



Captain Jenkins exhibits his Ear

Yellow Jack

The War of Jenkins' Ear 1739-1743

HISTORICAL COMMENTARY

BY IAN WEIR
MAPS BY PAUL DANGEL

Excerpt from The Gentleman's Magazine, June 1731 issue:

'The Rebecca, Capt. Jenkins, was taken in her passage from Jamaica, by a Spanish Guarde Costa, who put her people to the torture; part of which was, that they hang'd up the Capt. three times, once with the Cabin-boy at his feet; they then cut off one of his Ears, took away his candles and instruments, and detain'd him a whole day. Being then dismissed, the Captain bore away for the Havana, which the Spaniards perceiving stood after her, and declared, that if she did not immediately go for the Gulf, they would set the Ship on fire; to which they were forced to submit, and after many Hardships and Perils arrived in the River Thames, June 11. The Captain has since been at Court and laid his case before his Majesty.'

Excerpt from The Gentleman's Magazine, 28th March 1738:

'The West-India Merchants having on the 16th attended the House of Commons upon their Petition complaining of the Depredations, etc. of the Spaniards; to which were affixed Copies of Letters from English Sailors, etc. Prisoners among the Spaniards, representing their miserable Condition, that they work'd with Irons on their Legs, and lived on Beans full of Vermin, and a little Salt Fish; that in one Room in Cadiz were confin'd above 300 Slaves in Irons and Chains, and crawling with vermin, etc. The same was then read, and several Merchants, Owners and Captains, were called in, and examined on that, and some following Days, by the House as to the Allegations of their Petition, and after receiving Satisfactory Answers to the several Questions came this Day in a grand Committee to a Resolution to address his Majesty to use what Measures in his great Wisdom he should think proper, for the procuring from Spain Restitution of the Captures, etc. and Satisfaction for the Damage done to the British Navigation. There were near 500 Members in the House, and upon a Division with regard to wording the Address, the Numbers were 257 and 209.'

Excerpt from The Gentleman's Magazine, 21st July 1739:

'Notice was given by the Lords of the Admiralty, that in pursuance of his Majesty's Commission under the Great Seal, Letters of Marque or General Reprisals against the Ships, Goods and Subjects of the King of Spain, were ready to be issued.'

And for 28th July:

'Eight more Letters of Marque were granted to Merchants Ships to make Reprisals on the Spaniards, and an Order was sent from the Council Board to lay an Embargo on 3 Ships bound for Spain, richly laden.'

And for 31st July:

'Vice Admiral Vernon Sail'd the 20th for the West Indies with 9 Men of War, and a Sloop.'

Finally, an excerpt from The Gentleman's Magazine, 23rd October 1739:

' Was proclaim'd this Day by the Heralds at Arms, attended by the Guards at the Usual Places,

His Majesty's DECLARATION of WAR against the King of SPAIN.

GEORGE R. '

The 'War of Jenkins' Ear'. Well... it is a unique name. The Spanish title might be more enlightening: *La Guerra de Asiento*. Assuming one knows what an *Asiento* is. For all those who have never heard of this war, and for all those who have heard the name but are otherwise ignorant, let it be stated plainly that this and no other is the war for which that great British anthem, *Rule Britannia!* was penned. *That* is how important it was.

War was forced on the Spanish who would have preferred to husband their resources for the next round of Bourbon-Habsburg rivalry in Italy – which broke out in 1741. They feared Britain would attempt some conquest of their possessions in the New World, as they had previously done with Gibraltar and Minorca; in the 1720s and 1730 the British had already begun to encroach on Florida by founding a new colony, Georgia. However, both pre-war economics and wartime economics overshadowed 'raw colonialism'.

Pre-war, the Spanish had neglected their commercial colonial infrastructure, which had been unofficially usurped by British and North American trading interests. This helped bring on the clash in the first place. During the war, the bullion flow from the New World was challenged by the British; in this endeavour the Spanish had some success. As for colonies, the British proved unable to accomplish much, and interestingly, were hampered by elements within their own government as much as by the Spanish.

To this war, the British brought, perhaps for the first time, the now familiar theme of Big Money manipulating corrupt politicians for private gain while stirring the Mob with patriotic humbug and xenophobic lies. As instigators of the war, the British had a mix of motives. Conquest was one – not only the expansion of Georgia, but the seizure of ports, either to establish new trading factories or to simply siphon off some of the bullion flow. But this idea was thwarted by established trading interests who did not want the competition; they, instead, preferred to have the region opened to trade without conquest (which did not preclude fighting). Money, pure and simple, was another reason – Spain owed Britain reparations and would not (could not) pay. Finally, however, the thing took on a momentum of its own.

Ultimately, the war was sparked by a tariff row, which itself was a manifestation of the shifting economic balance between Spain and Britain. Long term, its effect was very mundane – Anglo-Saxon market penetration in Latin America.

Those who find such an outcome dull may take heart. In the view of many historians, this war also, more than the War of the Spanish Succession, or the Seven Years War, marks the beginning of Britain's rise to empire, an empire that was as much an economic hegemony as a military one.

Historians have bracketed the war by the years 1739 through 1743, but the protagonists remained in arms until 1748. This was because the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in 1740, for reasons connected in only the most tenuous way with the Anglo-Spanish struggle. However, after 1743 fighting between Spain and Britain was low-key; France became the British *bête noire*, transferring the focus of the war to the Low Countries and 'home waters'.

And yet, the last naval battle of the war – fought seven months after the peace was signed – was between the ships of Spain and Britain. It was inconclusive, but claimed as a victory by both sides. A fitting epitaph to the entire war.

[To contemporaries the war was nameless; the historian Thomas Carlyle gave it the name 'Jenkins' Ear' in 1858, borrowing from a comment of Voltaire's.]

Sources

Despite its obscurity, there are a number of comprehensive sources available for the War of Jenkins' Ear, some very old, some very new. The sources used most extensively as the basis for this commentary are given below. Sources used to fill out details or as correctives can be found in the bibliography.

Rear Admiral H.W. Richmond's books – a three volume set called *The Navy in the War of 1739-48* – heads the list. The books are available online. Apart from being a noted scholar, Richmond was a veteran of the Great War. His work, published in 1920, is still the most comprehensive available. Unfortunately, it is written solely from the British viewpoint and tends to gloss over (to put it mildly) the failures of some of its 'heroes'. There also appear to be minor inaccuracies – mainly order of battle issues – which were probably inherent in his own sources. With respect to operations in the Caribbean, Richmond is a strong partisan of the controversial figure of Vice Admiral Vernon. Nonetheless, this work remains a key source for the general narrative.

Two works by a modern author, Richard Harding, apply a corrective: *The Emergence of Britain's Global Naval Supremacy. The War of 1739-1748* and *Amphibious Warfare in the 18th Century; The British Expedition to the West Indies* (showing an entirely different impression of land-sea 'noncooperation' from that given in Richmond).

There is also *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain, 1727-1783*, by Robert Beatson, in six volumes. This work was published in 1804 and the pertinent volume, no.1, is available as an online document. It lacks the accuracy of Richmond in some places but provides additional material in others, particularly on minor actions. Beatson felt British military achievements should be glorified wherever possible, no matter how small the affair.

To find information about the 'other side of the hill' is not easy, even in the Spanish or French languages. The raw data is available, but few authors have collated it into a narrative. Some of them also rely extensively on British sources.

The main sources in French (solely because they were the most readily available and best recommended) are *La marine militaire de la France sous la règne de Louis XV* by Lacour-Gayet (1910), and (better) *Histoire maritime de France* (Paris, 1851), vol. IV, by León Guérin. Both are available online. The latter is better than the former. Because of their scope, the French works lack the detail of Richmond, but contain additional information.

The most useful Spanish source is *La guerra de la oreja de Jenkins: un conflicto colonial (1739-1748)*, by Jorge Cerdá Crespo. Unfortunately the book itself is out of print (as of writing), but, it is based on Crespo's 470-page doctoral thesis, which is still available online at the University of Alicante.

Fortuitously also, the Georgia Historical Society has preserved the Spanish documentation dealing with the amphibious campaign waged on the coast of Georgia in 1742: *The Spanish Official Account of the Attack on the Colony of Georgia, America, and of its Defeat on St. Simons Island by General Oglethorpe*. This is a complete book, available online.

And finally, the author wishes to mention the help of Mr. Albert Parker, who graciously supplied the mss of his upcoming book on the War of Jenkins' Ear. Mr. Parker has spent several years studying this subject, trying to reconcile variations in the accounts to produce the definitive work in English. Although not used as a source in its own right (at Mr. Parker's request) the mss proved an invaluable aid. He was also of great assistance in identifying (sometimes vehemently) a number of egregious errors made by the present author. His book will be well worth picking up.

Dates and Times

The modern Gregorian calendar (otherwise known as New Style, or NS) is used throughout this commentary. The Old Style (OS) Julian calendar, still in use by the British during the war, was 11 days behind. Should the reader spot a discrepancy in the timeline it will either be because a) the author has used a source that did not indicate the dating system, or b) because he failed to make the proper adjustment.

In this commentary, the author has used the dates supplied by the sources, but the reader should be aware that nautical and civil dates can vary, because the day at sea began at noon, when the sun sightings were taken, and not at midnight. This has produced discrepancies in the accounts over which day a battle or sighting took place on.

THE PLAYERS

What follows is background information about the protagonists. All three states – Spanish, French, and British – had their own 'personalities'. Even the two Bourbon powers, though labelled Absolute Monarchies and ruled by the same family, were not cut from the same cloth.

SPAIN

Spain was an Absolute Monarchy. The King was the focus of the State, and all were in his service. However, the State was a curiously federal body, a collection of provinces not all of which were connected by any infrastructure, and each with its own proclivities. Unity derived from the person of the Monarch and from the Church.

The current ruler of Spain was Felipe V. A manic hypochondriac, and an all-round Weak King, he was under the thumb of his second wife, Elisabeth Farnese. It was she who drove Spanish policy, more especially since at the outbreak of war the King was going through one of his periodic bouts of insanity.

Italian-born, Elisabeth was obsessed with obtaining territories for her sons in her homeland, mainly so she would have a place to retire to when the King died and her step-son came to the throne. To the Queen, as to her Administration, the Americas were absolutely vital, but only as a source of revenue.

This outlook was in keeping with the way Spain had functioned under the Habsburgs. When the Bourbon régime was instituted at the start of the 18th Century elements of the State took on a superficially progressive look. Still, after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession colonial trading practices and matters of naval defence really did begin to change, thanks to the offices of the *Secretario de las Colonias* (Secretary of the Colonies) and the *Secretario de Marina* (Secretary of the Navy).

In the 1730s these offices were dealing with such issues as British expansion toward Florida, illegal logwood harvesting operations in the Honduras and the encroachment of British traders in general, developing ways of beating them at their own game, the depredations of pirates, plus the need to expand and modernise the *Armada* – the Navy – and the chronic lack of funds to pay the same or buy necessities for the colonial population in general. It was a lot for one man to handle: the portfolios were always held by a single minister.

During the war three men held the posts: José de la Quintana up until October 1741, José del Campillo y Cossio from October 1741 to April 1743, and Cenón de Somodevilla, *marquis* de la Ensenada from then on. Campillo was honest and hardworking, which may explain why he did not last long. Ensenada was a formidable personality. But it was said of Quintana, the man at the helm in the run up to war, that 'a more difficult, tenacious,

disputable antagonist never was met with' (quoted in Temperley, p.199).

In fact, in the opinion of contemporary 'Spain watchers':

'This country [Spain] is at present governed by three or four mean stubborn people of little minds and limited understandings but full of the Romantick Ideas they have found in old Memorials and Speculative authors who have treated of the immense Grandeur of the Spanish Monarchy, People who have vanity enough to think themselves reserved by Providence to rectify and reform the mistakes and abuses of past ministers and ages'

Temperley, p.199

That would be the King, the Queen, Quintana, and Sebastián de la Cuadra (Quadra), *marquis de Villarías*, a man described as a dullard and a 'mere clerk'. He was *secrétaire d'Etat d'Espagne*, or chief minister for the Crown.

The one bright light of moderation was Cristóbal Gregorio Portocarrero y Funes de Villalpando, *conde de Montijo*, the *Presidente del Consejo de Indias* (president of the Council of the Indies). A former Ambassador to London, Montijo came to the post in 1737, when relations with Britain began to worsen. Unfortunately, he would be sidelined during the most critical period by the bellicose Don Casimiro de Ustariz, *Ministro de Guerra* (Secretary for War).

Nueva España

The Spanish colonies of New Spain were a product of the energies released by the *Reconquista*. They were not like those of the northern Europeans. They were not founded as 'factories' for trade with the indigenous population, nor as dumping grounds for the Great Unwashed. They had been carved out by explorers and *conquistadores* seeking glory and wealth, in a spirit very similar to that of the Crusaders in Palestine, and were only narrowly turned away from becoming, like the Crusader States, independent feudal kingdoms. Brought under central governance they were to be used as a measure of the greatness of Spain, beacons of Spanish culture, and a source of revenue for the State.

Over time, emigration did cause the population of the colonies to swell, and mercantile enterprises of all kinds did establish themselves, but these were secondary endeavours. It was never intended that *Nueva España* produce a surplus of resources and goods that could be sold in Europe – other than gold and silver.

Spanish America's primary export was bullion, which was used to pay government wages and to buy goods from nations already producing basic commodities in bulk. Though, having said that, by the 1730s the commercial element was growing by leaps and bounds; in great measure as a reaction to the activities of the British.

[Commerce took up a higher proportion of the total expenditure of bullion than is usually credited; the Spanish military used only a fraction of the money received from the New World.]

Santo Domingo, otherwise known as the island of Hispaniola, was the first colony, followed by the coasts of Venezuela and Colombia (the Spanish Main), and more islands, including Cuba and Puerto Rico. These were eclipsed as México and Perú began to pour forth their riches.

The Viceroyalty of New Spain – *Nueva España* – was the most important of Spain's new dominions, supplanting the Aztec Empire. By the 18th Century, the rule of México City extended to the Isthmus of Panama to the south, and beyond California and Texas to the north. Spanish explorers charted the coasts of what would become British Columbia. The viceroy's writ also ran in Spain's Caribbean islands, Florida, and even the Philippines.

Nominally, that is. In reality the more distant possessions had virtual autonomy.

[Louisiana had also been Spanish but was given up to France in the 1690s.]

Central America was not as tightly controlled. The final subjugation of the Maya peoples did not occur until the end of the 17th Century. This fact is important, since it meant that the Yucatán and Honduras were still debatable ground during the 1730s. There was a strong British presence there, disputed by Spain. Numerous logwood harvesting operations were conducted in the region, as well as illegal trading in cochineal and indigo, bought from Spanish plantations the Yucatán. Worse, the men engaged in these activities were buccaneers on the side.

Florida was the northern bulwark of *Nueva España*: undeveloped, home to smallpox-ridden Indian tribes. Pensacola and San Agustín (St. Augustine) were the only important sites; San Agustín was the capital, and also a coast guard and privateer base (the two jobs were complementary). Its main value lay in the fact that it was the last place that convoys traveling to Spain could resort to if the weather turned sour or if they needed replenishment or minor repairs.

South America

Perú was acquired only a few years after México, and in much the same manner. The region became its own viceroyalty in 1542. In 1717 the Viceroyalty of *Nueva Granada* was carved out of Perú's domains because of the slowness of communications between Lima and Bogotá, which, from a provincial capital, became the seat of the new viceroyalty. This was an experiment that seemed doomed to fade away – the region reverted to Lima's control in 1724 – but war caused the revival of the viceroyalty in 1740.

Nueva Granada incorporated Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, and part of Nicaragua. These latter regions were tacked on as a wartime rationalisation, creating an overlapping jurisdiction with *Nueva España* which aided the buccaneers who infested those coasts.

Venezuela was a special case, since it was under the *audiencia* ('Assembly') of Santo Domingo, the very first Spanish government in the region, though a part of *Nueva Granada*, and was also heavily influenced by the *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana*, or Caracas Company, which had bases at La Guaira and Porto Cabello.

The remainder of South America was divided between Spain and Portugal. Callao and several small Chilean ports played a role in the commerce of that part of the world and served as coast guard bases. The large bight called the Rio de la Plata, on which sits Buenos Aires and Montevideo, was the place where much slave labour was smuggled in by British 'blackbirds'. Paraguay and Uruguay were part of 'the Argentine'.

There was also Brazil. Portugal was friendly to Britain, though neutral, as always. In South America the Brazilians waged a 'low intensity' border conflict against the Spanish that lasted throughout the war.

Administration

Spanish administration in the New World followed the pattern established by México City. Though laying claim to vast tracts of land, most provinces were really collections of a few distantly appointed towns and their outlying villages.

The colonial government was not only aristocratic, but fundamentally military in tone. Town councils, or *cabildos*, were responsible to district and provincial commissions, or *corregimientos*, which were in turn responsible to the *audiencia*,

or provincial assembly, originally the judiciary arm of government.

Over all were the *virreys* (viceroys) and their provincial deputies, the *capitanes generales*, of which Florida, Venezuela, Panama, and Cuba are the most important to this narrative. The Captain-General of Cuba was responsible for all of the Caribbean island possessions. Both he and his counterpart in Florida had a direct line to Madrid, though they were under the Viceroy of New Spain; Cuba was senior to Florida.

All viceroys were answerable to the *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies) at Madrid, but only at the end of their term of office, when they were subject to a *residencia*, or review

[Rule over the indigenous populations had been quickly codified by Madrid, which appointed a set of special officials to look after them. This prevented the Conquistadores from establishing their own feudal systems independent of the mother country.]

[The viceroys who served during the war were:

Nueva España

Juan Antonio Vizarrón y Eguiarreta, Arzobispo de México – to August 17th, 1740.

Pedro de Castro Figueroa y Salazar, Duque de la Conquista – to August 23rd, 1741.

Pedro de Cebrián y Agustín, Conde de Fuenclara – November 3rd, 1741 to July 9th, 1746.

Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, Conde de Revillagigedo (formerly Capitán General of Cuba) from 1746 on.

Nueva Granada

Sebastián de Eslava y Lazaga – throughout.]

Trade

Spain's trading system was monopolistic. All commercial enterprises were subject to royal approval and oversight by royal commissioners, and generally included the Crown as a partner, the King's share being termed the *quinto* or Fifth.

In theory, all trade originated in Spain, where goods produced in the Peninsula or purchased abroad were warehoused for distribution. Initially, Seville was the main emporium, but under the Bourbons Cadiz became the main distribution center. This was for military reasons, not economic ones: with the merchant ships forced to base at Cadiz, it was easier to requisition them for government service.

In the New World, goods were distributed at a handful of locations through a system of annual fairs. The vessels bringing the goods would then carry on to the ports where the silver and gold was accumulated, and ship it back to Spain.

Foreigners were not permitted to trade directly with New Spain. Those companies that had the patience to negotiate the Spanish bureaucracy (or deep enough pockets to 'expedite matters') and acquire contracts were expected to sell to the Spanish trading houses; the latter would then distribute the goods. This allowed two sets of tariffs or taxes to be collected, one from the foreign company, and one from the end user.

There was only one legal exception, the *Asiento*, or Contract. This was a coveted deal whereby a single foreign company was awarded the right to sell slaves directly to New Spain. The Spanish, like everyone else, employed slaves, but they did not 'harvest' them. The Spanish Crown still received its Fifth, of course, and the local governors gouged the *Asiento* traders with various taxes and fees.

By the 1730s this system of commerce was not merely outdated, it was broken. Thanks to the seemingly unending river of silver and gold produced by New Spain, for centuries the Spanish could buy anything they wanted. In consequence, the domestic economies of both Old and New Spain were neglected for far too long.

The logwood industry may serve as an example, especially since it was one of the bones of contention between Britain and Spain. The logwood tree grows in Central America, and was harvested not for its wood, but for a dye it produced, which had become a critical component of the woollen industry. The Spanish could have made a great deal of money selling the finished dye, or even the raw materials, to the English manufacturing towns – the trade was estimated at 7.5 million pesos annually. Instead, they allowed British buccaneers to move in and harvest the dye, then, since the British also practiced piracy on that coast, *spent* money trying to remove the camps by force. If they had succeeded, there were no plans to supplant the buccaneers with Spanish companies.

[7.5 million pesos compares favourably with the contents of a couple of galleons carrying specie, which might be all that the Crown's coffers received over a period of two or three years. Such a sum was sufficient to fund the Navy for perhaps three, four, or even five years.]

For the inhabitants of Old Spain things were not so bad, but for New Spain, forced to buy expensive finished goods with whatever monies they had been allowed to siphon from the bullion flow, it had become a question of survival. There were only two 'fixes' possible, both of them illegal: produce goods locally and sell or barter the surplus to neighbouring provinces without paying the royal Fifth, or buy off the black market, which was run primarily by the British and North Americans, seconded by the Dutch and French.

Since colonial development was further held back through government policy – Spanish economic theory held that colonies should not become self-sufficient since this would produce a centrifugal effect on the Empire – the black market economy quickly outstripped even the local economies (which themselves had an estimated value going as high as 60-70% of the bullion traffic). By the outbreak of the war this shadow economy had become essential to the survival of New Spain.

[In 1739 the estimated value of the illegal British trade (much of it really American) with Spain's colonies was £25 million. By way of comparison, a common (RN) sailor's annual wages might amount to £15. Thus, if evenly distributed these moneys could have provided a 'living wage' (of sorts) for over one and a half million people.]

Ironically, after the War of the Spanish Succession, Spanish trading practices began to change. The old, stilted, 'Habsburg' method of sucking treasure out of the hills to be spent by the grandees of Old Spain began to give way to the Frenchified notions of trading companies and factories – the *Real Compañía de Habana*, for example, was formed in 1740. Partly, this was to copy and counteract the British and Dutch, and partly to address the fact that the mines were beginning to play out. Unfortunately, Spain was now so far behind the curve that she could not hope to compete and so remained reliant on the goods of other nations.

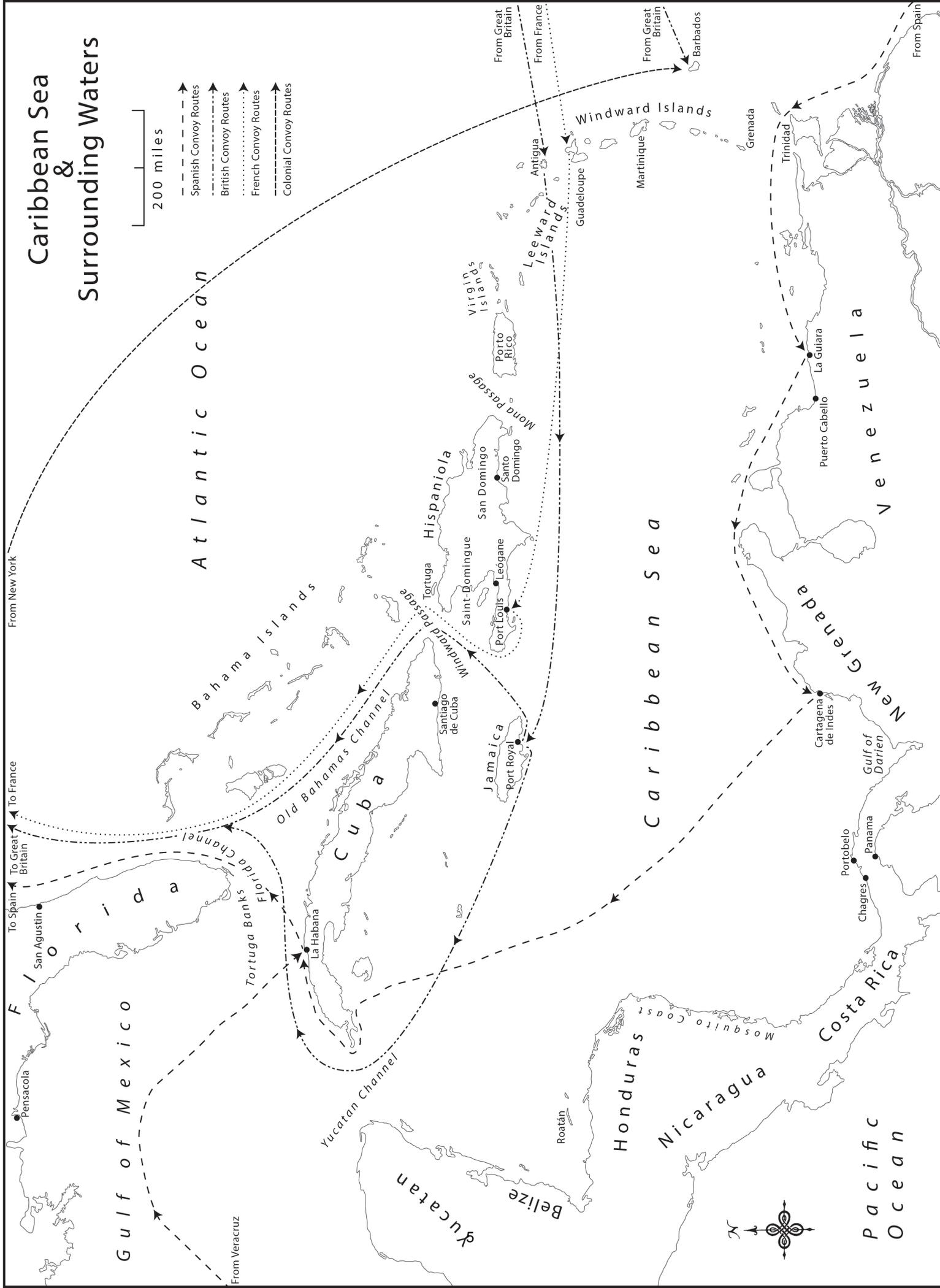
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The Spanish silver dollar was the primary currency of the New World. In a way, it still is – the American dollar is a lineal descendant. The dollar sign (\$) symbolises the Straits of Gibraltar; pieces-of-eight *are* dollars: 25¢ is two-bits of a piece of eight. Spanish silver was the medium of exchange of merchant houses throughout Europe. And, of course, it was used by the Spanish Crown to fund the Government and the Military.

Caribbean Sea & Surrounding Waters

200 miles

- Spanish Convoy Routes
- British Convoy Routes
- French Convoy Routes
- Colonial Convoy Routes



From New York

To Spain

To Great Britain

To France

From Veracruz

From Great Britain

From France

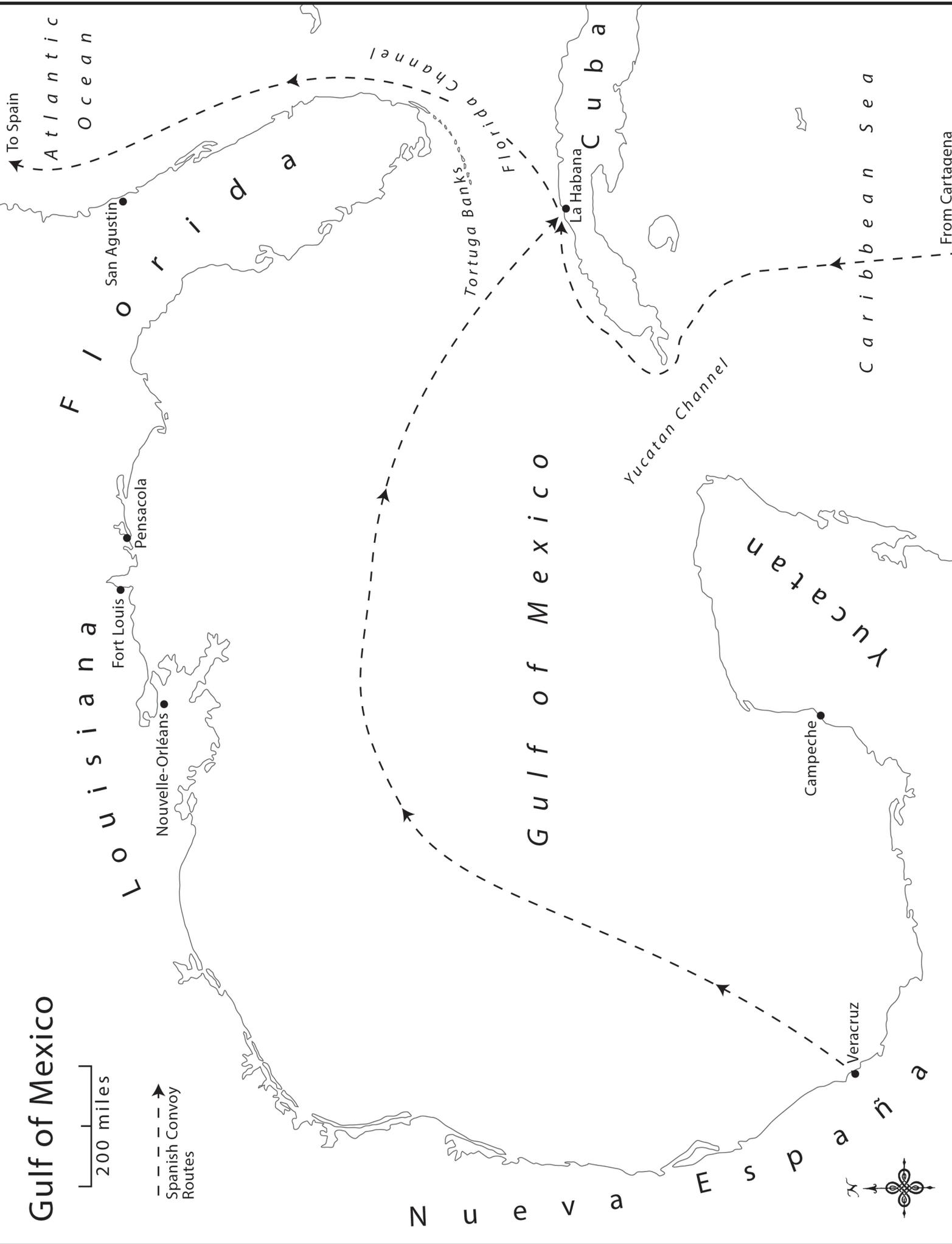
From Great Britain

From Spain

Gulf of Mexico

200 miles

Spanish Convoy Routes



Although the bullion trade was important enough to warrant State oversight, most of it was private, not public monies. So much money was involved that the King's Fifth, skimmed from only two convoys plus a handful of single bullion runs made during the war, was sufficient to fund the Spanish Navy for most of that same period.

[Over the course of the war about 60 million pesos were shipped. About 11 million were taken by the British.]

In theory, the bullion trade ran as follows. Treasure from Perú was shipped to Panama by sea, and packed by mule across the Darien Isthmus to Portobelo – or when the Chagres River was high, floated to Chagres. Once on the Atlantic coast, the cargo would be loaded onto galleons bound for La Habana. These would be joined by galleons bearing silver from Veracruz and gold from Cartagena de Indias.

In the opposite direction, silver from the Americas went to China by way of Manila, to buy tea, silk, and spices, which were then unloaded at Acapulco before being transhipped to the Caribbean.

Leaving La Habana in convoy, the galleons, known as the *flota*, or *flota de Indias*, would head for Cadiz, traveling northeast through the Florida Strait to the latitude of San Agustín or even Bermuda before catching the Trades home. At a safe distance, their escorts would usually return to La Habana, unless the cargo were critical or the escorts due for relief. Normally, the Azores were the *flota's* landfall, and from there the ships would sail up to Cadiz. In wartime, however, they often made detours and used other ports, as circumstances dictated.

The return journey to the Caribbean with finished goods and commodities was made by dropping down to the Cape Verde Islands to pick up the Trades, sailing west until striking the Brazilian coast, and heading northwest through the gap between Grenada and Tobago. This route was favoured by the Trade Winds and relatively free of inclement weather. A more dangerous route, used by naval squadrons and troop convoys, was to make landfall in the Leewards and head along the island chain to Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Cuba.

The *flota* was not a smoothly running operation. There might be months of delay before cargos were loaded; galleons were often lost because the ships were unable to depart the Caribbean before the hurricane season began. During the period under discussion, convoys from Portobelo and Cartagena were suspended, and there were only two *flotas*: one in 1739, travelling before war broke out, but still fair game in British eyes, and one in 1744. An attempted shipment in 1745 failed. Ships regularly made the run from Veracruz to La Habana; the difficulty was in getting to Spain.

To protect the galleons, there was the *Barlavento*, the Windward Fleet. At one time this had been a substantial element of the Spanish Navy. By the 1730s it had been reduced to two ships: the *Europa* (60) and the *Bizarra* (50). At the end of the war the formation was dissolved. Still, the *Barlavento* had its uses. As escorts, the ships, though carrying lighter guns than equivalent ships of the line, could drive off privateers. The *Barlavento* operated in the Gulf of México and Florida Strait, though sometimes they participated in the run to Spain; encounters with British ships of the line were rare, and in the Gulf of México nonexistent. The ships of the *Barlavento* frequently carried cargo as well.

[Archaisically, the entire Spanish treasure fleet was sometimes known as the Barlavento. The name was also applied to the Havana Squadron. The Havana Company (see below) was partly instituted as a replacement. During the war, the Barlavento's commander was Jefe d'Escuadra Benito Antonio Espinola. Espinola was frequently called upon to perform combat duties as well. In a word, he was ubiquitous.]

A vital element in the bullion trade were the *azogues*. These were special ships, usually fast, heavily-armed merchantmen, or even warships, that periodically made a dash across the Atlantic to Veracruz. They travelled singly or in pairs, and they frequently had a powerful escort. They carried quicksilver – mercury – which is used when mining silver and gold. '*Azogue*' literally means 'quicksilver' and the name was soon given to the ships carrying it (perhaps a sailors' pun referring to their speed and elusiveness?)

