protected, and it would be prudent to guard its backdoor. Securing the Malabar Coast would prevent the Portuguese or the English from ever using it as a stepping stone to conquer Ceylon.

²¹⁷ See above, 39pp.

The strategy that Van Goens en Van der Meijden therefore came up with, in one of the very few instances that they agreed on something, was to secure the Malabar Coast from the South upward. First Quilon needed to be retaken, subsequently the various rulers along the Coast needed to be appeased, then Cochin should be taken, and finally, if time and resources permitted, Diu and Daman should be conquered.²¹⁸

Particularly with regard to Cochin, the Company was in a very good political position at the time. The Malabar Coast was a patchwork of small political entities, of which the central region had long been the scene of rivalry between two main power blocks: Cochin and Calicut. As the Portuguese had centred their trade on the coast around Cochin, the VOC had soon started working together with the Zamorin, the ruler of Calicut. On this campaign, the Zamorin had also pledged to assist the VOC with military reinforcements of his own Nayars, and food supplies. The best card that the Company had recently been dealt, however, was a pretender to the Cochinese throne. A dynastic struggle in Cochin, settled by Portuguese intervention in 1658, had ousted one branch of the Cochinese royal family from the kingdom. The ousted pretender to the throne, Vira Kerala Varma, had subsequently sought contact with the enemies of Cochin and the Portuguese: the Zamorin and the VOC. Here, then, were some nice mutual interests. The Cochinese pretender to the throne had a means of conquering it, and the VOC had found a way of legitimating its conquest of Cochin and ousting of the royal family working with the Portuguese.²¹⁹

As the fleet departed from Colombo, the first seven ships on the 5th of November and the bulk of the fleet, fourteen large vessels and six smaller ones, ten days later, the wind was certainly not adhering to the prayers that the inhabitants of Colombo and the soldiers and sailors on the fleet had dedicated to the success of the expedition on the 4th of November:²²⁰ the fleet had to sail against the wind, and proceeded extremely slowly. En route, fire also broke out on the *Beurs van Amsterdam*. The ensuing attempts to extinguish the fire ruined part of the powder and the fuses. It was only on the 2nd of December that the entire fleet lay assembled before Travancore, ten miles south of Quilon. Information from the raja there and scouting along the coast before Quilon made clear that although the Portuguese might be willing to surrender, the *Nayars* of the queen of Quilon would not. The army landed on the 7th of December, 2 miles south of Quilon. The next morning, the march towards the Portuguese city commenced.

These Nayars were the knighthood of the Malabar Coast: a caste of nobles whose *raison-d'être* was fighting. Wouter Schouten qualified them and their fighting skills as follows:

218 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 246. All of this chapter based on this work, C5, unless stated otherwise.

219 T.I. Poonen, *Survey of the Rise of Dutch Power in Malabar* (Trichinopoly 1943), 75pp.

220 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 184

“The nairos are the keepers of the weapons and are trained in their use from childhood. [...] They are very strong and agile in fencing and wrestling, and prove themselves to be real masters at this. They use their weapons all their life. Like brave Europeans, they charge in ranks, and they ably use bow and arrow, muskets, but also artillery. [...] They go to battle naked, with only their loins covered. [...] When fighting their enemies, they often find their biggest advantage in flight, as they cannot be overtaken: they jump and fly quickly over fences and dams, through shrubbery, swamps, ponds and wilderness, and then suddenly charge again from the other side. With their shields they are able to protect themselves remarkably well and they do more harm slashing and stabbing than shooting, as their aiming is very poor which often makes their bullets fly into the air. They don’t easily retreat, but stand upright like poles, or bravely advance through fire, sword or barrage. By using opium they go quite mad and beside themselves.”²²¹

As the VOC army was marching towards the Portuguese fortress, it was attacked by an army of these Nayars, estimated by Baldaeus to be 7 or 8000 strong.²²² The VOC army was first taken under fire from an artillery battery and various smaller fortified positions. The smaller VOC vessels, which were sailing closely along the coast to provide cover for the army, in their turn took these batteries under fire, “so that the onslaught from that source lessened somewhat.” Wouter Schouten was observing the battle from one of these ships. In the meantime Van Goens tried to circumvent the battery and attack it from behind. Here, however, he was charged by the Nayar army:

“There under the high trees the nairos, cheered on by Portuguese and Mestizos, howling terribly and crazed like tigers and lions, immediately attacked our brave Batavians. The latter charged at the enemy quickly and in good order and shot amply. This first outburst of violence was extremely intense and the unafraid nairos struggled forward bravely, in the hopes of making a breach in our ranks. Most however walked right to their deaths, as our troops had stayed very closely together and had made a closed front. From our ships we no longer dared to fire, as friend and foe had come to clashes behind the batteries and bulwarks, under the shadow of the palm trees. The enemy, gone mad by the opium, remained standing like a wall and slashed and hacked at everything it could get at with big knives. Our Dutchmen however did not falter and opened their ranks on the sides with a few small pieces of artillery, loaded with scrap, to take the naked vermin under fire.”²²³

This latter treatment soon scattered the ranks of the Nayars, who had to retreat with great loss of life. The various batteries and strongholds were taken. Schouten mentions that as the VOC army was resting, the Portuguese came to the camp negotiate. Van Goens, however, refused the terms and the Portuguese went back to the city empty-handed. This peace offer is not mentioned in Van

221 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 193-194.

222 Baldaeus, *Exact description*, 644.

223 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Reis*, 194.

Goens' own reports on the campaign.²²⁴ At any rate, the march to the Portuguese city continued that same morning. As the Portuguese saw the army approaching, they simply abandoned the fortress: the women and children went to Cochin by land; the men joined the Nayers for another possible fight against the Dutch.

The next day, the council that Van Goens called together decided to a penal expedition in the region of Quilon. In words that echo Van Goens' *Vertoog* very closely, it was stated that now for the second time, the Dutch had come into the region of the Queen of Quilon as a friend, but had been treated as an enemy (the first time being 1659, when a combined Nayar-Portuguese army had forced the Company to evacuate the fortress.) The only thing that the Company could do to change this, was to inspire some awe for the might of the Company again, and teach the queen a lesson. In the morning of the 10th of December, the army, 24 companies strong, made way to the queen's capital, having to fight its way through the defences of the Nayers. Resistance was fierce, but the capital was not fortified, except by some makeshift Nayar positions. As soon as the VOC forces had broken through the outer perimeter of the city, fighting went on around the royal palace and the temple. Particularly the temple was fiercely defended; Wouter Schouten speculates that the Nayers amassed there believed that the god to which the temple was devoted would bring them salvation or victory. In any case, it failed to bring the latter. The temple and the palace, from which the queen had already fled, were taken and set ablaze. The cannon that were inside the complex were taken back to Quilon as a prize of war.

Van Goens now prepared to move against Cochin, leaving behind 480 soldiers, mainly inexperienced and sick folk, to garrison Quilon. However, just as Van Goens was planning to send ahead the first eight ships, one of these, the *Zeepaard*, caught on fire. In the end the crew managed to extinguish it, but the ship was severely damaged, the powder supply, some 10.000 pounds, had been set overboard and all the fuses, already in short supply, were ruined by the water. Then, just when the first eight ships had left under the command of Roothaas, the ships still before Quilon were hit by a hurricane in the night of the 18th of December.²²⁵ When in the course of the 19th of December the storm turned from southeast to southwest, the ships were in danger of being wrecked against the rocky coast. Several ships lost many of their anchors; the *Raadhuis* even tore loose of its last heavy anchor and seemed doomed to be hurled against the cliffs, but miraculously came to a standstill in an opening between two cliffs. Although the ship ultimately survived the storm, it was heavily damaged and had lost all its anchors and its rudder.²²⁶ All these disasters, added to the earlier trouble which had plagued the expedition, made Van Goens wonder if higher powers were

224 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 257-258; Schouten, *Oost-Indische Reis*, 194.

225 This came unexpected as the hurricane season on this side of the Indian Ocean is during the summer monsoon, i.e. from April to September.

226 Schouten lived through this storm on the *Rode Leeuw*. His description is of the storm is great but too long to quote here. See Schouten, *Oost-Indische Reis*, 200pp.

against him, as it seemed that “while we are making war on our enemies, God our Lord, in his turn, is making war on us.”²²⁷ The *Parkiet* was sent back to Ceylon to get as much powder and fuse as could be spared there. The *Raadhuis* remained before Quilon to make a new rudder, and the *Beurs*, under the command of Godske, would remain at Quilon to conduct peace negotiations with the Signati, the queen of Quilon. The rest of the fleet headed north.

On the 30th of December, the bulk of the fleet once again lay assembled before Cochin. Van Goens learned that the English had already informed the Portuguese of Dutch plans to attack, and the Portuguese, in spite of the ever more precarious state of their empire, had managed to send fifteen frigates, well-armed and well-manned with soldiers, from Goa to Cochin. The fortress of Cochin had been reinforced by an earthen bulwark around the existing walls, and the English, it appeared, had provided the Portuguese with ammunition and artillery. In addition, the Portuguese were also aware of the peace negotiations and the marriage between Catherine of Braganza and Charles II. They thus had both the means and the will to defend Cochin to the utmost.

In addition, the local ally of the VOC, the Zamorin of Calicut, also got in the way of plans. For this campaign, the Zamorin had pledged to aid the Company armies with food supplies and *Nayars*, in exchange for which the Company would conquer Cranganore, the northernmost large city now under the rule of Cochin, which had recently been conquered upon the Zamorin. This city also held a Portuguese garrison. Now, the Zamorin demanded that the Company would live up to its part of the deal before it moved against Cochin. Van Goens, who would have rather moved against Cochin first but who could not afford to cross the Zamorin, grudgingly agreed.

The fleet therefore moved another five miles north to Cranganore, and the army landed there on the 2nd of January 1662. When, on the 3rd of January, the army approached the Portuguese city, it became clear that the Portuguese had also been unusually busy here: the defences had been significantly enhanced, and it would require a regular siege to conquer the city. The Company army therefore got to work: trenches were dug and batteries were thrown up. The Company army started bombarding the city and the Portuguese fired back convincingly. The Portuguese fired on the soldiers digging the trenches incessantly, and made sorties from the city every night to break through the Dutch defences. They were unsuccessful, but caused a lot of dead and wounded among the Company soldiers. Schouten had been ordered off the *Rode Leeuw*, and now had the job of tending to the wounded right at the frontline. He describes how “we bandaged the wounded as well as we could, with candle light, under the open sky and in the open field, and in grave danger ourselves, as bullets whizzed around our heads. Then we had our wounded carried to the hospital by Ceylonese Lascars who had been appointed to that job, while our brave soldiers tried to bring the attacking Portuguese to a halt.”²²⁸

227 Quoted in Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 262.

228 Schouten, *Oost-Indische Reis*, 207.

Learning from a spy of the bad situation within the walls of Cranganore, Van Goens decided to storm the city. After a last attempt to a negotiated surrender, Van Goens ordered the attack in the afternoon of the 15th of January, after a siege of twelve days. He decided to use a subterfuge: not only did the attack take place in the hour that mass was held inside the city; he also had part of the army perform an all-out attack on one side of the wall, which however was only for show. The main force would meanwhile attack a weak spot in the defences as pointed out by the spy, only defended by Nayars. The plan worked: whereas the force performing the all-out attack suffered heavy losses, the main force meanwhile succeeded in entering the city almost without firing a shot. Bastion after bastion fell to the Dutch troops, until the Portuguese force withdrew into the church. Van Goens then once again requested the Portuguese to surrender, and the 350 soldiers inside the church did. At the end of the day, 50 Portuguese were dead. The Dutch had 20 dead and 80 wounded. The trenches were now filled up, the walls of the city repaired. Cranganoor was garrisoned only by the sick and wounded soldiers that Van Goens had to leave behind, about 200 in number.