[When extracting gold and silver, mercury is used to form an amalgam with the precious metal. In the case of gold, which was mainly in the form of flakes panned from river beds, a sluice lined with mercury was used. The gold would bond with the mercury as it passed down the sluice and the unwanted dross would run off. The amalgam was then refined, the mercury turning to vapour and leaving behind the purified precious metal. In the case of silver, mercury replaced the usual smelting process. Since ancient times silver was extracted from lead ore by smelting. But by the mid 16th Century the Spanish had already mined out the known deposits of high grade ore in the Americas; to extract the metal from poorer grades, a mercury process was developed. Instead of a sluice, the crushed ore was mixed with mercury and either heated or spread out and allowed to 'ferment' in the sun until the mercury had bonded with the silver; after which the amalgam would be refined. Spain held a monopoly on all mercury production and distribution.]

The ports of Veracruz, La Habana, and Cartagena had regional importance as well. Veracruz supplied much of the region's food, and timber for the naval shipyard at La Habana. Apart from its shipyard, La Habana was the nexus of trade and, during wartime, the base of operations for the Spanish fleet operating in those waters.

Cartagena de Indias, though an unhealthy spot, was the premier port on the Spanish Main, as the Caribbean coast of South America was known, and its fame had made it the target of many attacks. At the time of the war it had a population of about 20,000.

It was also important as a staging post for ships headed to the ports of Central America. These would arrive at Cartagena, rest and refit in the excellent anchorage, deliver their goods at the ports of Darien, pick up any bullion there, and return to Cartagena once more, before sailing on to La Habana (and thence to Spain).

Cartagena's greatest weakness lay in its remote location; it was difficult to provision. Not much was grown locally, so supplies had to come from Spain or from México, both a long way off. In fact, many of the town's supplies, even during the war, came from, of all places, the British colony of Jamaica!

Portobelo was the site of the most important of the annual fairs, and the location to which the British Annual Ship (of which there will be more to say) had to report. But the fairs were lapsing as people more and more purchased from unofficial sources.

La Guaira was the port of Caracas, from where the Caracas Company shipped cocoa out and brought European goods in, at a stiff price; Puerto Cabello was the Company's primary careening station for its ships. The cocoa trade was one of the most lucrative, matching that of sugar, tobacco, and slaves.

The other ports of the Main were of minor importance, and usually very unhealthy spots.

The Real Compañía Guipuzcoana

The *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana*, or Caracas Company, was a Basque trading concern. Founded in 1728, its corporate mission statement was to break into and dominate the cocoa trade, hitherto a monopoly of the Dutch, who traded 'illegally' with the smallholders of Venezuela and the Guianas.

Uniquely, the Company was the only firm allowed to import and export goods directly to and from Venezuela. Great profits were

made because the Basque Country did not fall under Madrid's customs regime. Other nations could also trade with the Caribbean at a reduced cost by using the Company as middleman. They virtually owned the ports of La Guaira (the port of Caracas) and Porto Cabello, monopolising domestic trade as well as imports and exports. They controlled the local government as well.

Rule by the Company was not popular. As always, the little man was squeezed out by the big plantations, and prices on every sort of product were fixed to suit the directors of the company. The British hoped to capitalise on this discontent when, as will be seen, they made attempts against the ports. 1749 saw the largest of several uprisings against company rule.

Like the other big trading companies, the *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana* had a paramilitary component, averaging three to five commissioned 50-gunners in any given year, plus several frigates, and a few supporting sloops. All were capable of carrying cargo. The frigates and sloops were used for fast runs and the 50s sailed in convoy. The Company also ran its own coast guard.

Company sailors were extremely experienced and very tough customers. Ships of the Company returning to Venezuela from Europe habitually attacked the ships of other nations – prizes defrayed transit costs. As the war dragged on the Company was also called upon to provide escorts for royal convoys, to the detriment of its bottom line.

The Real Compañía de Comercio de la Habana

The *Real Compañía Habana*, or Havana Company, is not as famous as the Caracas Company, but it played a significant role in the war. It was founded on December 18th, 1740, by a consortium of Cadiz-based traders, government officials in Cuba, (including the *capitán general*) and the Crown, which received a high percentage of the profits.

The Company was given the monopoly over tobacco, sugar, and nuts exported from Cuba, and over all imports to the island. As an additional duty, it was required to provide coast guard vessels for the defence of the islands and Florida, either by purchase or lease, or by building them at the *El Arsenal* shipyards at La Habana, which were placed under the Company's control.

During the war the Company built a number of powerful warships and ran a host of privateers, whose operations impacted the British far more than the Spanish battle fleet. The privateers also assisted the Company in various smuggling operations, with the connivance of the *capitán general*.

Ultimately, the Company fell victim to the usual faults of such monopolistic concerns. When the British captured La Habana in 1762, they closed it down.

Spain's New World Defences

Lagging in population behind France and Britain, yet owning a vast section of the globe, Spain put her trust in fortifications, privateers, and a large militia. The Army was reserved for use in the dynastic struggles of Europe. The Navy... well, the *Armada* was the subject of a policy debate.

Spanish colonial fortifications were second-rate when compared with those in Europe, but could still be formidable obstacles, especially in a region where operations were limited by the climate to a few months each year.

La Habana, Veracruz, and Cartagena de Indias boasted the strongest works. When combined with their locales, the first two daunted the British, who decided there were easier targets. The attack on Cartagena, the 'easiest' of the three, proved a costly

mistake.

Most of the smaller ports had only nominal defences, but many also enjoyed advantages in terrain or climate that served just as well as stonework. Portobelo's defences, for example, though the port was the transshipment point for South American silver, were utterly decrepit, and Vice Admiral Vernon would score the first and most notable British success of the war by reducing them. But he had no interest in remaining in possession; the climate on the Darien Coast was deadly.

Manpower for the Spanish turned out to be 'just enough', but no more. Ceremonial formations, or the odd squadron of cavalry and battery of guns, protected major centres such as Veracruz and México City. Veracruz had a battalion of marines – a new concept inspired by the Bourbon régime. Cuba and New Granada each had a nine-company *Regimiento Fijo* (static regiment), named *Habana* and *Cartagena*, respectively. Such units were chronically understrength.

Apart from 'palace guard' units, there were only two regiments of the line based in the New World: the *Regimiento de Florida*, and the *Regimiento de America*. The latter was stationed in Perú, mainly at Lima and Callao. The former is harder to place but most of the sub units seem to have been stationed at San Agustín and Pensacola. On paper, both regiments had four battalions instead of the usual two-plus-depôt battalion. These units were composed of men who had accepted long contracts in the Tropics in exchange for land upon discharge, and therefore were better acclimatised than any potential invaders.

[There are also accounts of a Regimiento Fijo de Florida but it is unclear whether the line regiment is meant, in which case there would only be a single regular New World infantry regiment – America – or whether this was a separate unit.]

Still, manpower was short enough that when it became clear Britain intended to capture one of the Caribbean ports, a number of regular battalions were hastily shipped from Spain, despite the expectation of high attrition from disease (and desertion; by war's end the islands and coastal regions were crawling with runaways and bandit gangs).

Like the other colonial powers, the Spanish 'whites' often fobbed off militia service onto the men of colour, but in Florida, the slave population had been freed as a reward for voluntarily assisting in the defence of the colony in the 1720s. The men were required to take military service for four years (and to become Catholic).

Ordinarily, Spain kept no cruising squadron in the Caribbean. As will be described, there was an argument between the Colonial and War Ministries over the proper use of the fleet. Eventually, under the threat of the British amphibious 'descent', a compromise was worked out and several warships were dispatched to the Caribbean. Though a few ships were rotated through, most remained for the duration of the conflict.

Typically, the Havana Squadron fielded a force of 12-15 ships of the line, supported by several frigates and many Havana Company privateers. True, most of the men-o-war remained at La Habana most of the time, in need of repairs and more crewmen. Their main role was to protect the *flota* and the port. A strong detachment would be sent to the Tortuga Banks, west of the Florida Keys, to rendezvous with ships coming from Veracruz and escort them to Cuba. Very rarely did they do anything else. This was not entirely due to maintenance problems; Cuba fell under the Viceroyalty of Nueva España, which meant the traffic between La Habana and Veracruz took priority over the shipping concerns of Nueva Granada.

However, the British could not ignore the Havana Squadron. It could sortie when a British convoy came by, forcing the the latter to habitually use other, less salubrious routes, such as the Windward Passage at the eastern end of Cuba. There was always the fear that the Spanish might 'descend' on Jamaica, too – the government at La Habana was, after all, responsible for the whole of the West Indies.

Santiago de Cuba, Cartagena de Indias, and La Guaira were the other naval bases of note. Veracruz usually kept some ships on hand, but it was so far away the British had no hope of attacking it.

Santiago, established when La Habana was just a careening station, was a coast guard and privateer base which threatened ships heading through the Windward Passage; on the east of that strait lay an number of French privateer bases.

Early in the war, Cartagena hosted the Havana Squadron, and until the defeat of the British there in 1741, kept about six major vessels for its defence; but they were all sunk during that campaign. The port was not really suitable for hosting a naval squadron. It was on the strategic periphery, very difficult to supply, and useless for maintenance.

La Guaira, as mentioned above, was the Caracas Company's main port and frequently had coast guard vessels in residence, to say nothing of the larger ships; royal naval vessels, however, did not base there.

Much has been written of the difficulties suffered by the British commanders (as the reader will discover), but the Spanish had their own problems. The jurisdictions of the viceroalties overlapped in Central America. The *capitánes generales* could applied to by Madrid directly, bypassing the viceroys. The naval commanders had 'issues' with their army counterparts. Military rank often counted for less than aristocratic rank. That said, and granted the lack of materials to work with, the Spanish seem generally to have performed better than their enemy.

The *Guardacostas*

'Badges? We don't need no stinkin' badges!'

As the name strongly suggests, the *guardacostas* were the Spanish Coast Guard, though the word can also simply mean a 'bodyguard'. It is a name which conjures up a picture of dedicated professionals hunting down smugglers and bringing illegal immigrants to book. It certainly does not jibe with the picture of *Capitán* Julio León Fandiño, of the *La Isabela*, ruthlessly slicing off Captain Robert Jenkins' ear with the callous statement that the King of England could expect the same treatment if Fandiño caught him in those waters. However, if one is told that the *guardacostas* worked under contract... well, then.

There were two versions of the *guardacosta*, the generic kind, and the *guardacostas real* (royal). The latter were a new creation, part of the Bourbon régime's attempts to reestablish control over the institution. Occasionally, the sources note that such and such a ship was a 'royal' one, but the number of such vessels, especially in the West Indies, was few.

The generic *guardacostas* were not a branch of the Navy, nor a separate service. They were a motley collection of civilians, local militia, and regular military personnel assembled by the local authorities to meet threats against Spanish sovereignty. In other words, a floating posse.

In addition to their policing role they provided a first line of defence against invasion and coastal raids. Primarily, at least in the Caribbean, they were expected to chase pirates and inspect merchant vessels for contraband. In wartime, they became *de*

facto privateers.

The *guardacostas* based out of Nicaragua harassed the British in the Honduras. Those of the Gulf of México protected Vera Cruz and Campeche. Eastward, the *guardacostas* of the Venezuelan coast were run by the Caracas Company. Initially organised to protect the company's bases, they later expanded their activities to include patrols against Antigua, out of which the Royal Navy had staged its own raids against the Company.

Naturally, the skill and dedication to duty of the *guardacostas* varied. Though they served the State, salaries did not fall within the royal budget. Therefore, colonial governors were forced to issue licences to private individuals. The question then arose, how were the crews to be paid?

If the Crown lacked the money to establish a coast guard department it could hardly be expected to come up with the funds to pay a pack of greedy contractors; wages were paid out of the sale of impounded contraband. The more contraband collected, the more the contractors were paid. Thus the defenders of law and order became privateers, and in some cases, pirates.

The colonial governors could take a cut to fund other aspects of local government or line their own pockets, so they were not inclined to examine the conduct of their hirelings too closely. As already noted, the *capitán general* of Cuba, though an otherwise excellent officer who would eventually become *virrey* of Nueva España, was not above using his position as one of the directors of the Havana Company to make a profit on its privateering enterprises (but remember, the King would also be granted his Fifth, making the business 'legal', regardless of whose merchant ship was pillaged).

Ships employed by the *guardacostas* ranged from galleys to sloops, brigs, and schooners. Occasionally, ships are described as *frigatas*, but these might not be frigates, since the term referred more to scale than class. San Agustín had a squadron of six half-galleys (galliot), suitable for working the coastal waterways of the Eastern Seaboard.

Ultimately, the *guardacostas* were unwilling to abandon the bad habits they picked up during wartime. By the mid-19th Century they had become more trouble than they were worth.

FRANCE

France, the most populous and most centralised kingdom in Europe, was a juggernaut in every sphere of endeavour. But less so in the mid-Eighteenth Century than under the Sun King. The current monarch, Louis XV, came to the throne at age five. He was a great-grandson of Louis XIV, but also his immediate heir, all the others having died. Acting as Regent was the Duc d'Orléans.

Because the duke loved power rather than war, and because Louis was a sickly child whose potential replacements were all contentious choices, throughout the period of the 1720s and 1730s France embarked on a policy of diplomacy with her neighbours. The policy of naked force indulged in by the Sun King had crippled France – though the threat of using such force again was often an effective ploy.

[Orléans had many faults, but he was faithful to the dynasty and never seriously thought of seizing the throne. He considered himself a steward, and a rather lazy one at that.]

The spider at the center of the web was Cardinal Fleury. He was Louis XV's 'first' Minister, and had been his tutor; the King never disregarded his advice. Fleury's opinion was that France was not ready for war, but if there had to be a war, let it be in Germany. This led to a rather odd circumstance: for much of the 1720s and

1730s Britain and France were allies, formally for a very brief time, otherwise *de facto*. Britain was the one power capable of seriously upsetting the appellation and had to be conciliated. Fortunately, Robert Walpole, King George II's First Minister for much of the same period, held similar opinions about the French.

[*Fleury was often called the 'French Walpole'; Walpole was often called the 'French Poodle', or alternatively, the 'Spanish Spaniel'.]*

Unfortunately, French policy was greatly influenced by the wishes of the Spanish monarchy, thanks to a familial relationship – Felipe V was King Louis' uncle. This would eventually involve France in an Italian quagmire; fortunately for her enemies, she never did work in concert with Spain in the West Indies.

France still might have remained at peace with Britain, but for the fact that Cardinal Fleury died in 1743 and his English counterpart, Robert Walpole, was driven from office in 1742. In both countries, the Hawks took full control. Fleury's replacement was Cardinal Tencin, who favoured direct action against England – he was an advocate of the dispossessed House of Stuart.

Tencin at least had some interest in a maritime strategy, if only to aid in the restoration of the Stuarts, but he lacked the stature of Fleury, and had to compete for the King's ear with the Marquis d'Argenson and the Belle-Isle brothers, whose *bête noire* was the Habsburg dynasty. Since the young King was keen to win his spurs, Germany and the Low Countries remained central to French war aims.

In any case, the French had no means of supporting a fleet in being in the Caribbean; they were limited to conducting periodic sweeps from across the Atlantic. With a smaller navy than Britain's, French maritime policy was almost wholly centred on convoy protection. When it became necessary to go on the offensive, a *guerre de course* (commerce raiding) strategy prevailed. In this, their methodology was very much like that of the Spanish.

[*The Spanish lacked the resources to host an ally's vessels. They did requisition a few French frigates.*]

By the time conflict between France and Britain did break out, at the start of 1744, the war in the Caribbean was at a low ebb. Not until 1746 did a French squadron establish itself at Martinique – mainly because British depredations had become so severe that something had to be done.

Earlier, there had been the odd clash between firebrand captains trying to escalate matters, but the only serious operation took place in 1741, when a powerful squadron under *Vice-Amiral le Marquis d'Antin* appeared in the region in an attempt to deter the British from capturing Spanish ports – an act that France had said would bring instant reprisals. War might have broken out then, but instead the action only serves as an illustration of France's difficulties. The force was battered by a severe hurricane on the passage over, picked up Yellow Fever at Martinique, and had to limp home with skeleton crews almost as soon as it arrived.

[*French Vice-Admirals did not normally take to the sea. The post – there were two of them – was a political one. The operation must have been considered of extreme importance for d'Antin to get his feet wet.*]

The French Colonies

The model and value of France's colonies lay somewhere between the Spanish and British versions. They were important, being a source of revenue and luxury items, but not so important for prestige, nor as vital. Partly, this was because, though most had been founded as commercial enterprises, they were now controlled by the Crown through the *Ministère de la Marine*, which handled questions of overseas trade as well as naval matters, and which always played second fiddle to the Army.

Although France ruled the lands drained by the St. Lawrence, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers, the French presence there was upheld mainly by fur traders and missionaries, supported by isolated chains of forts; most French settlements were centred in Lower Canada (Quebec). Even Nouvelle Orléans was only a village.

Port Royal (1605) in Acadia (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) and Quebec City (1608) also began as bases for trading companies. Only in 1665, when Jean Talon became the Intendant for Canada, was a policy of settlement for settlement's sake instituted. Talon was an enthusiast, but generally speaking it is difficult to prise a Frenchman off his native soil. Many of the 'volunteer' Canadian colonists were coerced, or were members of persecuted minorities. Ironically, Acadia, the one region that really embraced the idea of settlement, was traded to Britain in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713).

Louisiana, though deriving access to the world at large through the Gulf of México, may be considered part of the North American network. Seaborne trade through the Gulf was sketchy at best. At the outbreak of war, before their own involvement, the French encouraged the Spanish with talk of establishing a naval base and dockyards at Nouvelle Orléans, but nothing came of the idea.

The French West Indies developed in tandem with New France. The first French colony in the region was Guiana (1624), followed by St. Kitts (1625), which was shared with England until ceded to her in 1713.

French Guiana lies on the coast of South America, bordering Brazil. The colony was built by fits and starts. Christopher Columbus called this stretch of coastline the 'land of pariahs' – the famous Devil's Island penal colony lies just off the coast. The first settlement did not survive the Portuguese and the natives. Later attempts did not survive the climate. The Dutch took part of the colony. Only in 1763 was French rule truly established, but in the 1730s a small fortified settlement hung on at Cayenne.

The islands were a different matter. All were lucrative sugar colonies, run by slave labour.

In 1635, the *Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique* was formed. A scheme of Finance Minister Fouquet, begun at the instigation of Cardinal Richelieu, this was a restructured *Compagnie de Saint-Christophe*, the entity which had founded St. Kitts. Its mandate was to develop colonies in the Lesser Antilles (the island chain east of Hispaniola) and to convert the locals to Catholicism. Since most of the indigenous peoples of the islands were by now dead or in exile, it was the colonising and trading aspect of the Company that became important.

By 1650 the Company had established colonies at Guadeloupe and Martinique (1635), St. Lucia (1643), St. Martin and St. Barts (1648), and Grenada and St. Croix (1650). Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, was not interested in supporting the Company and the islands were sold off in 1651. Martinique, Grenada, and St. Lucia were bought for a song by the du Parquet family, who were intimately involved in the original foundations. The Sieur d'Hoel purchased Guadeloupe and a number of smaller islands, and the rest went to the Knights of Malta. However, in 1664, the Knights sold their holdings (St. Kitts, St. Croix, St. Barts, and St. Martin) to a new French concern, the *Compagnie des Indes occidentales*.

This new company was a project of Finance Minister Colbert. It only lasted ten years. Established in hopes of promoting settlement in Canada using the profits of the Antilles trade, its impact in this regard was small – for one thing, Colbert tried to establish tobacco plantations in competition with the previously

established sugar plantations, leading to much conflict of interest – but it succeeded in its secondary purpose, which was to effectively challenge Dutch economic hegemony in the West Indies. As part of the revocation of the company's charter, the Crown took possession of the French Antilles.

Unfortunately, the Company retained a monopoly of the sugar trade, leading to excessively high resale prices that crippled operations. This enabled the British to boost their own sugar trade by offering a cheaper alternative; in effect the French swapped Dutch competition for English competition.

Prior to direct rule, then, the French West Indies colonies were primarily for-profit enterprises, in some cases established or maintained by individuals.

An exception was the jewel in the crown, Saint-Domingue (Haiti), founded in 1664. Saint-Domingue began as a colony of buccaneers. The island of Hispaniola was owned by Spain, and had been one of her earliest colonies in the region, but the mainland provinces had long overshadowed it. Spain gave up the western third of the island to France in 1697 (Treaty of Ryswick). At least... it was not officially ceded, but it was left out of the treaty and the Spanish never tried to take the land back.

[In the war that ended in 1697 the Spanish and French had fought against one another – since Spain in those days was ruled by the Habsburgs. In fact, the French successfully captured Cartagena de Indias.]

The establishment of Saint-Domingue as a viable colony was thanks mainly to the efforts of Bertrand d'Ogeron, a buccaneer from Tortuga, where pirates had been settled for a long time. He promoted tobacco growing and ranching on 'le Grand Terre' (mainland Haiti). Colonists from the French Antilles were welcomed. Before the end of the 17th Century Saint-Domingue was thriving, although a collapse of the tobacco industry had led to the introduction of sugarcane. Ultimately, Saint-Domingue would supply 40% of all the sugar consumed in Europe, and 60% of the coffee drunk – before the slave revolt of Napoleon's day ended the happy dream.

Trade

It can be seen at once that there were two concentrations of French trade: Hispaniola, and the Windward Islands. Ships from France made landfall at Guadeloupe or Desirade (an outlying island of the same group) and proceeded to Martinique. Trade for the Windwards dispersed from there. Trade for Hispaniola continued to that island, south of the island chain if circumstances permitted. The northern edge was not as hospitable. Homebound, the French shared the same routes as the British – through the Windward Passage and north to Florida to catch the westerly Trades, or round the western end of Cuba (Cape Antonio) to catch the Gulf Stream. Passage north of the Bahamas risked attack from privateers and the danger of reefs on a lee shore.

The principle port in the Windwards was Martinique, which has several useful harbours, some on the lee shore and others to windward; the 'safe haven' was the Baye et Cul de Sac Royal, riddled with shoals & covered by Fort Royal (Fort-de-France). Guadeloupe, to the north of Martinique, is actually the western half of a pair of islands (Guadeloupe and Grande Terre), separated by a very narrow channel, almost a canal. The pair create two bays, north and south, joined by the channel. The south bay is part of a larger basin, surrounded by other islands in the group. Guadeloupe itself was the most developed, and well fortified. At the opposite end of the Windward Islands is Grenada, which was a privateer haven but otherwise not as valuable; its primary port, at its southwestern end, was another Fort Royal.

On Hispaniola, there were Port Louis (Saint Louis du Sud), Leogane, and Petit Goave. All three were on the southern arm of

Haiti, Port Louis on the outer, south coast, and the other two within the Bight of Leogane. Petit Goave was the first capital, but yielded to Leogane, a <slightly> better site. The Bight was tricky to navigate, which made those ports fairly safe. Port Louis was fortified. On the north coast of the island lay Cap François, now Cap-Haitien, the usual landfall for convoys making a direct journey to Hispaniola by passing north of the Leewards.

In time of war, ships outbound from France would collect at La Rochelle or Ile d'Aix. A naval squadron had the job of escorting the convoy out of the danger zone. In wartime the merchants did not sail unprotected from then on. Typically, six ships were assigned as escorts (this was one reason the battle fleets were not very active; the escorts were fully manned, leaving other ships with scratch crews). Enroute the convoy would split up, with a portion heading to Martinique and the rest to Cap François. The escorts usually remained on station until it was time for the merchants to go home.

The Crown charged 8% for this escort service, and since the money was necessary for the maintenance of the war, the escort captains were given strict instructions not to go chasing after prizes but to ward their charges closely at all times. In the West Indies the escort was usually strong enough to deter the British, and even an aggressive attacker could be kept at bay. It helped that the Trades blew continuously from the east, making enemy sorties from Jamaica very difficult. But leaving France in the first place was always a toss of the dice, and it became even more dangerous when the British Western Squadron was set up mid-war.

There were heavy penalties for infringing any of the rules laid down for convoys:

- a) All ships to be at the rendezvous on time and not sail independently – punishment 500 livres fine and reduction of captain or master to common sailor to serve aboard a King's ship for one year;
- b) No ship to leave a convoy – punishment 1,000 livres fine or one year's imprisonment, and a lifetime ban on commanding any ship;
- c) Flouting regulations at an Owner's demand – punishment 10,000 livres fine for the Owner.
- d) Escort commanders not to quit the convoy for any reason whatsoever – minimum punishment for so doing: to be broken, or a heavier punishment if warranted.

On top of this, the insurance premiums for ships traveling unescorted were 30%-35%. Paying the 8% was cheaper.

Administration and Defence

By the start of the 18th Century, the Crown had direct control over all the French colonies. All, even large ones like Canada, were under the jurisdiction of the *Ministère de la Marine*, whose Secretary appointed naval personnel to run them. In 1714 the French West Indies were divided into two zones: the Windwards and Hispaniola (Guiana belonged to the Windwards zone).

All power was vested in the Royal Governor, a naval official. Local merchants and planters could petition him, or their Metropolitan colleagues could bombard the Ministry with notes, but Commerce lacked the clout wielded by her British cousin.

Ordinary colonists were required to provide for state services, such as militia duty, or labour, at their own expense. By this time, the population of the Antilles consisted of a handful of rich, white planters, and thousands of slaves. Most of the poorer colonists from earlier days had left, some for Hispaniola. This meant that state services were often carried out by slave labour.

But there was a third social group who could perform them: the 'free men of colour', some of whom had slaves of their own and might be quite well off (though socially beneath the white aristocracy). Some creoles even managed to obtain classification as 'French'.

Though the Navy administered, it did not establish any naval bases until after France and Britain were at war. The fleet was based in Europe, where the action was. Defence of the colonies was left to privateers and local militia. The highest concentration of privateers based themselves in Hispaniola, but Martinique had its fair share, perhaps as many as three dozen ships; Grenada was also a key spot, threatening the gap between that island and Trinidad.

Militia units were, as always, poorly trained and equipped, and woefully understrength, except in Saint-Domingue. To solve this problem, *Compagnies franches de la Marine* accumulated on some of the more important islands. There was also the *Régiment Suisse de Karrer*, permanently seconded to naval service.

The first of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine* was raised in 1622, on the orders of Cardinal Richelieu, to serve as marines aboard ship. Over time the units evolved, so that by the 1730s there were two organisations, one of units serving exclusively aboard ship (or as landing parties) and one of units acting as naval garrisons. The sea-service role was abandoned in 1761.

The organisation of the units was not standardised until 1757 – '*compagnies franches*' means 'free companies', not 'French companies'. The bulk of the men were based in North America, where they played a major role in the conflicts of that region until the fall of New France, but several units were also deployed in the Caribbean. Overall, numbers fluctuated between 3-10,000 men.

Régiment Karrer was raised in Alsace, in 1719, and consisted of four companies of 200 men each. It was initially mustered to provide a garrison for Louisiana. However, the regiment was not sent overseas until 1731, when, in the pay of the *Compagnie des Indes*, elements briefly served as island garrisons. In 1732 the regiment came under the authority of the Navy, to be used as port garrisons in various parts of the world and as marines on board ship.

During the war, companies of these naval troops were distributed as follows:

- At Cayenne, to up 500 men of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine de la Guyane*.
- On Martinique, 500 men of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine* plus 200 men of *Karrer's*. In 1747 a *Compagnie de cannoniers-bombardiers* was also sent out.
- On Saint-Domingue, at least 800 men (16 cys) of the *Compagnies franches de la Marine* plus 400 of *Karrer's*. And, in 1746, a *Compagnie de cannoniers-bombardiers*. Saint-Domingue also boasted a very large militia force.

The first deployment of the *compagnies franches* to Martinique took place in 1674, to counter a Dutch attack. Those at Cayenne came in 1677. Once they had been sent the units did not leave.

The *Compagnies franches de la Marine de la Saint-Domingue* began with two companies, sent in 1690. Between 1732 and 1750 the units increased from 16 companies to 34 companies.

In general terms these units were armed and equipped like the units of Metropolitan France. As a concession to the heat, linen rather than wool was worn and waistcoats were not required. This put them in advance of their British adversaries (who would probably have worn leather stocks around their necks if those had been in vogue).

The *Bombardiers de la Marine* were specialists who operated the mortars carried on board bomb-ships. The first such company appeared in 1682. By the 1730s each naval base (Toulon, Rochefort, Brest) had a company. Acadia received the first overseas company (1702), then Louisiana (1740). Being specialists, individuals were often sent on special assignments.

THE BRITISH

Bob's Your Uncle

Britain was emphatically *not* an Absolute Monarchy. Kings who tried that on had a way of losing their thrones, even their heads. The British were indeed a curious case, mixing oligarchic and monarchical principles of government.

Their current king, George II, was a foreigner, beholden to Parliament for his throne, though a petty tyrant in his Continental possession, the Electorate of Hanover. But, he was more than a figurehead, possessing executive power – and especially, the right of vetting appointments to the various military and governmental offices. However, Parliament had the power to adjust his salary, and could often obstruct his desires.

The British Parliament was bicameral, the House of Commons being the legislative body, the King the executive, and the House of Lords a kind of senate, both an advisory body and a reward (or sanctuary) for members of the Commons, as well as the old aristocratic families.

At this period, Parliament was not formally divided into parties, though that word was already in use. Instead, there were ideological splits, the most well defined being the Whigs and Tories. This division was of long standing, having come about through the overthrow of the Stuart dynasty in the previous century; even now, Tories were sometimes branded as Jacobites – followers of James Stuart – though this was true of only a portion of them.

'Clan' connections counted far more than ideology. For example, there had been the Duke of Argyle and his brother, Islay, and their hangers on. There was Robert and Horace Walpole. There were their rivals, the Pelhams. High offices rotated among a select group of families.

Occasionally an ambitious man would break out, drawing a clique to him; occasionally a bipartisan group would coalesce around an important issue. Normally, however, lesser men voted in line with their leaders' inclinations. To do otherwise was to risk ostracism and a loss of perquisites.

The Administration was composed of men whom King George approved of, and in the Commons they were headed by Robert Walpole, who was the *de facto* Prime Minister, though that term was only just coming into use. His proper title was First Lord of the Treasury. Controlling of the purse strings allowed him access to the King and the means of rewarding supporters.

In simplified terms, the Whigs supported the Administration while the Tories comprised the Opposition. But of course, in politics, nothing is simple.

The Whigs had been in power since the end of the War of the Spanish Succession and the botched Jacobite Rising of 1715. By the 1730s, there was a glaring irony to their party ideology. Traditionally, the Whigs represented the mercantile, urban, 'progressive' interests – in short, The Moneybags. But, after several decades entrenched in power they had come to represent the Establishment. Stability was now their mantra, and scrambling for cabinet posts their main hobby. They were only a 'party' in the loosest sense.

Conservative Whigs embraced 'Country Principles' – in oversimplified terms, they opposed Industrialisation – and leagued with likeminded Tories, while at the other end of the spectrum, a group of radical Whigs, calling themselves the Patriots, cried that Walpole's clique in the Administration had 'abandoned the party's roots' and leagued themselves with the rising class of Tory monied interests.

The Tories originally represented the agricultural, rural, 'conservative' interests, including families who supported the former dynasty of the Stuarts. Walpole could gain advantage in debate by painting all the Tories as Jacobites, but in fact the 'party' now had a strong mercantile wing; it was they and the Patriot Whigs, forming the Opposition to Walpole's Administration, who would push for war. Walpole could not act decisively against this bloc, because he needed their support, particularly for that perennial bane of British prime ministers, the Irish Question.

[There is another way of looking at the same issues as they pertain to the war with Spain. Whig merchants tended to be those who had developed trade ties with Old Spain (because when they were building their family dynasties there was no means of trading with the New World directly). A war, closing Spanish ports, would cripple their businesses. The new Tory merchants, unable to break in to the Whigs' Old Spain monopoly, had turned to the New World, investing in colonies and various quasi-legal shipping concerns – smugglers to the Spanish, and Interlopers to the Whigs.]

A similar political progression had been going on in North America. Initially, it was the Whigs, fleeing Tory oppression under the Stuarts, who dominated the colonial scene. Now, the Tories were growing in influence as they searched for opportunities for advancement denied them in England.

Though the King's favour was essential to the enduring rule of the Whigs, corruption was the glue that cemented it. Robert 'Bob's your uncle' Walpole was the uncrowned king of patronage, distributing political favours wholesale, gerrymandering elections, and packing parliaments to ensure the Government was run as he desired.

Now, it must be stated, that this was not entirely for his own benefit. He served the King, whose favour he never lost, and he served his Country, which proved more fickle; controlling votes through bribery simply made it easier for him to govern 'in the best interests of the State'. In any case, clan loyalty trumped; he would not have remained leader of his party long if he had not rewarded his followers.

Looking back, the consensus of opinion seems to favour Walpole on state policies, but with a caveat that his systematising of corruption very nearly ruined his legacy – and the Government. Walpole used corruption as a tool. His successors practiced it as a habit, without a larger aim in view.

[He also had the nasty habit of brooking no rival talent in his own party, though he often seems to have disposed of opponents judiciously. For example, he sent one man more able than himself out as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland – an exile to the hinterland – but the man was suited for the post, and did a good job.]