Of the more than 2500²²⁹ soldiers which Van Goens had had at his disposal at Quilon, he was now marching on Cochin with less than 1800. Of these, 300 had to be left at the Periyar river, which sealed off the north of Cochin. To prevent the Portuguese from crossing the river, he had a small fortification built on the northern bank, called it *Nieuw Oranje* and manned it with 300 soldiers. The remaining force of 1500 soldiers, however, was not sufficient to risk an attack on Cochin. Van Goens presently sent word to Quilon to send 100 soldiers from the garrison there, and had 100 sailors disembark to work as bus-firers. With these 1700, Van Goens would now have to lay siege to a well-defended Portuguese city the size of which he himself compared to the city of Leiden.²³⁰ In addition, the Portuguese could count on the support of the thousands of Nayars of the raja of Cochin.

As much as Van Goens thought it useless, he sent representatives into the Portuguese city to offer terms to the Portuguese. The two representatives were politely received and heard out by the Portuguese commander, Ignacio Sermento, and the latter also politely declined to accept the terms, telling the representatives that even should they take the city, they would simply have to return it afterwards by the terms of the imminent peace treaty. The Dutch representatives therefore returned empty-handed, as Van Goens had expected.

After these formalities, Van Goens proceeded with the attack. Leaving behind the garrison in the newly-built fortification, Van Goens silently embarked his army in the night of the 1st of February, and landed four miles south of Cochin the next morning. No river to protect the city on this side.

229 That is 2139 European soldiers and 240 Lascars counted before the arrival of the *Rijzende Zon* and *Huis te Swieten*. The latter two ships must have brought at least 200 more soldiers.

230 Interestingly, at the siege of Leiden in 1574, the city had had 15.000 inhabitants. As Cochin had about 14.000 when Van Goens laid siege to it, his estimation was in that respect pretty accurate. At the time Van Goens made this statement, however, Leiden had four times as many inhabitants.

To the pleasant surprise of Van Goens, the Portuguese had apparently not counted on this move of the army: he had been very concerned about the landing, but no Portuguese was even in sight. The Cochinese pretender to the throne, who had been in exile in Beccenore, slightly inland from Cochin, now joined the Dutch army. He had Van Goens promise that the local population was to be left completely unharmed, and Van Goens instructed his troops accordingly.

The same day, the VOC army headed for Portuguese Cochin, meeting surprisingly little resistance from Portuguese forces. Van Goens, however, learned that a great force of Nayars was amassing in the old city to defend the palace and the royal family. Having this large enemy force looming in the background while the Company army was besieging Cochin could prove a serious liability, and it was therefore decided first to attack the old city and effectuate the planned 'regime change.' Nine companies moved towards the old city. An attempt at negotiation ended in a shoot-out, after which the VOC troops attacked the Nayar force. The old queen of Cochin, who had been ousted by the conflict in 1658, was still living in the palace as a hostage of sorts, but she was successfully evacuated from the scene by VOC forces. Both Vira Kerala Varma and the old queen gave the Company forces *carte blanche* to slaughter the present royal family, and the Company forces acted accordingly. The palace was attacked from two sides to prevent anyone escaping. It became a slaughterhouse: more than 500 Nayars met their deaths, as well as the new king and his closest advisors and family. As Schouten describes, the "walls were painted with blood and spattered with brains."²³¹ Vira Kerala Varma was now king. Van Goens left the palace to him, but also left two companies of VOC soldiers there.

Now, Van Goens needed to come up with a way to attack Portuguese Cochin, the second largest city in Portuguese India, well-armed and well-stocked. As mentioned before, he himself was low on troops. This made a regular siege problematic: in spite of the fact that the city was sealed off by a river and the small Dutch stronghold on the north side, by the ocean and the Company fleet on the west side, and by swamps and backwaters on the eastside, the 1400 soldiers which Van Goens still had at his disposal were not enough to securely seal off the remaining 1100 meters of city wall, particularly considering the fact that Van Goens expected the garrison inside the city to be at least as large as his own army. In addition, the rain season was approaching rapidly. All in all, Van Goens had neither the time nor the resources to take the fortress the usual way. His only chance of success was a surprise attack on a weak spot in the city's defences.

Thus, on the 4th of February, the entire VOC force stormed the eastern side of the wall, just off the river. At this spot, the city actually continued outside the city wall, which was a serious liability to the Portuguese defences there. At some spots, the VOC forces managed to break through the Portuguese defences and enter the city. The Portuguese, however, were clearly expecting the attack. They rushed to the scene, and soon the Company forces were caught up in skirmishes. The Portu-

²³¹ Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*, 216.



Illustration 8: battle between Nayars and Company forces in Old Cochin.

guese set fire to some of the buildings in which the Company forces had taken cover, and shortly afterwards the Company army was in retreat.

As this first surprise attack had not managed to breach the defences in any way, Van Goens was unwilling to risk another storm attack. On second thought, the city was simply besieged with what little resources the army had. Trenches and tunnels were dug, batteries thrown up and moved ever closer. The city was steadily bombarded, both from the fleet, the trenches and batteries on the south side, and the fortification on the north side.

Whereas this steady bombardment was certainly bad for Portuguese morale inside the city, the situation of the Company was not getting any better either. Several of the ships which had sailed along with the fleet had orders to continue to Suratte and Persia, and Van Goens reluctantly allowed them to go. These ships took with them a great number of sailors which Van Goens had deployed to

operate artillery. In addition, a prince of the royal house which the VOC had recently almost, but not quite, eradicated, was now building an anti-Dutch coalition in Purracad, slightly further south, and was rumoured to have amassed as many as 6000 Nayers there. The arrival of 1000 Nayers to reinforce the Company army from Calicut did not help an awful lot: the arrival of these Nayers from the old enemy of Cochin greatly antagonized the local population, some of whom now started fleeing the area. As the Company had too few small boats to completely control the river, and the Portuguese still had several frigates, the latter were still capable of getting supplies into the city and even getting their possessions, women and children out. Disease was once again making itself felt among the Company forces. And worst of all: the powder and fuse supply, which had been so severely diminished by fires and storms earlier in the campaign, was now rapidly running out.

Van Goens, who had earlier declared that he would continue the siege right through the summer monsoon if necessary, now saw his supplies run out, his soldiers go ill and his trenches ruined by the first rains by the end of February. He finally had to admit that continuing the siege any further was pointless. In the night of the 2nd of March, the army secretly embarked, covered by a small group of constables which made enough noise for the entire army. Vira Kerala Varma, who had been in power for a month, was informed of the retreat and immediately packed to leave for Mannar. He would just have to go into exile for a little longer.

The fleet presently split up. Roothaes stayed before Cochin with a few ships for a while longer, to prevent reinforcements from coming in. Van Goens went down the coast in the *Notenboom* to make treaties with the various rulers, so that his conquests would be secure and his possible return next year would be provided for. Two yachts were left before Cranganoor. The whole expedition had cost the lives of 500 VOC employees, half of them dead by disease, half of them in combat. In addition there were 400 wounded.

Van Goens, of course, was very disappointed, as would be the *Hoge Regering*. Nonetheless, the expedition had been a partial success. Cranganore and Quilon were now in possession of the Company. The failed siege of Cochin might partly be attributed to the fact that the expedition, which had nothing less as its aim than to completely drive the Portuguese from the Indian coast, had to be conjured up in very little time on the basis of developments in Europe. Expectations had been too high, and the means too few. Van Goens himself had been particularly unhappy with the quality of the fresh reinforcements from Europe: these young men without any fighting experience had been sailed right from the Netherlands into this intense campaign, and had therefore not received the usual training in Batavia. On various occasions, they had simply fled the battlefield. This did not surprise Van Goens, as their first combat experience consisted of being stormed by howling, intoxicated Nayers who greatly outnumbered them. In addition, the fleet had its fair share of those eventualities of war that could not be planned for, such as storms and fires ruining the ammunition supplies.

‘The shameful fall of fort Zeelandia’

At about the same time, some 5000 kilometres away, the Company was facing another military debacle on Formosa. The VOC had originally come to the island off the Chinese coast in 1624 as a way into the Chinese trade. An attempt to simply take Macao, the Portuguese gateway into the Chinese trade, in 1622, had miserably failed, after which the Company had limited itself to structurally blockading the Macao harbour. Negotiations with the Ming government in which the Company tried to present itself as a tributary country to China, which would allow them to trade with China directly, failed. The Company then had no choice but to look for a settlement from where to start indirect trade with China. In 1624, Fort Zeelandia, on the southwest coast of Formosa, was erected in the hopes of being able to lure the Chinese junks there and get a foot in the door of the silk trade.²³²

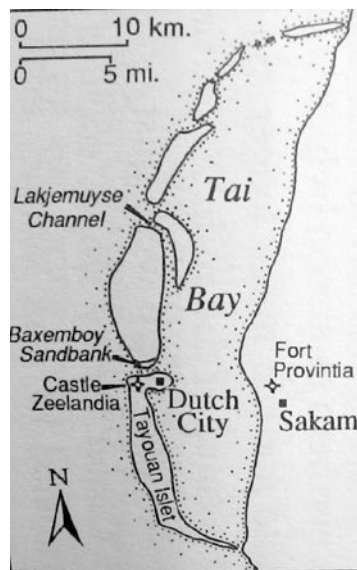
Whereas, particularly in the 1640s, the trade at Taiwan (which means “terrace bay”, now the name for the entire island, then only for the small bay and the islet on which fort Zeelandia was situated) had become rather successful, in the years leading up to our period of study, the harbour at Fort Zeelandia was once again becoming less prominent. The most important reason for this had nothing to do with trade systems or political developments: in the decades since the founding of the Dutch settlement, the channel that gave access to the bay had silted up so badly that it could no longer be navigated by any but the smallest of vessels. Ships therefore had to anchor in the open sea in front of the harbour, and could subsequently only be loaded and unloaded with specifically designed flat-bottomed boats. In addition to being highly impractical, anchoring in the open sea was simply very dangerous in this typhoon-plagued part of the world. The China trade, which had been the sole reason for building the fortress, had therefore steadily moved away from Taiwan harbour.

On the political front, however, the China trade was also becoming more complicated, as the Chinese mainland was being ravaged by war. In 1644, Manchu armies had driven the Ming dynasty from Beijing, but this in no way meant the end of the war. In the area around Fujian, just across from Taiwan, troops had remained loyal to the Ming dynasty, and were continuing the war against the Manchus. The VOC now had to navigate a precarious course between the two warring parties: on the one hand, it immediately attempted to build up relations with the new dynasty, for one by sending out an embassy to Beijing in 1656.²³³ On the other hand, the Company was trying to keep up relations with the Ming-loyalists fighting on just across the Chinese Sea, under the general Zhen Chenggong, known in the Dutch sources as Coxinga.²³⁴ The latter had never hidden the fact that

232 Blussé, ‘De Chinese nachtmerrie’, 209-226.

233 *Generale Missiven*, III, 122-123; *Daghregister* 1657 (Den Haag 1903), 69-70.

234 The name Coxinga is probably a corruption of the Minnanese pronunciation of Guoxingye. Lynn A. Struve, *Voices from the Ming-Qing cataclysm: China in tiger's jaws* (Yale 1993), 206n. The latter work is a fascinating study, of which chapter 13 sets off Coyet's rendering of the events with that of Coxinga's revenue officer, Yang Ying.



Ullustration 9: map of Taiwan in 1661.

he felt that Formosa belonged to him, but the Company still hoped for a solution by negotiation. The fact that Coxinga's war efforts on the mainland were quickly unravelling and he had fallen into discord with several of his generals, did not improve the chances of such a solution being reached, as Coxinga was looking for a place to retreat his army to. Just like the Kwo Min 'Tang some 300 years later, he let his eyes fall on Formosa for this purpose. The governor of the fortress, Coyet, who had feared an invasion by Coxinga for years, saw these fears confirmed in the beginning of 1660, when several intercepted letters made clear that Coxinga was about to make the jump to Formosa. On the 10th of March, he sent out a junk against the monsoon asking Batavia for immediate reinforcements.

In the last chapter, the laconic attitude with which Maatsuiker responded to Coyet's cries for help was already pointed out. In an anonymously published pamphlet called *'t Verwaerloost Formosa* (Formosa neglected), Coyet would later give utterance to his frustrations over the fact that he had hardly been taken seriously in Batavia. Not only was this expressed in Maatsuiker's rather lukewarm response to Coyet's warnings about the invasion: he had also pointed out to Batavia that Fort Zeelandia was a rather troublesome fortress. It was protected by a redoubt, *Utrecht*, which was in fact built on a hill, and should it be taken by an enemy, Fort Zeelandia would become a sitting duck to artillery bombardment from there. The defensibility of Fort Zeelandia was thus entirely dependent on the fate of a small redoubt, but Batavia had never given permission to change this situation. The bickering over matters like these had already soured the atmosphere between Maatsuiker and Coyet before the latter sent out his cry for help in March 1660. Developments were about to worsen their mutual dislike quite severely.

In July, responding to Coyet's letter, Maatsuiker sent out a fleet to come to his aid, commanded by Johannes van der Laan, the same who had been the right hand of Van Goens in several of the campaigns in the Western Quarters. After his attack on Macao had failed to materialize,²³⁵ he arrived before Taiwan harbour in September. Coxinga's attack had not come, and Van der Laan was eager to immediately return to Macao with his eleven remaining ships (one had been wrecked in a storm while headed for Macao.) However, on a council meeting on the 20th of October, Coyet decided to cancel the Macao expedition. He was retaining the soldiers brought to Taiwan by the fleet to strengthen his garrisons. Most of the ships had orders to continue to various destinations in the Indies, and the fleet was dispersed by next March. Van der Laan, furious at being robbed of his chance to attack Macao, left for Batavia in February 1661.

The complete dispersal of Van der Laan's fleet was apparently what Coxinga had been waiting for, and with the onset of the northern monsoon, his fleet had set sail. Herport, being one of the soldiers who had been transferred from Van der Laan's fleet to strengthen the Fort Zeelandia garrison, describes the arrival of the huge Chinese fleet as follows:

“In the morning of the 30th of April, as in the entire preceding night, there was a very thick mist, due to which one could not see into the distance. As soon as the mist had cleared, however, we saw such a fleet of ships, to wit Chinese junks, lie before the harbour in front of Baxemboy, that we could not oversee them, let alone count them. There were so many masts, that it looked like an arid forest. We looked at this, all of us equally awestruck and puzzled, as no-one, not even our Lord Governor, had expected anything like this, and we did not know, whether they were friend or foe.”²³⁶

The Lord Governor, however, probably did have a vague notion whose fleet was lying before the coast, and must have been less surprised than Herport, although probably as appalled. Coxinga had arrived, bringing 25.000 soldiers on hundreds of warjunks.

Taiwan island, on which Fort Zeelandia was situated, was in front of the bay. Coxinga presently sent several of the smaller ships into the bay through the Lakjemeuse Channel, slightly further north, and started landing his forces on the Formosan mainland as well as the island of Baxemboy,

235 Boxer writes that Van der Laan went straight from Batavia to Macao merely to boast his fleet to the enemy in their plain sight, and then continued to Formosa, only planning to take the fortress on his way back from there. He does not disclose his sources in this passage, but does not mention the storm or the dispersion of the fleet. As Van der Laan might have been self-righteous and rash but certainly not stupid, it seems unlikely that Van der Laan merely dropped by Macao to warn the Portuguese that he was going to attack them in a few months. More probably, he was earnest in attacking Macao, but the chaos caused by the storm finally made him call off the attack. It wouldn't, after all, be the first time that Van der Laan attacked without orders on the basis of his own judgment, witness his solo action before Tutucorin. (See above, paragraph on Jaffanapatnam) Boxer, 'The siege of fort Zeelandia and the capture of Formosa from the Dutch 1661-1662' in: *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society of London* (24:1926), 16-47, there 24.

236 Herport, *Reise*, 52.

which was only separated from Fort Zeelandia by the narrow silted-up channel. At the mainland Coxinga's soldiers were aided in their landing by the local Chinese population, which was happy to see Coxinga arrive and sped up the landing by providing small boats.

Fort Zeelandia was now isolated from the mainland, and thus also from Fort Provintia, a smaller fortification providing cover for Fort Zeelandia from across the bay. Van der Laan's fleet now being almost entirely dispersed, Coyet only had four ships at his disposal. Only one, the *Hector*, was a large vessel, the other three were small vessels. Coyet thus had to look on helplessly as his fortress was surrounded on all sides. After the initial shock, however, resolve grew to defend Fort Zeelandia as well as possible. For this purpose, Baxemboy should be reconquered, and Sakkam, the settlement in which Fort Provintia was situated, should be occupied, so as to keep open lines of communication between the two fortresses.

The next day, on the first of May, these plans were put into effect. Three of the four ships, the *Hector*, 's *Gravenlande* and *Vink*, first having provided cover for the landing on Baxemboy, subsequently made for the Lakjemeuse channel in an attempt to destroy the Chinese fleet guarding it, about 60 vessels strong.²³⁷ The last ship, *Maria*, which was a practically unarmed flute, meanwhile sped out to sea, making use of the chaos to escape and bring news of the attack to Batavia. At first, the attack at the channel seemed successful, as the *Hector*, a 600 ton vessel well-equipped with artillery, blew several large Chinese junks out of the water. Soon, however, it became clear that the three ships were too severely outnumbered. The *Hector* was closed in. Coyet would later describe what subsequently happened:

“Heated by the fight, five or six of the bravest junks attacked the *Hector* from all sides; whose warriors, in trying to save it, caused such a dense smoke by firing its cannon from below, above, front and behind, that neither the *Hector* nor the junks could be observed from the castle, from which this battle could otherwise have been easily watched. During the smoke, such a terrible explosion was heard that it caused the windows of the castle to shake: and when the smoke had cleared away, neither the *Hector* nor the junks which had been nearest to it could be seen. Unfortunately the *Hector* had been blown up [...]”²³⁸

The loss of the *Hector* convincingly tipped the scale to the advantage of the Chinese. The 's *Gravenlande* and the *Vink* now made a run for it, heading out into the open sea, fighting off Chinese all the way, who actually succeeded in entering the 's *Gravenlande* but were beaten off the ship again,

²³⁷ This sounds more grave than it was: these junks were rather small, and each only equipped with two guns, whereas a ship like the *Hector* would have carried a few dozen.

²³⁸ Coyet, 't Verwaerloost Formosa', quoted in Struve, *Tiger's Jaws*, 213. Boxer wonders whether the explosion was accidental or not, i.e. whether the powder-chamber had been struck by enemy fire or some precursor of Van Speijck had been at work, resolving to blow up the ship and taking the junks around it with it. Boxer, 'siege', 27.

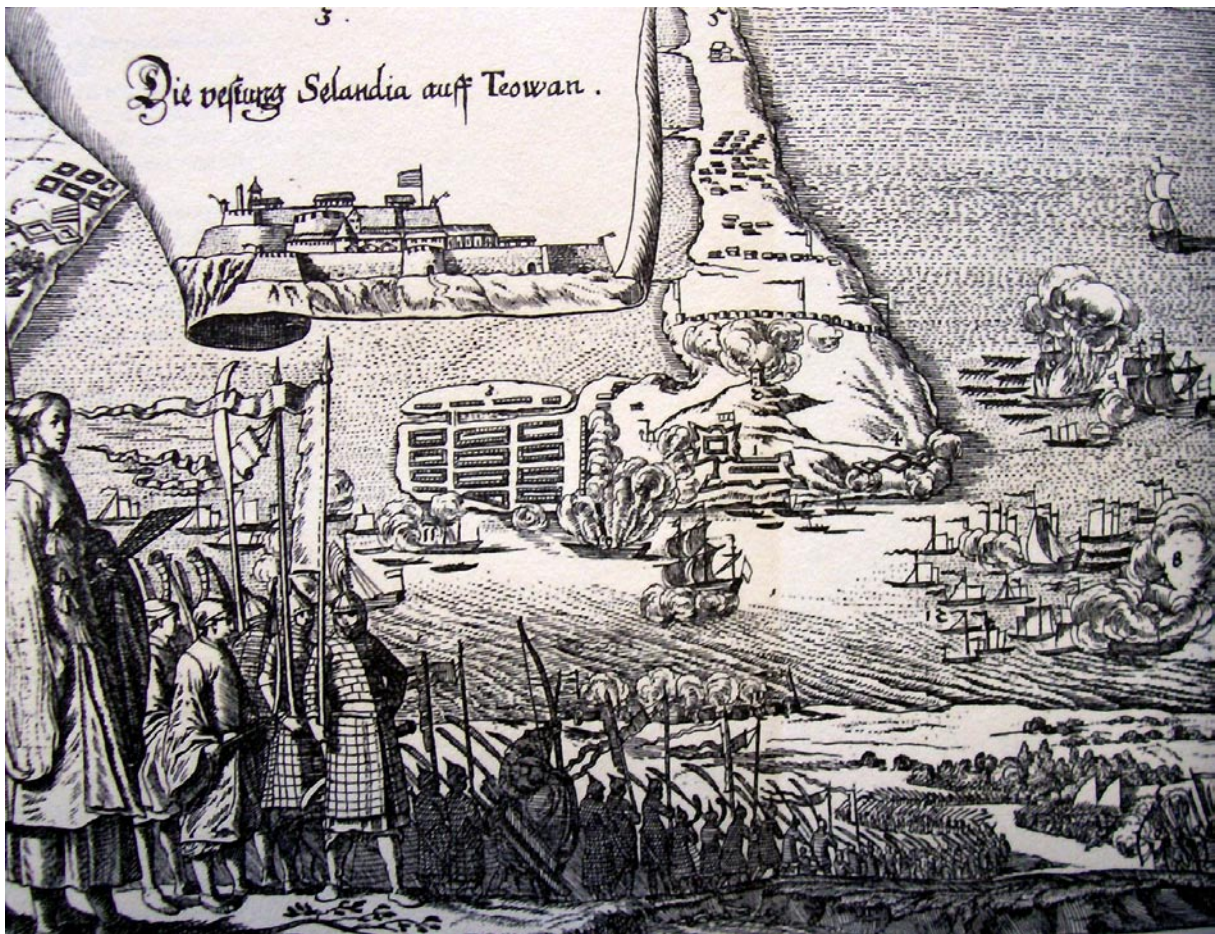


Illustration 10: Impression of the siege of Fort Zeelandia from Herport's Reise. We are looking south from Baxemboy. Number 1 is the fortress, number 2, hardly visible up on the hill, marks the redoubt Utrecht. Number 3 is the city, number 4 is the wooden bulwark the Company forces managed to set up in November. Number 6 is Sakkam and fort Provintia, on the other side of the water. Number 8 is the exploding Hector, attacked from all sides by Chinese junks. This was probably added just for dramatic effect, as the battle with the Hector took place on the other side of Baxemboy.

and avoiding fire-ships let at it, one of which actually brushed the 's Gravenlande but did not destroy it. Having cleared the Chinese fleet, the two ships headed north for Japan.

The two actions on land, meanwhile, had also both failed. The attempt to reconquer Baxemboy, under the command of captain Pedel, had been undertaken with 240 soldiers. The Chinese had by now landed 4000 soldiers at the small island, but a heated-up Pedel, out for revenge as his son had lost an arm in the first clashes with the Chinese the day before, just went ahead and attacked. Pedel himself died in the initial clash, along with half his soldiers. The others fled back to the boats and crossed the water to Taiwan in disorderly retreat. Herport, who took part in the action, describes how some of the boats were overcrowded and several of them sank, many of the survivors arriving back on Taiwan swimming. The other action, an attempt to reconquer Akkam and reach Fort Provintia, also failed: the commander of the small army, Aeldorp, realised the hopelessness of the

situation and retreated back to Zeelandia almost as soon as he had made contact with the enemy. The next day, two messengers from Fort Provintia managed to reach Coyet, informing him that Fort Provintia's water supply was insufficient, and the fortress would not be able to hold out for very long. Coyet decided to abandon the fortress and just retreat the entire force to Taiwan. Even this failed, however, as in the first negotiations with Coxinga the next day, he did not receive permission from the latter to evacuate the force to Zeelandia. Fort Provintia surrendered to Coxinga unconditionally on the 4th of May.