Walpole's foreign policy can be summed up by the phrase 'peaceful coexistence'. After the War of the Spanish Succession, Britain needed a period of recovery. There was rapprochement with France and Spain. This grated on many, including the King.

The War of the Polish Succession (1733-1735) brought isolation when a policy of strict neutrality backfired. Britain prevented France from sending sufficient aid to her Polish proxy and refrained from assisting the other side, alienating everyone involved. The French in consequence turned to their natural ally, Spain, engaging in what was known as the First Family Compact.

Walpole's position began to weaken, both from this policy failure and from various domestic issues. Simultaneously, the Opposition, particularly the Whig Patriot faction, became more strident about prying open the Spanish oversea markets, and angry at the concomitant Spanish 'depredations' against British shipping. The Opposition wanted war and they would get it.

The British Colonies

The list of British colonies is a long one. British colonisation of the Americas began at Jamestown in 1607, followed by St. Georges, Bermuda, in 1612. St. Georges holds the claim to be the oldest English town in the Americas. Both were started by the Virginia Company – Bermuda accidentally when a party of colonists went off course. The newest American colony at the time of the war was Georgia, founded in 1732.

Most of the British Caribbean islands were sparsely settled by Europeans and given over to the usual plantation system. Some of the smaller ones merely served as wood and watering stations.

St. Kitts (shared with the French for much of its early history) was one of the more important islands, along with its neighbour, Nevis (1628). The latter was one of the wealthiest islands, producing high quality sugar; it was also the center of the Windward Islands slave trade. Nevis had been the capital of the Windwards until 1698. Antigua (1632), another such island, took the title because it was more suitable as a naval base and functioned as a 'gateway' to the Caribbean.

Nearby Barbuda (1632) was what was called a proprietary colony. It was owned by the Codringtons. Also the driving force behind Antigua's economic development, the Codringtons used Barbuda as a slave nursery. The island was heavily fortified.

Barbados (1627) was another important sugar island. Originally a proprietary colony, its secondary value lay in the fact that it was a common landfall for ships traversing the Atlantic. However it lacked sheltered harbours and never developed into a major military base.

Other British islands included Montserrat (1632), a destination for Transportees, Anguilla (1650), sparsely populated, the British Virgin Islands, more of a strategic asset than an economic one, the Caymans (1670), which were part of the Colony of Jamaica, and the Bahamas (1647), originally owned by the proprietors of the Carolinas and a haven for pirates until established as a crown colony in 1718.

[At this time Grenada was under French rule, while Trinidad and Tobago were Spanish.]

Mention must also be made of the Honduras. As noted earlier, Spain exercised only a loose control over that region. The natives and climate were both hostile to them. Other nations visiting the coast could at least rely on friendly Indians. The Mosquito Coast served mainly as a wood-and-watering station, but Belize was also important as a source of logwood, and was settled by a mix of Scottish entrepreneurs and buccaneers.

Logwood, as previously mentioned, is a species of tree harvested as a source of cloth dyes, and was therefore extremely important to Britain's textile industry. The Spanish tried several times to drive the British out of Belize, without success. Eventually, the Spanish would agree to Britain's presence in exchange for her removing the pirates who also infested that coast.

Jamaica, taken from Spain in 1655, was Britain's most important Caribbean colony. Like the others, its primary export was sugar. Its size and central location made it a suitable base for piracy. Port Royal (Kingston) became the primary British naval base in the West Indies; Antigua did not have its own squadron until the war was well underway.

Considering only the West Indies, the principal ports were Port Royal, Jamaica, then, English Harbour on the south side of, and St. John's Town on the north side of, Antigua. Then, Bridge Town (a.k.a. Carlisle Harbour) on Barbados.

On the North American coast (ignoring New England and Virginia) were several valuable harbours. Savannah harbour was not developed until 1744, but there was Port Royal in the Carolinas – the best harbour on that coast – Charles Town (Charleston), and the delta of the Altamaha River, specifically, St. Simons Sound, where Brunswick, Georgia, now stands. All these harbours were coveted by Spain.

Administration and Defence

Over the years, three kinds of colony had emerged: Crown, Charter, and Proprietary. Crown colonies had a royal governor, and if set up that way originally were often conquered lands or lands with a predominantly non-British population. Charter colonies had their own local government, holding a charter from the King which set out the rules and regulations governing them. Proprietary colonies were owned by an individual or cartel; the owners were the governors, acting under the King's authority. Pennsylvania was the prime example of this. As population grew beyond the power of the governors, such colonies were converted to crown colonies.

Thus there were a number of governing styles, but most colonies worked in traditional British fashion, with some form of assembly or parliament representing the vested interests to the governing body. Not infrequently, the same men wielded power in the home Parliament as well, enabling them to put pressure on or circumvent the will of the colonial governing body. By contrast, Spanish and French colonies adhered to the Absolutist fashion, with a powerful governor who might take advice but could overrule local opinion in the name of the King.

In common with the other colonial powers, Britain relied for defence on naval forces, fortifications, and local militia. In North America, thanks to the mounting population, the militia could pretty much take care of itself, though the 40th Regiment of Foot was permanently stationed there, scattered up and down the coast.

Jamaica had a force of eight companies of militia, backed by another eight companies of volunteers. Sometimes called the 63rd of Foot, the regiment was not constituted as such until late in the war. The Windwards were garrisoned by the 38th of Foot. Not until the outbreak of war were additional forces sent, and then mainly to participate in the Cartagena expedition.

Prewar, Britain's naval forces included only four ships of the line and a few frigates, stationed at Jamaica. It should be remembered that the Spanish considered the Caribbean to be 'their sea', and a peacetime military build up by Britain, Holland, or even France, would have had serious repercussions.

The North American coast was guarded by a collection of local vessels, none carrying more than 32 guns; usually allocated one or two per harbour, their main purpose was to prevent smuggling. There were, however, a variety of small craft, including *bilanders*, longboats and pirogues or 'dugouts', and the like.

[Bilanders (i.e. 'by-lander') were two-masted merchant ships, usually under 100 tons burthen, developed for use in the Dutch coastal and canal trade. The foremast had a square rig and the mainmast a lateen rig.]

Command of the Caribbean was exercised from Jamaica. North America fell under its nominal jurisdiction as well, in that the commander there was a junior, and in the fact that trade protection required efficient coordination throughout the New World. However, North America was effectively its own station; because of the shortage of small ships in the West Indies, a squadron from

New England often wintered in at Antigua before returning north for the summer.

When the French joined the war, the Leewards Station was set up to deal with everything east of Hispaniola, and with Venezuela. The reason for this was simple. Thanks to the Trade Winds it took only a day or two to sail from the Windwards to Hispaniola but might take two weeks to get back.

Britain's ability to support a fleet in the Caribbean fell somewhere between Spain's and France's. France had no such ability. Spain had dockyards, but was dependent on the mother country for critical items. The British were more efficient at running fleets, but Port Royal and English Harbour were only depôts, not proper yards. Materiel and food had to come from England, or from New England. Skilled workers were scarce and did not live long – the Spanish used locally trained skilled workers and negro labour, but the British plantation owners were not about to give up their slaves in imitation.

The Triangular Trade

Britain's trade with the Americas is often defined as the Triangular Trade. It involved slaves, sugar, and rum. These days, naturally, the issue of slavery is the aspect that receives the most attention, but in the 18th Century that institution was accepted as a matter of course. Being a 'dirty' industry, like tanneries or soap making, it was not discussed in polite society, but, like tanneries or soap making, it was a necessary part of the economy.

There were actually many triangle routes, not all of them British. The one implied here saw clothing, guns, and rum shipped to Africa, followed by the shipment of slaves from Africa to the West Indies, followed by the shipment of sugar and other Caribbean goods to Britain. A full cycle took about a year to complete.

Another route started from New England, with goods sent to Africa, slaves to the West Indies, and sugar to New England. Unlike the more familiar triangle, this one did not run in a continuous cycle.

A third triangle reversed the flow. It involved the shipment of basic commodities, especially fish and wood, from North America to the West Indies, followed by sugar and rum to Britain, followed by finished goods to North America.

Ships from both Europe and North America arrived first in the Windwards, usually at Barbados or Antigua. Trading zones were the Antilles, and Jamaica. In wartime, the route home around Cuba's Cape Antonio was abandoned in favour of the trickier Windward Passage at the eastern end of the island. Apart from the contrary winds, the Spanish privateer base at Santiago de Cuba and the French ones in Saint-Domingue made this route dangerous as well, but it was not necessary to use a full squadron of ships of the line as escort, as would be the case in the other direction.

Merchant ships are notorious for resenting convoy rules, but at least the nature of the sugar crop made forming convoys easy, since it was harvested more or less at the same time across the region. Sugar convoys left the Caribbean in June, and again in September, after the peak of the hurricane season. Like the French and Spanish, the British escorted these valuable convoys all the way home, using ships that were due for relief.

Other, local, convoys applied the more usual practice of keeping their escorts only until they were out of the danger zone, about 100 nautical miles from port, or as far north as the Soundings (Cape Cod). Inter-island trade did not use the convoy system until very late in the war (and naturally the traders blamed the Royal Navy for their shrinking bottom lines). Heavy losses were

incurred because both the Spanish and French used privateers as their weapon of choice; they swarmed everywhere and could be found as far north as the boundary between North Carolina and Virginia (latitude 34°).

There were the ‘runners’, too. Lone ships who hoped they were fast enough to outrun both the privateers and the convoys. High profits could be made by being the first into port (which was why the merchants hated convoys). But the insurance premiums were higher, too.

Buy British

After the ruin of her trade during the Eighty-Years War (1568-1648), Britain began and long continued a policy embodied in the Navigation Acts, designed to restrict or prohibit imports from other countries. In a familiar pattern, the colonies were to supply raw materials and receive finished goods in return. Holland was the primary target of these acts, since the Dutch who became a nation thorough that war, established a cinch on international shipping.

The Navigation Acts are famously cited as one of the causes of the American Revolution, but in fact the earlier editions gave favourable terms to British colonists, who were allowed to trade freely within the system, and who could also trade non-restricted commodities externally without penalty. Finished goods, however, had to be bought from England.

Then, too, the Colonists were in the enviable position of enjoying the protection of the Royal Navy while they conducted their smuggling operations among the Caribbean islands. The Spanish Crown protested and frequently set the dogs on them, but Spain’s local representatives were only too happy, for a cut of the proceeds, to obtain necessities of life that the mother country failed to supply.

The Act of 1663 was somewhat onerous, as it forced all European goods bound for the British colonies to be rerouted to England for inspection and customs before being sent on to their destinations. (This was similar to the Spanish practice.)

The most irritating act to date, however, was the Molasses Act of 1733. This one really was irksome. The reader may remember that French sugar had, through overtaxing, at one time become more expensive than British sugar. By the 1730s, however, this was no longer the case. Seeing their profits slump, the Sugar Lobby tried to maintain the level of consumption of their sugar by the device of imposing heavy duties on French sugar. Naturally, smuggling increased, and naturally, this led to an increase in ‘incidents’ that might one day trigger a war.

Still, those who complained the loudest about violations to the Navigation Acts were not foreigners, or even colonists. The noisiest whiners were also the most dangerous – Big Money. Of the various trading cliques, the Sugar Lobby was the most influential, but it only squalled when the Americans tried to horn in on the trade by secretly purchasing French sugar and selling it at home. Most incensed was the South Sea Company, which claimed a monopoly, by Royal Charter, over *all* trade in the Spanish sphere.

Too Big To Fail

The South Sea Company was founded in 1711, at the height of the War of the Spanish Succession. Given that one of its functions was trade with Spanish-owned South America, from the first this made it a highly speculative endeavour. In fact, the trading element of the company never did pay. The company’s main utility lay in the what would eventually become the preserve of the banking houses – the management of the National Debt.

From the start, the company was an inside job. Though the idea may have been mentioned first by William Patterson, founder of the Bank of England, its main promoter was Robert Harley, at that time Chancellor of the Exchequer. Harley’s brother and brother-in-law joined him on the committee that set up the company.

[Four years later Harley would be charged with participating in a Jacobite conspiracy.]

The concept of a National Debt, still something of a novelty to the European powers, had become essential to the prosecuting of long and expensive wars. An investigation into the Government’s accounts revealed the shocking fact that in 1711 the National Debt already stood at £9,000,000 (an incomprehensibly large sum).

In these early days, however, everything was being done piecemeal, with loans arranged by individual government departments through a number of private banks, many of which were simply small businesses willing to loan money on the side.

The Bank of England, founded in 1694, had been conceived as a way of consolidating this government debt under one roof. So far it had been moderately successful, but the war was straining its resources. The bank’s latest crash repayment solution, a state lottery, had mixed reviews. The promoters of the SSC promised better results.

Because the Bank of England held the *banking* monopoly, the SSC had to be set up as a joint-stock trading company. However, trade was never intended to be more than a sideline. Like *The Bank*, the SSC would buy up outstanding loans to the Government and consolidate them for repayment on easier terms. Instead of raising money for this purpose through lotteries, it would do so through the selling of shares (*ahem... yes, the difference is a purely technical one*). The State would pay 6% annual interest on the Debt and this money would be disbursed as dividends.

[The idea of the SSC won for Harley the title of Earl of Oxford and the position of Lord High Treasurer.]

In its conception, the SSC was thus a Good Thing. Government debt would be brought under control. The stated intent to trade with South America would even encourage peace talks with Spain. But these positive elements soon vanished.

Corruption entered the picture even before the SSC was floated. Some of the debt marked down for purchase by the company was already available at a discount price on the open market and was snapped up by insiders who immediately resold it to the SSC at a high profit. Harley did not mind. It boosted the share price.

This habit continued once the SSC was up and running. Government debt was traded in batches for shares in the SSC. Those who had prior knowledge of when a particular batch was due to be exchanged – i.e. the company directors and their cronies – could buy it in advance in the marketplace and resell it to the company at a profit. Compounding matters, *company* funds were used for the initial (private) purchases! Even worse, company shares were used to *guarantee loans* made by the SSC to individuals wishing to buy more shares!! Massive bribes were paid to MPs to ensure legislation was passed making everything nice and legal.

Readers will likely know of the South Sea Bubble, the ‘first’ stock market crash. In 1720, with dozens of copycat schemes appearing and stock market fever gripping the nation, the chickens came home to roost. It was a proper smash-up, complete with suicides and a noticeable Shrinking of the Economy. Members of the public who had no knowledge of how things were really being run were encouraged to buy shares in the SSC on the promise of returns from its virtually defunct trading element. As the share

price peaked, there was a massive selloff. Those who bought on credit – with their loans backed by the value of the shares – lost their shirts.

The international situation made things worse, since the French Mississippi Bubble burst at the same time. A domino effect ensued when bankers and goldsmiths were unable to collect on the loans they had made.

Losing money to racketeers is one thing, but the SSC was backed by the Government. Since the removal of Harley during the Jacobite troubles of 1715, the Governor of the SSC had been the King himself!

[As a crowning irony, the directors of the SSC were the first to push for the Bubble Act, which forbade the creation of joint-stock companies without royal charter. It was mainly an attempt to crush private competition, not to atone, and in fact contributed to the inflating of the company's stock.]

After the parliamentary inquiry – unfortunately for the SSC, many of the bankrupt were powerful aristocrats – heads rolled, notably those of the Postmaster General, the Secretary for the Southern Department (in charge of trade and the colonies), and the heads of the current Ministry, all of whom were impeached. However, the men actually running the company got off lightly.

[The British term for firing a person from a company – ‘given the sack’ – dates from this time; there were calls from the public that the bankers responsible for the crash be tied up in sacks filled with snakes and tossed off London Bridge. The idea was even discussed in Parliament.]

Though the collapse of the SSC cemented the position of the Bank of England, the Company was not liquidated. Restructured, it lasted well into the Nineteenth Century, still managing a portion of the National Debt. After the Seven Years War the SSC gave up all pretence of trade, but it is the company's trading practices that are germane to the War of Jenkins' Ear.

Robert Walpole, who had enjoyed a relationship with the Company since its inception (one of the first directors was his brother-in-law), was instrumental in saving the Company. It might have been better for him if he had let it fade into oblivion.

The Asiento

Here at last the *Asiento* shall be explained. In the 1730s, the restructured SSC was making a valiant attempt to justify its existence through Caribbean trade. The device employed was the *Asiento*. An *asiento* was a particular kind of contract, concluded between the Crown of Spain and an individual or cartel. In the case of *The Asiento* it was exclusively a slaving contract. Only one company at a time was permitted to participate. By the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) that concluded the War of the Spanish Succession, the SSC was awarded this coveted concession.

Though extracted at gunpoint, the *Asiento* was able to address a real need – a shortage of slaves. Spain did not collect her own slaves. In theory, only slaves who had been born in the Americas were supposed to work the plantations. Unfortunately, even slaves die of disease, malnutrition, and overwork. The *Asiento* gave the SSC the right to sell up to 4,800 slaves per year to the Spanish colonies, for a period of thirty years. Perhaps more importantly, the Spanish Crown was to receive a fourth of the profits (instead of the usual Fifth), plus five percent on the rest of the profits.

As a bonus for England, there was the innovation of the Annual Ship. This was to be one (1) vessel of no more than five hundred (500) tons burthen, permitted to carry trade goods to the annual fair at Portobelo on the Isthmus of Panama (and only to Portobelo).

Despite its monopoly, and despite the posting of company reps at places other than Portobelo, the SSC fared poorly. The slaving division functioned well (only 11% of the cargo being ‘damaged’ in transit over the life of the contract) but profits were undermined by the Interlopers and the Spanish themselves. To begin with, the tariffs were a crushing burden. The Interlopers, not infrequently protected by ships of the Royal Navy, and on occasion in *partnership* with Royal Navy officers – strictly against official government policy – smuggled slaves from West Africa to the Rio Plate duty free.

[At the time of the War of Jenkins' Ear there were specific allegations being floated around that two British warships were illegally engaging in the slave trade (naval vessels working the Atlantic stations often patrolled the African coast for some months before rotating to the West Indies).]

The Annual Ship was a dismal failure, at least as far as legitimate trade went. The wrong sort of goods were exported. (Heavy woollen coats were not of much use in the West Indies.) Consignments rotted on the docks. Revenues were further depleted by the activities of the more experienced American Interlopers, who were not restricted to a single ship sent once per year. Accounts receivable rose as the Spanish authorities proved unable or unwilling to pay for what they did buy, while at the same time charging outrageous tariffs on deliveries.

This is not to say that the SSC were injured innocents. After petitioning Parliament for strong measures against the Interlopers, without much result, the Company decided they had better enter the black market racket themselves.

For example, all goods traded by the British at Portobelo had to be carried on the Annual Ship. So, the Annual Ship always appeared with a train of other vessels. These did not violate the agreement by tying up at the dock and trading in concert or in competition with the SSC ship. Instead, one by one they tied up on the Annual Ship's seaward side and sold their cargoes through her!

Always in low water financially, the SSC was dilatory in paying its dues to Spain. This may be why its ships were especially targeted by the *guardacostas*, though the latter's claims that the Company was trading at unauthorised ports was justified, too. As the arrears and impositions mounted, both parties became more and more angry.

In Madrid's view it was the SSC who were the most to blame for the war, and there is some merit in this opinion. Why should the Company pay even a portion of its arrears when a nice little war would increase its royalties on the National Debt and cancel its debts to Spain?

[By the by, the King of Spain held shares in the SSC.]

Walpole, despite his influence, was unable to reign in the Company. It was too vital a part of the machinery for handling the National Debt. He had saved it in its darkest hour; in his own, the SSC would roll over him.

'PATRIOTISM MEANS PROFIT': THE POWER OF THE PLANTATIONS

Excursus by David Hughes

It seems baffling to a modern reader that a tiny group of men, growing crops in small Caribbean Islands, could wield enough political power to make the Royal Navy and the British Army perform as they desired during the War of Jenkins' Ear. And this was not an isolated case – their influence was even more obvious thirty years later during the War of American Independence. For in 1777 the British were, by common agreement, at least holding their own and by some accounts in a dominant position – yet when France and then Spain declared war British interest in success in America suddenly dwindled. The reason for this was simple. The value of the American colonies was trivial compared with that of the Caribbean, and British naval and military strength was diverted accordingly.

Today such attitudes would be considered absurd, but it made sense when measured against two of the economic theories then in vogue. The first stated that prosperity through trade could only be measured by the import of 'raw assets' (items such as wood, coal, and above all, sugar) plus cash, while the 'correct' exports should be manufactured goods – *English* manufactures, that is. This led to some seemingly absurd acts, such as the Act of Trade in War, instituted in 1740. It permitted the sale of factory goods to both Spain and its Colonies, despite the fact there was a war on. The other theory, wrongly ascribed to John Locke, was the concept of 'channels of trade'. This emphasised the importance of keeping a trade network functioning, as any break would mean the permanent loss of customers. Naturally, it followed that one should maintain trade links with companies or nations even when they became enemies. A remarkable example is the beef cattle industry of Ireland, whose main customer was the French Navy, and which was allowed to keep exporting throughout the war. For if they did not, the fear was, the French might turn to Denmark. But perhaps the most outrageous example was the British South Sea Company which, as the siege of Cartagena de Indias was about to start, claimed the right, as they had customarily done, to supply the Spanish galleons with flour!

With such attitudes in play it is not surprising that the plantation owners felt that British policy in the West Indies only made sense when it matched their interests. And since they had very great political power it was usually the case that their wishes controlled the decisions of admirals and generals.

The political power factor was simple. The Whigs were permanently in power by virtue of their association with the House of Hanover, giving them massive Parliamentary influence through the great offices of state such as the Admiralty, the Ordnance and the two Secretaries of State who controlled many seats in the House of Commons. But the Opposition Tories remained strong in the counties, and while unable to take official power (George II saw to that) mustered enough seats to threaten the Government. The balance was often held by the 'new men' – merchants rather than landowners – and in this period most of these were connected with the West Indies Trade (within a decade their influence was being shared with those trading with the East Indies). They were the absentee plantation landlords, the owners of the merchant fleets, and the operators of the textile industries in northern England. When they threatened to vote with the Tories the government buckled and voted for War with Spain.

[The same combination actually removed the 'prime minister', Robert Walpole, from power in 1742. Not so much because of his by-now ineffectual opposition to the war, but because of commonplace political ambition; he was supplanted by a former supporter who felt his time had come.]

Now, the West Indies Traders war aim was simple – increase their wealth. This could be accomplished by doing two things. One was to make sure that the enemy, by which they meant all foreign producers, could not compete. This meant the blockade of Spanish, and later, French ports. The other was to ensure that under no circumstances whatever were the British to acquire any foreign colonies. Doing so meant two unspeakable results: the opening of new friendly sugar plantations which would reduce the value of the existing ones, and the departure for these new sites of the very few and highly prized white supervisors. It should be remembered that the greed of the owners had resulted in a very fragile island structure, with a black slave labour force needing constant replacement (disease and bad treatment), while the original 'white slaves', the indentured labourers ordered out by the courts (especially after the Monmouth Rebellion in the 1680's) were now free and in very short supply as their small estates were bought up by the rich. As a result during the entire war the Royal Navy only took and kept one single French possession, the fort city of St. Louis, in Saint-Domingue (1748).

[Similarly, the island of St. Lucia was repeatedly put forward as a candidate for colonisation during the war, especially since George II claimed it for England. But the governors of the Windwards were oddly opposed to any such bloodless amphibious operation.]

And that was due to another demand of the traders. The island of Jamaica had two power groups, both influential and often mutually antagonistic. One was the plantation owners, and the other was the ship owners and traders – and the latter had a very different war aim. They made their money by trading, illegally of course, with the Spanish and French colonies, and their primary enemies were the Spanish *guardacostas* at sea and the Spanish and French fortifications on land. Both of these were impertinent enough to stop their God-given right, as Englishmen, to trade with whoever they wanted and wherever they wanted. Absurd it seems to us, but the storm raised over one highly questionable employee of theirs – a Captain Jenkins – was enough to propel Britain (the Scots, too, had long memories of 'Spanish duplicity' from the collapse of the Darien Settlement) into war with Spain.

The Jamaica Traders expressed their influence through the Governor of Jamaica and it was enough to persuade Vice Admiral Vernon that his duty was to attack small Spanish ports like Portobelo, but with one single aim in mind – just destroy the forts that guarded the entry to the harbour. That would of course allow effective Jamaican trade with the local Spanish, who naturally did not mind at all, once the customs authority had vanished. It was not just Jamaica that had this approach. The traders in the Windward Islands had much less influence than the planters, but their complaints over the monopoly over the trade with Venezuela exercised by the Caracas Company were loud enough for the Royal Navy to attack the Venezuelan ports, too. In this case the attack was an ignominious failure, but it confirms the pattern. It should be noted that there is every reason to believe that the admirals and commodores were quite happy to carry out the wishes of the traders, since they could become very rich on a proportion of the new trade income.

[The descent on Cartagena de Indias, and the contemplated alternate descent on La Habana, were in intent blockades, not conquests. Close blockade of a port by a floating force was a difficult operation at this period, and very costly; indeed, almost impossible on a far station such as the Caribbean. Much easier to destroy the port and leave.]

Indeed such relationships flourished with the commanders of both the Jamaica and Leeward Stations happily setting up convoy protection in their areas – for a price. The standard rate for joining a convoy to places like Bastimentos (near Panama) or the South Keys of Cuba was a flat 5% of value straight into the pockets of station admirals. All this was highly illegal, but covered by pretending that this was a legal charge for carrying that amount of bullion in their flagships! This protection racket extended to the Navy condoning, even encouraging, trade with the enemy. The capture of St. Louis mentioned above had the obvious and public value of getting rid of a privateer base, but the local admiral and the Governor of Jamaica had a different and secret aim, to ship, at high profit, Jamaican slaves to the French sugar plantations in Saint-Domingue! Of course this was well known in Jamaica and led to a massive political storm between the traders and those plantation owners who were passionately angry over the Navy helping foreign sugar planters. The admiral in question was Charles Knowles, a follower of Admiral Vernon. Like Vernon he had helped the Trade and earlier, as a Commodore, had led the failed attacks at the behest of the Leeward Traders on the Venezuelan ports of La Guaira and Porto Cabello. (He later served as a highly controversial Governor of Jamaica.)

[Knowles was one of the better, 'fighting' admirals. Being on the make and at the same time a good officer was neither unusual nor frowned on in the 18th Century. The storm of controversy was fanned by those not in on the deal.]

The pursuit of profit also applied to the defence of the sugar islands. The planters, as required by colonial law, maintained a militia, but its combat capability was highly questionable, because planters and their staff being highly conscious of status insisted on social position being reflected by military rank. So it was not unusual for a militia company on a smaller island, say St. Kitts, to have a captain, his lieutenant, two sergeants and four privates. On paper Jamaica had a militia of 4,500, Antigua 1,000, and the smaller at best a battalion of 500. Well aware of this weakness the planters, greedy and easily terrified of attack (they had a point – it was very easy to wreck a plantation by firing the sugar fields and burning the stores and mills, especially the mills) demanded Regulars from London, promising new barracks and extra pay. Just before the war the Ministry gave in to their demands sending a battalion to both Jamaica and Antigua and predictably once they arrived the local Assemblies forgot their promises. In reality what these wanted was an excuse to cancel the call-up of the militias, so that the few white overseers had time to supervise the plantations. So Dalzell's Foot in Antigua ended up with companies sent to the smaller islands, often charged with menial and non-military tasks. It is not surprising that there were many complaints about the performance of these local companies when they were ordered by General Wentworth to join the expedition against Cartagena de Indias.

[The Jamaican battalion was not constituted as such until late in the war; it began as companies of volunteers, probably debtors and the like because no one in their sound mind would volunteer for the West Indies (in those days a weekend at Negril would not be a compensation).]

As for the other nations: the Dutch settlement at Curaçao had been founded as a pirate base and remained little more than the headquarters of privateers hunting along the Spanish Main and a few traders shipping home their loot.

The French were more formidable, with their few, mainly Swiss, regulars integrated into a more effective militia, some 4,000 strong at Martinique and 6,000 on Saint-Domingue. But they were in trouble, as their supply of slaves had dried up with the loss of the French West African factories, while they could no longer get supplies from home. Inevitably they decided to negotiate with the traders from America.

The Spanish were abandoning their traditional *flota* and galleons for two new initiatives. One concession to modernity was the trading company, the better known being the Caracas Company, the rising star being the Havana Company. As well as running ships and convoys to and from Cuba, the latter had built at its new shipyard copies of the Mediterranean *xebec* used by the Navy, which proved deadly when directed against the British and American trade passing their island. The other innovation was the introduction of the Register Ships, essentially licensing both Spanish private and foreign ship owners to carry trade from Spanish ports – but only to Cadiz. Very many of these were French and a few even British, who of course complained bitterly in Admiralty Court when a Royal Navy warship arrested them for trading with the enemy. For after all they were just maintaining the 'channels of trade', just as countless other traders happily shifted cargo, often under naval protection, between British and foreign colonies. This was a well established practice, especially between the Northern Colonies (New England and New York) and the French West Indies, trading American mules and slaves for French/Spanish sugar, rum and molasses.

This American trade was very important and also underpinned the legal British trade cycle. Since manufacturing in the colonies was discouraged they shipped fish, wood, flour and horses to the West Indies, getting the essential rum and molasses in return, while the planters completed the cycle by shipping sugar to Britain. The problem was that the Northern Colonies were getting larger and more productive while the West Indies Colonies were static and since the Americans were prohibited from shipping to Britain the only answer was to ship to the French and Spanish.

And now the last example of Caribbean political power came into play. Although the West Indies men deemed it fair that they could trade with the enemy it was obviously highly improper that other British Colonials could do the same. So, with plenty of politicians in London and sea-officers in the West Indies in their debt, they were able to order the Navy to intensively patrol and seize Northern Colonial shipping trading with the French sugar islands. Of course they could not stop this entirely, but the anger this obvious unfairness raised in New England was just one of the factors that eventually led to the War of American Independence.

[At the end of his account of the war in the West Indies, Richmond takes several pages to explain the poor relationship between the Navy and the civil authorities – and between the authorities of the several islands. There were some who resented the breakdown of the cozy prewar relationship between the French, British, and Dutch colonists. As an example, Richmond mentions not only the abuse of neutral status by the Dutch (who were supposed to be Britain's ally) but also cites the case of a British ship taken in the act of smuggling war materiel to Leógame; the case was thrown out by the Attorney-General of Jamaica, since canvas and tallow, the goods in question, were not specifically mentioned on the list of contraband, even though they could be used by warships. If a case like this was thrown out of Prize Court the captors received no money and might even have to pay compensation!]

LA GUERRA DE ASIENTO (The War of Jenkins' Ear)

POLITICS

They may ring bells now, but they will soon be wringing their hands!

Robert Walpole

Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

Mark Twain

'Spanish Depredations Upon the British Subjects'

"Spain has never pretended to dispute our right of sailing from one of our own settlements to another: but she pretends, that in the course of that navigation, we ought not to touch upon her coasts, nor to trade with any of her subjects. We, on the other hand, admit that the Spaniards have a right to prevent any trade from being carried on by the subjects of other nations with hers, except that trade which is expressly stipulated by the Asiento treaty. But we deny that under that pretence her subjects ought to stop or search our ships."

Robert Walpole, speech in the House of Commons

It takes two sides to make a war, but the British started this one. The financial troubles of the SSC were one part of the equation, and the desire of much of the merchant community to break into the markets of New Spain was another. Thirdly, there was the counter-hope some entertained of expanding British rule over new territories. This led to several related grievances:

- To recapitulate, trouble with the *Asiento* arose out of financial disagreements involving the South Sea Company – Spain claimed arrears of fees and taxes; the SSC claimed damages against the *guardacostas*. The question was complicated further because the King of Spain was a shareholder, and still further because the SSC had a grudge against the Spanish for their seizure of Company assets in 1718 and 1727.
- There were also the 'Spanish depredations' against British merchants – which came about because the British *would* smuggle. If New Spain needed illegal imports to survive, the North American economy was itself becoming ever more dependent on Latin American markets. This was the biggest issue which fanned the flames of patriotic indignation. Notwithstanding popular fervour however, the matter could have been – *and indeed was* – settled by the work of a commission. Almost.
- There was also Spanish harassment of the logwood operations in Honduras. This is not given prominence in most histories, but a lot of money was at stake, and the British felt they had a right to operate in the 'debatable lands' of Central America. By itself, however, the matter could have been resolved through negotiation.
- Beyond commercial matters there was the establishment of the colony of Georgia. Spain feared Florida would be encircled, but one reason the British Crown agreed to the experiment was to erect a buffer for the more lucrative colonies of the Carolinas. Again, taken as a standalone question, a solution was not unobtainable. Both this and the logwood dispute were intended to be settled by a round of conferences stemming from the one that addressed the question of reparations.

Britain may assume the greater blame, but the Spanish were not guiltless. There were elements of Bourbon society who did nothing to discourage war. The merchants and planters were perhaps less interested; living under an Absolutist régime, they had less influence. There were no party politics for men to play the fool with, but there were factions among the ministers and the aristocracy: in simplest terms a war party and a peace party.

Not only that, but the Spanish and British governments shared no common world view. The former, continuing to embrace Medieval ideas and still regarding the innovations of the Renaissance as daring marvels, did not understand the latter's entrepreneurial spirit, and not understanding, despised it. The British, for their part, mocked Spanish *gravitas* and perpetuated amongst themselves a myth of Spanish cruelty, corruption, and administrative incompetence.