The Company army was now entirely surrounded on Taiwan. The negotiations of the previous day had yielded nothing, other than a good look at the Chinese camp, which housed about 12.000 soldiers by Coyet's estimates.²³⁹ His council now unanimously decided to defend Fort Zeelandia to the utmost, and on the same 4th of May, the blood-flag was hoisted over the fortress. There would be no surrender. That same night, the Chinese moved into the settlement on Taiwan, and many of the civilians from the settlement sought refuge in the fortress. It was decided to evacuate the entire city and set fire to it, so as not to provide cover for the Chinese. An attempt from the fortress to go into the city and set it ablaze two nights later succeeded only partially, and the entire settlement fell into Chinese hands, including large amounts of rice and sugar still in the warehouses there. The positions still in Dutch hands were now only Fort Zeelandia, and the small redoubt Utrecht up on the hill.

At first it seemed that Coxinga was content to just wait it out and starve Fort Zeelandia. In the night of the 24th of May, however, after three quiet weeks, the Chinese threw up a battery near the fortress. Two days later they started a massive bombardment from this battery, and a large Chinese army approached the walls of the city. Coyet, seeing how the storm attack on the city was rather rash and disorderly, had his soldiers and bus-firers hold fire until the Chinese army was quite near and he had the best shot. Then he had a massive barrage unleashed on them. The Chinese commander leading the attack, however, had promised Coxinga to take the fortress on the forfeit of his head, and kept on bringing in reinforcements, until some thousand Chinese soldiers had been killed. Only then did the army go into retreat, also abandoning the cannon on their battery. Coyet immediately organised a sortie to spike (i.e. sabotage) these cannon. Just as these had arrived back from their mission, Coxinga had the castle stormed two more times, but both attacks failed.²⁴⁰

After these rather bloody attempts to storm the fortress, Coxinga decided not to try such a thing again and just be patient. As he had landed on Formosa just as the southern monsoon had started, he was confident that news of the invasion would not reach Batavia for months, and that he could comfortably wait the whole thing out. The flute *Maria*, however, which had escaped on the first of May, had beaten its way right against the monsoon via the Philippines, and had arrived in Batavia

239 The other half of the army was spread out over Formosa by now, to occupy the rest of the island.

240 Boxer, 'siege', 31-32.

after fifty days, bringing the tidings of the attack. Interestingly, only two days before, Maatsuiker, hearing Van der Laan's somewhat biased version of how Coyet had behaved, had just decided to have him sent up to Batavia and replace him as governor of Formosa. The new governor, Hermanus Clencke van Odesse had just left Batavia two days ago, sailing to Formosa with two ships, and a yacht sent out to cancel his instructions failed due to adverse winds. Clencke would therefore be sailing into a very interesting situation. By July 5th, then, Batavia had managed to organise a succour fleet of ten ships carrying some 700 soldiers. Its commander, Jacob Caeuw (reportedly a rather incompetent and presumptuous figure), carried a letter with instructions to retain Coyet as governor.

Apart from some gruesome executions of Dutch prisoners by Coxinga within sight of the fortress²⁴¹ and disease which had broken out inside the fortress and left only 400 men fit to fight, the siege had continued rather uneventfully, when Clencke's two ships arrived on the 30th of July. In the end, the letter that Caeuw, who would be arriving a few days later, had with him was not even necessary: assessing the situation, Clencke was quite ready to just forego the honour of becoming governor. In fact, he did not enter the fortress but stayed on his ship, until after a few days he sailed out to sea on the pretext of bad weather, and continued to Japan.

Only days later, on the 12th of August, Caeuw's fleet arrived within sight of Taiwan. Fate, however, was apparently not on the side of the Company: just as the fleet had started unloading reinforcements and supplies, a great storm put up. Now, the danger of the access to the bay being silted up made itself felt. The fleet had nowhere to safely anchor, and had to sail out to sea to ride out of the storm. Only 28 days later, on the 8th of September, did the weather calm down and did the fleet return to aid the beleaguered fortress. The same storm gave Coxinga time to put his defences in order. The arrival of the fleet had woken him up from his rather complacent attitude towards the siege, and in the four weeks that the fleet spent out at sea, he now closely sealed in Fort Zeelandia and prepared his troops for more serious resistance.

When the reinforcements and supplies had finally been brought on land, it was decided in a council meeting on the 15th of October to retake the initiative and attack the Chinese in Taiwan to reconquer the settlement, and to destroy as many of the junks as possible with the ships. The attack took place on the following day, but backfired terribly. Adverse winds prevented the larger Dutch ships from coming within range of the city of Taiwan. The smaller vessels, meanwhile, did attack but, without the support of the large vessels, were repulsed. Two of the larger ships actually stranded due to the unfavourable wind and were subsequently destroyed by the Chinese. As support from the sea was therefore less than convincing, the land attack also failed, and the army lost 128 sol-

241 For one, Coxinga had had several Christian missionaries executed by crucifixion, forcing other prisoners to watch.

diers. The next day, the Company army attempted another sortie, but this was also beaten back by the Chinese lines.

Incredibly, in November, the Company army managed yet another offensive move of sorts, this time to some degree successfully. It succeeded in erecting a *wambuis*, a wooden bulwark, outside the main fortress, on the shore right opposite the Chinese battery on Baxemboy, from where they successfully bombarded it.

The moves which were to finally draw the curtains on the defence of Fort Zeelandia, were, ironically, all to be made by Company personnel. On the 6th of November, a letter from the Manchu governor of Fukien reached the besieged Dutch fortress. It offered assistance to the Dutch against the common enemy, in return for which the Dutch would temporarily provide some ships. On the 26th of November, the council decided to accept the proposal, and send out three ships to the Chinese mainland. This might force Coxinga to send part of his force back to the mainland, and would at any rate ensure Manchu cooperation. Jacob Caeuw, the commander of the rescue fleet who had until now done virtually nothing, volunteered to lead the fleet to China. On December 3rd, three ships left the harbour. Caeuw, however, had never meant to go to Fukien: as soon as he reached the Pescadores, he set sail for Siam, and from there to Batavia. It would appear that he had only volunteered to command the fleet to have a ticket out of the whole mess. In doing so, he had taken three good ships and a considerable number of men with him, which were now lost to the defence of the fortress.

In the meantime, many Company soldiers, convinced that the situation was hopeless, were deserting to the enemy. Among these deserters was sergeant Hans Jurgen Radis. He finally pointed out to Coxinga that the conquest of the redoubt Utrecht, which was still bravely holding out, would make Fort Zeelandia indefensible. Coxinga took his advice to heart and concentrated his efforts on the redoubt. Coyet, painfully aware of what was afoot, concentrated his resources on the defence of the redoubt, but to no avail. In the night of the 25th of January, after two abortive storm attacks on the redoubt and a massive bombardment of 24 hours which had left the redoubt to be no more than a ruin, the Company forces withdrew from there to Zeelandia, leaving a booby-trap in the ruins, which killed quite some Chinese as these took the redoubt the next morning.

With the redoubt taken, it was only a matter of time before Fort Zeelandia would fall. Coyet decided not to await that moment. On a council meeting on the 27th of January, he found a majority of the council members to be in favour of opening negotiations on the surrender of the fortress with Coxinga. On the 1st of February, Fort Zeelandia surrendered, after a nine month siege.

Charles Boxer, in his article on the siege from which I have extensively drawn in this paragraph, concludes with a rather moralizing yet very interesting passage in which he assesses the roles of the various Company officials in this entire drama. He fells rather harsh judgments on all involved except for Coyet, who held out in a gruelling siege for an improbable nine months, both against a vastly superior power and the ultimately fatal cowardice of those that were supposed to come

to his aid. Incredibly, Coyet, upon his return to Batavia after the surrender, was immediately imprisoned, tried on rather ridiculous charges, and banished to the Banda Islands, only returning to the Netherlands in 1674. Caeuw and Clencke, by contrast, who had both effectively deserted from Taiwan leaving Coyet to fend for himself, were never tried and in fact promoted. It would seem that Maatsuiker, who was after all Governor-General and had clearly wrongly assessed the entire situation, had in this case simply used power politics to shut up Coyet who was now a serious threat to his position. When Coyet finally returned to the Netherlands, he attempted to find justice by anonymously publishing *'t Verwaerloost Formosa*, in which he rendered his account of what happened at Taiwan.²⁴²

It is of course doubtful whether Fort Zeelandia would have held out against such a vastly superior force, should Maatsuiker have liked Coyet more and heeded his warnings. The fortress, after all, was facing a professional Chinese army, 25.000 strong, well-equipped with artillery and bent on wiping the Dutch off Formosa. To this was added the impossible strategic situation of the silted-up bay, inaccessible to the large Dutch ships, in the region of the world most visited by typhoons. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that in this instance, when the Company for once did not command the field, self-preservation reflexes in people throughout the chain of command prevented an adequate response from materializing. Coyet was the notable exception, and as a reward became the scapegoat for the entire drama.

The Mozambique-expedition: battling the monsoon

In the spring of 1662, the directors in the Netherlands had once again decided to make an extra effort against the Portuguese in Asia by sending out an extra fleet, equipped with an unusual number of soldiers. On the 17th of April 1662, Huibert de Lairese set sail from the Republic, commanding a fleet of six ships manned with some 1400 souls. His mission was first to drive the Portuguese from their port of call Mozambique. From there, two ships would continue to Batavia; the rest would set sail to the Indian coast to aid the Company war effort there.

Had the expedition of last year been slightly late to the taste of Van Goens; the expedition of this year never actually made it to the Indian Coast, or to Mozambique for that matter. The first port east of the Cape in which it would arrive was Batavia, after a trip which had lasted for almost a year. A small dossier on the expedition in the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* tells what actually happened, and why the Mozambique attack never took place.²⁴³

242 Boxer, 'siege', 44-46.

243 VOC-Archives, *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*, 1239, 1365-1455. These pages contain letters from de Lairese to patria, Batavia and the Cape, as well as the various resolutions of the *brede raad* of the fleet (the 'broad council', which was the meeting of all the high officers), and the *Dagbregisters* of the *Kennemerland*, De Lairese's ship.

The head of the fleet, Huibert de Laïresse, had set sail from Texel with three ships on the 16th of April: the *Kennemerland*, which he commanded, the *Rijnland* and the *Waterboen*. The other three ships, the *Kogge*, the *Oranje*, and the *Waterboen*, set sail from the Wielingen on the 23rd.

After leaving the Republic, the three ships sailing with de Laïresse had immediately run into delays. Adverse winds had forced it to sail ‘along the backway’ (i.e. around Scotland instead of through the Channel). Sailing in convoy even with this small fleet soon proved difficult: the flute *Waterboen*, fresh off the yards, proved to be a crank ship, and kept on lagging behind. As the fleet approached the equator, more and more people on the *Kennemerland* fell ill, and being forced to wait for the *Waterboen* thus became increasingly frustrating. On the 29th of June, five degrees above the equator, Laïresse finally decided that it would just have to be every ship for itself. They would just have to meet up at the Cape.²⁴⁴

Leaving the *Waterboen* behind sped up things somewhat, and the *Kennemerland* ran into Table Bay on the 3rd of September, finding four ships there: the yachts *Kogge* and *Vlaardingen*, and the flutes *Veldboen* and *Zeeridder*. Of these ships, the *Kogge* was in a very bad state. Not only had it lost a lot of sail in storms, its foremast was also broken. The *Veldboen* and the *Zeeridder* were not even part of the expedition fleet. The former of these had left the Netherlands in January and was simply still at the Cape; the latter had not been in the Republic since 1656, its year of commissioning, and had arrived at the Cape from the East. The various larger ships of the fleet had not arrived yet. Laïresse was particularly unhappy to be missing the *Oranje*, one of the larger ships of the fleet. This ship had the bulk of the timber with it, and its arrival would greatly speed up the repairs of the *Kogge*.

Four days later, the *Wapen van Zeeland* arrived. This ship had sailed in convoy with the *Oranje*, but had left it behind as its skipper “had just left his sails flutter” and was not making an effort to get to the Cape as quickly as possible. The skipper of the *Wapen van Zeeland* also suspected that the *Oranje* was not planning to stop at the Cape at all. The *Oranje* was in fact one of the two ships that would continue to Batavia after the battle at Mozambique, and as Laïresse had not given out orders yet, it would seem that it did not know of the plans against Mozambique and simply supposed it would have to go to Batavia.²⁴⁵ This would be disastrous to the expedition: not only did this ship have much of the timber; it was also one of the larger vessels in the fleet, carrying 344 souls. Having to miss it in the attack would be detrimental. At any rate, Laïresse now sent the crew of the *Kogge*

244 Overgekomen B&P, 1239, fol 1365-1366. Leaving the *Waterboen* behind turned out to be a good decision, as this ship only ran into the Table Bay on the 22nd of November. (Ships-database on vocsite.nl)

245 It has every appearance that the skippers didn’t know the exact goal of the expedition until they had left the Cape. The resolutions and the Dagregister make clear that Laïresse only gave out specific instructions to the *brede raad* and the *krijgsraad* on the 31st of September, when the fleet had already departed from the Cape. In his later letter to patria, Laïresse describes how around the same date, the crew was very enthusiastic to be part of such a ‘notable exploit.’ In his letter of the 21st of September, he does not mention the word Mozambique once but only talks about ‘our design’ and alike formulas; he only talks about Mozambique in his later letters. It therefore seems that the exact goal of the expedition was a secret even to its participants, and in this light it becomes understandable that they expected that the *Oranje* would just sail on. *Overgekomen B&P*, 1239, fol. 1367, 1419, 1445.

into the woods to make a new foremast; “a bloody task, I can assure Your Honours, as I was there myself.”²⁴⁶

Although the crews of the ships were apparently not yet aware of the exact goal of the expedition, it did become clear at the Cape that they were up for a fight. Lairese divided his soldiers into companies, and had crews work around the clock to produce storming ladders and other siege equipment. The muskets were tested and the troops were drilled. Lairese was also looking for pilots to Mozambique, or at least skippers who could tell him how best to sail. As the Company had very little experience sailing northward from the Cape (last year’s fleet to Ceylon had been the first since the days of the *Voorcompagnieën*, and the fact that one ship bound for Ceylon had accidentally sailed to Batavia by reflex is telling), he did not actually find anyone who knew anything about sailing to Ceylon. He would just have to make use of the “old documents and printed books” brought from the Republic, which was far from ideal.²⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Lairese was haggling with the commander of the Cape Colony, Zacharias Wagenaar, for more ships.²⁴⁸ It had already been decided that the *Veldhoen* would go with the expedition fleet; now Lairese was also trying to get his hands on the *Zeeridder*. Wagenaar had planned to send out the *Zeeridder* to look for the missing vessels of the return fleet from Batavia, which had been hit by a severe storm. Only three out of the seven ships had come in, and Wagenaar was planning to send out a search party to see if the ships, or any survivors, had ended up on Madagascar or Mauritius. Lairese, however, managed to convince Wagenaar otherwise, promising that during his expedition he would also do his utmost to find the missing ships. This brought the fleet to seven ships, with a total crew of 581 sailors and 660 soldiers.²⁴⁹ By the 20th of September, the fleet was ready to sail, and a day of prayer was held in the Cape Colony. The next day, Lairese sealed his letter to the directors, concluding it in a very war-eager spirit, and on the 22nd, the fleet was to lift anchor.²⁵⁰

The day of prayer, however, had apparently not helped an awful lot. Just as the fleet was preparing to depart, a strong adverse wind came up, trapping the fleet in the Table Bay for another four days. Then, just when the wind had turned and the fleet had left the bay, the wind completely died down and the fleet was adrift for two days. By the 28th of September, the fleet was still within sight of Table Mountain.

246 Ibid., fol. 1368.

247 Ibid., fol. 1419.

248 Wagenaar had replaced Jan van Riebeeck just four months ago, as the latter had been recalled to Batavia for an investigation concerning his private trade.

249 In one of those instances where actual events are way more intriguing than any fiction, Maatsuiker had predicted this shipwreck. Six weeks after the return fleet had left on the 10th of December, he had a recurrent dream in which the ship *Wapen van Holland* was wrecked, and the head of the fleet, Arnoud de Vlaming, who was repatriating with his wife and child, was calling out to him for help. He found this dream so curious that he noted it down. As it later turned out, the *Wapen van Holland*, along with the *Gekroonde Leeuw*, the *Prins Willem* and the *Arnhem*, had been wrecked on the 11th and 12th of February. *D.A.S.* III, 74-75.

250 This first letter was thus sealed on the 21st of September 1662. *Overgekomen B&P*, 1239, fol. 1365-1375.

After this rather slow start from the Cape, things went better, but only slightly. Only on the last day of October did the fleet gain sight of the southernmost point of Cape Corinth (the area around Inhambane in present-day Mozambique.) After more than five weeks of struggling, they had covered only two thirds of what should have been an easy and quick sailing trip. And things were about to get worse: the next day the wind turned and became stronger. As the current was also coming from the northeast, the ships were mercilessly blown back to where they had come from. Five days later, the ships were still near Cape Corinth, and back on the wrong side of it. Supplies had not been prepared for this great amount of ill luck, and water was put on ration by the 9th of November. Of course it was not only bad luck which caused the fleet trouble: the combination of the earlier delays before the Cape and inexperience sailing this route were taking their revenge. As Lairese was at least partly aware, the fleet had entirely missed the summer monsoon. Whereas, two months ago, it would have been blown right to Mozambique, the fleet was now facing adverse winds and calms. In addition, the onset of the Northeastern Monsoon also hailed the start of the cyclone season on the East African Coast, and the fleet was now stuck right in the area where the bulk of these cyclones hit the African mainland.

The first storm hit the fleet in the night of the 17th of November. As Lairese visually describes, “the dense rain, combined with the complete darkness and the incessant lightning, made everyone blind as a bat.” Collisions were only avoided because each of the ships was carrying a big lantern on the stern. When the sky cleared by dawn, damage turned out to have been limited to several sails torn to rags. And the wind was now finally blowing in the right direction!

Nonetheless, Lairese was getting quite fed up. On the 20th of November he once again called the *brede raad* together, as “this continuous sailing back and forth without making any advancement, or even the appearance of advancement, was making us all rather sad.” In addition, supplies weren’t getting any bigger, and disease had struck several of the ships. Slowly but steadily, various council members started wondering whether it was at all sensible to still try and attack Mozambique. With so much of the crew lying sick, the attack might well become a complete disaster, even if the fleet actually reached its destination. Then again, what were the other options? Waiting it out on the African Coast or the Cape was madness, as the monsoon would only turn around again by March. On the other hand, just giving up on the whole project and continuing to the Indian coast or Batavia was also undesirable. Not only was this a humiliation after struggling for so long; it was also insensible, as the ships bound for the Indian coast would still have to wait until March anyway.

It was finally decided to keep on trying to head north for another five days. If there was no improvement within that time, the fleet would find a suitable place along the Coast to take in fresh water and supplies. The wind did not turn around, so after five days the fleet did. The next day, it was once again at the southern point of Cape Corinth, which by now must have looked awfully familiar to the crews of the ships.

To de Laïresse's great amazement, the fleet had not spotted a single other sail since its departure from the Cape. Near Cape Corinth, however, a ship appeared ahead of the fleet. As it approached, it turned out to be the *Oranje*, the arrival of which De Laïresse had so fervently been hoping for at the Cape. The ship had not passed by the Cape, but had just been extremely delayed and after a ten day stay at the Cape, had tried to catch up with the fleet. The crew must have been somewhat surprised to see the fleet coming towards it.

After a failed attempt to anchor on the 27th of November, the fleet found a river the next day, and anchored in the open sea "near what was called Bazzaratto on the maps."²⁵¹ The river turned out to be brackish, but by digging wells one could obtain fresh water. The local "blacks" were very friendly, and more than willing to sell animals and fruits in exchange for cloth and simple ship's blankets. The fleet, however, was two miles out on the open sea, and therefore completely unprotected. The fear of another storm immediately prompted de Laïresse to send off the *Veldboen* to look for a bay.

For four days, the various chalooks rushed back and forth between the coast and the fleet. Then, the weather once again got in the way of plans. A strong seawind trapped the little flotilla of chalooks on the coast for three days; then the wind just died off completely, making traffic between the fleet and the coast extremely troublesome. All in all, the replenishment of supplies didn't make as much headway as had been hoped. De Laïresse had also expected that fresh fruit would hem the diseases that ran rampant among the crews somewhat, but mortality just kept on increasing. The *Wapen van Zeeland* was now so low on sailors that operating the ship became troublesome. But the *Veldboen*, which was supposed to be back within eight days, was also trapped by the calm and only appeared after twentyseven days, during which the fleet was just lying there and the crew just kept on dying off.

The *Veldboen* finally arrived back on a rather strong wind blowing towards the coast, which was dangerous to the fleet and made the trade on the coast virtually impossible. It was decided to bring all personnel back to the ship as soon as possible, and set sail. However, just a few hours after the ships had set sail on the 1st of January 1663, another storm hit the fleet, threatening to throw it against the beach. The *Zeeridder* and the *Oranje* actually stranded and were in grave danger for two days, but ultimately managed to get afloat again. In the end, all the ships survived the storm, but several anchors and many of the chalooks were lost.

251 In some old maps, the area between Cape Corinth and the Maputo Bay, the present-day province of Inhambane, is called Bassarat or Bazarat. The river might be the Limpopo, but as the map used by Laïresse would probably have a name for this river, it is at least as likely that they anchored at a smaller stream further to the northeast. This would also explain the brackish water of the river, as these streams are fed by salty backwaters. Looking at the map of this area will also explain why the *Veldboen* was unable to find a bay: the coast is a straight line for hundreds of kilometres in this area.

Before the fleet had lifted anchor, de Laïresse had informed with the council members “whether anyone still felt inclined to tend to our goal.” No-one did. The only question that still needed to be resolved was whether an attempt to reach the Indian Coast was still viable. Reaching Batavia was no problem, but the bulk of the fleet was supposed to go to Ceylon. Crossing the Indian Ocean would still be impossible for another two months, and the fleet would have to sail all the way to the coast of Sumatra to circumvent the adverse winds. Under these circumstances, sailing to Batavia in convoy was the most sensible thing to do.

De Laïresse sealed his letter on the 6th of January 1663, after a disaster journey of three-and-a-half months since the Cape. On the same day, on the other side of the Indian Ocean, Van Goens stormed Cochin and thus finished the campaign in which the fleet had been supposed to participate. The letter bound for patria was sent to the Cape with the *Veldhoen*. De Laïresse concluded it by telling the directors how sorry he was to see that the good designs of the Company had had so bad an outcome, and that, if the war with the Portuguese should continue, he would request of the Governor-General and Council to be sent to Mozambique once again. The battered fleet finally arrived before Batavia on the 30th of March, after a fruitless journey of almost a year. News of the peace reached Batavia only two-and-a-half months later,²⁵² and Mozambique would never be captured by the VOC. De Laïresse’s fleet had not fired a single shot at the Portuguese, but the East African monsoon had proven itself an adversary not to be messed with.