And Spain bought French goods in bulk for colonial use without whining about encroachment – the difference was, the French sold their merchandise at Cadiz, whereas the British paid no tariffs.

Still, Spain had some legitimate grievances:

- Spain used the question of Gibraltar and Minorca, both in British hands, as leverage. She was unwilling to go to war over them directly, but it made the British nervous, for if war did break out for some other reason, Madrid might order their recapture.
- Also, at Minorca lay for a long time a number of Spanish ships, taken during the 1718 war. No compensation had been paid for them.
- The 'depredations' were not all inflicted *by* Spain. The British regarded every *guardacostas* as a pirate ship, and attacked them at will, not only to prevent and chastise the unlawful detaining of British merchants, but even to protect British pirates! This was an affront to the dignity of the Spanish Crown. Wholesale smuggling corrupted officials and suborned loyal populations; were not such activities attacks on Spanish Sovereignty?
- British pirates infested Central America, illegally harvesting logwood, smuggling all manner of goods in collusion with the local population, and inciting the natives against the Spanish authorities. The British said their rights derived from 'custom and long usage' – a species of law with which Madrid had no truck. There were even rumours that Spaniards were being sold as slaves on British plantations.
- There was also the Sugar Factor. Spanish sugar production in these years was low. She bought most of her sugar from France. But the Interlopers (or Contrabandists as they were also called) threatened to ruin the Franco-Spanish trading system and dry up the tax revenue it generated by directly selling not only British goods, but *French sugar*, to the Spanish colonials, taking Spanish silver in exchange (in this the Interlopers annoyed the British, too).
- Above all, the British *attitude* irritated the Spanish. When the Dutch smuggled, they went about in powerful convoys, or if caught making a solo run, apologised and paid the fines. The British merchants never defended themselves, but complained shrilly that their rights were being violated and demanded their Navy sink the customs vessels.

As the English Ambassador, Keene, reported of a conversation with the *Conde de Montijo*:

'If Spain would accumulate all her grievances against us, she might make as much to do as we did... that there were Faults on both Sides; our Contrabandists ought to be punished, and some of their Governors hanged'

Temperley, p. 204

The Visitation Right

'I was a little surprised to hear of the usage Captain Jenkins met with off the Havana, a I know the governor there has the character of being an honest good man, and I don't find anybody thinks he would connive or countenance such villainies.'

Rear Admiral Charles Stewart to the Duke of Newcastle, 1731.

To combat a rising number of disputes between Madrid and the South Sea Company, in 1729, at the end of a short Anglo-Spanish War, Spain was granted the right to board and inspect British merchantmen – the Visitation Right.

The seizure of foreign ships was common practice, even in peacetime, and especially in the Caribbean. So the troubles with the Contrabandists were nothing new – witness the Golden Age of Piracy – but under this new policy the Spanish authorities took the offensive, and the British merchants did not like it. Especially, the SSC did not like it.

The Spanish also went too far. The *guardacostas* were encouraged by corrupt officials to board and seize vessels outside of territorial waters.

[Caveat: the benchmark for 'territorial waters' was three nautical miles, but Spain claimed six, which may explain many of the 'illegal' seizures.]

The affair of Jenkins' Ear (see page one) took place in 1731, and was only one of many such incidents – 52 British ships, valued at £140,000, were impounded from the time the Visitation Right was initiated until 1738. Jenkins' violent treatment was not unusual, either. The *castillo* dungeons of the Spanish Main held many a smuggler in the most abominable of conditions. The significance of the affair, and the reason it was dragged forth seven years later as a *causus belli*, was that it was the first of the 'notorious' seizures under the Visitation Right, and the start of the current round of demanding apologies and seeking reparations, which was to continue until the outbreak of war in 1739.

[And throughout, the same men negotiated with each other, giving continuity to the process. On the one hand, this enabled progress to be made, provided both parties desired it, but on the other, there were no fresh ideas.]

Negotiations proceeded at a snail's pace. At Madrid, the dances were slow and stately, and might be broken off to discuss whether a dancer was not wearing too much lace for his rank. There was statecraft in this, naturally, even if it was a case of the Spanish making the best use of their foibles. Anyway, since the negotiations were constantly being interrupted by fresh 'outrages' on the high seas, the Spanish saw no reason to hurry. In the Ambassador Keene, however, they had a worthy opponent.

Described as 'good natured, easy, fat, and agreeable, but yet resolute and adroit enough when occasion served' (*Temperley, p. 200*), he accommodated himself to the pace of Court life and remained on good terms with the King and Queen, and the handful of ministers he found it necessary to bribe and cajole.

The Ambassador's job was made harder, however, because he served two masters: Lord Newcastle, his real boss and the titular Chief Negotiator, Secretary of State for the Southern Department (i.e. the Colonies), and Robert Walpole, who had a hand in the pie since he was First Lord of the Treasury. Walpole was dealing behind the scenes with the Spanish Ambassador to England, Don Thomàs Geraldino, on behalf of the South Sea Company – and the reason for that was, of course, that the SSC was an essential cog in the management of the National Debt, and moreover was beholden to Walpole for its salvation after the crash of 1720.

[Newcastle, otherwise Thomas Pelham-Holles, was Secretary of State for the Southern Department, which dealt with Trade and the Colonies. He should not be confused with his brother, Henry Pelham, who became

Prime Minister after Walpole was ousted.]

1733 was a watershed. In that year, the First Escorial – the First Family Compact – was signed: an alliance between France and Spain. In that year also, the War of the Polish Succession broke out. The British had been adopting a curious mix of humility and bluster in the ongoing commercial negotiations. This now stopped. In fact, all negotiation stopped. Newcastle feared in the case of war that Spain would attack British shipping, which would make his cronies very angry indeed. Walpole feared France would scrap her pacific attitude and dominate the Channel.

So, Britain adopted a policy of strict neutrality in the Polish succession crisis, which backfired. Britain found herself isolated and forced to tread softly, which was not to the liking of the Opposition. The Walpole Administration was seen as 'soft' and subservient to the French and Spanish, though the latter charged Britain was too highhanded (the British prevented France from sending sufficient aid to their faction in Poland). As the Administration lost popularity, those who favoured war as a means of redress for Spanish wrongs became more vocal.

Tellingly, the Patriots – that faction of hardliner Whigs – were loudest in their attacks. They were led by William Pulteney, a onetime partner of Walpole's who had gone through the same political storms in their rise to power but felt himself shortchanged, given minor posts while his former colleague went to the top of the tree. The Patriots threw themselves with gusto into championing the cause of the mercantile community, whether Whig or Tory.

This brings into focus another, seamier, facet of the situation: parochial political rivalry. War would pay back the Dons, but war could also topple Robert Walpole. He was for peace. If war broke out, he would either have to stand down or lose credibility with his own faction. Moreover, by placing himself in opposition to war he would be taking a different position than his chief protector, King George, who fancied himself as a military monarch. Even if Walpole was not removed right away, any failures, and there were bound to be some, could be laid at his door, while any successes could be claimed to be due to the 'farsighted preparation' of the Opposition.

[This was a bit naive of the Opposition. As Walpole himself pointed out, War is a great coverer of political sins.]

Lord Newcastle, Walpole's chief aid in the dealings with Spain, was no help. Described as the 'aristocrat of aristocrats', he had a horror of the Mob, and would do anything to appease it and maintain his popularity. This fact, along with the intransigence of the South Sea Company and Walpole's inability to discipline it, would make war almost inevitable.

[Spain, too, had her own 'sordid' secret play to make – the Jacobite Card. Britain's Stuart dynasty, which ended with the accession of George I, but still existed in the persons of the exiled Catholic branch of the family – namely, Charles Edward Stuart – had many supporters in Britain, and in France, and in Spain. Some of the parliamentary Opposition were closet Jacobites, enemies of the Whig Administration, of Walpole, and of King George II. Some in Spain hoped a war might bring régime change.]

In 1737, however, Walpole was not ripe for toppling. Rather, it appeared that a peaceful settlement might yet be achieved between the Shopkeepers and the Dons.

The Charter Colony of Georgia

Between the Spanish colony of Florida and the British colony of the Carolinas lay a 'debatable ground' claimed by both powers. By a charter of the English King Charles II, dated 1665, all the lands between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers were considered to be – since Spain had established no physical presence beyond a few mission stations – open to development. (The missions were disposed of through Indian raids incited by British traders.)

[The charter actually claimed the coast as far south as latitude 29°, but since that line lay far to the south of San Agustín (Daytona Beach to be exact), no practical attempt was made to wrest the intervening lands from Spain.]

In 1670, England and Spain signed the American Treaty, which stated that the two countries could only make future claims on territory that they 'owned' or occupied as of the date of signing. In other words, the future site of Georgia belonged to Spain. Notwithstanding this treaty, by the 1720s the British had developed a presence in the region between the St Johns and Altamaha rivers.

In 1720, on royal authority, they built a fort at the mouth of the former river. Before it could become a bone of contention, however, it accidentally burned down. Meanwhile, British traders moved among the local tribes, inciting them against the Spanish.

[Walpole's Administration was not sorry to see that fort vanish, as it made the Spanish 'sticky' on other issues.]

In 1732, General James Oglethorpe was authorised to set up a proprietary colony in the region, to be named, with blatant tact, 'Georgia', in honour of the reigning monarch, George II. On February 12th of 1733, Oglethorpe founded the capital, Savannah, and formally declared Georgia's northern and southern bounds to be the Savannah and Altamaha rivers, and her western extremity to be the Mississippi.

Georgia was to be a model colony, unique in a number of ways. For one thing, it would eschew the feudal society of the Carolinas, where a handful of white aristos lorded it over a mass of black slaves and treated white immigrants as inferiors. Oglethorpe was a member of the Country Party in England. This Whig-Tory alliance was dedicated to restoring or maintaining traditional values – so vehemently dedicated, in fact, that Oglethorpe was suspected of having Jacobite sympathies (his wife actually was a Jacobite).

His party deplored the evils of industrialisation that were already beginning to be felt in England: the enclosure of common land, the rush to the towns, the virtual enslavement of thousands just to make a few factory owners rich, the destruction of traditional society.

Georgia was to be a refuge for the poor of Britain, especially those who would otherwise be confined to a debtor's prison, and would be operated on egalitarian lines. For example, Savannah was planned as a series of interconnected but self-sufficient villages – almost communes – each with a section of common land around which were arranged dwellings, shops, and cottage industries. Farming, much of it with experimental crops, would be done by smallholders, and lands would be distributed fairly. There was to be no slavery.

Now, there are some who suggest this was all 'blue sky', that what Oglethorpe and his cronies wanted was additional land that could be annexed to the Carolinas, pre-stocked with settlers who might not have come over if they had had to put up with the Tidewater blue bloods farther north.

However, the weight of evidence seems to be that the project was a sincere one; Oglethorpe truly was a strong campaigner for the

rights of the poor and debtors, though doubtless the claim that Oglethorpe wanted a colony of his own has some merit – who would not?

It must also be pointed out that Oglethorpe and the rest of the colony's trustees were all Opposition MPs who had property or connections in the Carolinas. It was Oglethorpe who was appointed commander-in-chief of the forces of Georgia and the Carolinas in 1737. And this is probably also the place to mention that Oglethorpe shared his borough – Haslemere – with a man named Peter Burrell. From 1735, Burrell was the Subgovernor of the South Sea Company. Peachy.

[The principal officers of the SSC were the Governor (George II), Subgovernor, and Deputy Governor (John Bristow). There were about 30 'faceless' directors. Burrell and Oglethorpe retained their seats against a great deal of opposition from 1722 to 1754.]

The Spanish took violent exception to the new colony. They suspected Georgia was merely the next step in a well thought out master plan of encroachment. By claiming lands as far west as the Mississippi, Oglethorpe must be planning to encircle Florida. Pensacola was always under threat from Yuchi Indians to the north, and they were longtime British allies.

The Captaincy-General of Florida had been settled as early as 1559, at Pensacola. Jacksonville, then known as Fort Caroline, was founded by French Huguenots in 1564. But the Spanish took the settlement in 1565 with an expedition from their newest town, San Agustín (St. Augustine). The southern regions of the peninsula, being largely swamp and jungle, remained undeveloped, home to the Seminole confederation.

Along the ill-defined border with the Carolinas there was endemic raiding. The Spanish supported the Timucan and Apalachee tribes against their enemies the Creek and Yamasee. San Agustín had been taken and sacked several times, long before the present war.

Oglethorpe took the threat of a Spanish military response to his new colony seriously. In 1734 he established two forts, Frederica and St. Simons, on St. Simons Island at the mouth of the Altamaha river, and invited colonists to settle nearby.

In 1737 the rumours intensified. The Spanish were contemplating an attack on Charles Town. They were stockpiling at San Agustín. In August of 1737 the Spanish Ambassador, Don Geraldino, went so far as to warn the British Government that if Oglethorpe returned to Georgia (he was lobbying in Parliament) it would be considered an act of war.

[Oglethorpe countered by claiming right of possession by occupation.]

But, the Spanish offensive was shelved in 1738 when the talks leading to the Convention of the Pardo (see below) began. However, this did not satisfy the Governor, who agitated for an augmented defence force. Funds were obtained from Parliament for the raising of a new colonial regiment out of elements of the Gibraltar garrison. A small Independent Highland Company was recruited from the environs of Inverness, Scotland.

The Governor was not above fabricating a 'smoking gun', either. He published two false reports, one that the Spanish had marched 5,000 men into his colony, and the other that they had taken a British sloop off the coast of the Carolinas. Well, fabricating a war is one way to 'boost' a colony. Both Walpole and the Spanish nearly had apoplexy.

Oglethorpe was unfazed. In February of 1739 (which was about the time the peace initiative began to unravel thanks to the efforts of his cronies in the Opposition and the SSC) he visited the Governor of South Carolina and the State Assembly, and obtained provisions for three months, the cooperation of the local naval commodore, and additional troops.

Peace or War?

'These gentlemen [the merchant classes] upon this have assumed a quite different air from what I have formerly known. They used in times past to come Cap in Hand to the Office praying for Relief, now the second word is You shall hear of it in another Place, meaning in Parliament. All this must be endured, and now in our turn we must bow and cringe to them.'

Letter to Ambassador Keene, dated 1731. Temperley, p.222

"'No search", my Lords, is a cry that runs from the sailor to the merchant, and from the merchant to Parliament, my Lords, it ought to reach the throne.'

*Lord Carteret, speech in the House of Lords, 1738.
Quoted in Franklin, p. 88.*

Once again, one must invoke the War of the Polish Succession. In 1736 that war was over, but not the peace talks. Both Spain and France had participated, on the same side, but now there was a rupture. Elisabeth Farnese had had it with that conniving snake, Cardinal Fleury. The French candidate had been toppled from the Polish throne and given Lorraine in compensation. To compensate the former owners, the Habsburg couple Francis Stephen and his wife, Maria Theresa, Tuscany was handed over to them. Tuscany should have been Spain's plum! The Bourbons were not on speaking terms.

Not by coincidence, a fresh round of Anglo-Spanish 'reparation talks' suddenly cranked up, with Newcastle taking a hard line. His tough talk was partly to appease his fan club, and partly because time was short. This was a perfect opportunity to work a deal with Spain. Who could say when the French and Spanish would kiss and make up.

Madrid at first adopted a conciliatory approach, seeking to close loopholes in the existing treaties and promising to punish officials who had exceeded their mandate. They only asked that in future, all goods be routed through Spain (after all, this was no more than copying British practice). Even smuggled goods (*ssh*) ought at least to be traded in the Basque Country.

But the British negotiators were hampered by their own set of Hawks. 1737 was the year the Spanish began escorting their *flotas* and *azogues* to discourage any preemptive British attacks. Not without good reason. While the 1737 round of talks was in session, the Royal Navy's small Mediterranean Squadron, under Commodore George Clinton, was issued secret orders – intercept the *flota*. If he had been successful, war would have come right then.

[It cannot be emphasised strongly enough that the Patriots' charge that the Administration was soft on Spain was unfounded. As early as 1737 the Government was considering war; Newcastle had even threatened war as early as 1731.]

After a stormy parliamentary session in January of 1738, Newcastle felt stronger measures were needed. More and more, he was coming to the conclusion that war was inevitable; he lacked the will to push back against the Patriots, who were gradually whipping the Mob into a frenzy with stump speeches and inflammatory pamphlets.

[The usual looniness common to such patriotic drives took place, with, for example, verbal attacks on a popular opera star who was putting on a show for the King of Spain; his concert in Madrid was compared to the Spanish seizure of British ships. (At least they could not call him 'un-British; he was an Italian).]

Hoping the Spanish could be made to 'go a little faster', Newcastle warned Ambassador Keene that His Majesty was considering issuing Letters of Reprisal to those merchants who had suffered from 'Spanish Depredations'. This got Madrid's

attention. Issuing Letters of Reprisal was like opening Pandora's Box; blank cheques justifying years of piracy!

[Actually, the letters were only issued later on, and not in any great quantity. The British Government had no desire to create more pirates.]

On March 3rd, after much debate, a petition was got up by the Merchants' and Planters' representatives asking for a resolution to the 'Spanish Depredations' question. It was at this point that Captain Jenkins was brought forward to testify, seven years after losing his ear, exhibiting the organ itself wrapped in cotton (or, alternatively, in a bottle, suitably pickled). William Pulteney, leader of the Patriots, exulted, '*We have no need of allies to enable us to command justice; the story of Jenkins will raise volunteers.*'

Even during the captain's testimony there were those who claimed it was a monkey's ear. Others hinted he had lost his ear the pillory. His testimony felt coached. The peroration, with its solemn and patriotic appeal, was pure kitsch. But it was also effective.

Jenkins' case was added to the list of 'Spanish Depredations upon the British Subjects'. The committee's report fed war fever, and, very much against his will, Robert Walpole was forced to act. On the 6th, an Address was approved by both Houses and sent to the King asking for redress from Spain.

[At the same time as the motion for the Address to the King was passed, a bill for the support of 12,000 seamen and 17,000 soldiers for the coming year was moved. This was hotly contested by the Patriots. The same men who were pushing Walpole into war refused to allow him the means to fight because they feared a standing army might be used to maintain him in power! The bill passed anyway; Walpole's network of patronage was weakening with each assault against him, but it was still strong enough.]

On April 23rd, Newcastle wrote to Sebastian de la Cuadra, Felipe V's chief minister, with a 'final offer'. On the spot, Ambassador Keene skilfully modified a rather crude dispatch so that the Spanish felt a full and amicable settlement was in their power alone. De la Cuadra, knowing the royal purse to be empty, made complaint, but he was bluffing. The Spanish Ambassador to London was instructed to negotiate with the SSC over the arrears on the payment of the Fourth required by the *Asiento*, while a more public reparations commission was to nail down the amount of State reparations to be paid, and by whom.

[De la Cuadra would become the Marquis de Villarias.]

So far, so good. Until it was learned the Mediterranean Squadron had been augmented to ten ships under command of Rear-Admiral Nicholas Haddock. Officially this was a 'peaceful redeployment'. Unofficially, it was an attempt by Newcastle to pressure the Spanish whilst taking the heat off himself. But Haddock also held the same secret orders issued to Clinton – intercept the *flota*. If he had been successful, war would have come in 1738.

The Spanish threatened to break off the talks. As a sign of good faith, they had actually ceased work on various colonial fortifications, and decommissioned what ships they had fitting out. Now they began again, redoubling their efforts when it was reported more British troops were arriving in Georgia. De la Cuadra took a high tone.

Newcastle made matters worse by invoking a navigation treaty from 1667 to justify a lifting of the Visitation Right. This treaty had arranged for 'free navigation' in European waters; the Secretary of State interpreted it rather liberally to include the West Indies, but de la Cuadra pointed out (in a memorial dated June 11th) that it did no such thing. Newcastle had to eat crow; he began to hope war *would* break out, if only to help him get even with Madrid.

At this moment, Robert Walpole stepped in. So far, he had played no role in the negotiations – it was not his place – but he had sat in on the side talks between Don Geraldino and the SSC. There must be no war. A deal could still be worked out. The wording of De la Cuadra's memorial of June 11th, though harsh, left an opening for more diplomacy, and this was to culminate in the Convention of the Pardo.

The monetary issues had come down to this. Britain claimed damages amounting to £343,277 for the period 1731 through 1738. Some of the claims were spurious, so the British commissioners arbitrarily reduced this sum to £200,000. Also, because the merchant community insisted on cash payments, £45,000 was deducted as a bonus for prompt payment – the Spanish Crown being notorious for delays. Spanish counter-claims, mainly for the ships taken in 1718, amounted to £180,000. This was reduced to £60,000 by the British, leaving a sum of £95,000 owed by Spain. This payment would wipe the slate clean as far as the British were concerned.

[The Spanish claimed the value of their ships as they were in 1718 and refused to accept the ships themselves, at which the British scuttled the lot.]

There was another sum to be dealt with, however. This was the arrears of the Fourth, amounting to £68,000, owed by the SSC to the Crown of Spain. As a way of pressuring the SSC, the Company was not mentioned in the Convention, and privately threatened with a suspension of the *Asiento*. Now, if the SSC had been any old commercial concern, this threat would have worked, and the money would have been paid. But the SSC was a) always in low water financially, b) intimately tied into the management of the National Debt, and c) closely connected to very powerful interests, not all of them commercial.

Also, if Don Geraldino had been any old ambassador, he would not have a) adopted the traditional Spanish High Tone toward the SSC while b) simultaneously assuring its Patriot allies that Spain would never agree to Britain's demands, and revealing some of the secret correspondence between the two governments to prove it; and he would never c) have secretly encouraged the Old Tories with dreams of a Jacobite restoration. But then, his anglicised name would not have been Thomas Fitzgerald; he was an Irishman.

To his own people, Don Geraldino reported that despite Walpole's pacific utterances, the British were bent on the destruction of Spain's trading networks (this probably from a sense that the Patriots were about to take down Walpole, or from soaking in the Patriots' mantra that Walpole was a hypocrite). Madrid instructed Don Thomas to foment unrest wherever he could.

Still, by October of 1738, all seemed to be back on track. Despite their machinations, the Spanish Government was genuinely interested in arriving at a settlement. And, so was the British Administration.

Parliament was prorogued to get it out of the picture. Madrid might quibble on details, but Haddock's squadron, still on station, could be used to keep them focused. The Spanish again halted their military preparations. Officers were sent on leave. Progress was such that Haddock would soon be sent orders for the recall of his squadron. The mood in Spain was jubilant; war had been greatly feared. Ambassador Keene was even asked to sound out Madrid about a possible alliance.

Unfortunately, the Spanish could not be hurried. No matter how much they wanted this deal, they refused to omit a single point of court protocol. Time slipped away. Parliament was again sitting by the time the Convention was ready to sign. It was presented to that body in February of 1739. When the King made his speech in

the House of Lords, both parties applauded it (the *speech*, that is) and assured him there would be no difficulty in ratifying the Convention. But when the terms were read out in the Commons, it was a different matter.

In brief, the Spanish agreed to pay the £95,000, less additional deductions for counter-claims, such as the (unmentioned) £68,000 owed Felipe V by the South Sea Company. A commission was to solve the questions of the logwood harvesting and Georgia boundary disputes, as well as the overall question of trading rights and freedom of navigation. Lord Newcastle dealt with the latter issues by sweeping them under the rug – everything would work out; the fact that Britain was 'in possession' would overrule Spanish sensibilities.

Newcastle's sanguinity was not entirely misplaced. On the question of Contrabandists, as the smugglers were called, he could make (so he thought) some concessions that would allow Spain to save face on the other issues. And the British Government would be doing the SSC a favour by getting rid of some of the competition, which ought to make it more willing to pay Spain her due.

The commission's work was to be completed within eight months – leading to a final settlement, though this was assumed and not explicitly stated. There was no mention of the 'right of search' or 'freedom of navigation' – Newcastle had got his arguments wrong on a technicality, and so again laid the questions aside. But the wording of the Convention implied an admission of guilt by Spain, which was something the Opposition demanded. It would pave the way for the annulment of the Visitation Right.

Horace Walpole, Robert's brother, praised the document and the King's handling of the crisis, and moved an Address of Approbation. Immediately, a storm arose as the Opposition gathered its wits. And very formidable wits they were. This was to be one of the greatest parliamentary debates of the age

Walpole's strongest arguments in favour of accepting and working with the framework of the Convention – which by the way, he only belatedly called a work in progress, leaving himself open to the charge of making excuses after the fact – were that a) Peace Means Prosperity, and b) Britain could be branded with the stigma of waging an unjust war if she struck first.

But, the Patriots felt that War could also mean Prosperity. Not for the last time, it was claimed that a war could pay for itself. The Administration's arguments were also weakened by the methods they employed to win support, as will be described.

A young William Pitt (Pitt the Elder) castigated the Administration, calling the Convention 'a stipulation for national infamy', 'dishonourable', and an 'insecure, unsatisfactory' document. It was the God-given Right of all Englishmen that they sail where they please and trade with whom they please, without interference, especially by Spaniards, and now this Eleventh Commandment was to be quibbled over by plenipotentiaries and foreigners?!

Sir Thomas Saunderson and Lord Gage pointed out that the treaty nowhere spoke of giving satisfaction for wrongs and very nearly let the Spanish off the hook entirely. Gage reminded them that the SSC was owed some '£1,000,000' by Spain! George Lyttleton accused the Administration of crying wolf over the question of war: that Englishmen must be abused and impoverished because a war would give the Jacobites a chance of toppling the Dynasty! He countered that weak conventions such as this were a surer method of weakening the State.

[Saunderson actually opened the attack; Pitt played the heavy artillery. Saunderson was treasurer to the Prince of Wales, who, estranged from his father, had his own 'shadow court' to which the Opposition flocked. As a

further side note, it may be mentioned that attempts to reconcile the Prince to the King were quashed every time, because the Opposition needed his shadow court as a rallying point.]

The Walpoles fought bitterly to uphold the Convention. It was a fair document, and in any case only the preliminary to a proper treaty. A war would be expensive and disruptive, and no guarantee of security. Britain was isolated and could not risk a war with Spain, since France would be sure to join her. Even now the Papists were plotting to bring back the Pretender.

[Unfortunately, not only did the Patriot Whigs ignore Robert Walpole's warnings about the damage to British trade that would arise from a war, but his soft talk led the Spanish to assume a tougher stance, placing the minister between two fires.]

After a second debate the motion to approve the Address was carried, but the House was split without a clear majority. The motion passed with only 28 votes (254 yeas; 226 nays). Sir William Wyndham warned such a split might lead the nation to believe Parliament lacked authority, that the Administration was a mere Faction.

Though the Patriots made the tactical mistake of withdrawing from Parliament in protest, allowing the Whigs to pass much minor legislation, the Convention was by no means secure. The SSC had not agreed to cough up.

In the Lords, meanwhile, a rift appeared. Lord Carteret, a rival of Walpole who had been kept in the political wilderness by the latter, scented blood and immediately asked whether there were any 'protest' or qualifying declaration secretly appended to the Convention (such as, 'we will pay the debt only so long as...'). He declared himself suspicious, and unfortunately the Administration did not give any specific denial but only vague statements. Carteret would not be put off.

[Carteret had the ability to speak German with the King. That fact alone made him a threat to the Walpole clique.]

It turned out there was something of the sort. How Carteret was tipped off was never spoken of, but it must have been from the offices of the SSC or the Spanish Ambassador. The Spanish Crown was not at all happy with the Convention. For one thing, immediately after agreeing to it the British had turned around and seized three Spanish *guardacosta* vessels, sentencing their crews to be hanged! So, it was revealed to the noble Peers that Spain had reserved the right to suspend the *Asiento*, and would refrain from signing the Convention, unless paid the £68,000 owed by the South Sea Company.

This was not all pique. Spain needed the £68,000 before she could afford to pay the £95,000. But the requirement for the SSC to pay anything at all had been omitted from the Convention, giving the impression that there was only one payment to be made – Spain's. So that 'out of nowhere' came this revelation that true-blue Englishmen were to be forced to give money to Spain?!

The split in the Lords widened, and here, Carteret's faction – Lord Bathurst, Lord Chesterfield, and the Duke of Argyle – were more skilful than their opponents (Newcastle and sundry others). Newcastle was halfhearted in any case; his sympathies were with the Merchant Interest. The address passed with a majority, but with a question hanging over it since so many of the most illustrious of the Peers were against it.

The SSC counterattacked by refusing to pay unless Spain first coughed up the full value of the Company's losses, dating from 1718. The claim of £1 million was brought up again, but the Company refused to open its account books to prove the claim – probably because they were in the red. On May 17th, the *Asiento* was annulled.

As Ambassador Keene, a former officer of the SSC, wrote at the time:

'Other Countries and Companies would have given as large a sum as what is askt for the goodwill of a Court to let them carry on a winkt-at Commerce, but our Directors would not so much as bribe the Court of Spain with its own Money, as They might have done some time ago. Tho' now all is over, and Spain is now so disgusted at the crambe repetita They [the SSC] sent me, when Geraldino told them I had full Powers, that she will never lend an ear to any further Representations till she hears the money chink.'

Temperley, p. 224.

The British were annoyed at the suspension. Here they were trying to forge a lasting bilateral agreement, and the Spanish were threatening to wreck it over a private commercial matter (*but it was not private, because the SSC was a crown corporation*). Worse, the Administration had staked its reputation on the success of the Convention. The warmongers were 'proved right'.

Madrid, insulted by the rhetoric of the Patriots and seeing Newcastle would do nothing to discipline them, then went farther, demanding that Haddock's squadron, whose recall had just been rescinded (March 10th), be withdrawn as a precondition to their signing of the Convention. Newcastle replied that the countermanding of Haddock's recall was an unfounded rumour. The Admiral was surely on his way home. He instructed his staff to tell the same lie.

[Haddock had actually been given fresh instructions to hunt the azogues.]

When Keene was summoned before his hosts, his embarrassed mumbling replies to their questions convinced them there was no further reason to negotiate. The British had broken faith and were preparing for a first strike while Spain's guard was down.

(Newcastle 'shot himself in the foot' with his evasions. Accused of bad faith by Spain, he was castigated by the Patriots for not countermanding a recall that he actually *had* countermanded!)

Ambassador Keene became so alarmed that he sent warnings to the various Spanish ports where British merchants were quartered to clear out as quickly as possible. Just in time. As May turned into June, both sides began making preparations.

On June 7th, Spain signified she would not pay the £95,000. She needed the money to arm her fleet.

On June 11th, orders were dispatched to South Carolina for local forces to begin attacking Spanish assets in the region. By now, Walpole was trying to regain lost ground by asserting that he would not yield Georgia to the Spanish and would support Oglethorpe with more men and money.

On June 14th, Ambassador Keene was instructed to suspend negotiations and begin spying.

On July 14th, King George gave orders for the return of all British seamen in foreign service and offered hefty enlistment bounties. The letters of marque began to be issued around July 21st. By then, Haddock had taken two Spanish merchant ships, the *San José* and a ship of the Caracas Company.

On July 19th, the King made a Proclamation, listing the Spanish Depredations and their failure to comply with the Convention of the Pardo, but only calling for reprisals and issuing letters of marque for that purpose – that is, authorisation for privateers to harass Spanish shipping. Madrid was informed that this did not constitute a breach of the peace, and the measures would cease as soon as the £95,000 was paid. Surprisingly, the King of Spain chose to interpret the issuing of letters of marque as an act of war.

Two 'disinterested' powers might have been able to reign in their disputants. The United Provinces were full allies of Britain – indeed, the two countries were known as the Maritime Powers – but were making too much money selling to the Bourbons. It was easy for the French to persuade them to stand aside. But before doing so, the French themselves twice tried to reconcile the parties, first by offering a full alliance with Britain, and next by offering to assume Spain's debt.

The French only made matters worse. They could hardly portray themselves as a disinterested party, what with their blood ties to the Spanish dynasty and all. And, besides, the offer came in August. Clearly, it was a ploy to place the British off guard. The offers were not picked up.

The window of opportunity had closed. A new French Ambassador had appeared at Madrid, equipped with all the courtier's arts necessary to captivate the Queen of Spain, and in February, a royal wedding had taken place between the Infanta Felipe and Maria Isabel of France.

[As early as March, many in the British Administration were convinced the appointment of this new ambassador meant war was inevitable.]

Madrid ordered the seizing of British ships in Spanish ports. France declared herself committed to sending an army and a squadron of ships to assist the Spanish should they be attacked. (As she was bound to do by the terms of the First Family Compact.) The French began military talks with their Spanish counterparts – which in the event came to nothing, but disquieted the Royal Navy for over a year. More effectively, the French Ambassador to the Hague persuaded Britain's Dutch allies to keep out of the quarrel.

Spain put her squadrons at Ferrol, Cadiz, and Cartagena on alert, and the Army mobilised against the Portuguese border and against Gibraltar. The Dons also started concentrations in Catalonia as an implied threat to Minorca, and in Galicia to suggest they might try a descent on Ireland or Scotland, Don Geraldino providing the necessary rumours in London.

Most importantly for this narrative, a squadron of six ships commanded by Vice Admiral of the Blue Edward Vernon left England in July, bound for the Caribbean. Authorisation for the deployment of troops to the West Indies in a defensive role had already been given. Vernon had barely begun his campaign of reprisals in October before he learned there was a full-scale war on.

STRATEGY

It will be remembered that Britain and France were hampered in their Caribbean operations by a lack of suitable shore facilities. France had nothing, though Martinique was developed during the war to support a small squadron. This meant France could only conduct large operations at great cost, and for a limited time.