The second siege of Cochin

In the first days of July 1662, while Huibert de Laïresse was slowly making his way towards the Cape, news of the extra fleet and the postponed peace reached the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. Van Goens, who had arrived back in Batavia only two weeks earlier, would be getting another chance at conquering Cochin, and would perhaps even find time and resources to undertake something against Diu. A small fleet of three ships, manned with some 300 soldiers under command of Ijsbrand Godske, was sent out on the 26th of July, in order to block Cochin, and take command of the Dutch garrisons on the coast to form a field army. Learning lessons from the failure of the earlier campaign, the *Hoge Regering* also instructed Godske to have the Dutch garrisons in Malabar produce fuses, and sent out a huge order for gunpowder to the Coromandel coast, where the Company had a powder mill. The rest of the fleet would be sent after Godske as soon as it had been assembled.²⁵³

By the end of August, the fleet, consisting of thirteen large ships manned with 800 European soldiers and 134 Mardijkers, Bandanese and Ambonese, was ready to sail. The *Hoge Regering* reckoned

252 On the 14th of June, the *Joncker* brought news of the ratified treaty to Batavia. Dagregister, II, 236.

253 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 302-303. This paragraph mostly based on op. cit, C6. Footnotes will only be added when referring to other sources.



Illustration 11: map of part of the Malabar coast. To the right we see the Ghats mountain range, separating the Malabar coast from the rest of the Indian mainland. The top leftmost island is Baypin. Right underneath we see Cochin ('Coetsjen'), and slightly further south Purracad ('Porca'). The map also nicely shows the backwaters connecting the various Malabarese cities, which made isolation of Cochin highly problematic. Just south of the backwaters we see Quilon ('Coylan').

that the total force, consisting of this fleet combined with soldiers drawn from the Ceylonese and Malabar garrisons and even 150 which would have to come from the Cape, would amount to a good 3000 soldiers. This calculation did not even include the extra fleet coming in from Patria. Disappointed by the late arrival of last year's extra fleet, combined with the poor quality of the soldiers it brought, the *Hoge Regering* was apparently not getting its hopes up this time.

The fleet set sail on the 26th of August. As Van Goens was severely ill at the time, Jacob Hustaert was in command. Should Van Goens recover, he would come after the fleet and retake command later. Van Goens, did recover, and went in pursuit of the main fleet on the 10th of September, with one ship and a yacht. He received additional orders to sail to Wingurla in Bijapur, north of Goa, to inform there whether any reinforcements had run into Goa that year. On the basis of that information, it would then have to be decided whether Goa should be blocked, to prevent these reinforcements from sailing out to Cochin.

As Van Goens departed from Batavia, Godske, after a very speedy journey, arrived before Cranganore on that same 10th of September. He presently learned that only three small ships, bringing 100 Portuguese soldiers, had come into Cochin in the past few months. Combining the troops from his fleet with a good part of the Cranganore garrison, he marched towards the northside of Cochin, and had the Dutch stronghold built last year, *Nieuw Oranje*, restored by the 24th of September.

Hustaert arrived before Cochin on the 17th of October. He immediately called together the military council. His own suggestion, inspired by Van Goens' original plan, was to just have a storm

attack on the city and get it over with, but all the other officers thought this too risky. An attack on the city from the north, over the river, was considered too risky as the Company had very few small boats and the Portuguese still had various operational frigates which could navigate the river. It was therefore finally decided to just do what they did last year: besiege the city from the south.

On the 28th of October, Hustaert landed 1600 men two miles south of Cochin. The Portuguese, apparently also learning from their past mistakes, were waiting there with six detachments of Portuguese soldiers and 2000 Nayars. A short battle followed. Herport was one of the 1600 soldiers now landing on Malabar shore, and he describes the battle as follows:

“As soon as the Portuguese had gotten wind of our plan, they had rushed to the beach and dug trenches. Now, at the crack of dawn, we got on board chaloups and small vessels, 23 in number, each of which was equipped with two field cannon. We sailed towards the land in a line. The Portuguese, however, fired heavily from their trenches, so that we were forced to fight our way onto land. When we had finally arrived on the beach, with great trouble because of the wild surf, the first to jump onto land was an Ambonese with shield and sword in hand, after whom we then quickly followed. There we got a full blow of fire, as we were out in the open field, but the Portuguese were taking cover in their trenches. When, however, we attacked them on one side, where we found that they were mostly Nayars, or Malabars, we came at them with a lot of violence and killed several of their leaders. After this, the rest fled. When the Portuguese saw this, having put all their faith in the Nayars, they also made way towards the city, with us in pursuit.”²⁵⁴

With slightly more trouble than the year before Hustaert had now landed 1600 soldiers and could start building siege works around Cochin. The army of 3000 soldiers which Batavia had projected had not yet materialized, but things looked a lot better than last year. From a captured Portuguese, Hustaert learned that there were only 600 soldiers within the walls of Cochin, a lot less than expected. Although the Portuguese had now also fortified old Cochin, where Godorme, the leader of last year's anti Dutch coalition, was now inhabiting the palace, this prince and his Nayars had simply fled the city as soon as they learned of the Dutch landing, and the Dutch army could simply walk into the old city with two companies and occupy it. The extensive defences of the old city were reduced to a small, easily defensible position. Hustaert's biggest advantage compared to last year, however, was the fact that it was only the 28th of October. He had a full four months of dry season ahead of him.

Hustaert, whose force was barely enough to lay siege to the city but also too small to storm the walls, had been steadily bombarding the city, hoping for Van Goens to arrive with reinforcements. Van Goens arrived on the 14th of November, bringing 400 veteran soldiers and 500 Lascars from Ceylon and Quilon. Assessing the situation before Cochin, he immediately forewent his plans to

254 Herport, *Reise*, 96-97.



Illustration 12: the siege of Cochin as depicted in Herport's Reise. In the top-left we see the small fort Oranje. Papeneiland is not visible but would be slightly up-river, on the top-right. The lower branch of the water led to the backwaters. Calenety is the bastion to the far right, across from the small island. The bastion to its left is St. Lazaro. Furthermore we get a great impression of the Company's siege works. The form of the city, however, is not very accurate, as becomes clear when we compare this map to that of Baldaens. (See below.)

blockade Goa and attack Diu. The force would certainly not be split up until Cochin had been stormed and taken.

For now the siege works needed to be perfected and the city isolated. The trenches and batteries were moved ever closer towards the city. Complete isolation of the city however remained troublesome, as the Company army did not control the river or the backwaters. Several VOC soldiers who had deserted to Cochin last year, came to the camp on the 5th of December and asked for pardon.²⁵⁵ They informed Van Goens that prince Godorme, now once again in Purracad, was supplying the besieged city not only with food, but also sulphur for gunpowder production, and Nayers, over the backwaters. As many as 150 Nayers had been brought into the city this way, and if the need arose he was able to send a whole lot more, so Van Goens learned.

255 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 328-330. Date from Herport, *Reise*, 99.

Van Goens took immediate action: he ordered an attack on “Papeneiland”, an island in the river, that same day. Being in control of this island would make smuggling over this route virtually impossible. The attack succeeded. This, however, was not all. As several small vessels were taken at this attack on the island, Van Goens equipped a fleet of small boats to sail south over the backwater, which reached all the way to Purracad, to take or destroy the various small vessels by which Cochin had been supplied, that same night. Herport was sailing along on one of these vessels. His ship, however, had not been conquered, but, along with one other ship, joined the small flotilla from the main VOC fleet at sea. It immediately became clear why this raid could only be performed with small ships:

“As these two ships were sailing into the river mouth, one of them sailed right on, but the other one, in which I sailed, ran onto a sanbank, hardly a pistol shot away from the city. As the Portuguese saw this in the clear moonlight, they fired away at us, with muskets and cannon, until, through the rising tide, we finally came loose and could sail on. They had fired ten balls through our ship, and besides many wounded, had also killed our pilot, the quartermaster, one corporal, four soldiers and five sailors.”

Due to this delay, the raid therefore took place by daylight. Initially it worked beautifully, but grown reckless by the success, the commander De Roer threw his orders of staying on the water to the wind and risked a landing at Angicamal, on the other side of the backwater, slightly east of Cochin. Here, the Company soldiers turned out to be too severely outnumbered. De Roer himself was killed, as were many other soldiers.²⁵⁶ Definitively clearing the various settlements along the backwaters of ships and enemy Nayars, was however so important to Van Goens, that he later sent Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee de out with a large force to conquer both coasts. By the 4th of January, this would ultimately be accomplished, and Van Reede returned to the camp, leaving Nayars from Calicut to guard the various settlements.

In the meantime, the Company siege works around Cochin had at many places come within a pistol shot of the city walls. Some unexpected rain in December had come to an end again, and the ground had once again dried up. Powder and fuses had not run out (although supplies were by now running low), the city had been incessantly bombarded throughout the siege, and Portuguese morale would probably be crumbling by now. It was time to storm the city.

Van Goens decided that a small attack would take place on the westernmost point of Cochin, where the wall had been breached. The commander there, Schimmelpenninck, would however only proceed as far as the breach in order to draw as many Portuguese soldiers as possible from the

²⁵⁶ Interestingly Meilink-Roelofs, basing herself on the official reports sent to Batavia, talks of 20 dead. Herport, who was there, talks of 40 dead in the first attack wave alone, and a total of about 300(!) dead later on. He is not even counting the 12 dead from earlier on. Even if an extra zero was printed accidentally, this is a rather great difference. Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 329; Herport, *Reise*, 100-101.

rest of the city. Then, the northeasternmost Portuguese bastion, called Calewety, where the walls had also been breached, would be stormed by Van Goens. If this attack immediately succeeded, then the entire force would move there and enter the city. If not, Hustaert would lead his force in a storm attack on a Portuguese bastion slightly to the West, called St. Lazaro. All the while, all the Dutch batteries should start an enormous barrage on the city.

In the early afternoon of the 6th of January 1663, when the water in the defense moats was at its lowest, the attack began. Van Goens personally led his force to Caleweti, where a bloody fight ensued. 50 Company soldiers died or were or mortally wounded, another 70 were wounded. On the Portuguese side, as it later turned out, 200 Portuguese died in the initial clash. It was now clear to the VOC troops that there were slightly more than 600 Portuguese soldiers in Cochin. Although this first storm attack was not decisive, Van Goens nonetheless called off the attack on St. Lazaro, to prevent chaos and another bloodbath. Instead, the city would slowly be taken from the northeastern side, where the defenses had now been breached. Van Goens had six fresh companies reinforce the troops there, and severe skirmishing in the streets of the city followed.

One of the soldiers sent in with these six companies was Herport. By nightfall the troops had fought their way to what Herport calls “the half-moon Portogaf”,²⁵⁷ probably halfway along the southeastern city wall, which meant they had the entire narrow part of the city along the river under their control. Then, still under fire from the Portuguese, the army started barricading itself in, to continue the city guerilla at dawn again. Continuing the attack, however, turned out to be unnecessary. In the early hours of the next morning, a Portuguese officer approached the Company’s makeshift defenses with a peace flag. It was agreed that hostilities should be ceased, and that a Portuguese delegation would arrive shortly to negotiate a peace.

Thus, On the 7th of January 1663, Cochin had finally fallen. The siege had cost the VOC 360 soldiers. However, there were 300 wounded (many badly burnt by firepots), and beri-beri had left another 500 too sick to fight. The Portuguese had had more than 900 casualties. Incredibly, more Portuguese had died than the Company had even believed were in the city. The total defense force of the city turned out to have been 2300 souls, consisting of soldiers but also volunteers from the students and clergy living in the city. The VOC army, by contrast, had had a maximum of 2000 soldiers in its camp at any given time, as many other activities (garrisoning Baypin and Cranganore, raiding the backwaters) had diminished the total size of the force.²⁵⁸

As was Company policy, the final treaty entailed that Cochin, the second largest Portuguese city in Asia, would be completely rid of all Portuguese influence. The *soldados*, unmarried Portuguese receiving wage from the *Estado* (which included but did not limit itself to the soldiers) would be

257 In his own map, there is a bastion in the form of a half moon halfway onto the southern wall of the city, where the narrow part of the city ends. Herport *Reise*, 104-105.