Britain had Port Royal, Jamaica, and numerous anchorages. There were excellent harbours on the Eastern Seaboard, but America had her own strategic issues. Nevertheless, ships were routinely shuttled back and forth in an attempt to achieve local superiority. Especially, a few ships would winter in the Leewards and return to New England before the hurricane season, typically escorting convoys in the process. Convoy escort was also routinely provided by ships rotating back to England for extensive repairs.

Spain, also suffering from a lack of crews, materials, and money, maintained an adequate force at La Habana. Spanish doctrine was almost a 'point defence'. Her *guardacostas* patrolled the coasts, and she relied, like the French, on privateers to attack enemy shipping. There was not even supposed to be a fleet in the Caribbean, but since one did grow there due to circumstances, it

was at least freed from routine patrolling, functioning as a 'fleet in being'.

None of the combatants conceived it possible to 'sweep the seas' of enemy vessels in order to protect their supply lines. They had too few, too fragile ships for such operations. The onus of the offensive, however, was on Britain.

Britain

British strategy, typically for them, was muddled. The Administration hoped at the last minute to avert the outbreak of a proper war by granting permission for a series of 'reprisals' to satisfy the bloodhounds and bring Spain back to the negotiating table. But war was not averted and additional methods had to be implemented.

Spanish Trade remained the focus in the first years of the war, especially the bullion traffic. Obviously, if that could be stopped the Spanish could not support a war. It was also a strategy that tempted everyone with dreams of exploits like those of Bloody Morgan. Circumstances were somewhat altered from his day, but that did not matter. Galleons and quaysides awash with loot still mattered in everyone's mind.

Other possibilities existed. There was the chance of picking up new colonies. Sir Charles Wager, First Lord of the Admiralty, put forward a scheme for a descent on Cuba, which was taken as far as offering land grants there to the American colonists as an enlistment incentive. But the men on the spot, especially Vice Admiral Vernon, foresaw tremendous difficulties. And, the established merchants foresaw competition.

[Canada, for example, became a British possession after the Seven Years War simply because the British merchant lobby wanted to unload all the captured sugar islands before the price of sugar crashed. (Hence Voltaire's pun about 'a few acres of snow').]

What else could be done to make Spain pay? Blockades – that is what navies do, they blockade things. But blockading in the classic sense of the word was exceedingly difficult. Many ships are required for a tight blockade. Any change in the wind, or the coming of a storm, and the blockade would be broken. Blockades require a lot of resources: not just victuals and gunpowder, but dockyards for maintenance, spare ships, and on and on. The Caribbean is a larger body of water than one expects from looking at a map, and there were few facilities within range of enemy ports.

Of course, a port can also be neutralised by occupying it. Occupied ports can be traded back for other concessions. There is always the possibility of loot. If the port is small, occupation might not be too expensive; the population might not be able to retake it. There were several Spanish ports worth considering:

- La Habana. The ultimate prize. Take Havana and you stop the bullion traffic. Take Havana and you have readymade shipyards, fortifications, a food supply – everything, in fact. Which is why La Habana was almost impossible to take, because the Spanish had those things and the British would have to attack the port without them. Cuba as a whole was a potential acquisition, but it would be expensive to hold.
- Santo Domingo, San Juan. Meh. Poor colonies. As bases, some, but not much advantage over the Windward islands already held. And, any enterprising Englishman or American colonial who managed to crank up sugar production on those islands (Hispaniola and Puerto Rico) would be a nasty competitor.
- Santiago de Cuba. Useful. A nest of enemy privateers, worth cleaning out, and conversely a forward base for the British. The best harbour in the region. But very tough to crack.

- San Agustín, Florida. Meh. A noisome den of privateers but a rotten harbour. Worth attacking to prevent the Spanish from getting ideas about the Carolinas. It might be possible to take possession of Florida in the name of the Tidewater Aristocracy. The place was virtually empty now the Indians had all died of smallpox.
- Veracruz. Lucrative, but too far away. La Habana would have to be taken first.
- Portobelo. Constant rain, constant mosquitos, constant death. A place to be raided, or occupied for a raid on Panama.
- Panama. The next best thing to La Habana. But not for occupation, only to be looted.
- Cartagena de Indias. On the desirability scale, mid-way between La Habana and Portobelo. Worth considering; would be hard to maintain an occupation given the climate and the weather patterns. Like Veracruz, it would give access to the mineral resources of the interior, which might justify the high attrition rate.
- La Guaira, Venezuela. Commercially, but not strategically important. A secondary target. If the locals could be persuaded to revolt, a long term occupation might be possible.

What about raiding? A raid does not continually drain resources. It may even pay for itself. Raiding is What The Royal Navy Does Best. Raiding and Cruising For Prizes. The Spaniard can fight, but he is powerless against the Sudden Raid. Any of the above locations might be raided, but it ought to be a spot where treasure was piled up for the taking. Yes, raids were definitely on the table.

There was also a hybrid strategy. Descend on a port, destroy the fortifications and customs house, and leave. Sounds, odd, but it had a logic to it. The object was to open the port to British merchants. The locals, local authorities included, had no objection to trading with the British, only the Spanish Crown did. This strategy fulfilled the requirement for reprisals and benefited the Traders, and all at a relatively low cost. Why conquer a colony or occupy a port and then pay maintenance on it, when you can simply trade with it?

This last strategy was the one adopted at first, though the idea of a dramatic capture remained, if only as a means of finishing the war quickly.

But, as the war widened and dragged on, Europe consumed most of the Government's interest. The war in the Caribbean devolved into the common round of convoy escort and cruising for prizes; in the end, the most effective strategy of all.

Spain

On the Spanish side, the same equations were analysed, but the results were different. She was being forced into a war she did not want. It was estimated that a year of war would burn up the same amount of taxes as three years of peace. And 1739 was a particularly bad year because the harvest had been very poor. Spain was commencing the struggle with an empty purse. How should she react?

Among Felipe's royal councillors, the agéd José Carrillo de Albornoz, *Duque de Montemar*, *Ministro de Guerra* (and successor to Don Ustariz) advocated a Europe-first strategy. The El Ferrol Squadron, Spain's main fleet, was in no wise prepared for war, nor even to put to sea. War was inevitable, but they should use the Convention of the Pardo as a delaying tactic.

This would allow one last *flota*, that commanded by *Jefe d'Escuadra* Pizarro, to make it home, and allow a pair of vital *azogues* to reach Veracruz. Once war was declared, the bullion

shipments would have to cease until sufficient strength could be mustered – which would probably require active French assistance.

[It is difficult to tell just when the Spanish stopped looking for a real settlement and started using diplomacy as a tactic for delay. But certainly once the Crown's caveat regarding the SSC's debts became public knowledge. By that point it was clear neither side would budge.]

France was committed to aiding Spain militarily by the First Family Compact, but she was decidedly cool at present. Cardinal Fleury agreed with Robert Walpole that war was not desirable. All that could be managed were some military talks that gave the impression France was prepared to aid Spain. But, hopefully the new royal marriage would pay off.

Montemar was concerned that if Spain split her naval forces, or sent the bulk of them to the New World, she would not only be weakened in Europe, but be unable to maintain them anyway. In this, he was quite correct. By maintaining a European fleet in being, the Spanish would force the British to do all the work. While Britain wasted her resources in temporary overseas conquests, a League could be formed against her. At the peace, Spain would get her colonies back.

As for the vital silver traffic, it could be rerouted to Lima and transported overland to Argentina, or run when French support was available (in fact, no proper *flota* did sail until 1744). This might bring about some financial hardship, but it was better than shovelling money into Britain's purse. Similarly, the treasure ports were to be stripped of anything valuable.

(As an illustration of the Spanish Crown's misinterpretation of British strategy, let it be noted that by restricting the bullion traffic they cut the amount of victuals and military stores that could be purchased in Europe and sent to the New World. And who stepped into the gap to feed the 'starving population'? The British. Yes, even while the war was on. Business is business.)

Montemar's strategy was old-school. He does not seem to have realised that the British were not playing primarily for conquests, but for new markets. The enemy's lust for the great galleons was a similar harking back to olden times, a benchmark of success that was no longer relevant. All they really needed to do was open the Caribbean to British trade and the war would... well... not pay for itself exactly, but pay off in the long run.

The Colonial Faction, if it may be called that, represented by the *Conde de Montijo*, *Presidente del Consejo de Indias*, and José de la Quintana, *Secretario de las Colonias*, naturally advocated the deployment of Spain's fleet in a similar manner to their enemy. They had to read the pleas from the various governors and merchants, begging for protection. The defence of the New World should be the lynchpin of Spain's maritime strategy. If necessary, a fleet action should be brought on to make the British reconsider their options.

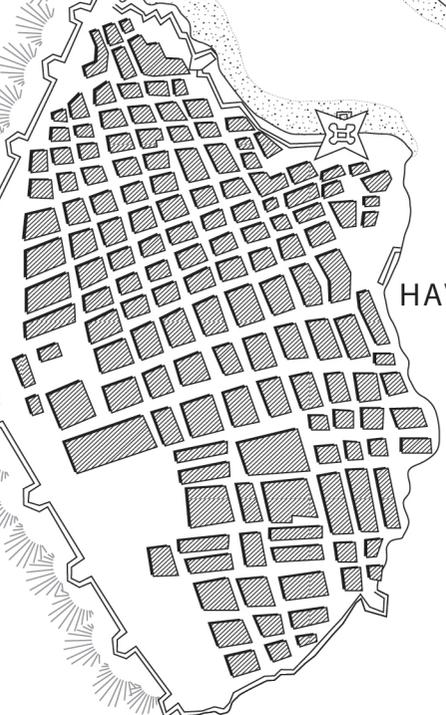
Already, several *azogues* – small warships in this case – were enroute to the West Indies (sent in pairs for added security); they should be protected. A small troop convoy was also underway; more troops should be sent to bolster the garrisons of the key ports. Let six or seven ships of the line be sent out, if need be stripping crews and equipment from the rest of the fleet, and let them transport additional troops and supplies, then remain as a local strike force. Perhaps a descent on Jamaica could be made. It was pointed out that there were two 70-gun vessels already nearing completion in the La Habana shipyard, which would bring the squadron's strength to a respectable level.

Despite its 'antiquated' methodology, Montemar's strategy was wisest – because it was fitted to Spain's military complex as it then stood. Spain's strength was failing; what strength she had

Morro Fort



Point Fort



HAVANA

H A V A N A
H A R B O R

HAVANA

was in her Army, and that Army was deployed against Europe. This might be outdated strategy, but they could not simply flip a switch and become a colonial superpower overnight.

However, the squadron and additional troops would eventually be sent, rather in haste and inadequately provisioned. Apart from the argument over grand strategy, there was the argument over who should pay for the squadron. Montemar wanted the Colonials to pay for the squadron; the Colonials wanted the Crown to pay.

Long term, of course, the British could defeat even the combined Bourbon fleets through simple attrition. So, the cost of war must be increased for the British at a greater rate. This naturally suggested the solution of commerce raiding, and for that, the *Armada* was not required. The job could be farmed out to privateers. When the war began, both sides began issuing 'letters of marque' – State authorisation for piracy by any interested sea captains. These were in the nature of reprisal measures; Britain issued them in reprisal for Spain not paying what was owed her and the Spanish issued them in reprisal for Britain's expected reprisals.

But, hiring privateers carried its own danger. Sailors preferred working for privateers. Corsair skippers paid well, unlike the Government. By embracing a privateering strategy the Spanish were, in the long term, virtually guaranteeing the death of their battle fleet. But, like everyone else, they expected it to be a short war.

One factor affected all strategy: logistics. Spain's federated provincial system meant she had a poor internal logistics net. This not only made supplies slow to accumulate, it also made them more expensive, since it was often quicker to obtain them from other countries. When some crisis came along and a squadron needed to sortie immediately, there was no option but to buy the necessary stores abroad.

Interestingly, there seems to have been no thought of using Britain's more 'democratic' form of government against her – war weariness and so forth. Well, for one thing Britain was an oligarchy, not a democracy. However, the idea of a Jacobite coup remained popular; perhaps the best method of destabilising an oligarchy is to play the factions. The Jacobites were leagued with the Opposition, and the Opposition pushed for war.

Perhaps that is why the Spanish Ambassador behaved in such a highhanded manner; knowing war was inevitable, Madrid tried to rush the British – if their Government failed, it might fall, and the dynasty with it, and peace talks could begin with a friendly régime. Alternatively, they may simply have been as blind as most governments engaged in brinkmanship.

Still, the Jacobite card proved quite useful. An army was assembled in Galicia, the traditional staging area for a descent on Ireland or Scotland. This tied a significant number of British ships to north European waters.

Additional feints could be made. In addition to the Galician ruse, armies were formed facing Gibraltar, and in Catalonia, threatening the capture of Minorca – at this time, Minorca played the role of Malta, which at that time still belonged to the Knights of Malta. Any of these armies could be used if circumstances permitted (in fact, the Catalan army would be sent to Italy on the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession), so the British could not ignore them.

France

France's strategic options were quite similar to those of Spain's, and she would ultimately adopt the same one – *guerre de course*, or commerce raiding. In 1739 however, there was nothing but talk.

Most of the relevant points of France's strategic policy have already been alluded to. Before their entry into the war the French were officially friendly to Britain, but in practical terms, friendly to Spain, supplying her with war materiel and renting merchant vessels, and even a few warships, to run supplies under a neutral flag. (The Dutch, technically *allies* of Britain, did the same.)

During military talks between the Bourbon powers, France spoke of mobilising Canada and setting up shipyards at New Orleans, but these were pipe-dreams.

When they joined the fray, the French placed less emphasis on their colonies *per se*, despite their richness, instead regarding convoy protection, whether of traders or troop transports, as the most important objective. This was because taxes levied on the merchant ships went straight into the royal coffers – French escort commanders suffered extreme penalties for abandoning their charges, even to pursue an enemy.

If British forces could be tied down protecting their own assets against the *threat* of French attack, this would help. Ironically, from the British point of view, the French Navy – *La Royale* – appeared to be far more aggressive than she really was. Which is to say, the French posturing achieved its object.

THE LINEUP

The Opposing Fleets

On the outbreak of war, Britain had (by the most reliable of the sources) 124 ships of the line, including 'hybrid' 40- and 50-gunners (popular in the last century, but too heavy for escort and scouting duties, and too light for the line of battle). Of the 124, some 44 ships were completely unfit for sea. Of the rest, 35 were in 'sea pay' – ready to sail. A rough breakdown gives:

- 4 ships of the line in the West Indies.
- 10 ships of the line in the Med (counting Haddock's ships).
- 22 'three-deckers' – 80 guns and up.
- 10 'guard ships' – 50-gunners with half-crews guarding the major harbours of Britain.
- 43 smaller ships (70s and under) in the Reserve.

To man these ships, the British began the war with 26,000 men. Though this was not enough to equip the entire fleet, still, in comparison with any opponent, it was a huge number. She would be sure to win in any protracted contest.

[On paper there were six 100-gun 1st Rates, three of which were 'sort of' in commission as floating HQs, and thirty 80- and 90- gun 2nd Rates (70-gunners were two-deckers). The difference in totals comes from the fact that a number of these ships were virtually hulks. Two of them are in fact confirmed as hulks in the official records. One was undergoing a rebuild and two more may have been already cut down to 74s. The 80-gun Second Rates of this period were a poor design choice.]

Spain's order of battle is not as well documented, perhaps because the *Armada* had been undergoing a comprehensive restructuring since the 1720s, which included not only new construction, but new doctrine, new ordinances, and officer training to match. The process was far from complete when war broke out. Especially, the officer corps was a real mix of good and bad. Practical seamanship was definitely below par.

One highly important change had been the shifting of the merchant emporium from Seville to Cadiz. This was done so that in time of war the merchant marine could be placed at the Navy's disposal.

Another change, which branched off from this, was the increase in the corsair arm. In previous conflicts, the fleet had done most of the work. Now, to save money and to keep the *Armada* concentrated in European waters, the job of cruising for prizes, and hunting for pirates was farmed out to contractors. Some of the work went to the *guardacostas*, and some to new concerns like the Havana Company.

[The downside, as with all military contractors, was the temptation to stretch a point on what constituted a 'legitimate target', and the use of unsavoury methods. In particular, the corsairs saw no reason why they should not smuggle contraband captured, or even bought from the enemy.]

The three naval bases of Ferrol, Cadiz, and Cartagena each had a squadron, but not only were most of the Spanish sail unprepared, those that were 'in sea pay' were scattered across the globe.

The Spanish source Crespo, who is probably the most accurate, lists as royal ships 27 ships of 50 guns and up, and 7 frigates of 36 guns or more.

[Spanish frigates historically tended to be large and clumsy. Part of the new building program introduced smaller, faster ships with smaller crews, but well armed. It was felt they could stand up to even the larger enemy warships, which often could not utilise their lower gun deck.]

The highest estimate is 58 warships, but this includes vessels of the Caracas Company and galleons converted for military use. By another measure there may have been 45 military ships of 24 guns or more available. Some Spanish sources give only 25 ships of 60 guns or more, of which 22 were in commission by December of 1739, and 8 'frigates' of 50-58 guns. However, the reader may assume armed merchantmen of 50-60 guns were added to the list (the Spanish Crown assumed so).

[Civilian 60-gunners would be far weaker than naval ones, simply because the calibre of the cannon would be smaller. The guns were only for defence against pirates and might not even be mounted.]

France, not interested in a naval war at the moment, but always a factor to consider, had some 47 ships of the line (bearing 42 guns or more), of which perhaps 20 were in good condition. Very few were prepared for sea duty. France's ships were concentrated at her main naval bases of Brest and Toulon, with a strong detachment at the third base of Rochefort.

Forces in the Caribbean

For such an important region, the prewar forces allocated to each side were minimal.

Peacetime command of the Royal Navy's Jamaica Station was given to Commodore Charles Brown, who disposed of the following ships:

- *Hampton Court* (70) flag
- *Windsor* (60)
- *Falmouth* (50)
- Frigates *Shoreham* (20), *Diamond* (40), *Torrington* (40), *Anglesey* (40), *Roebuck* (42), *Lowestoft* (28)
- Sloops *Drake*, *Saltash*, and *Spence*

In July of 1739, *Anglesey* was at Antigua, supported by the *Saltash* sloop and the 6th rate *Lowestoft* (28). *Windsor* cruised the Mona Strait between Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. *Roebuck* was at Barbados. The rest were at Port Royal, Jamaica, or en route there.

A number of light ships were present on the North American coast that might be called upon at need. In the Carolinas and Virginia were *Hector* (44) and *South Sea Castle* (40), and about ten 6th

rates or sloops. *Shark* (20) was at New Providence (Nassau). These numbers, and even many of the ships themselves, remained fixed throughout the war, except for brief periods during the campaigns in Georgia and Florida, and when a large North American squadron was put together for the attack on Louisburg, Nova Scotia in 1745.

Vernon's squadron, when it finally arrived, consisted of:

- *Burford, Worcester* – 70s
- *Strafford, Princess Louisa* – 60s
- *Norwich* (50)
- *Sheerness* (20) frigate

Like Haddock, Vernon was given last minute instructions to hunt for Pizarro's *flota*; being delayed in his departure, he left part of his squadron (not listed) off the northwest Spanish coast instead of cruising there himself.

[As an example of the difficulties inherent in merely leaving England, Vernon sailed from Portsmouth on the 24th of July, had to shelter in the Portland roads until the 1st of August, then wasted a day at Plymouth before sailing for Cape Ortegale on the 3rd. Some sorties from the Channel took much longer. Notice that the Gentleman's Magazine article quoted at the start of this commentary reported '9 men-o-war and a sloop' being sent out.]

Information on the deployment of French and Spanish ships is not as comprehensive as the British. (Admittedly, British sources are not always accurate, even about their own side.) It appears, however, that the French had no royal ships in the Caribbean. Being at peace and 'officially' on good terms with Britain it is also unlikely any privateers were setting up shop in preparation for the coming storm.

A good list can be compiled for the Spanish, but as noted before, there is often a question of whether a ship is owned by the state or not. Lighter vessels are often *guardacostas*, craft at the disposal of the viceroys and captain-generals but not royal vessels, or privateers hired for additional protection.

[There is also the danger of confusing frigatas with frigates. Frigatas were vessels of a certain size and armament, not necessarily frigates, though they could be.]

At La Habana, therefore, it appears that there were the following ships:

- *San Juan Bautista* (60) and the sloop *San Nicolas*. (And possibly *San Cateyano* (24)).
- Out of commission: *Santiago* (60), *Genoves* (54), and the frigate *Conception* (22).
- Under construction: *Invencible* (70) and *Glorioso* (70). The Spanish were having difficulty getting parts and skilled workmen to complete them.

At Veracruz there were:

- Frigates *San Cateyano* (24) (if not at La Habana), *San Cristobel* (30).
- Sloops (probably *guardacostas*): *Trionfo* (18.6), *Tifone* (16)

[Another example of the difficulty in tracking names: Spanish ships frequently had two names; in this case, San Cristobel's other name was also Trionfo or Triunfo.]

At Santo Domingo:

- *Europa* (64) – one of the *Barlavento* ships – and *Dragón* (64).

At Cartagena de Indias, under the command of Don Blas de Lezo, *Teniente-General de sus flotas y comandantes de los galeones y todas las fuerzas navales en América Majestad* (Lieutenant

General of His Majesty's Fleets & Commanders of the Galleons and all naval forces in America):

- *África* (64)
- *Conquistador #1* (62)
- *Santa Barbara* (24), *La Habanera* (24) frigates
- Light vessels (*guardacostas*) *San Pedro*, *Santa Rosa*
- A pair of bomb-ketches

At Portobelo

- *Astrea* (30) frigate (probably a privateer)

At Chagres

- Possibly two more *guardacostas*

Moving about, as escorts or reinforcements:

- *La Bizarra* (24) – the other *Barlavento* ship

[*Bizarra* is an odd fish, alternately listed as a 50-gunner and 20-gunner. She seems to have been modified during the war, but in this instance she probably had room for 50 guns but was only carrying 24, plus cargo.]

Ordinarily, most of the ships would be based at La Habana, but war was immanent, trade was gathering for a last run home, and the Spanish did not know where the British might strike first. The *flota* had just left the region, under *Jefe d'Escuadra* José Pizarro, but there were still galleons lying around (four at Cartagena).

[Pizarro commanded: León (70), Guipúzcoalo (60), Castilla (60) and Esperanza (50). All were warships; there was no 'convoy' in the traditional sense, and most sources term them *azogues* – though carrying mercury out, they would not go home empty. The ships carried £846,000 in silver.]

The Caracas Company had under sail:

- *Nuest' Señora del Coro* (50), *San Ignacio de Loyola* (50), *Santa Ana* (50) – listed as *navios*, or 'ships'.
- *El Jupiter*, *La Galera Guipuzcoana*, *La Susana*, *San Sebastian* (30) – all listed as *frigata*.
- *El Real de Portobelo* sloop.

At La Guaira were:

- *San José* (52), and *El Santiaguillo* (16) sloop.

Though the names change, this mix of Company ships was consistent throughout the war. Sometimes French ships appear on the Company books. These were employed in blockade running when France was still a neutral, or hired for extra muscle. None of these were royal vessels, and would have had lighter 'broadships' in combat. Nevertheless, they were well-crewed and considered formidable opponents.

1739 – THE PRICE OF AN EAR

"War was at last begun, and it cannot be said that it began under the most favourable auspices. The fleet was not ready, the army was not ready, and the offensive operations had not yet been determined, nor were they fully decided upon two months later... war had actually broken out before the British Administration began to consider in what manner it should be conducted."

Richmond, vol 1, p.38.

[*Richmond may be indulging in hyperbole here. The evidence suggests the Administration had things lined up, but was unwilling to shell out until it had to.*]

In August of 1739, Commodore Brown received his reprisal orders and put out from Port Royal, Jamaica, in search of prizes, covering the lanes leading from Nueva Granada to Cuba. A guard sloop was set to watching the coast of Jamaica. Convoy protection was not neglected and two ships escorted an outbound convoy through the dangerous Windward Passage.

Brown incorrectly believed there were no warships at La Habana, but that did not matter. The Spanish were in no condition to oppose him. As already mentioned, that port contained only four ships, all lacking crews and other essential parts, and all small. The other ships in the region were in similar shape.

Brown hoped to catch the *azogues*, but they were already gone. However, it was reported that La Habana contained a number of rich targets forming up for the next *flota*, and Brown put the place under an unofficial blockade. On September 8th, the Spanish suffered an additional affront when British privateers burned some boats at Batabano (on the south coast of Cuba, roughly opposite La Habana – there was a small shipyard there). On September 17th, Brown went so far as to destroy by gunfire a new fort being built on the coast to the east of the city, at Bacuxano (Bacuranao), after which his ships chased a sloop bearing warning letters to the Viceroy of Nueva España. On the 22nd, Brown's forces landed at Bahía Honda (west of La Habana) and conducted a cattle raid.

In retaliation, the Spanish impounded a SSC ship at La Habana, and laid an embargo on the British <trading> factory there. Another SSC ship was impounded at Santiago de Cuba.

Notified of Vernon's belated arrival at Port Royal, Commodore Brown left two ships behind (*Windsor* and *Falmouth*) and went off to meet the Vice Admiral (November 8th; he was late, much to Vernon's annoyance).

[*No Spanish convoy was bound for the West Indies at this time; one had been in the making, but the escorts were diverted to other duties.*]

[*Beatson says Brown reported with his flagship, the Hampton Court, only.*]

The New Boss

Traditionally, the Royal Navy had nine officers of flag rank (though additional appointments were made during the war). To the three familiar ranks of Rear Admiral, Vice Admiral, and Admiral were appended the flag colours blue, white, and red.

Vice Admiral of the Blue Edward Vernon was therefore the fourth most junior flag officer in the Royal Navy. His appointment to the Jamaica Squadron was made for three reasons. First, he was tremendously popular. Second, he was a vociferous partisan of the Opposition; his direct manner of speaking often grated and it was hoped his voice would not carry over the waves from Port Royal. He was also a spokesman for the Traders, standing to make a good profit should all go well.

As a final consideration, he was a good officer, if not the paragon his supporters have made him out to be, and was believed to be an expert on the Caribbean. He was a consistent advocate for the common sailor. Conditions under him were always better than in other commands. He also went to the trouble of constantly drilling his crews in seamanship and gunnery – apparently not a mandatory procedure at this time.

[There is an apocryphal story that Vernon was only given six ships because he had boasted he could take Portobelo with only six ships, and the Administration hoped he would make a fool of himself.]

Aged 55 in 1739, Vernon began his naval career at 17, and his first action was the Battle of Vigo Bay in 1702. Prior to his joining the Navy he had studied at Oxford. The source Richmond, a strong partisan, felt his notoriously short temper was due to impatience; he did not suffer fools gladly.

[Fans of Jules Verne will remember Captain Nemo restocking his coffers from the wrecks on the bottom of Vigo Bay.]

But, Vernon's most famous contribution to the success of the Royal Navy was to replace the sailors' habit of drinking straight rum with a rum-and-water ration – grog. Watering the rum reduced the dangers of sailors binging on several days-worth of rations. But the real benefit came because the grog was adulterated with citrus juices (watered down rum does not taste that great), and this, as Captain Cook would famously prove, drastically improved the health of the crews, enabling them to resist scurvy. The name 'grog' was given to the drink in honour of the Admiral, whose nickname around the fleet was Old Grog, after the antique grogham coat that he habitually wore.

The Vice Admiral was late, having wasted time looking for Pizarro and his *azogues*. His instructions, having arrived on station, were to 'commit all sorts of hostilities against the Spaniards in such manner as you shall judge the most proper'. In concrete terms this meant finding and destroying Spanish warships at sea, gathering intelligence on Spanish trade and interdicting it, protecting Jamaica in case of an attack from Cuba, and watching out for Spanish descents in the other direction – against Georgia or the Carolinas, for example.

Vernon was further instructed to risk his ships if he thought it possible to 'cut out' prizes from the harbours of Portobelo or Cartagena de Indías, and, secretly, to decide upon the most advantageous locations for a major amphibious landing.

[Richmond emphasises that a) the popular conception that Vernon had direct orders to attack Portobelo is incorrect – it was only an option – and, b) that the Government was considering a major amphibious attack before the war started. He also notes that having asked for enough data to make a decision, the Government sat on the idea until the last minute, which is perhaps unfair; some of them were trying to avert a war.]

Porto Bello

As yet, war had not been declared. A little fact like this did not disconcert Vernon, however. He had his orders. In any case, the declarations came soon enough: Britain on October 30th, 1739, and Spain on November 28th.

Vernon arrived at Antigua on October 9th and proceeded to St. Kitts in hopes of finding pilots for the Spanish Main – the Venezuelan coast – where there were always prizes to be had. *Strafford* (60), *Princess Louisa* (60), and *Norwich* (50) were dispatched thither. This left him *Burford* (70), *Worcester* (70), and the frigate *Sheerness* (20).

Before committing himself to any major operation, Vernon sent a sloop down to Cartagena under a flag of truce and the offer of a prisoner exchange (of arrested merchant crews); really, the ship was to gather intelligence.

There are a couple of interpretations of Vernon's subsequent actions. Richmond says his first intent, in line with prewar thinking, was to strike at La Habana and seize the <ephemeral> treasure fleet, but that the Spanish, with their typical un-English attitude toward promptness, had not yet assembled the *flota*, and might not get around to it before the spring. In that case, what to do?

After conferring with Governor Trelawny of Jamaica, Vernon decided on a strike at one of the major ports (as David Hughes has noted, with the intent to open them to British Trade, not to destroy them).

Portobelo seemed the safest target. It was far smaller than Cartagena de Indías, less well defended, and was the point of embarkation for the treasure coming from Panama, as well as the location of a regional fair. According to Richmond, no treasure was expected to be piled on the docks for the taking, but there was still the hope that some merchantmen might be found.

Beatson, contradicting Richmond, says that from the information Vernon was able to gather, it seemed to him that the four galleons at Cartagena were about to sail to Portobelo, there to actually take part in the annual fair, and in consequence, both the goods for the fair and any bullion there might be waiting at that place.

Either way, the British were bound for the Darien Coast.

According to Spanish sources, Portobelo was one of the worst postings in the Caribbean. All men tried to avoid service in the West Indies; those unfortunate enough to find themselves in those waters tried to avoid being handed the death sentence of a stay at Portobelo. The climate was deadly. It rained all the time. The local Indians hated the Spanish and were strong enough to cause them trouble. The current commandant, Francisco Martinez de la Vega, had been sent there so that those with greater ability and greater influence should not have to go.

The authorities had written off Portobelo. The port's defences were decayed. Before the war, *Fuerte* (fort) Santiago de la Gloria was armed with three culverins, two mortars with broken down carriages, and some swivel guns (called 'patteraroes', they were breech-loading weapons used to fire stones, buckshot, or scrap metal). The store of gunpowder was perpetually damp. *Fuerte* San Jeronimo was no better off. The outermost fort, the so-called Iron Castle, was a minor work. The paper strength of Portobelo's garrison was about 200 men, with 100 in each of the main forts.

De la Vega applied to Panama for reinforcements several times but received no reply. At Cartagena de Indías there were four galleons, three ships of the line, two frigates of some sort, and a battalion of troops, but the authorities reserved them for the defence of that port.

At the time of Vernon's descent on the port the harbour contained four *guardacosta* sloops of 20-guns: *Santa Barbara*, *Santa Rosa*, *San Pedro*, and *Triunfo*, plus a *snow*. Their cannon had been dismantled to augment the fortress batteries and the crews had gone with the guns.

[Some British sources speak of 120 fortress guns and a garrison of 300 men. Later historians place the port's garrison at 90 men, 36 of whom were gunners. Citizens were 'volunteered' at the last minute, though most ran away. Spanish sources describe the commandant as both a coward and an incompetent.]

Meanwhile, having found the port of La Guaira too well guarded, the detached British ships rendezvoused with their admiral at Jamaica. He arrived there on October 23rd. One prize was taken, by a Captain Knowles (who will later figure prominently in this story), carrying bundles of army uniforms and 78,000 pieces of eight. A good omen.

[Beatson says the ships were ordered to be at Jamaica within a set time period, which would not have given them much time to sweep for enemy ships.]

The 'descent' on Portobelo would involve six ships:

- *Burford* (70) – Admiral Vernon's flag
- *Worcester* (70)
- *Hampton Court* (64) – Commodore Brown's flag
- *Strafford* (60)
- *Princess Louisa* (60)
- *Norwich* (50)

Governor Trelawny loaned 200 troops – black Jamaicans – for use in any landing party.

Windsor (60) and *Diamond* (40) were to follow on as soon as possible; the former was monitoring La Habana and the latter was under repair.

The *Sheerness* (20) watched Cartagena for signs of trouble; the Spanish were expected to rush reinforcements to the Isthmus, and the prevailing winds were from the east.

[The remainder of the Jamaica Station, *Falmouth* (50) and *Torrington* (40) were on cruise. Spanish ships were distributed as follows: *África* (64), *Conquistador* (64) and *Dragón* (64) at Cartagena, *San Juan Bautista* (60) and *Bizarra* (50) at La Habana, *San Cayetano* (24) and *Triunfo* (24) at Veracruz; and enroute to Cartagena the *Galicía* (70).]

The expedition sailed on November 16th, arriving on December 1st, anchoring well offshore for the night, since there would be some tricky navigation to get into the port. In Richmond's words (vol. 1, pp. 46-47):

'The entrance to Porto Bello harbour is a bare half mile across, and the land rises steeply behind it on either side. The winds inside are tricky and in the month of October are light and mainly westerly. On the north shore, with thickly wooded hills immediately behind it, stood the Iron Castle. At the head of the bay in its south-eastern corner were the Gloria and San Jeronimo Castles, protecting the town. There is bold water close inshore at the Iron Castle, so that ships could go practically alongside, but the Gloria and San Jeronimo could not be approached closer than about 400 yards.'

Vernon issued his orders as to the manner in which he proposed to attack, on the day after sailing from Jamaica. The squadron, led by Commodore Brown, was to sail in close line of battle so as to pass less than a cable's length from the Iron Castle, each ship firing its broadside into the castle as she went by; from this point Brown was instructed to lay up for the Gloria Castle and anchor as near as he could to its eastern end, leaving room for the 'Worcester' to anchor astern of him abreast the western bastion. The 'Norwich,' after passing the Iron Castle was to anchor off the fort of San Jeronimo and engage it; the 'Strafford' and 'Princess Louisa,' following the flagship, were to anchor abreast the Iron Castle and assist in its bombardment. All ships were directed to have their longboats in tow astern and their barges alongside ready to tow the longboats in with the soldiers, who would receive their directions as to landing from the Admiral. Special instructions were given to avoid hurry, confusion or waste of ammunition.'

Such an attack sounds foolhardy, but it was the most effective way to deal with shore installations, unless they were set on high ground (in which case they would probably be out of range). By closing to within musket range ships often came below the firing angle of the fort's guns, while sharpshooters in the topmasts could fire down on the enemy gunners. Colonial forts, even if stoutly built, could be rubble by successive broadsides from 18- and 24-pounders – a Third Rate disposed of firepower equivalent to a 40-gun siege battery.

Last orders were given at 5am on the 2nd of December. Richmond gives the line of battle as: *Hampton Court, Worcester, Norwich, Burford, Strafford, Princess Louisa*. Weighing anchor at 6am, the squadron took until 2pm to manoeuvre itself into a position to commence the run into the harbour.

[Here Vernon for the first time used a new form of signal which gave the lead to Brown regardless of the current 'tack'. This may not sound important, but it relaxed the rigidity of the battle formation and avoided the sort of problem that would arise at Toulon in 1744, when much time was wasted as captains struggled against the wind to conform to a fixed deployment.]

The attack did not go according to plan. *Princess Louisa* lagged behind – a problem that reoccurred in most actions because of poor maintenance and rapid 'fouling' in tropical waters. The British relied on a northerly wind which annoyingly swung to the east, then died away. Brown improvised, attacking the Iron Castle instead of the Gloria. Although light winds prevented immediate assistance, the *Hampton Court* was able to work over the fort without taking much damage. His anchor cable shot away, Brown drifted off but the *Norwich* and *Worcester* took his place, followed by the *Burford*.

The Spanish defenders in the Iron Castle, commanded by Lieutenant Don Juan Francisco Garganta, had been taken by surprise. Though aware the British were off the coast they did not believe they would be so bold as to attack. Three broadsides and concentrated small arms fire (from the topmasts against the enemy gunners) soon dampened their enthusiasm and Vernon ordered out a landing party. Within half an hour the Iron Fort was taken. Only the commander and about 40 men remained in the inner defences. They surrendered when someone fired a shot through the door of their bunker.

The other two castles remained. Unable to close thanks to the wind, the squadron engaged Gloria at a distance until about 8pm, then pulled out of range for the night. Light damage was suffered by both sides, though to everyone's amazement a shot from the flagship plunged through the Governor's roof, and another actually sank one of the sloops at extreme range.

The next morning, as his ships began their approach – they had to warp their way up the bay – Vernon received a deputation from the governor. Since the terms proposed omitted mention of the various ships in the harbour, Vernon sent the deputation away with instructions to come up with something better before 3pm.

'In the afternoon the Admiral's terms were accepted. The troops were landed at once and took possession of the castles. Vernon gave the strictest orders against plundering the inhabitants [according to Beatson the Spanish crews, having jumped ship during the action, did all the plundering], and the occupation of Porto Bello was carried out in a manner which the Spaniards admitted did honour to the Admiral's humanity and justice. Vernon now set about destroying the fortifications, in order, as he told his captains, to leave the place "an open and defenceless bay." The iron guns were spiked, the brass ones and the ammunition were carried on board [40 brass guns, 10 field guns, 4 mortars, and 18 'patteraroes'], and the walls of the castles were blown up, their demolition being entrusted to Captains Boscawen and Charles Knowles, who carried it out with skill and thoroughness [both men were to become admirals in later years]. This work occupied three weeks, during which Vernon considered the possibility of repeating Morgan's exploit of 1671 and making a dash on Panama.'

Richmond, vol. 1, p. 49.

There was no great mound of treasure, only the garrison's pay, which the Spanish soldiers could not shift in time. It was shared out among the British crews. Though a meagre £1,650, it boosted morale. The remaining Spanish vessels were taken as prizes. The destruction of the defences took some time – the walls were so thick it took weeks to mine them – so Vernon was also able to secure the release of several South Sea Company employees being held prisoner at Panama. No raid was undertaken, Vernon simply sent the President of Panama a letter.

The Admiral concluded that though the probability of there being bullion at Panama was high, a further attack was beyond his

capabilities. Augmented by *Windsor*, *Diamond*, and *Anglesey*, the squadron left Portobelo on December 13th, and, sailing for Jamaica, ran slap into a storm that scattered them. Only *Burford* and *Hampton Court* made Jamaica without severe damage; *Burford*, sent off again to search the coast of Panama for ships that might have taken shelter there, grounded and only got off with difficulty. Eventually, all the missing ships reached Port Royal, save the *Triunfo* prize, which foundered.

In what was to become a common theme, Vernon's squadron was now stuck in refit. Until February 1740 only five ships remained in service and between them they had to hunt for prizes, cruise off La Habana, and escort nervous friendlies. Fortunately the enemy privateers had not entered into their stride.

[The Opposition made much of the lack of preparation (by an Administration that had been forced into war) and this has come down as gospel. Actually, the British were more or less on top of the situation, but Ministers are always reluctant to spend money unless they have to. Prewar stocks at Port Royal were rotting away but no new stores had been sent out. Politics played its part, too. For example, a sensible bill for registering those eligible for sea service was defeated by the Opposition on the grounds that it was a step toward Absolutism.]

The victory at Portobelo (Porto Bello in English tradition) caused a great stir. The whole country was roused. Of course, it was only natural that Britain should best the Dons, but still... The captain who brought the news was rewarded with 200 guineas and promoted to post-captain. The Whig/Tory rivalry was laid aside for a short space.

Besides the congratulatory addresses, bonfires, and such like, the battle also inspired the song 'Rule Britannia!', first sung during the new royal masque, *Alfred*, in August of 1740.

More practically, no difficulty was made in passing a bill for the maintenance of 28,000 soldiers, plus new levies, and additional

monies to commission more ships, and to buy or rent merchantmen for transports.

[London's Portobello Road and its associated market were named after a farm built in 1740 which commemorated the victory. There is also the Vernon Yard mews. Portobello districts were laid out in Edinburgh and Dublin, and there was Porto Bello, Virginia. (The Americans had great cause to cheer the chastising of Spanish arms). More famous is George Washington's estate, Mount Vernon. Washington's half-brother, Lawrence, served under Vice Admiral Vernon at Cartagena, as an officer of Gooch's American Marines. Which argues that at least some people admired the Admiral.]

Although the intent was to leave Portobelo open for trade, sans forts, the Spanish decided to set up fairs at other locations (in particular, Veracruz, Acapulco, Quito, and Jalapa). Even so, the British managed to conduct a great deal of trade at the town during the course of the war – black market, that is.

*As near Porto-Bello lying
On the gently swelling flood,
At midnight with streamers flying
Our triumphant navy rode;
There while Vernon sate all-glorious
From the Spaniards' late defeat:
And his crews, with shouts victorious,
Drank success to England's fleet.*

The Ballad of Admiral Hosier's Ghost





Caribbean Sea



Caranage

The Coves

Portobelo

Spanish Vessels
(sailing order unknown)

- Santa Barbara (sloop)
- Santa Rosa (sloop)
- San Pedro (sloop)
- Triunfo (sloop)
- snow

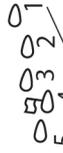
Iron Fort

Old Portobelo

Fuerte San Jeronimo

Fuerte Gloria

Anges Islands



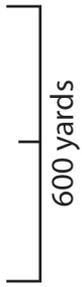
Positions on the First Day



Positions on the Second Day

British Vessels

- 1 Hampton Court
- 2 Worcester
- 3 Norwich
- 4 Burford (flag)
- 5 Strafford
- 6 Princess Louisa



600 yards

RELIABLE IF DANGEROUS: THE CARIBBEAN IN THE AGE OF SAIL

Excursus by David Hughes

Sailing ship captains lusted for consistent weather. Utterly desirable was weather that could be predicted with a high degree of certainty. And that the Caribbean provided, unlike the fickle Mediterranean or the restricted Baltic waters. But even so there were constraints, and these were most evident in the process of actually getting to the Caribbean. The Royal Navy had the biggest problem as the prevailing winds from the west – that is blowing up the Channel – rendered uncertain the time it would take to even start the journey. Note that this was most serious for a troop convoy; there being no way in which the regiments could be kept on land in readiness to load since the convoy had to be ready to set sail the moment the wind shifted from the west, or especially from the south-west. And since the conditions for dysentery or even typhoid were initiated the moment the troop ships were loaded, delays could have serious consequences – even doubling the ‘normal’ 10% death or sickness rate.

Once free of the Channel and with the heading changed to south matters improved and by the time northern Spain was reached a Royal Navy expedition could expect to have a ‘soldier’s wind’ (this being a wind from astern or the rear quarter, so easy to sail with that even a soldier could manage it!). Clearly the French would often have an easier start sailing from Brest or La Rochelle – the Spanish even more so as their winds tended to be favourable the moment they left port. All three nations would now sail south, gently tending east as they sought the Trades. Unfortunately while every captain knew with absolute certainty that they would eventually reach the zone where the winds perpetually blew from the north-east there was no certainty as to how far north their zone lay. A lucky force would catch the Trades soon after passing the latitude of Gibraltar, a doomed few would have to lethargically sail (for the further south one went the weaker came the winds until one was trapped in the dreaded Doldrums) south until parallel with the Cape Verde Islands before reaching them. And that meant more time meaning loss of income for the merchant captain and loss of life for a troop convoy.

But once in the Trades certainty arrived, for while they varied in speed they were utterly consistent in direction and in the Age of Sail that was the crucial point. All that really mattered now was skill of navigation. (Quick summary: at this stage latitude could be easily and very accurately measured by both simple and complex devices – the best known being the sextant. But determining longitude was still a mystery despite the vast prizes for its solution being flung around by every navy and insurance house in Europe.) The only safe system was to sail south-west until one reached the latitude of the target and then sail directly west, heading for the line of small islands that stretched from the Virgin Islands in the north down to Tobago in the south – collectively known as the Lesser Antilles. For the Royal Navy the preferred landfall was Barbados at about 13 degrees North latitude as it lay well to the east of the other islands. Whatever the target, care was needed as even the most brilliant navigator (an astute judge of wind and current speed, of cloud formations and bird patterns) was well aware that he could be off by as much as 100 miles of latitude after a voyage from the Channel. The best bet was to set speed to arrive just after dawn when the air was at its clearest and a lookout could spot the distant land – arriving during the night could be very stressful. The Royal Navy had a particular problem with Barbados as, unlike most Caribbean Islands, it was low lying and therefore difficult to spot. But it did have the vital advantage of being upwind from the other islands and therefore became a base – the initial headquarters of the Leeward and Windward Islands Command.

This position, with its ability to provide instant shelter and water to ships and fleets arriving from Britain after a long voyage led to the Royal Navy quickly establishing land facilities near Bridgetown. However Barbados had major weaknesses as a base; it was acutely difficult to enter (its low coastline meant no easy navigation points or ‘marks’) requiring local and very expensive pilots. More importantly, the island was low and sandy in marked contrast to the other mountainous, lushly vegetated islands. Hence its water proved to be prone to ‘going sour’ – often contaminated and almost undrinkable groundwater. The final fault was that its harbour, Carlisle Bay, was exposed to the rare storms. As a result little effort was made to improve its facilities; hence for decades warships requiring elaborate repair would sail with the Trades to the larger dockyard in Jamaica. In 1728, work had started on an additional station at English Harbour on Antigua in the Leeward Islands but little was done until 1743 when Admiral Knowles informed the Admiralty that he intended to build facilities that could careen (safely beach and clean) two 60-gunned ships at once, justifying his decision by citing Antigua’s ‘sweet’ water and safe harbour.

The Spanish tended to make landfall a little further south, with the *galeones* fleet then steering south-west with the trade wind to Cartagena and the ‘Spanish Main’ – the lands on the South American mainland - while the fast warships of the *azogues*, loaded with quicksilver, sailed north-west to Hispaniola and Vera Cruz. These ships could make their journey of almost 8,000 kilometres in about eight weeks, but of course their pilots and sea-captains were extremely experienced and leaving from Southern Spain had favourable winds for their entire voyage. Convoys and ships of other nations normally took far longer. The Dutch, bound solely for their islands of Curaçao and Aruba made landfall even further south (at about 12 degrees North), as did the slave traders sailing the whole way with the Trades from West Africa.

The French bound for St Lucia and especially, their main station at Martinique, needed the most accurate navigation, steering close to the 14 degree North line. This was because these fleets and convoys were being driven by both the Trades and the incipient Gulf Current and when the latter reached the Antilles it increased speed as it passed between the islands, creating enormous eddies in their wake. Of these the most powerful ran north along the western (leeward) side of Martinique – so strongly that it was impossible for a sailing ship of the period to fight it and sail south. So to reach the main French base of Fort Royal on the north-west coast of Martinique one had to pass south of the island and then sail north.

To some degree this sailing pattern became the norm all along the Antilles, if for no other reason than that all decent harbours and settlements were located on the western coasts where they could be protected from Atlantic storms and many hurricanes. As an example British merchantmen trading in the Lesser Antilles would first head south to Grenada and then sail along the island chain, always keeping in the lee and moving with both the Trades and the Current. Of course this predictable pattern was a gift to pirates and in wartime privateers and meant that the Royal Navy was compelled to station handy (as they might have to sail against wind and current at times) brigs and sloops in the region. In contrast the Spanish merchants, especially those of the Caracas Company, sailed due west along the South American coast through the ports of La Guaira, Porto Cabello and the as-yet scarcely developed coast of Colombia to Cartagena. This was normally a placid sailing run, but one on occasion exposed to extreme danger. The threat was the Caldereta, a very sudden, very powerful line squall that came down the steep coastal hills of Venezuela, capable of wrecking or sinking any sailing ship it met.

For although the hurricanes were feared, this much more common type of high wind was equally a great risk. The reason is implicit in the design of sailing ships which, quite obviously, featured tall sails, rigging and masts, all intended to catch and use the wind. Which is fine, except that when the wind became especially powerful and particularly when it also blew from an unexpected direction it was quite capable of exerting so much force so high up that the ship would list away from the wind direction. And once that list became so extreme that the sea broke over the sides she was ruined, and likely to sink. Now that was not a problem if two factors were at work. The first was enough

warning, usually evident at sea by highly visible squall lines (and it was the lack of this warning that made the Caldereta so dangerous) and secondly that the crew was both capable and large enough to get down most of the sails before the squall hit. Because once a ship was reduced to what were called 'storm-sails' there was a very, very good chance that she could ride out the squall with ease. Warships with their large crews obviously had the edge here over a merchantman, even if they normally carried more sails. And this also explains a merchantman habit that drove Royal Navy convoy escorts berserk with rage – that of taking in most of their sails at dusk. For there was a huge risk at night, even in the placid Caribbean, as a squall could only be seen at a distance when its clouds started to block out the stars, easy to spot for a warship with lookouts at each masthead, not for merchants with perhaps just one man on lookout. At least with sail reduced the chance of being blown over was much less, even if it did increase journey time by days or even weeks.

Hurricanes, if encountered, had stronger winds than those of a line squall and above all produced far taller and therefore more dangerous waves. But in reality they caused very little damage to typical European and American merchantmen for two reasons. One was that they were predictable, both because they only blew in certain seasons and because they were clearly heralded days in advance by sea and cloud pattern. In any case, merchantmen were ruled by an even stronger force – insurance. While the hurricane season was on (in this period from July to October) only those sailing always in sight of and in easy reach of land were normally at sea. British merchant owners, however much they may have wanted to order their expendable crews to sail in the hurricane season, were forced to bow before the dictates of the insurers, and especially their underwriters at Lloyds. Starting in July a ship at sea paid double the premium and on the 1st of August every ship had to either leave the Caribbean or remain in port until November. Any failure meant revocation of protection and penalty for owner and captain. Now this did not mean safety – the major British harbour of Port Royal in Jamaica and the ships sheltered in it were wrecked by a hurricane storm surge in 1722, while of course ships forced to be at sea in hurricane season went down with distressing frequency.

Once within the Caribbean, movement was governed by the North-East Trades (whose exact position varied by season as the wind belts shifted north and south). It was difficult to sail to the east ('beating to windward') which was why the Royal Navy had two separate commands. And hence the reluctance of the Leeward and Windward Islands Command to lend its ships to the Jamaica Command, since they could more easily reach, or be sent to, New York than Antigua when no longer needed. It also explains why attacks on the Spanish possessions in present day Venezuela came from the Lesser Antilles, not Jamaica. Yet the Trades did vary, weakening as they reached towards Panama and the Yucatan, while becoming erratic and sometimes dangerous as the winds were deflected by the larger islands of Jamaica, Cuba and Hispaniola. But even so, sailing was simple as long as one was bearing anywhere to the west.

Coming home to Europe was trickier. With the notable exception of Havana all the major Caribbean ports lay along the southern or eastern edges of the islands which meant that they had to pass through the island chain. These 'Passages' governed the trade routes, especially west of Puerto Rico. To its east there were several routes between the Leeward Islands, the best known being the Leeward Passage off the eastern edge of Puerto Rico, much used by American and French shipping as they were most active in the eastern Caribbean. Next, to the west was the Mona Passage, between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, wide, but prone to dangerous currents (the weak fringes of the Gulf Current fighting the cooler water of the Atlantic) and commonly used by Spanish local traders, and then the two most important – the Windward Passage and the Florida Passage.

British merchantmen sailing home from Jamaica were especially affected by the Passages. Looking at a map the choice seems obvious – sailing east from Port Royal takes one straight into the Windward Passage which in turn points straight towards the British Isles. But very few ships took this route. For when, after beating east along the coast of Jamaica, a ship reached its eastern point it would usually run into strong and unpredictable headwinds, created as the Trades slammed into the hills of the island. The only solution was to sail far to the south-south-east (perhaps as much as 100 miles) and then tack to the north-west heading for Santiago de Cuba. Even then one was faced with endless tacks as the Trades blew down the Passage, made worse for the British by the Spanish and French settlements on both sides. Instead a wise merchant captain sailed west from Port Royal into the Gulf of México, forced to keep close to Cuba by the current flowing out of the Gulf on the Yucatan side, but at least sailing at speed with the Trades behind. Once the ship headed north-east towards the Florida Passage (today called the Florida Channel) the wind died or became adverse. However while the winds might not help the ship had reached the point where the Gulf Stream was compressed between America and Cuba and could move north-east with it. And soon, as it passed up the coast of Florida, it would reach the prevailing westerly winds and head for home. Assuming of course that it did not delay too long, for this was the area where hurricanes and storms were at their deadliest, with the long reefs of the Bahamas Island chain preventing ships from gaining safety to the east, leaving them blown towards a deadly lee shore to the west, the Florida coast with its lack of decent shelter. Not surprisingly many of the 'Spanish treasure wrecks' are found in this region. For while the British were ruled by their insurance brokers, compelling them to leave before hurricane season, the Spanish often could not, trapped by lethargy and delay in the Caribbean. Far too often in the three centuries that they sailed the *galeones* could not depart until very late in the season and both pride and greed prevented them from staying safe in Havana harbour.

Another weather risk loomed in the region as for much of the year strong north-easterly winds, often growing to gales, drove against the northern coast of Cuba. The Spanish did not mind, having a superb, protected harbour deep enough for any ship yet built (thirty years later Havana saw the launch of the giant 136 gun *Santissima Trinidad*) but the ships of other nations would find themselves in serious trouble, meaning that no amphibious attack could safely be made against Havana for much of the year.

A very different trading pattern tied together the two parts of the British Colonial Empire. While the sugar islands were a source of enormous wealth they were incapable of maintaining themselves and needed constant supply of goods and food from the American Colonies. Most came from New York and New England and their captains followed a completely different route, sailing well to the east with the Westerlies before sailing south, catching the Trades around Bermuda and then reaching down to the sugar islands. The other trading patterns were local and demarcated by the Trades, examples being those from Jamaica south to the Mosquito Shore and the trade being started by the Spanish Caracas Company from its headquarters at La Guaira west to Maracaibo.

1740 – OLD GROG & PEG LEG

Further Operations in the Caribbean

The British spent most of 1740 attempting to repeat the Portobelo operation – opening the weaker Spanish ports to British trade by destroying forts and customshouses – and in fruitless hunting for the Great Spanish Treasure Fleet. With April came the rainy season, and with June the hurricane season. Unless under dire necessity, no significant operations were attempted over the summer. Activities picked up again in the fall, when all sides began their convoy routines. Most especially, Vice Admiral Vernon was told to expect a large troop convoy, to be used for amphibious operations in the winter.

The big event for the Bourbons would also come late in the year, with the arrival of not only a strong Spanish squadron under *Teniente-General* Don Rodrigo de Torres y Morales, bringing troops to match against the British expedition, but a powerful squadron of French ships under *Lieutenant-Général le Marquis d'Antin*.

These squadrons would effectively pin Vernon, though, as will be seen, they failed in their other purposes. Weather damaged, the Spanish ships took months to repair, and the French ships had to leave immediately. But, thanks their appearance in the theatre, their enemy would find himself conducting a major amphibious operation at the worst possible time of the year.

Meanwhile, Brigadier General Oglethorpe, Governor of the colony of Georgia, was planning to launch a surprise attack (that was no surprise) against the port of San Agustín, capital of Florida.

Singing the Spanish Mane [sic]

Vice Admiral Vernon took to sea again on March 7th, 1740. Lord Newcastle had written to him suggesting an attack on the shipping at Cartagena; he had sent along four bomb-ketches and some fire-ships for that purpose. Vernon was skeptical (stand-off attacks were one of Newcastle's pet theories) but wanted to check on the state of the defences. Besides, the Dons might rashly attack him.

Burford (70) not being fit for sea, Vernon switched his pennant to the *Strafford* (70). He also took with him *Princess Louisa* (60), *Windsor* (60), *Norwich* (50), and *Greenwich* (50) (a new arrival), plus three bombs and two fire-ships. Commodore Brown retained command of the rest of the squadron for defensive duties.

[Falmouth (60) joined the squadron on the 14th of March; Burford & Torrington (40) were to join when repaired but do not seem to have done so. Not all sources name the *Strafford* as present.]

Making landfall of Santa Marta on the 12th of March, Vernon's squadron arrived at Cartagena the following day. (The prevailing winds and currents being from the east, it was always necessary to strike the coast to the east of one's target – to windward – otherwise days would be wasted tacking upwind.)

The British spent five days charting the coast without molestation. On the 17th Vernon anchored in the Playa Grande in front of Cartagena and gave orders for an all-night bombardment of the town. British sources claim this was ineffectual. Spanish sources claim they used incendiaries and caused widespread damage.

[Beatson suggests the bombardment was in retaliation for an insulting letter Don Blas had sent to the Admiral: "If I had been in Puerto Belo you would not have assaulted the fortresses of my master the King with impunity, because I could have supplied the valour the defenders of Puerto Belo lacked, and checked their cowardice."]

Provoking the Spanish was a risky move, since the *Capitán-General* of Cartagena de Indias, *Teniente-General* Blas de Lezo,

was a formidable opponent, and had what appeared to be five ships of the line and five armed galleons to Vernon's nine ships (the bombs hardly counted in a surface engagement).

However, the Spanish refused to be drawn, though they returned fire ineffectually, probably to boost morale. They were much weaker than they appeared. De Lezo was coping with disease and desertions that threatened to reach epidemic proportions; supplies could not be had: he was trying to build up five and a half months of provisions in case the town was besieged, but could not get anyone to listen to him. Stores dribbled in from Spain aboard a variety of neutral shipping, or were purchased from the Dutch at Curaçao. The Viceroy of New Spain was applied to, but México was a long way off. It was almost faster to get stuff from Europe.

De Lezo had *Conquistador* (64), *Dragón* (60), *Europa* (60), *África* (60), and the frigates *Santa Bárbara*, *La Habanera*, and *San Cayetano* (all 24s). But, the Spanish squadron was in poor shape, virtually decommissioned, its guns ashore in batteries to counter amphibious landings. The galleons (probably still four of them) were no use in a sea fight.

Unable to draw the Spanish, Vernon sailed away to Portobelo (March 21st) after detaching *Windsor* and *Greenwich* to observe Cartagena. He hoped they could catch two enemy ships of the line (*Bizarra* and *San Juan Bautista*, plus a *snow*) ordered to reinforce de Lezo from La Habana, but the enemy made port safely.

[Richmond says Vernon probably came to the decision that Cartagena would be the best place for a naval landing after this visit. The inertia of the Spanish made him contemptuous of their abilities, and he wrongly assumed his reconnaissance had told him all he needed to know about the approaches to the town and its defences.]

The British squadron reached Portobelo around the 24th of March, augmented by the arrival of Captain Knowles in the *Diamond* (40). The reason for this return visit seems to have been the interception of a Spanish communication revealing there were four million pesos cached at Panama. Oddly, though, the British made no attempt on the city. This was probably because Vernon encountered an English pirate named Lowther. This man, a frequent visitor to the Darien Coast, may have warned him of the difficulties involved in attacking Panama with such a small force. Thus, Portobelo being deserted, the British merely took on wood and water and spent some days conducting repairs.

[Vernon was so pleased with the pirate's information, and with a detailed chart of the coast that he received from him, that he pardoned the man. Lowther will be heard from again.]

A reconnaissance was made of the port of Chagres, 25 miles to the west, and small patrols scoured the coast for prizes. On April 2nd the British headed to Chagres in force, arriving there by morning on the 3rd. This town was used by the bullion trade when the Chagres River was high. Otherwise the silver had to be packed by mule all the way from Panama to Portobelo (the road was nicely paved but subject to periodic Indian attack).

Chagres was also a *guardacosta* base. Even if the silver was not there, destroying it would open the area to British smugglers. There was only one insignificant castle – San Lorenzo – which surrendered the day after a seven-hour bombardment. The British razed the fort, blew up the customhouse, sank the last two *guardacosta* vessels on that stretch of coast, and absconded with a quantity of merchandise, eleven brass guns, and eleven *patteraroes*.

On April 10th all the elements of the British squadron rendezvoused at Portobelo, before sailing for Jamaica, arriving there on May 14th. Enroute, *Burford*, *Windsor*, and *Greenwich* were detached to Santa Marta in hopes of catching the *Galicia* (70) and *San Carlos* (62), now at Puerto Rico. Part of a small

reinforcement sent from Spain, these ships reputedly carried 700 soldiers and the incumbent Viceroy of Nueva Granada, *Teniente-General* Sebastián de Eslava y Lazaga. Again, however, the Spanish eluded their opponents.

Madrid had belatedly decided to send the reinforcements demanded by the *Conde* de Montijo during the prewar arguments over strategy. For security, the ships sailed in pairs. Apart from the *Galicia* and *San Carlos*, carrying 700 men of the *Aragón, España*, and *Granada* infantry regiments, which departed on October 18th, 1739, and arrived at their destination on April 21st, 1740, there were:

- *San Antonio* and *Minerva*, arriving at Matanzas, Cuba, on April 25th, with three picquets each of the *Portugal* and *Vitoria* infantry regiments;
- *Santa Susana* and *San Pedro* with three picquets of the *Milan* cavalry regiment (dismounted) and a dismounted company of the *Italica* dragoon regiment, also travelling to Cuba, and arriving July 13th;
- Two more ships carrying six dismounted companies of *Italica* to La Habana, arriving August 6th.

[In all, 1,200 soldiers. The regiments lost a number of men in transit; a detachment was also left behind in Puerto Rico.]

Having sinned the Spanish Mane [*sic*], Vernon was now at a loss. London, enthused by the news of Porto Bello insisted on another grand stroke, but with only a handful of ships and no soldiers, the Vice Admiral had no eligible targets left. Interdicting trade through a blockade of the principal enemy ports would certainly require more ships.

Commerce raiding would mean a dispersal of forces at a time when the Spanish might decide to counterattack; word had come in April that the Cadiz and El Ferrol Squadrons, under *Teniente-Generales* Manuel López Pintado and Andrés Reggio, had both sortied. That meant more than twelve new enemy capital ships – reportedly nine of the line and three frigates from Cadiz alone. Rear Admiral Haddock, commanding in the Mediterranean theatre, had been ordered to chase them, but might not arrive in time. Also, the French, though neutral, were rattling their sabres.

Still, Vernon was not too worried. He erroneously believed that the Spanish were only sending an escort for the *flota*. Now that the British were active, the Spaniards could not simply shepherd it from La Habana, but must proceed to the Isthmus and accompany the galleons every step of the way. Having destroyed the land defences there, the British might manage to pile on an attack while the enemy were crowded together in one of the ports. If the escorts could be attacked piecemeal as they arrived in the Caribbean, that would be even better.

On the 6th of June, Vernon sailed for Santa Marta once again, with five ships and a fireship (*Burford, Hampton Court, Windsor*; and two others, and *Success* fireship), hoping to intercept the incoming Cadiz squadron before it reached Cartagena. He also sent two ships (*Worcester* and *Falmouth*) in the opposite direction, on a speculative sweep of the sea lanes between Veracruz and La Habana, with the object of capturing the Viceroy of New Spain, rumoured to be at sea. By a happy chance the Viceroy's ship – a Dutchman – was indeed taken, and his papers seized (*plus jewels and money valued at 10,000 louis d'or*), but the man himself escaped aboard an escorting privateer.

Blas de Lezo y Olavarrieta (3 Feb. 1689 – 7 Sep. 1741)

Blas de Lezo was one of Spain's most famous and flamboyant naval figures, one of her greatest admirals. His nickname was 'Patapalo' – Peg Leg. He was a Basque, bred for the sea.

De Lezo joined the *Armada* in 1701 as a midshipman, fighting his first major battle, Málaga, in 1704, where a cannonball shattered his left leg; reputedly, the sixteen-year-old endured amputation without uttering a sound. Additional actions in the Med, including the Defence of Toulon, which cost him his left eye, led to his promotion to *teniente*. He made *capitán* in 1713.

In 1714 de Lezo completed the mutilation of his body by the loss of his right arm at the Siege of Barcelona. This did not stop him. Commanding a frigate, he went on to capture 11 British ships, including some privateers and an East Indiaman.

During the 1720s he held the generalship of the South Sea (i.e. Peruvian) Fleet, with which he cleansed the coast of British and Dutch pirates.

During the 1730s he held command of the Mediterranean Fleet and conducted punitive raids against the cities of Oran, Mers-el-Kébir, and Genoa. The latter action was merely the collection of funds owed Madrid, but the former was a major operation, in which Spain regained the cities named; de Lezo beat off a counterattack by the Barbary pirates and then took his flagship into their main sanctuary alone and rumbled its defences.

In 1734, de Lezo was promoted to *teniente general*. In 1737 he was appointed *capitán general* of Cartagena de Indias, and in 1741, as will be recounted, he was instrumental in the defeat of the British before that city. Sadly, he did not live to receive his hero's welcome in Spain, dying of infection only four months after his last victory. To this day, no one knows where he is buried.



Santa Marta was a bust. Three of Vernon's supposedly refitted ships were found to have rotten rigging and spars and had to return to Port Royal. Vernon accompanied them in the *Burford*, leaving only a nervous *Hampton Court* to watch Cartagena.

[*Hampton Court* (64) was later relieved by the *Strafford* (60).]

June ended, and July was nearly done, and nothing had occurred. Nothing could occur. It was hurricane time. The British remained concentrated at Port Royal and the Spanish squadrons did not arrive. August passed. Vernon's reputation was beginning to suffer from his enforced inaction. He was now aware London was planning to send 8,000 soldiers, plus a further 3,500 from America, along with a sizeable portion of the Fleet. They could arrive at any time.

But what Vernon really wanted was more supplies, and above all, more sailors. More ships would be no use without them. He had still not received any basic ships' stores, which limited his cruising time and led to problems such as had occurred enroute to Santa Marta. In fact, he did not really want an Expedition at all. But, orders are orders, and the operation was in line with his Party's desires.

The Admiral had done some hard thinking on the subject of targets. He estimated that Cartagena de Indias was the best choice. Veracruz was too far away. La Habana, which everyone else, both then and since, said was the only worthwhile target, was unsuitable because there were no anchorages or landing points anywhere near it, and it was exposed to severe northern gales all winter long.

There were two other considerations. Cartagena was one of the ports the Traders wanted opened up, but Vernon needed the extra muscle of the expedition to achieve this. And, there was the hope that by holding the port for a time, the mines of the hinterland could be accessed and plundered.