258 Meilink-Roelofs, *Vestiging Malabar*, 339.

The bulk of the army, under command of Hustaert, meanwhile left for Cannanoor, the last remaining Portuguese stronghold on the Malabar coast, which would fall to the Company on the 15th of February after a short siege. Van Goens, however, remained at Cochin, to attend to another important matter now that Cochin had fallen: Malabarese politics. Vira Kerala Varma, whom the VOC had very much wanted to see in the Cochinese palace, had died, in all probability by poisoning, and the Zamorin of Calicut now coveted sovereignty over Cochin. This, however, was unacceptable to the Company, as this would make Calicut too powerful and would thus make Malabarese politics unmanageable to the Company. The old queen was now requested to appoint a successor to the throne, and she chose Vira Kerala Varma's brother. The Zamorin would never forgive the Company. Thus, the conquest of Cochin also entailed a *renversement des alliances* on the Malabar Coast: Calicut, the old ally of the Company, now became its sworn enemy, while Cochin, the old Portuguese ally, was now on very good terms with the Company.

Nieuhoff, who during the siege had mostly worked as an ambassador along the Malabar Coast (in fact, Vira Kerala Varma had died on board his ship after a visit to Quilon to build relations) describes how, on the sixth of March, "[Vira Kerala Varma's] brother, being the next heir to the crown, was, after the taking of the city, crowned king of Cochin by the Dutch, his crown, which was of gold, having the cypher of the East India Company, engraven on one side."²⁶⁰ This ceremony was based on a similar ceremony which was performed under Portuguese rule.

With the fall of Cochin and the subsequent fall of Cannanore, Portuguese rule over the Malabar coast, the area where Vasco Da Gama had first arrived 165 years ago, had come to an end. In some six years of intense warfare, the Portuguese empire, already greatly diminished by the Company's campaigns under Van Diemen, had now been reduced to only a handful of posts. The past years, however, would turn out to have been the last great VOC campaign directed against the Portuguese. The VOC was now entering a century of its existence during which the bulk of its enemies would be Asian rather than European. Most Portuguese possessions that had survived the Company's concerted effort to entirely drive the Portuguese from Asia, would remain Portuguese until the days of Salazar.

Conclusion

This chapter is probably the most 'old-fashioned' part of my thesis. It has mainly consisted of various stories which I have taken back out of the drawer from usually very old literature, spiced up with some eye-witness accounts and supplemented with some additional sources. Little new research or new approaches have gone into this chapter. Nonetheless, I felt that a chapter like this was essential for making this thesis meaningful. Knowing the proceedings of the actual campaigns

²⁶⁰ Johan Nieuhoff (Anthony Reid ed.), *Voyages and travels to the East Indies, 1653-1670* (Oxford 1988, facsimile of English edition of 1723), 221.

‘on-the-ground’ adds the last stage to the wider scope of the previous chapter, showing the actual nature of these wars, as well as the results. Putting several of these detailed campaign descriptions, very different in nature and taking place over a huge area, next to each other, offers a kind of cross-section of VOC warfare in this period.

Particularly when contrasting these campaign histories to the last chapter, this approach yields an interesting insight into the nature of VOC warfare. By substantiating the final result of the entire logistic and organisational system as described in chapter III, which after all existed to defend the Company’s possessions and facilitate these battles, it shows the merits and limits of this system. The merits, for one, become clear when we look at the campaign against Makassar or the second siege of Cochin. In the case of Makassar, it is interesting to see how the extensive knowledge of the situation as well as the tendency to plan everything from Batavia had exactly the desired result. Six months before the attack took place, the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia thought up a battle plan which specified the movements of the fleet, the garrisons from where the soldiers for the attack would have to be drawn, and the exact proceedings of the attack on Makassar, with pretty much every move described in detail. Months later, this plan proved its worth as Van Dam was able to successfully execute it to the letter. The *Hoge Regering* in Batavia clearly knew what it was doing. In the case of the second siege of Cochin, we wonderfully see the logistical and organisational network kick into gear. Within two months of the news that the war could go on, the Company had amassed an army of both its own soldiers and its allies in Batavia, 800 strong, and had specified where the rest of the army would have to come from. The way in which Godske was sent ahead to mobilize the Malabarese garrisons, Van Goens was ordered to take soldiers from Ceylon, and the gunpowder order to the Coromandel coast was immediately sent out, all give testimony to the functioning of the Company’s great knowledge of its own possessions and a logistical system to put this knowledge to good use. The *Hoge Regering* in Batavia was able to mobilize half of Asia from its council room, and even though not all of its plans were executed exactly as hoped (for one, no soldiers from the Cape showed up at Cochin), the way in which “the plan came together” remains an astonishing feat.

The case studies of this chapter, however, have also shown that one could not plan for everything. As Clausewitz wrote: “War is the province of chance. In no other sphere of human activity must such a margin be left for this intruder. It increases the uncertainty of every circumstance and deranges the course of events.” This applied all the more strongly in the vast area of operation of the VOC. Due to the time news took to travel, the Company was always acting upon outdated news. In addition, it was to a very great degree dependent on such whimsical things as the wind for the success of its campaigns. We see this exemplified in the first siege of Cochin: the already somewhat shaky and overenthusiastic plan for this campaign was subsequently further complicated by circumstances which simply could not be planned for, such as the various storms and fires ruining the powder supply or the rather lacking cooperation of the Company’s local ally. Even Van Goens, who had been working nearby on the Coromandel Coast, could not possibly know how

well Cochin would be defended when he arrived there. Although Van Goens could adapt plans and tactics to the circumstances, the resources he had at his disposal were entirely determined by earlier planning.

Indeed, reading through the various case-studies treated in this chapter, one gets the impression that storm might have been the most decisive factor in the wars of these years, saving Macao and Mozambique from attack, preventing the aid to Coyet from materializing in time, and severely hampering the 1661 campaign on the Malabar coast. If we were to follow the reasoning of contemporary Europeans on this matter, who often attributed favourable winds during naval campaigns to divine intervention, we might be tempted to conclude that perhaps in 1588 in the English Channel the winds might have been protestant, but that in Asia in our period of study, they were definitely Catholic. This was certainly the opinion of Van Goens, whom we have seen explicitly wondering whether God Almighty might be attempting to sabotage his campaign. Of course, Van Goens had no idea how many Portuguese fleets were hit or destroyed by storms in this period, and admittedly, neither do I.

Finally, this chapter has also attempted to add to the previous chapters the experience of war, by showing the entire period not in the form of tables, or from the perspective of the decisionmakers, but also from the eyes of soldiers, surgeons and preachers who were actually participating in the campaigns and working in the line of fire. This has hopefully added the roar of the cannon, the long months at sea, and the chaos of battle to an otherwise somewhat technical approach of Company warfare in this period. I have also hoped to show this 'human aspect' with regard to the Portuguese. Whereas the former chapters might have rendered an image of these campaigns against the Portuguese as some sort of chess-game, in which both parties had a number of pieces at their disposal, the war was not by far as symmetrical. Van Goens' remark on his laying siege to a city the size of Leiden gets a wholly new significance when we take into account that he would afterwards simply 'disband' this city, by deporting one part of the population and scaring off the rest. Such a city, rid of the society that it had housed, could afterwards become a much smaller trade settlement with garrisoned fortress. This was not one chartered Company driving out another. In order to reach its trade goals, the Company had to drive off an adversary entirely unlike itself; one which had large cities housing schools, churches, civic institutions and a mixed society of which many members no longer considered Portugal their homeland. Van Goens' successful attempt to monopolize the cinnamon trade, get hold of the Malabar pepper and secure the region, thus drew the curtains on a way of life and society which had existed in this region for 150 years.

Conclusion

The subtitle of this thesis promises the description of a ‘military system.’ Of course a master’s thesis is hardly the place to try and come to an all-encompassing view on VOC warfare, even should such a thing be possible. Nonetheless I hope the thesis has made a meaningful argument on VOC warfare, which might serve as a first step towards a coherent view on VOC warfare.

The first stage of this argument has been a case for the research of VOC warfare in its own right, and making clear that, considering the unique kind of organisation that the VOC was, we might expect that the form of warfare it developed would also be ‘unique’, and only comparable to e.g. warfare in Europe in the early modern period to a limited degree. It would therefore make sense to attempt and sketch this form of warfare anew and, so to speak, from the bottom up.

I have subsequently tried to make such a sketch, by looking at various factors that would be determining for the military system the VOC developed in the first decades of its existence, and its success. This sketch has of course looked at the ‘military hardware’ the Company had at its disposal and its worth or significance in the Asian context within which it operated, but has also looked at other factors such as its financial system and goals and its political culture. On the basis of this I concluded that the VOC might to some degree have developed a ‘technological’ form of military superiority, particularly in the realm of naval warfare and fortress design, but that in the early modern context this technological gap alone, particularly considering the improbably small size of the Company’s armies, was insufficient to explain its military success. Other factors, such as the political longevity and the informational and logistical network that the Company had, were at least as determining for its military success.

This informational and logistical network has subsequently been the object of research for the period 1655-1663. By looking at the connection from patria, via Batavia, to the battlefield, both with regard to equipment and soldiers, politics, decisions and information, I hope to have shown this network in action, and proven that it existed, made sense, was practicable and indeed significantly contributed to the military success of the Company. The assessment of this network for the given period was subsequently further nuanced and substantiated by looking in more detail at its end result: several of the actual battles within the period 1655-1663.

This, then, might also be a good time to present some final thoughts which had no place in any of the separate chapters, but are nonetheless the result of this thesis as a whole. Coming back to the discussion on the quality of the Company’s soldiers, for one, we might now conclude that De Iongh’s view of the VOC troops as lazy, ill-trained and mostly doing garrison work, might have applied to the 18th century, but is definitely not applicable to our period of study. For our period, this is simply numerically impossible, witness the fact that, for instance, in the last few months of

1661, over 4200 Company soldiers (not even counting indigenous troops and sailors) were simultaneously taking part in combat; in other words: about half of the total Company army was actually off fighting somewhere at that moment. Stories like Herport's, who in the course of his soldiering career was literally dragged from one battle to another, go to illustrate what this meant for the troops. Even if training in Batavia did not amount to much, the average soldier saw enough combat in the course of his five years of duty to build up a lot of fighting experience. We see the value of this combat experience confirmed in the trust Van Goens kept on putting in the troops that had been with him since his first campaigns on Ceylon, as opposed to those soldiers that freshly arrived from Batavia or the Netherlands. The soldiers' actual fighting capabilities are furthermore confirmed by the many descriptions of battles, in which we often see the Company armies fight in closed ranks, successfully using European tactics against superior numbers. How much the quality of the troops contributed to the VOC's military success in general remains hard to say, but at any rate I did not recognize the rather rag-tag image of the Company soldiers as brought forward by De Jongh and others in the descriptions of battles and soldiers in this period.

Another point that needs to be made here is of a more general nature. This thesis has mostly focused on the logistical and organizational aspects of VOC warfare, and one of the most prominent conclusions time and again was that the whole venture was remarkably well-organised. This conclusion of course echoes similar conclusions made in the last few decades about the VOC's logistics and organisation *with regard to trade*. An obvious but important point to make here, is that these two networks are not only similar, but largely one and the same, not only in that soldiers, spices and letters were transported by the same ships, and that the *Generale Eis* listed trade goods right next to cannonballs, but also in terms of the chain of command. In all but the lowest echelons of hierarchy, the VOC did not have a separate military organisation: the Governor of Ceylon, to name but an example, was in charge of both the cinnamon trade and the garrisons there. Even Van Goens, sent to the Western Quarters with a predominantly military commission in the function of "admiral", was also supposed to visit the various factories in the area and see if they were profitable and well-run. The Company's military aspects, which in this thesis I have studied to some degree separately from its trade, were in that respect simply part of the daily functioning of the entire enterprise. This opens up the question whether all kinds of arguments with regard to the VOC being rather 'modern' and 'rational', as have often been made with regard to its trade policy and organisation in the last few decades, do not simply extend to its military aspects. I hope that the description of the Company's military logistics made in this thesis have to some degree laid the basis for such an approach.