[*The problem with El Dorado was not that it did not exist, but that it was not specific location. It was (and is) the river network of Colombia, Peru, and the upper Amazon basin – i.e. panned gold. Hard to raid half a continent.*]

Cartagena could not be attacked *now*, as the rainy season was on and would last until November, but let the expedition first descend upon Santiago de Cuba. After being seasoned by action in eastern Cuba, the soldiers would be ready to tackle the main prize. This plan would also keep them out of mischief, while furthering the designs of the merchants – Santiago was another of those pesky privateer bases.

Vernon decided the best way to carry out his plan would be to rendezvous with the expedition near the southern end of the Windward Passage and proceed immediately to Santiago. But September passed and neither expedition nor Spanish reinforcements, nor Haddock with his pursuit squadron, arrived. On the 16th of the month a victualling convoy turned up (escorted by two 60-gunners), so Vernon was at least able to refit his squadron.

October. Surely the expedition must have arrived by now. On the 14th, Vernon sailed for the rendezvous point. Not that a rendezvous was in the expedition's plans (no transatlantic cable communications in those days), but it would have to pass the spot if it was headed for Jamaica. On the 23rd, the Admiral received word at last, but the news was not good. From a captured ship it was learned that a large Spanish squadron had been in the Caribbean for some time.

The Balance Shifts

It was not Pintado or Reggio as early reports had suggested, it was *teniente general* Don Rodrigo de Torres y Morales, with twelve ships from El Ferrol. Don Rodrigo was ordered to sail when it became clear from Spanish intelligence sources (probably the London financial news) that the British were putting together a major amphibious operation.

Originally, the Rio de la Plata was believed to be the enemy's objective (which may have been disinformation or market rumours). Admiral Norris was to command, it was said. A secondary operation by a Commodore Anson seemed to complement this; he was supposedly headed for Chile. There was also talk of a descent on El Ferrol, which would be far more serious. Two English foot regiments (the 34th and 36th) had already been earmarked for the expedition, wherever it was off to.

[*An attack on Montevideo was quite likely, because the black market slave trade was centred there.*]

Later, Spanish Intelligence crystallised the threat into an attack against one of the Caribbean ports. Most likely, this would be La Habana. It was the obvious choice, and the New Englanders were recruiting men for the American regiment by offering land in Cuba. But it was also known that Vice Admiral Vernon had the final say. So, Don Rodrigo had orders to a) disembark reinforcements at the principal garrisons, b) augment Don Blas' squadron at Cartagena or La Habana, and c) attack Vernon if at all possible.

This was not an act of 'rapid response'. Spain suffered from the same supply, crew, and maintenance problems as Britain (and France, for that matter). It was a full year before she could react to Britain's initial aggression in July of 1739. When Don Rodrigo did leave Spain his squadron was still poorly outfitted – he was told his missing stores would be sent on later (*we promise*). But, the authorities felt he had to be pushed out the door, otherwise the British might seal off El Ferrol.

A grand council meeting was called on July 5th, 1740, at which it was decided to outfit two forces: *chef d'escuadra* Pizarro to take five or six ships and chase Anson, and de Torres to take twelve more and hasten to the West Indies.

[*The Duke of Montemar might have opposed this measure, but he chose to have a diplomatic illness, allowing Montijo to dominate the council.*]

The British believed, from information received from their ambassador in Lisbon, and from their own, rather overly-fearful assessments, that de Torres had been given express orders to attack Jamaica – and in fact, documents would later be recovered from a Spanish ship that proved the French were to combine with them in this project. However, this 'master plan' was an illusion – almost.

De Torres' orders did mention Jamaica, but he had other instructions, too. Landfall would be made at Puerto Rico. Here he would conduct maintenance after the transatlantic voyage and assess the situation. The first priority was to dispose of the troops in his convoy. Most of them were destined for Cartagena de Indias and La Habana. Some had to be dropped at Portobelo (lucky them) and Santiago de Cuba.

If the British were blockading Cartagena and his own ships were in good shape, Don Rodrigo was to attack them immediately and relieve the port. If he ran into weak enemy forces south of Hispaniola he was to pursue them, and then proceed to Cartagena. But, if he felt the British were too strong, he was to make sail for La Habana, the best place to keep his squadron in fighting trim, and choose his own time for attacking the enemy.

After relieving himself of his charges, de Torres was to both protect the bullion traffic and force an engagement on Vernon before the latter could join with the reinforcements coming from England.

[The chain of command was established as follows: *Eslava*, virrey of Nueva Granada in overall command, de Torres as fleet commander, de Lezo as commander of the galleons, and the Barlavento commander, jefe d'escuadra *Espinola*, in charge of the most important of any flying detachments.]

Making a decision and issuing orders was one thing. Outfitting was another. Everything was done in a rush, but with the intention that every last detail should be perfect – an impossible task. Somehow the authorities scraped together three years worth of backpay for the naval officers. Basic ships stores, unobtainable locally, were purchased from overage stocks in France and Holland.

Ultimately, both de Torres and Pizarro would sail only half-prepared. The budget had run out. To address this problem, a stream of ships was sent out after them, bearing additional supplies and troops.

Pizarro never went near the Caribbean; his job lay farther south. Don Rodrigo's convoy consisted of the following:

- *San Felipe* (84)
- *Reina, Santa Ana, Principe* – 70s
- *San Luis* (62 or 66), *Andalucia* (62)
- *Real Familia, San Antonio, Nueva España, Castilla, Fuerte, Santiago* – all 60s
- Sloops *Pingüe, Isabela, Hermoso, Santa Marta*

These carried about 2,000 soldiers and three months provisions:

- 4 companies of *Regimientos de Toledo, Lisboa, and Navarra*.
- 6 companies of *Regimiento de Vitoria*.
- The rest of the second battalions of *Aragón, España, and Grenada*. (This is not certain, but likely).

[*San Felipe* is not given in every source – a seventh 60-gunner sometimes replaces her. Some sources state *Fuerte* was sold in 1739, which raises more questions. *Regimiento Vitoria* was dropped at *Caracas*, the rest went to *Cartagena*, temporarily.]

[The composition of the followup ships is not clear. *Crespo* gives the most comprehensive list. Ships had to be hired from the French and from the *Caracas Company* and other merchant concerns. *Crespo's* sailing schedule for those vessels sent to the Caribbean is as follows:

- *October 24th* – *Jupiter sloop*
- *November 9th* – *El Rosario sloop*
- *November 18th* – *Mars sloop*
- *November 21st* – *Nuestra Señora del Carmen (Caracas Company)*
- *November 25th* – *Santa Barbara sloop (Caracas Company)*
- *November 28th* – *San Nicholas sloop (Caracas Company)*
- *January 1741* – *San José (French)*
- *January 22nd* *San Lorenzo (French), San Andreas sloop, Carmen patache.*]

De Torres sailed from El Ferrol on July 31st, snapping up prizes in his way so they could not spread the alarm. The crossing was uneventful, but at 10pm on September 11th squadron ran into a hurricane near St. Barts. Two ships were severely damaged and the rest battered. Don Rodrigo had 60 dead and 700 sick by the time he made landfall. Over the next few days the squadron reassembled in the bay of San Francisco, at the west end of Puerto Rico (the first ships arriving on the 15th). Two vessels were missing: *Fuerte* and *Andalucia* (62). Badly off course, both tried to make La Habana. The former did so, but *Andalucia* struck in the Bahamas Channel.

Don Rodrigo now had the opportunity to make his initial assessment. He had two months supplies remaining. His ships

were fit for a short cruise, but nothing more. After writing to the Viceroy of Nueva España for victuals and ships stores to be sent to Cartagena, he deposited 250 soldiers to augment Puerto Rico's garrison and set off for Cartagena (October 6th), sweeping for the British by way of Hispaniola. Not finding them, the Spanish dropped down to Rio del Hacha (October 16th), where a sloop was dispatched to make sure Cartagena was not under blockade, after which the squadron made Santa Marta on October 23rd and Cartagena on October 24th.

Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Vernon received more bad news. The British expedition was still in England, unable to exit the Channel due to poor weather. Supposedly Haddock was still coming from the Med with ten ships, but there was no word from him. Vernon's one hope now was that the American troops would arrive. These were a newly raised regiment of four battalions, Gooch's American Marines, 3,500 strong. They should be sufficient for an attack on Santiago, or, if need be, the defence of Jamaica. With the Spanish divided between Cartagena and La Habana (it was hoped), they would be unable to prevent a British landing at Santiago.

But the Americans did not turn up. Instead, on the 29th of October, word was received that a large *French* squadron, under *Lieutenant-Général* le Marquis d'Antin (*Antoine-François de Pardaillan, Marquis de Gondrin et d'Antin, to give his full name*), was at Martinique:

- *Dauphin Royal, Juste, Bourbon, Lys* – 74s
- *Achille, Ardent, Elisabeth, Fleuron* – 64s
- *Content* (60)
- *Mercur* (54)
- *Argonaute* (44)
- *Gloire, Parfaite* – 46s
- Plus *Astrée* (30) frigate, a 10-gun corvette, and *Fée* (12) and *Gaillarde* sloops.

Worse, to d'Antin's Brest Squadron had been added *Chef d'Escadre* Gaspard de Goussé, *comte de la Roche-Allart's* Toulon squadron (sailing on August 25th):

- *Ferme* (74)
- *Conquérant* (68)
- *Eole* (64)
- *Léopard, Toulouse* – 62s
- *Tigre* (56)
- *Alcion, Diamante* – 54s

Also from Toulon, traveling separately under *Lieutenant-Général* (or *Chef d'Escadre*) Jacques-Aymar, *le Chevalier* de Roquefeuil, were:

- *Superbe* (74)
- *Sainte Louis* (64)
- *Triton* (56)
- *Amazon* (46)

[By merely activating these squadrons the Bourbon powers delayed the British expedition even longer; the Admiralty got into a 'flap' and made repeated adjustments to the size of the escort, which naturally meant additional crews, additional stores, additional repairs, etc.]

The Spanish meanwhile were deployed as follows (October 26th):

- At Cartagena: *Galicia, San Carlos, Conquistador, Dragón, África, Europa*
- At La Habana: *Glorioso, Invencible* (both just arming), several small ships, and the *Bizarra* and *San Juan* from Veracruz.
- At Veracruz: *San Juan* and *San Nicolas* sloops.
- At Portobelo: the frigates *Real Infanta* and *Castilla*.

And, of course, De Torres' force, currently working its way along the coast to Cartagena.

To Vernon, it was clear the Bourbon powers were planning a combined descent on Jamaica. The Vice Admiral hunkered down.

This was to overreact. First, de Torres was now very low on victuals; he was also discovering just how much the Spanish Government had been shortchanged by their chandlers. In his opinion, he would be unable to conduct any operations for some time. And, if the Viceroy of Nueva España did not come through with more supplies, his squadron might be permanently trapped at Cartagena.

Second, Don Rodrigo was unaware that the Bourbon powers had made an attack on Jamaica a priority. The decision to do so had been made after he left Spain, after some intergovernmental talks. The *Marquis* d'Antin was instructed to inform him of this upon his own arrival in the West Indies.

Third, strictly speaking the French were not going to attack Jamaica anyway. They had been dispatched primarily to bolster their Government's public statement that France would not permit the British to capture any Spanish port.

However, the Marquis would be quite happy to attempt such a descent, knowing there was strong desire for an action in certain court circles; any *post facto* justification would be accepted. But as things fell out, upon arrival in the theatre the French would be in worse shape than the Spanish.

D'Antin left Brest on September 1st, 1740. Although the accounts vary, it is clear the Brest Squadron was roughed up by at least one storm – a hurricane that struck the vanguard (under the Chevalier de Nesmond) on October 11th, about 250 Km east of Martinique. One ship was lost and three others badly damaged. The squadron was scattered. Elements made Martinique on as early as the 21st, but d'Antin himself only arrived on October 30th. After hasty repairs the squadron reached Port Louis, San Domingue on the 7th of November.

[Beatson's account omits the fact that three ships of the line and three lesser ships were detached to cruise the Spanish coast, saying only that some ships turned back to Brest due to the weather. (Confusingly, these were under command of Roquefeuil, who then brought out the additional Toulon ships.) Four of the Toulon vessels, too, were diverted before passing Gibraltar to help the Spanish with their upcoming Italian operations.]

While waiting for the other elements of his command, d'Antin wrote to de Torres on the 22nd of November, urging the latter to join him in the attack on Jamaica. He was joined by Roche-Allart on December 15th, and by Roquefeuil on January 8th, 1741, but by no Spanish ships. Don Rodrigo wanted the French to sail down to Santa Marta. He was still seeking information about the *Andalusia* and *Fuerte*, and daily discovering new shortfalls in equipment.

D'Antin demurred. All too typically, insufficient provisions had been allocated to his ships as well. This was not entirely the fault of the French commissaries. An embargo had been placed on Irish ports, trapping a number of key French victualers at Cork. At the other end of the supply chain, the Governor of Martinique had had no word that the squadron was even due. In any case, the Islands, being given over to cash-crop plantations, could not hope to supply so many ships. And, 1740 was a bad year for hurricanes; many of the islands had been devastated.

Despite British fears, Jamaica was really quite safe. Holding Port Royal, they were operating on interior lines. If the French tried to link up with the Spanish on the Main, they might be attacked enroute. If not, they would still be out of supplies at the rendezvous, and then have to sail upwind to reach the island. The

same was true if the Spanish tried to link up with the French.

D'Antin's stopover at Martinique put the cap on things by infecting his squadron with Yellow Fever. By the time the French got to Hispaniola, the Admiral's crews had been decimated and he had no choice but to return to France (February 7th, 1741). Seven ships in better condition than the rest were left behind at Petit Goave, under Roquefeuil, with orders to cruise for prizes, but Roquefeuil exercised his discretion and very soon followed d'Antin. Shortly after arriving at Brest, the Marquis d'Antin died.

There was a second reason why the French withdrew precipitately. Charles VI, the Holy Roman Emperor, had died. The War of the Austrian Succession was about to begin. There is an interesting 'what if' here. If the Emperor had not died, would d'Antin have tried to repair his ships and remain in the West Indies?

[No one knows exactly which ships comprised Roquefeuil's squadron, or the date they left the theatre. There is no record of them even arriving in France! (But they did arrive, because the known ships participated in further actions during the war.)]

Throughout the rest of 1740, however, and well in to 1741, the British imagined the Bourbons were massing to strike them. At this moment the Spanish and French ships were separated, and Vernon thought it might be possible to at least blockade Cartagena (the hurricane season did not affect the Spanish Main), but only if Haddock's ships arrived to help him deal with the French, which they did not. Their lordships at the Admiralty had given Haddock a full plate and then some. His own attempts to intercept both the Spanish and the French had all been unsuccessful, mainly because what ships he did have were busy escorting self-important merchantmen of the Levant trade.

November passed in a heightened state of tension. On October 20th, the French corvette, *Fée*, had been stopped by the *Norwich* (50) outside the Bight of Leógane. A contretemps arose when the captain of the *Fée*, harassed by the British boarding party, refused to go or send representatives aboard the enemy vessel. *Norwich* fired a warning shot which accidentally brought down the foresail tackling on top of a French officer. The under-gunned *Fée* responded with a broadside but was quickly re-boarded and taken as a prize. Vernon, perhaps wishing his subordinates would be less gung-ho when he only had a handful of ships to work with, restored the corvette to the French authorities and the matter was overlooked.

[Both captains died before any internal inquiries could be started.]

The Americans at last began to dribble in (starting October 30th), but the regiment was not fully assembled until December 23rd. The French strengthened their garrisons on Guadeloupe and Grenada. Meanwhile, stirring events were taking place in Florida.

Rodrigo de Torres, First Marquis of Matallana (1687-1755)

De Torres was 53 when he came to the Caribbean. He began his career with Spain's galley fleet, in action against the Barbary pirates, before serving in Sicily during the War of the Spanish Succession. By 1713 he was a *commandant*, and returned to Spain that year, participating in the Siege of Barcelona, where he captured several enemy ships.

Wounded and taken prisoner after a fight with two enemy schooners, he spent a year as a prisoner in Mallorca but was released when that island was retaken by Spain. He finished the war fighting off Sardinia.

During the 1718 War of the Quadruple Alliance de Torres drove off two Dutch ships in a small sea fight, then participated in the

Battle of Cape Passaro, saving his ship from the general destruction.

In 1719 he commanded a ship in the squadron that was to take Spanish troops to Scotland in support of a Jacobite Rising that year; the squadron was wrecked in a Biscay storm. Later that year he beat off a patrolling British force off Cape St. Vincent.

In 1720 he was made *capitán* and sent to the Caribbean, where he encountered Vernon in a fight off that town. Given the job of escorting a troop convoy, he successfully defended his charges.

From 1724 to 1727 he was in command of the *Barlavento*, then commanded a squadron that cruised the English Channel during the Anglo-Spanish War of 1727-1729.

In the 1730s he served both in the Caribbean and in the Mediterranean, during the War of the Polish Succession; in 1733 he lost an entire *flota* in the treacherous waters of the Bahamas. Despite this calamity he was promoted to *Teniente-General* upon his return to Spain in 1734, serving as the commandant of Cadiz and a member of the Admiralty board.

Sent to the Caribbean in 1740, he served there for some years, but having failed to fulfil his orders to engage the British he was under permanent threat of recall, and returned to Spain in 1744, having lasted so long only because the *capitán general* of Cuba required his services.

Antoine-François de Pardaillan Gondrin, Marquis d'Antin (1709-1741)

The Marquis d'Antin was a great-grandson of Louis XIV and the younger brother of the Duc d'Antin. His mother's second marriage was to the Comte de Toulouse, natural son of Louis XIV and *Grande Amiral de France*. This facilitated d'Antin's career – he made *Captaine* at the age of 22, in 1731.

In 1732 d'Antin commanded a squadron in the Levant, then fought the Barbary pirates, and during the War of the Polish Succession served as second in command with the squadron that was sent to the Baltic in support of the French Claimant.

He was made chef d'escadre (rear admiral) in 1735, *lieutenant-général* in 1738, and *amiral de Ponant* (commander of the Mediterranean Squadron) in 1739. In 1740 he commanded the fleet sent to the West Indies, but died of an illness shortly after returning to Brest in 1741, age 32.

Though he himself lacked experience he had under his command in this final expedition several outstanding officers.

The Siege of San Agustín (1740)

Governor Oglethorpe issued his own declaration of war at Savannah's courthouse, on October 3rd, 1739. On October 6th, he received the go-ahead from London.

By now he had assembled a variety of troops. The new colonial regiment took pride of place: the Georgia Rangers. These were a mounted band of about 300 whose peacetime duties would be to patrol the border and participate in raids with local Indians; two bands (about 200 braves) of the latter, the remnants of once-mighty confederations, were settled in the vicinity of Frederica as additional protection.

There was also the band of Scots from Inverness, the Independent Highland Company. These men, with their families, were settled at Darien, upstream from Frederica.

[Confusingly, the Georgia Rangers and the independent company are often named the 42nd Regiment; the same number as the famous Black Watch. However, there is no connection (except perhaps that some of the Inverness men may have served in the Black Watch). The Rangers, too had

a high proportion of Scots. But at this time the Royal Highland Regiment was 43rd on the regimental list (which in any case was not finally codified until 1751). The Georgia Rangers had no regimental number. The Independent Highland Company was accorded regimental status only in 1747 – as the 42nd – but was disbanded in 1749. Its commander also led the Carolina-based Northern Company of Marines, and it seems likely the two units were combined on paper in order to acquire the regimental title (such are the tricks COs play). In 1751 the RHR had become the 42nd, as it remains to this day.]

[The fact that their settlement was called Darien suggests a connection to the survivors of the Panama folly.]

[According to Spanish intelligence, in 1738, 500 troops returned with Oglethorpe from his Parliamentary junket, along with some artillery, and another 300 men arrived in 1739 from Gibraltar, under a Colonel Cochrane. The last were likely the Rangers, while the former may have been the Scots with their families.]

Extra troops were available in the form of a South Carolina militia regiment of 400 men (Vanderusson's), a second troop of Rangers in formation, and enough presents to buy the services of 500 Indians.

Though not all sources mention it, apparently the Spanish struck the first blow, sending Seminole bands to raid Amelia Island and massacre isolated traders. Oglethorpe countered by unleashing his Creek allies. In December, accompanied by Oglethorpe's Rangers, they began skirmishing against the various Spanish blockhouses along the St. Johns River, such as Fort San Nicholas and Fort Caroline. A redoubt was established at the mouth of the St. Johns, called Fort St. George. The Spanish response was lacklustre, and Oglethorpe felt bolder measures would be successful.

The main operation began in April, 1740, with a concentration at St. Simons Island. Naval support was provided by a squadron under Captain Vincent Pearce, consisting of most of the armed ships present on the Carolinas coast:

- *Flamborough* (20) flag, *Phoenix* (20) from South Carolina
- *Hector* (40) from Virginia
- *Tartar* (22), *Squirrel* (20)
- Sloops *Spence* and *Wolf*.

[Beatson lists 5 frigates and 3 sloops. Blandford (20) was Georgia's vessel, but seems not to have been used, Shoreham (20) was another vessel not present with Pearce.]

Pearce established a loose blockade of San Agustín while the troops loaded onto coastal craft. Oglethorpe would employ a force of between 900 and 2,200 men (depending on which estimate of tribal auxiliaries one uses). These included his Independent Highland Company (120 men), the Rangers (300), the colonial militia of Carolina and Georgia (500, mainly Vanderusson's Regiment), and bands of Creek, Chickasaw, and Yuchi Indians (100-1,200). His artillery train comprised 56 pieces. Not included in most OOBs are the 800-strong labour force of black slaves and 900 sailors (to man the guns).

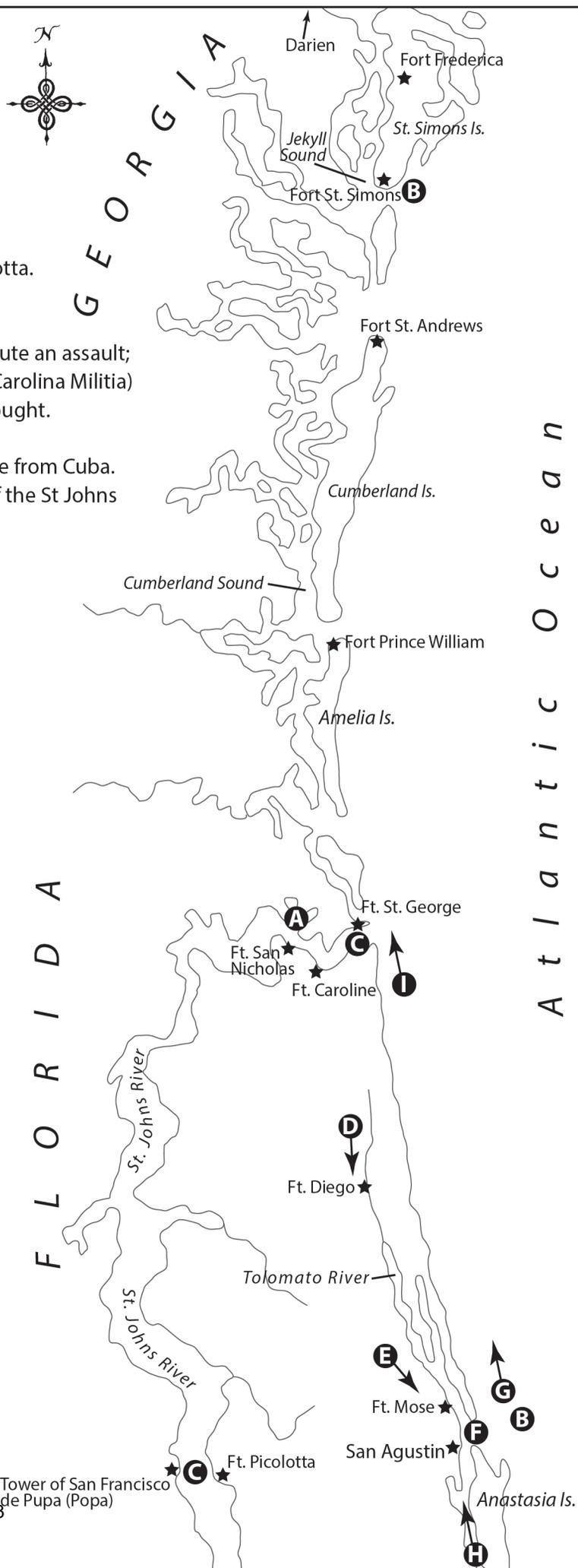
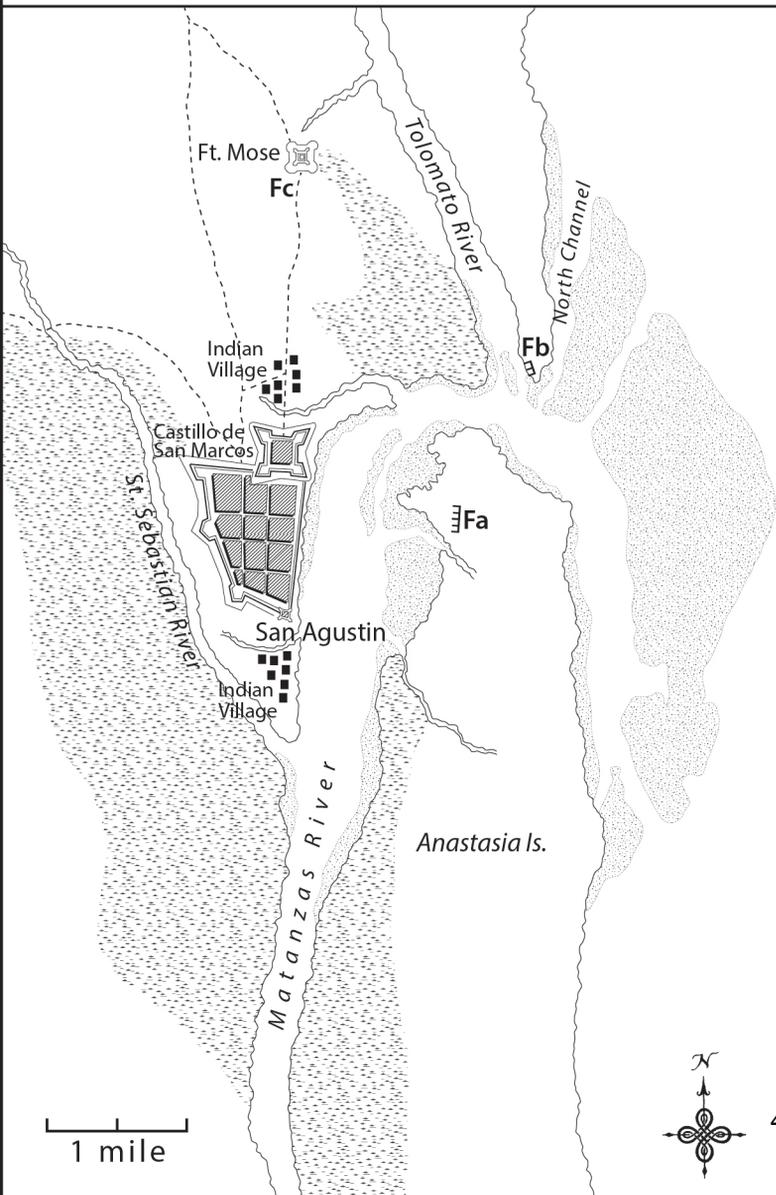
[The best estimate of Indian allies is 600 Creeks and Yuchis.]

Against this rather small column the Governor of Florida, Don Manuel de Montiano, could match only 750 men, including 100 reinforcements from Havana that arrived during the siege. Nonetheless, he reacted with vigour, entrenching his forces and conducting numerous sorties during the course of the campaign, usually with success. Only 300 of his men were Spanish regulars. The rest were Seminoles (actually a mix of Indians and Maroons – freed slaves) and Zambos (Negro-Indians). Additional defence was provided by 50 artillery pieces, six galliots, and two armed launches.

Campaign of 1740

- A)** December 1739: Skirmishing between Rangers/Indians and Spanish - various works overrun e.g. Ft San Nicholas.
- B)** April 1740: Muster at St Simons; Commodore Pearce establishes naval blockade of San Agustin.
- C)** May 19: British advance party arrives at the mouth of the St. Johns River and captures towers of S.F de Pupa and Picolotta.
- D)** May 23: British capture Ft. Diego.
- E)** May 31: British advance from Ft. Diego and capture Ft. Mose.
- F)** June 1-26: British establish batteries and plan but fail to execute an assault;
 - a) Battery on Anastasia Island; b) Vanderdusson's Regiment (Carolina Militia) and battery garrison on Point Quartell; c) "Bloody Mose" is fought.
- G)** July 8: A storm drives the Royal Navy squadron north.
- H)** July 14: A Spanish resupply convoy and reinforcements arrive from Cuba.
- I)** July 16: The British abandon the siege, return to the mouth of the St Johns and evacuate (July 26).

25 miles



Oglethorpe's advance party arrived at Fort St. George on May 19th. The same day, the towers of San Francisco de Pupa and Picolotta, were overrun (the former had only a sergeant and 12 men). These towers sat at an old Indian ferry crossing over the St. Johns, due west of and only 17 miles from San Agustín. No details are given, but they probably used longboats and Indian pirogues to approach them. On the 23rd, Fort Diego, lying on the main road to San Agustín from the northeast, and with a garrison of 50 men and 13 light guns, capitulated to Oglethorpe's advance guard.

[The site of Fort Diego is now buried under a golf course.]

After garrisoning Fort Diego the expedition returned to the mouth of the St. Johns to await the arrival of the train, which landed on May 29th. The twenty-five mile march from Fort Diego to San Agustín began on the 31st.

The final outwork to be overcome was Fort Mose (or Moosa), a stockade two miles up the road from the capital. However, Governor Montiano had ordered its evacuation, after Indians began ambushing the garrison's families. The British made three breaches and burned the gates, to signify its capture and render it useless.

Fort Mose had an additional significance. It was a Free Black settlement – the first in North America – established by the Spanish in an effort to destabilise the economy of the Carolinas by attracting runaways (most of whom only fled as far as Georgia). As mentioned earlier, the Governor of Florida had, on his own initiative, freed all slaves in his colony, as a reward for their assistance in defending San Agustín against attack in 1728, and it was widely proclaimed that the same freedom awaited any who could make it to Fort Mose.

[It was hoped the slaves, offered freedom and their own lands to farm, would form a useful militia. Those freed in 1728, and those managing to escape to Fort Mose, were required to become Catholic and to serve four years in the Army.]

Already, Fort Mose had borne fruit. On the 9th of September, 1739, the Stono River Rebellion (or Cato's Rebellion) had broken out in South Carolina. This was the largest pre-Revolutionary slave revolt to take place in North America. 20 slaves, led by one Jemmy, or Cato, marched south from the Stono River toward Fort Mose. Chanting 'Liberty' and carrying a flag with the same word printed on it, the band swelled to some 80 men. Enroute they managed to burn seven plantations and kill 22-25 whites before the Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina brought the state militia against them at the Edisto River. In a sharp affray, 20 more whites and 44 blacks were killed. Though a few of the slaves fled, they were hunted down within the week by Chickasaw and Catawba scouts. Most of the captured slaves were executed, and the rest transported to the West Indies.

The timing of the revolt had much to do with the heightened tensions between Britain and Spain: a new law had just been passed in the Carolinas requiring whites to carry arms at all times. Jemmy and his crew felt this would be their last chance. A malaria epidemic at Charles Town provided a distraction.

Incidentally, the men were almost all Angolans, former soldiers of the Kingdom of Kongo – perhaps even former Portuguese troops – and were both literate and Catholic (Kongo had representation at Rome). The 9th of September was significant as the nativity of the Virgin Mary.

[In 1740 a Negro Act was passed in the Carolinas. Slaves could not earn money or grow their own food, or learn to read, and must be given a Protestant upbringing. Whites were empowered to judge the actions of any black person without the need for courts. The movement of slaves and their public assembly was also restricted. Manumissions had to be approved by the government; even people of mixed race were prevented

from being freed. A ratio of one white to ten blacks was enforced on the plantations, and a ten-year moratorium on imported slaves was put in place, so that more slaves would be native born and conditioned to their lot. By tacit consent, slaves were not to be imported from Angola. In an attempt at fairness, the law also imposed penalties for harsh treatment, but since the testimony of blacks was automatically deemed invalid, enforcement was next to impossible.]

Before San Agustín could be invested, the British made a reconnaissance. As can be seen from the accompanying map, the walled town fitted into a south-jutting peninsula formed by the Matanzas River on the east and the marshy St. Sebastian creek on the west. The quays lay on the Matanzas. The citadel, *castillo* de San Marcos, sat at the north end of the town, covering the gates. Just north of it was a small creek or inlet, and two miles farther north, Fort Mose. Today the Tolomato River is part of the Intercoastal Waterway; in 1740 it was a creek flanked by wide marshes.

The harbour was shallow, and the bar even shallower. There were channels through it, but they were narrow. Far to the south, the Matanzas gave a second access to the sea via a muddy creek, but this could only be used by ships with an extremely shallow draught.



Castillo San Marcos

According to Beatson, who gives the most detailed account of the amphibious portion of the campaign, General Oglethorpe left a small party at Fort Mose to hold Spanish attention (120 Georgia Rangers and 50 Indians) and sent Vanderdusson's Regiment to occupy Point Quartell. The main body marched back up to Fort Diego and reembarked aboard the transports. From there they sailed to Anastasia Island, opposite the town.