Another question that perhaps deserves attention here, is whether the VOC was capable of plotting a 'grand design', as they would have called it in the 17th century, or a Grand Strategy, as it would be called in present-day strategic studies. An often-heard argument with regard to Dutch colonial history is that whereas the West India Company did have such a strategy, as it had effectively been

called into existence for making war on the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the VOC did not. On the basis of the research for this thesis, I feel it is justified to question this view. Although the VOC had indeed been founded on very different grounds than the WIC, in the period here under study it definitely did have a long-term strategy which we might dub 'grand.' If we take Grand Strategy to be the setting of long-term goals over a period of years or decades, and subsequently directing policy and strategy on all levels towards eventually reaching this goal, then this definition certainly applies to what we have seen the VOC do in the course of our period of study. The long-term goal set, in this case, was a complete monopoly over the trade of Asian goods in Europe, specifically fine spices and pepper. This long-term vision had been brooding in the heads of the directors and the Asian personnel from the 1620s onwards, and we might well see the subsequent concerted effort to secure the Spice Islands as part of a Grand Strategy towards this goal. As soon, then, as the Spice Islands had been largely secured, the strategy towards this goal shifted towards the complete expulsion of the Portuguese from Asia. Policy in this direction started materializing around 1636, when Antonio van Diemen became Governor-General, and was only brought to a grudging and temporary halt in 1644, in the wake of the *restauração* in Portugal and the subsequent treaty between Portugal and the Republic. The subsequent years of uneasy peace, and trouble with the English, which prevented this strategy from being put into effect for the time being, do not however seem to have changed it. As soon as the Company got a chance in 1654, it simply picked up where it had left off a decade earlier, and managed to almost completely drive the Portuguese from Asia by 1663, when another peace treaty definitively ended this strategy. This policy towards ousting the Portuguese, which can well be interpreted as a deliberate policy which lasted almost three decades and was ultimately largely successful, might thus definitely be seen as a Grand Strategy.

All the above statements are however merely some thoughts on the basis of this thesis, and deserve separate attention in the future. Which, of course, brings us to a final and important point. Above all I hope that this thesis has reconfirmed that the study of VOC warfare is a hugely interesting and important field, which has remained thoroughly understudied in the last few decades, and in which a lot of work is to be done in the future. I can only hope that this thesis has made a small contribution to filling this historiographical gap.

Appendix A: on the tables

Table 1

Source for the data: D.A.S., outgoing voyages 861 through 1001 (for the second and third column), and the Resolutions of the Gentlemen XVII for the years 1656-1663, in VOC-archive 103, 104, 105 (for the first column). Please note that the numbers should be considered estimates. The data on people disembarking in Batavia are almost complete, the data of people embarking in Amsterdam much less so, particularly for the period 1656-1658. Where embarking data for a certain ship was missing, an estimate has been made by dividing the number of arrivals from this ship in Batavia by 0,91, the average departure/arrival ratio for the entire period, based on all the successful voyages with complete data. E.g. in 1656 embarking data for 2 ships, the *Witte Olifant* and the *Zeeland* were missing. A total of 725 people disembarked from these ships. On the basis of this it is estimated that 796 people embarked. Added to the 3417 heads on the other ships, this gives the total of 4213.

The specified numbers of soldiers, sailors, and others are the *known* totals; I have not made estimates for those, as data are in many cases too incomplete to do that. This is why in many cases the math for an entire year doesn't add up, as for many ships only the total number on board is known. To make easily visible where data are (virtually) complete, the numbers which do *not* add up to at least 97% of the total are in a smaller font.

A special case in these data is the year 1658-1659, when the *Wapen van Amsterdam* made a pretty fast and uneventful passage, of which, however, no data on either side of the trip seem to exist. On the basis of its tonnage of 920 I have simply made an educated guess of 300 embarking and 273 disembarking in the totals.

Conversely, ships that ran into trouble or remained at the Cape for a while, and went 'missing' from the data afterwards (always with the remark that they probably arrived in Batavia at some point), have *not* been compensated for. The number of people arriving in Batavia will therefore probably have been slightly higher than the numbers here indicate. This only concerns three ships with a total known number of 196 people on board.

The numbers of soldiers and sailors 'resolved upon' is simply calculated from on the ratio that the resolutions mention, usually 2/3 against 1/3, or 3/5 against 2/5. Where not specified, the ratio was not mentioned in the resolution.

Tables 2 through 4

Source for the data is the *Generale Eijs* for the years 1656-1663, to be found in VOC Archive 13473. Please note that the subcategories here applied are my own: there are no categories like "entire melee weapons" in the text of the actual *Eijs*, which lists all needed items in a seemingly random

order. In addition, not by far all goods listed in the *Eis* are included in these tables, which in that case would have become intolerably long and intransparent. As tools for making powder alternately show up in the category “for the armoury” and under “for the powder makers”, I have left those out here. In addition, materials that rarely showed up in the tables, in very small amounts, or did not seem particularly interesting to include in statistics are not listed. Products that have been left out for this reason are copper and iron thread, nails and screws, and needles and other sewing materials (mostly for making cartridges.)

As to the translation of the various products’ names: I have put quite some effort into this but I am no weapon’s expert. In addition, the *Eis* uses various names for several products. Where I was almost certain that two names signified one product, I have merged these. In some cases, it was however impossible to discover the distinction between categories. For example, ‘langscherp’ is a name that usually signifies chain shot or bar shot, but ‘draadkogels’, chain shot, is in many cases a separate category. Similar problems arose with all the various types of powder horns, which I have just left separate. In some cases, I suppose one would have had to work at the Company warehouses to be able to know what product was actually requested. The tables are therefore less exact than might be desirable, and only give an impression of the products requested and sent. Anyone who wants to use these data for his own research and finds my selection, categorizations and translation rather too sketchy, is welcome to contact me for my ‘raw material’, i.e. untranslated, uncategorized tables listing all products, plus notes.

Table 5

Source: count of the Company’s artillery held in 1656. VOC-archives, *Overgekommen brieven en papieren*, 1217, fol 138pp.

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'VOC-Archive' refers to the VOC-Archives in the Dutch National Archive in The Hague, to be found under inv. nr. 1.04.02.

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Illustrations

Cover illustration: Company troops disembarking at the Malabar Coast near Quilon. Detail from pen drawing in Wouter Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*.

Illustration 1: pen drawing of Batavia and surrounding area. From Johan Nieuhoff (Anthony Reid ed.), *Voyages and Travels to the East Indies*.

Illustration 2: VOC-soldiers embarking at the Montelbaanstoren. Pen drawing by Ludolf Backhuysen, ca. 1685. Taken from Eymert Jan Goossens ed., *Backhuysen aan het roer!*, catalogue with exhibition by the same name (Amsterdam 2004). Original source: Amsterdam Municipal Archive.

Illustration 3: Map of southern India and Ceylon. From: Francois Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*.

Illustration 4: Map of Mannar. From: Baldaeus, *True and Exact Description*.

Illustration 5: Map of Jaffanapatnam. From: Aalbers, *Rijcklof van Goens*. Original source: Dutch National Archive.

Illustration 6: map of coastline of Makassar. From: Stapel, *Bongaais Verdrag*.

Illustration 7: the attack on Makassar. Pen drawing from: Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*.

Illustration 8: battle between Nayars and Company forces in Old Cochin. Pen drawing from: Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*.

Illustration 9: map of Taiwan. From: Lynn Struve, *Voices from the Ming Qing Cataclysm*.

Illustration 10: drawing of the siege of fort Zeelandia. From: Herport, *Reise*.

Illustration 11: map of part of the Malabar coast. Detail from map in Niehoff, *Voyages and travels*.

Illustration 12: drawing of the siege of Cochin. From Herport, *Reise*.

Illustration 13: Portuguese and Dutch Cochin. From Baldaeus, *True and exact description*.

Illustration 14: reference map of the Charter area

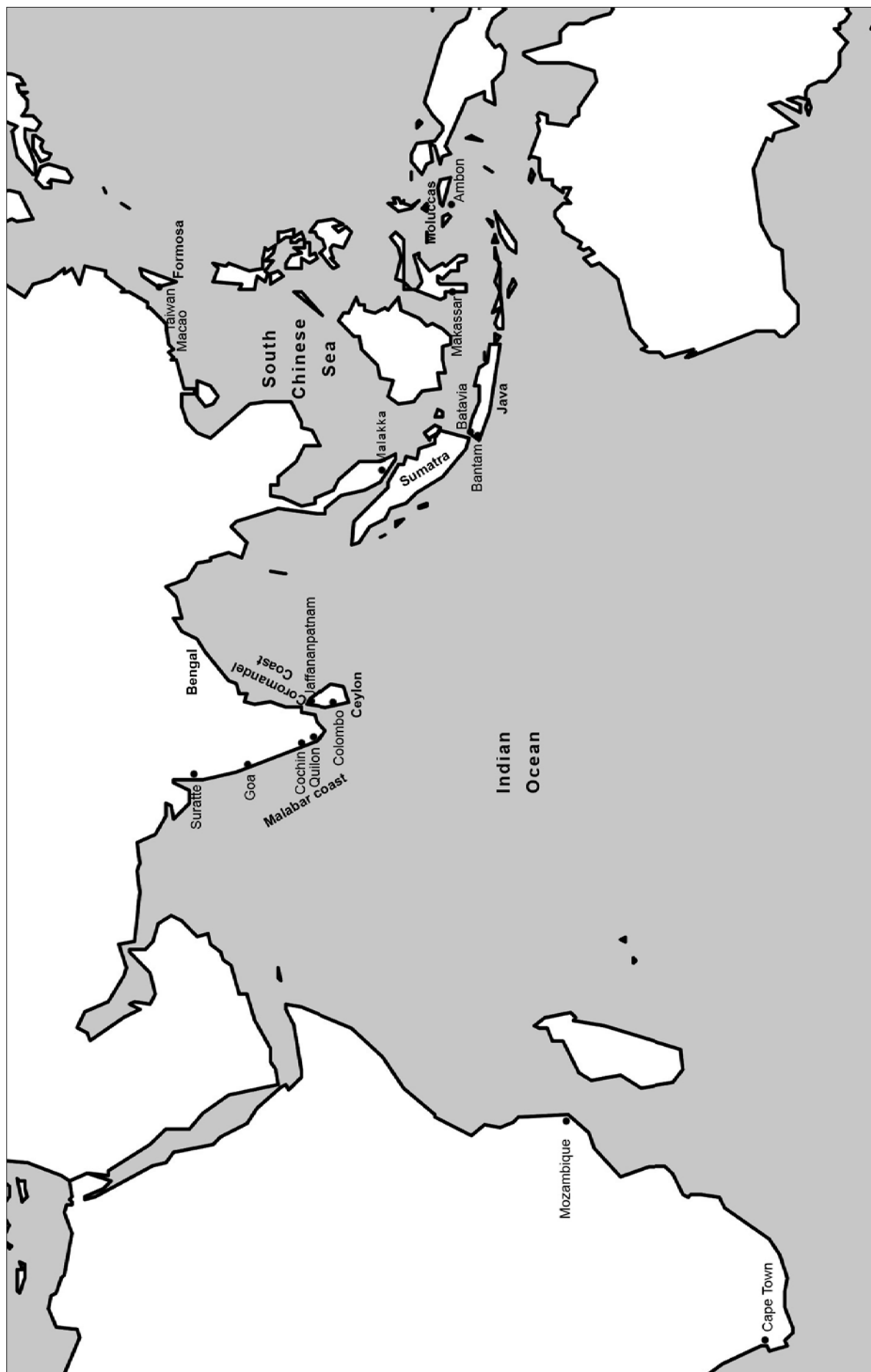


Illustration 14: reference map of the VOC Charter area