This operation was not part of the original plan. Oglethorpe had hoped to surprise the garrison and force a surrender by his direct approach, but of course, the campaign's objective and timing was common knowledge up and down the coast. Montiano did not blink. So, it was decided to conduct a siege. Though a proper investment was not possible, by blocking the harbour and patrolling the hinterland, enough supplies might be intercepted to force a surrender.

With help from the sailors, batteries were established on Anastasia and Point Quartell. Unfortunately, the range was too great for the cannon and little damage was inflicted on the castle or the town, while the enemy galliots' own harassing fire was annoyingly effective. The Point Quartell battery could prevent free access into or out of the harbour, but not engage the galliots or the town effectively.

Growing desperate, Oglethorpe determined on an assault. First, the Navy would enter and clear the harbour – even such small vessels as Pearce's 20-gun 6th Rates were sufficient to obliterate

the enemy squadron – after which an assault column would land on the mainland, supported by fire from Point Quartell.

Commodore Pearce refused to risk his ships. The harbour was too shallow. His squadron had had the town under blockade since April, long enough to become familiar with the coast's proclivities. Engagements were fought with Montiano's naval forces. But these were limited to British longboats with 3-pounders against the 9-pounder-sporting galliots.

And, despite his seemingly aggressive demeanour, Pearce was a worrier. He would not even try the bar, but kept harping on the approach of the hurricane season. There was nothing left to do but maintain a blockade.

The defenders became bolder. On June 26th, in an action called Bloody Mose, Montiano's 300 Spanish, supported by Seminoles under Francisco Menendez, and a party of *Zambos* under Captain Antonio Salgado, stormed Fort Mose in a surprise attack, overwhelming the defenders in a hand to hand fight in which the British CO, Colonel John Palmer, was killed.

[The British lost 68 KIA and 34 POWs. The Spanish lost 10 KIA.]

The loss of this post threatened Point Quartell. The accounts are not clear whether the latter position was evacuated, but though this seems likely, the fact that the British ultimately withdrew by land suggests it remained garrisoned. Still, in practical terms Oglethorpe was confined to his island, completely reliant on an elderly naval officer of shaky morale. After 27 days the British had made no appreciable gains. And yet, the Spanish were close to starvation. Montiano considered capitulation.

The dice did not fall in Oglethorpe's favour. On July 8th a storm forced Pearce to head seaward, and on its heels (July 14th) came a resupply squadron from Cuba, carrying not only food and materiel but 300 more soldiers.

[The convoy escorts were the frigatas Bizarra (20), San Antonio, and Diligente (the last two were requisitioned armed merchantmen or privateers; all belonged to the Barlavento). Invencible (70) was to have been hurriedly outfitted and sent, accompanied by the fragata San Juan and the pingüe San Nicolas, but her draught was too deep for coastal work. She remained under construction, to be destroyed later by a freak lightning strike. With only the three lighter vessels, the Spanish could not

hope to drive off the British – in fact the squadron commander balked at running the gantlet after learning what he faced and actually entered the port via Matanzas Inlet, 14 miles south of the town, so he would have a protected run in and avoid the Quartell battery. The Spaniards' heaviest armament would have been 9- or 12-pounders against the 12- and 18-pounders of the British.]

With the town resupplied, the British gave in (they had previously set the final date of departure to be 'early July' at a council of war on June 16th). On July 16th they crossed to the mainland and marched to the mouth of the St. Johns (July 26th), where they were evacuated to St. Simon's Island. Oglethorpe had accomplished nothing. He was forced to abandon his artillery. Moreover, from their prisoners the Spanish obtained accurate information about the intended amphibious operation against Cartagena.

[British casualties for the campaign were 122 KIA, 16 POW, 14 deserters, and the loss of 56 guns plus a schooner. Spanish casualties are unknown. That Cartagena was named as the target by the POWs suggests Vernon had already put the colonial authorities on notice; the information would have come from men with contacts in Gooch's Marines.]

For the next two years, little occurred in North America beyond vicious, small scale Indian raids between San Agustín and Pensacola, and periodic slave revolts. Though Spanish agents may only have played a minimal role in fomenting these last, it seems significant that the revolts died down after the failed Spanish campaign of 1742.

[It appears a contributory cause to the failure of the expedition was Oglethorpe's insistence that his Indians be trained to fight as European troops. This wasted time, plus the braves did not like it. To placate them after they returned – without any slaves or booty, by the by – he rescinded his orders and allowed them to fight in their usual manner, which helped pin down the Spanish until 1742.]

[The image below is an engraving of the 1740 'siege'.]



TRIBAL ALLIES

Indigenous peoples played an important part in the struggle between Spain and Britain, and not just in North America. In most places the locals hated the Spanish, although some 600 tribesmen assisted them in the defence of Cartagena. But it was the war in Florida and Georgia that saw their greatest effort.

Allies of the Spanish

The Timucua used to control most of northern and central Florida, excepting the panhandle. The tribe had been many thousands strong – perhaps as many as 200,000 – with 35 chieftaincies. But they were not politically unified. Decimated by disease, their numbers had dwindled to around 1,000 by 1700. Repeatedly targeted by colonists and other tribes, they became extinct early in the 19th Century.

The Apalachee, a mound-building people, were also native to Florida. Their capital was at Tallahassee. Like the Timucua, they were once a powerful nation. Far ranging traders, their influence extended north to the Great Lakes and west to Oklahoma. Initially, thanks to the de Sotò Expedition's public relations drive, the Apalachee waged merciless war against the Spanish, but Franciscan missionaries had better success. The relationship remained a stormy one, however. Attempted revolts led to the men being pressed for the *corvée*. Though by now Catholic, the tribe may have stuck with the Spanish for another reason – the Creeks like to capture them to sell as slaves. By this time the Apalachee had dwindled to less than a thousand, and those that still lived in Florida were returnees from a western diaspora.

The Seminoles were a federation of several groups, including Creek and Choctaw, who formed a new culture apart from their relations to the north. Their name meant 'runaways'; most were Creeks who had fled to the Spanish side of the line for one reason or another. Fighting on the British side, however, was the Seminole chief Ahaya the Cowkeeper and his 45 men. Ahaya hated the Spanish, who he believed were trying to enslave the Seminole.

Spain also made use of people of mixed race, and freed black slaves, called Maroons. One interesting combination were the *Zambos*, men of mixed Indian and Negro parentage.

British Allies

The Creek were descendants of the Mississippi Mound-Builders. Their true name is Muskogee (Mvskoke), but the British called them Creeks after Ocheese Creek, where the tribe had built a refugee camp – the Spanish had driven them north in a punitive raid for welcoming a Scottish explorer. The name Creek was indiscriminately applied to their Yuchi and Natchez allies as well.

The Yuchi (Uchee) had been driven down from Tennessee by the Cherokee (at the instigation of Carolina fur traders) and sought protection in South Carolina. It was the Yuchi who brought the Creek Confederation into the British fold. Intermingled with the white settlements, they developed good relationships with men like Governor Oglethorpe.

The Natchez came from Natchez, Mississippi. A small tribe, at the height of their power they could only muster 1,500 warriors. In 1730 they were on the losing end of a war with the French. Many were sold to the plantations, but some obtained refuge among the Creek. Others joined the Cherokee.

[The details of that struggle are quite interesting. For such a small tribe they seem to have suffered from an excessive amount of factional politics. They also practiced ritual human sacrifice – which seems to be common in matriarchal societies such as theirs.]

[The Yuchi and Natchez languages are both 'isolates', unrelated to any other tribes.]

The Chickasaw, or Chicksaw, a confederation of the remnants of multiple mound-builder tribes, ranged across Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee and are related to the Muskogee. They allied with the British when the Carolinas were founded, acquiring firearms to make war on their enemies, the French-sponsored Choctaw. The tribe did not participate in Oglethorpe's campaigns as a unit, but braves who happened to be in the Carolinas came along for the ride.

The Yamasee (Yamacraw) were likewise not a single tribe, but a collection of the remnants of other tribes, mostly living in Georgia. They became notorious for playing a leading role in the 1715-17 Yamasee War, though the Cherokee may have played a bigger role. Like King Phillip's War, this was a serious attempt to eradicate the white colonists; it was a much bloodier encounter, too. Ironically, the war came about not through fears of encroachment by the White Man, but because the tribes of the Southeast were becoming indebted to British traders; there were also rumours of a census, which smacked of enslavement. By the 1730s the confederation had been reduced to a remnant, but still had an important role to play. For one thing, their war had led to the conversion of the Carolinas into a crown colony, for another, they agreed to let Governor Oglethorpe have the site of their last settlement, Savannah, for his capital. Their participation his campaigns was due to his personal relationship with them.

The Catawba lived in the region of the border between North and South Carolina. They speak a Sioux dialect, but never had to evacuate their homeland for the Great Plains. Agriculturalists, they quickly allied themselves with the Europeans, since they were in a constant state of war with their neighbours, the Iroquois (which did not stop them joining the Yamasee War against the whites). Their contribution to Oglethorpe's war was slight, because of a smallpox epidemic that broke out in 1738 (the sickness also affected the colony's fortunes, witness the Stono River uprising).

1741 – CARLOS DON'T SURF

Europe was on fire. In December of 1740, Frederick the Great invaded the Austrian province of Silesia. In the spring of 1741, the French would join him as auxiliaries of the Elector of Bavaria. Later, the Spanish would take advantage of Austria's weakness by invading Italy. This would reduce the amount of assistance available to New Spain.

Britain, for her part, remained embroiled in the *Asiento* war. King George, fearful for Hanover, kept a low profile on the Continent, and Walpole's policy of noninvolvement, despite prewar commitments to the Habsburgs, had his backing.

The Great Expedition

The capture of a major Spanish port had become an *idée fixe* of the British Government. The Administration hoped Vernon would plump for La Habana. Historians and analysts name La Habana the only worthwhile target. Vernon chose Cartagena, for reasons already discussed.

The Vice Admiral had gone on record opposing the idea of a large expedition (though not the idea of a 'descent'), but his views seem to have been ignored. Richmond suggests that as he corresponded directly with the Duke of Newcastle, and as no mention is actually made in the records of the committee charged with planning the affair, the Duke suppressed his opinions.

The final decision to launch such an attack was made in December of 1739. But, it took time to assemble the necessary ships, troops, and stores. The ships gathered at Portsmouth and the troops were encamped on the Isle of Wight.

Overall command was given to Lord Cathcart, a general of high reputation. Vice Admiral Vernon would command the fleet once it reached the West Indies; in the interim, Rear Admiral of the Blue Sir Chaloner Ogle commanded.

[Ogle's appointment came about because he was the only one of the three flag officers junior to Vernon who was available. Rear Admiral Haddock already had an independent command in the Med, whereas Ogle's last posting had been a subordinate one. The Earl of Granard was the third option, but he opposed the King's policies in Parliament and found the practice to be a career-stopper.]

Excluding the 3,500 of Gooch's new American regiment, the number of soldiers involved may have topped 8,000:

- Cavendish's 34th Regiment of Foot
- Bland's 36th Regiment of Foot
- Churchill's 1st Marines or 44th Regiment of Foot
- Fraser's 2nd Marines or 45th Regiment of Foot
- Holme's 3rd Marines or 46th Regiment of Foot
- Byng's 4th Marines or 47th Regiment of Foot
- Cochrane's 5th Marines or 48th Regiment of Foot
- Cotterall's 6th Marines or 49th Regiment of Foot
- Gooch's American Marines or 43rd of Foot

[A lower estimate from Harding gives 3,100 for Gooch's and 6,000 for the troops from England.]

The six English marine regiments were raised specifically for this operation, but their premise was based on a lie. In prewar days, Vernon had recommended reintroducing the concept of marine regiments for use aboard ship. His idea had been shelved, but was dusted off to serve the present necessity. The regiments were nothing more than line battalions, under Army control. They were called Marines to encourage enlistment, suggesting a life of ease on board ship.

[Perhaps, also, it was to avoid parliamentary squabbles over Army enlistment quotas.]

The composition of the covering squadron fluctuated as events unfolded. At one point it was a mere six ships. Then, the French appeared on the point of sortie from Brest and it suddenly jumped in size – imposing additional delays. After d'Antin's squadron did sortie, the numbers dropped again.

There is thus confusion over the order of battle. The following seems pretty certain:

- *Princess Caroline* (80) Vernon's flag
- *Russell* (80) Ogle's flag
- *Boyne, Cumberland, Chichester, Norfolk, Princess Amelia, Shrewsbury, Torbay* – 80s
- *Orford, Buckingham, Prince Frederick, Suffolk* – 70s
- *Augusta, Deptford, Jersey, Dunkirk, Lyon, Rippon, York, Weymouth* – 60s
- *Litchfield* (50)
- *Frigate Ludlow Castle* (40)
- Plus *Firebrand* (8) fireship, *Vulcan* (8) fireship, *Phaeton* (8) fireship, *Etna* (8) bomb, *Strombolo* (8) bomb, *Princess Royal* (18) hospital ship.

Defiance (60) and *Tilbury* (60) also appeared in the West Indies around the same time, as a separate command under a Captain Trevor, probably arriving with a 'normal' convoy.

[Some sources add the following: Prince of Orange (70), Tiger (32), Experiment (20). These ships do appear in accounts of the Caribbean actions of 1741, and were included in some of the earlier Admiralty instructions, but it would seem they were not part of the Great Expedition – again, probably commercial convoy escorts dropped from the original order of battle.]

The fleet, scheduled to depart in July, actually left the Channel on October 26th. Fortunately the passage was swift, encountering bad weather but no hurricanes. An early storm (November 11th) sent the *Buckingham* home and the *Superb* and *Prince of Wales* to Lisbon in company with the *Cumberland*. The latter made her own way to the Caribbean while the others returned to England.

[It is recorded that the troops loaded up in July. It is not recorded whether they were ever disembarked for a rest before they left port.]

Ogle ultimately brought 28 men of war and 5 smaller ships with him, the ships of the line reduced to 21, plus the *Cumberland*. Though scattered, the ships assembled in Prince Rupert's Bay, Dominica, within a few days of each other.

On the 7th of January, 1741, the fleet left Dominica for Jamaica. They brought with them the body of Lord Cathcart, who had died of 'the bloody flux' on the 31st of December. Many believe his untimely death led to the failure of the expedition. Command of the army devolved on Brigadier General Wentworth, a desk jockey.

[From at least one firsthand account, the fleet put in at Barbados first, which would have meant Cathcart died there and not at Dominica. Most of the major historians do not recount this landfall. Also, the French were disturbed by reports of 'Admiral Norris' landing at Santo Domingo with a vast host, but this may have been Cathcart's funeral procession (he was a Peer, remember). A 'sedan chair' had been observed, which was thought contain the aged Admiral Norris, but it could have been a makeshift bier. Perhaps he actually died at sea and was taken ashore after.]

Passage of Arms

'We were all determined to defend ourselves and die rather than surrender. They never fought with such fury!'

Ensign Roquefeuil, recounting the mood on board the Diamant during the action of January 18th, 1741

Enroute to Jamaica the British had their first 'real' encounter with the French in Caribbean waters. It was on the 18th of January, 1741. The Expedition had coasted the south side of Hispaniola. They passed the wide bight known as Canal de l'Est, in which lay the French ports of Port Louis and Les Cayes, passed, too, d'Antin and his squadron, without challenge, and perhaps even without knowledge. Now, six leagues south of Cap Tiburon, at the western end of the southern arm of Haiti, 'five' strange sail were sighted around 6am, and Rear Admiral Ogle altered course to investigate.

[D'Antin was unable to leave the bight for quite some time, due to light winds and adverse currents. Only four of the sail were warships. The fifth ship does not feature in the account below; she was only there by coincidence.]

Deciding he should not risk an engagement with his vast convoy in tow, Ogle detached five or six ships to investigate (*Prince Frederick, Orford, Lyon, Weymouth, Rippon, and Dunkirk*), under the aggressive Lord Aubrey Beauclerk. At first, the unknowns seemed becalmed – they were inshore – but they soon picked up speed and an eastward chase ensued, with the strange ships maintaining course and only shortening sail because of a laggard.

[Beatson names the Augusta and an unknown instead of Rippon and Dunkirk. Some sources state that only five ships were detached, but that the captain of the Orford exercised his initiative and joined up in time for the night action, which might account for some of the confusion on the British side.]

Finally, as the British showed no sign of discontinuing the chase, at 3- or 4pm the strangers decided to hoist their colours, showing them to be French. But it might be a ruse. They could be Spanish, and if so might be carrying treasure (!). The detachment continued the pursuit, overhauling the 'French' at 10pm.

Coming to within 'half a pistol shot' (15 to 20 yards), the British began questioning the strangers. From this point on, the narratives vary wildly depending on the nationality of the writer telling the story. Albert Parker seems to have the best grasp of the situation, and what follows is based largely on his assessment (see also the attached map and diagrams).

What appears to have happened is this:

- The unknowns were heading east after rounding Cape Tiburon from the north. The commander of the squadron arranged his four ships in a box formation, possibly because night was coming on and one of his ships was slow; the formation was not a perfect one.
- The British pursuit came up from behind. Their formation also was ragged, with each ship making the best speed it could. The squadron flagship, *Prince Fredrick (70)*, leading, came abreast the stranger's flagship on the outside (starboard of the vessel). About the same time, *Weymouth (60)*, commanded by Captain Knowles, came up with the other rear ship, also on its starboard side (i.e. within the 'box'). The other British ships lagged behind.
- Both British ships began hailing the strangers: Beauclerk, 'Where is this ship from?'; Other Vessel, 'From France?'; Beauclerk, 'Where is the ship going?'; Other Vessel, 'On the sea.' [*Stupid Englishman.*]; Beauclerk, 'We need to talk. You do not answer? You say nothing?'

- Beauclerk, annoyed, then ordered a shot fired across the ship's bows, and then a second one. Knowles, seeing this, and having a similar verbal exchange, gave the same orders.
- At this, both the strange ships opened up with broadsides, the British replied in kind, and the firing became general.

Prince Frederick and *Weymouth* had matched up against the French ships *Ardent (64)* and *Mercure (56)*, respectively. Ahead of the *Ardent* was the *Diamant (50)*, and ahead of the *Mercure*, the *Parfaite (44)*. Commanding the squadron from *Ardent* was *Capitaine Nicolas Hercule de Boisgeroult, le Chevalier d'Epinau*.

[Evidence points to Diamant as the laggard.]

Earlier in the month, D'Antin, based at Port Louis, had dispatched two pairs of ships: *Diamant* and *Parfait* to escort a packet (*Méduse (16)*) to Cap St. Nicholas, and *Ardent* and *Mercure* to visit Santiago de Cuba and collect the pay for the Spanish garrisons on Hispaniola. The four had rendezvoused at Petit Goave, in the Bight of Leógane (January 14th), before rounding Cape Tiburon, headed for Les Cayes, where d'Antin, having shifted his base, awaited them.

The behaviour of the French, their 'ignoring' of the British and their violent response, can be explained quite simply. They had sighted the British about 6am. They were aware of the incident of the *Fée* (hence the strong escort for the *Méduse*) and had no wish for a repeat incident. Moreover, the size of the British convoy suggested war might have broken out between the two countries. Finally, it is likely they were still transporting the Spanish pay chests, *in contravention of the laws respecting neutrals*, and had no wish to invite the British on board.

Prince Frederick and *Weymouth* fought one-on-one against their opposites, *Ardent* and *Mercure*, for 90 minutes or so, and both dealt and took damage. Light winds prevented any of the other ships from assisting their compatriots, and indeed scattered the combatants.

As unconfirmed, Parker reports *Parfaite* being engaged by a British ship, and *Diamant* by three (this from French eyewitnesses). He points out, however, that *Rippon* is not supposed to have engaged at all, and *Orford* – which may have been trailing anyway – only took part in the second phase of the battle. That would leave *Dunkirk* to fight *Diamant* and *York* to fight *Parfaite*, assuming they did come within range of each other.

At some point Knowles came to the conclusion the ships were French – that they spoke in French was no clue, since the *lingua franca* of the day was French – and, being disengaged, managed to visit his flagship, advising Beauclerk that they should cease fire, at least until the dawn. Beauclerk agreed, but it proved difficult to communicate the decision to the rest of his squadron. This led to a 'second combat'.

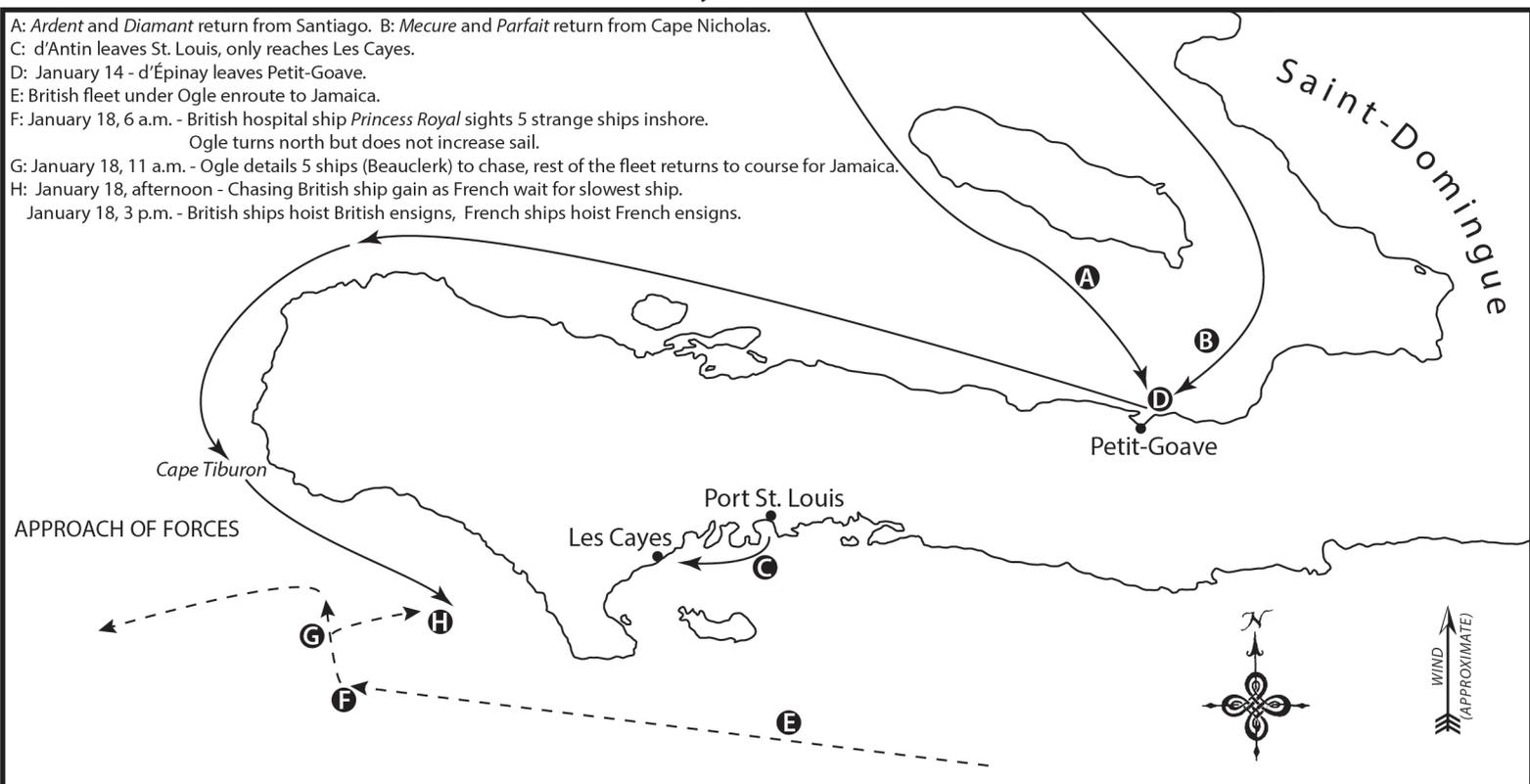
The battle recommenced after midnight. According to Parker's investigations, *Orford* overhauled *Dunkirk*, which fired at her when hailed (!). Still under the misapprehension that they were dealing with Spaniards, *Orford* then charged up the line to engage (probably) the *Diamant* for about an hour in the blind dark. Parker reports as unconfirmed the other three French ships coming to the assistance of *Diamant*, attracted like moths to the 'commander's light' hung out by the *Orford's* captain.

[Such lights were suspended in the rigging to provide a reference point for the squadron. The captain of the Orford was next in seniority to Beauclerk and apparently assumed the latter, whose light was shot away and not replaced, was dead.]

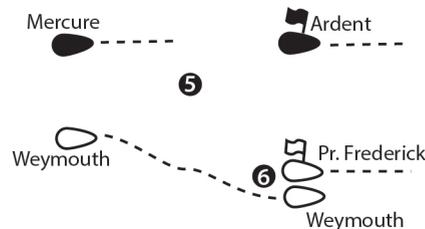
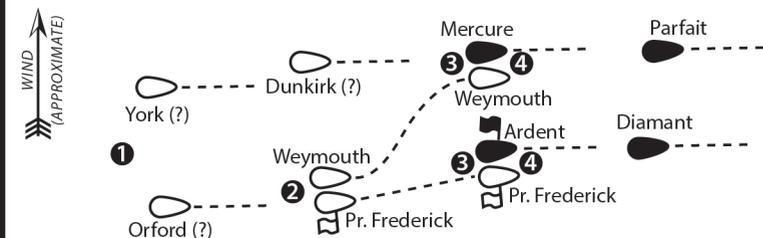
At some point the winds died away completely and the ships had to be towed to maintain their firing positions. *Prince Frederick* was able to assist *Orford* in some manner, *Weymouth* was not.

Beauclerk vs. d'Épinay January 18/19, 1741

- A: Ardent and Diamant return from Santiago. B: *Mercure* and *Parfait* return from Cape Nicholas.
 C: d'Antin leaves St. Louis, only reaches Les Cayes.
 D: January 14 - d'Épinay leaves Petit-Goave.
 E: British fleet under Ogle enroute to Jamaica.
 F: January 18, 6 a.m. - British hospital ship *Princess Royal* sights 5 strange ships inshore.
 Ogle turns north but does not increase sail.
 G: January 18, 11 a.m. - Ogle details 5 ships (*Beauclerk*) to chase, rest of the fleet returns to course for Jamaica.
 H: January 18, afternoon - Chasing British ship gain as French wait for slowest ship.
 January 18, 3 p.m. - British ships hoist British ensigns, French ships hoist French ensigns.



NIGHT ACTION: 10 p.m. to midnight, January 18, 1741

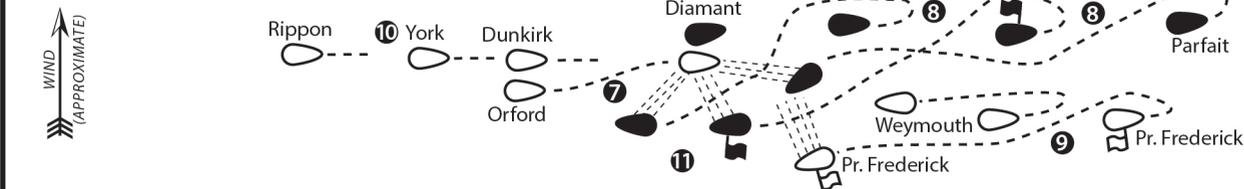


- 1: January 18, 10 p.m. - British come up from astern of French, some to windward, some to leeward.
- 2: Capt. Knowles (*Weymouth*) consults Capt. Beauclerk (*Pr. Frederick*).
- 3: Beauclerk interrogates *Ardent*, Knowles interrogates *Mercure*.
- 4: Firing breaks out after French replies unsatisfactory to British.

5: *Rippon* hangs back or arrives late, involvement of *York* and *Dunkirk* uncertain, *Oxford* not yet present.

6: *Weymouth* presses ahead, Capt. Knowles convinces Capt. Beauclerk to cease firing. Other British ships already disengaged.

NIGHT ACTION: 1 a.m. to 4:30 a.m., January 19, 1741



- 7: *Orford* comes up, speaks *Dunkirk*, presses ahead to engage last French ship (*Diamant*?).
- 8: Other French ships drop back, engage *Orford* on other side.
- 9: *Weymouth* tows head around, does not engage; *Pr. Frederick* tows to assistance of *Orford*.
- 10: Involvement of *Dunkirk* and *York* uncertain. *Rippon* not engaged.
- 11: Firing dies out around 4:30 a.m.

Dawn brought on the second and final ceasefire about 4:30am on the 19th. The French were seen stood off about a mile, in battle order. They appeared ready to continue fighting, despite, (presumably) having suffered more punishment than the British, but accepted a flag of truce readily enough.

According to British accounts, they boarded the French like policemen – ‘now then, what’s all this; you can’t shoot at us you know, we’re British.’ According to the French, the British apologised, hoping they had not caused many casualties, to which d’Epinay is said to have replied, ‘but too many’. With mutual compliments veiling hostility, the two sides parted. Not this time, but soon, soon, *mon cher*.

The tally of broadsides and the damage (which varies), indicates *Ardent*, *Prince Frederick*, *Weymouth*, and *Mercure* did most of the work and received the heaviest damage, except for the *Diamant*, which, in confirmation of French accounts, suffered severely, with 80 shots through her hull, and over 500 through her sails and masts; she also fired 25 broadsides.

As to the motivation for the British attack, it seems they truly did fear the strange ships might be Spanish, flying false colours. If enemy, then Beauclerk would be committing a grave fault by not attacking them. If French... oh well.

[It was not unknown for French and Spanish flags to be mistaken for each other at long range, but in this action the British saw the flags were French.]

The Royal Navy, as a corporate entity, held the view that war with France was coming, and that Britain should strike the first blow. Rear Admiral Ogle actually had secret orders to engage and destroy d’Antin’s force if he could get away with it, and Beauclerk was an aggressive commander. It should also be noted that besides the ‘bullying’ of the *Fée*, a similar action between matched forces occurred off Cape Spartel on July 25th. However, Ogle does not appear to have communicated his secret orders to Beauclerk; neither does he appear to have recognised the nationality of the strange ships before making his detachment. Thus British excuses can be allowed.

A desire for war was also strong on the French side, since they had long chafed under the ‘unnatural’ Anglo-French ‘friendship’ of the 1720s and 1730s, which prevented the French Navy from flexing its muscles. Though it is possible that the French deliberately provoked the British, the French were under strict orders not to begin any engagement. Later French writers, acting on nationalistic impulse, have perhaps painted the French commanders in heroic colours, leading their readers to assume they were trying to provoke hostilities.

Both sides downplayed the incident. The French, busy making ready for war with Austria, made a formal diplomatic complaint, but nothing more. They had dropped plans for aiding the Spanish with the death of Charles VI. Privately, Beauclerk was faulted for doing ‘too much or too little’, but he was killed in a later action and no inquiry was instituted into his conduct.

‘The British Army is a Bullet Fired by the Royal Navy’

Meanwhile, the remainder of the British expedition pressed on to Jamaica, arriving on the 20th of January, where Vernon received it with a sour face. The letter ordering a rendezvous off Cap Tiburon had gone astray and now he was faced with yet another change in plans. However, the new commanders were amenable to his suggestion that the French be routed out of Port Louis before they established a blockade on in the Windward Passage – he was unaware that d’Antin was homeward bound.

[Richmond notes that at this time, complete harmony reigned between Vernon, Wentworth, and their subordinates. Soon, things would change.]

The fleet was victualled in record time and set out at the end of January. Nothing like had ever been seen in the Islands. Vernon staggered the departures, so that the van of ten ships under Ogle left on the 2nd of February, the second division under Commodore Lestock on the 4th, his own division on the 6th, and the transports on the 7th. Richmond gives the full tally as 29 ships of the line (i.e. all of them less the *Augusta*, which grounded while exiting the harbour), a 40-gunner, 23 ‘corvettes’, bombs, and tenders, 1 fireship and the Admiral’s tender, and 85 transports. In all, 140 sail.

[Crespo’s totals for the expedition, at the point when it actually arrived off Cartagena are: 28 ships of the line, including 8 third rates, plus 12 frigates (but frigata are not always frigates in the literal sense), 130 transports, 9,000 troops, 2,000 blacks, 15,000 sailors, and 2,763 men of Gooch’s Marines. Beatson says 124 sail after leaving Hispaniola for Cartagena.]

In its essentials, this was still the same plan. A preliminary ‘practice’ strike against a secondary target – Port Louis instead of Santiago – then the main effort against Cartagena. There is a vague feeling that Vernon was trying to put off the evil day. Capturing Cartagena was a futile move, hardly in the Traders’ interests, whereas Santiago and Port Louis affected them directly. If the operation took too long, perhaps the Cartagena landing would not be feasible. Just a feeling...

[Beatson suggests Vernon had formed no concrete plan until Ogle arrived, possibly because he wished to coordinate matters with everyone present. According to Richmond this is not strictly true, but certainly the plans were not fully thought out. As the accounts of the San Agustin operation reveal, the American authorities knew the target before the Expedition sailed, else why did the British POWs tell the Spanish Vernon was bound for Cartagena? The British, given a long-term aggressive campaign strategy, had been forced on the defensive by the French and Spanish reinforcements; now they were reverting to the offensive, with limited time to prepare.]

Vernon believed d’Antin was still at Port Louis. Reconnaissance by the observing sloop (*Wolf*) on the 10th of February, at a range of five miles, identified 19 sail, plus an admiral’s pennant and that of two squadron commanders. *Wolf* took herself off to Cap Tiburon, but the British fleet, having first to sail south from Jamaica and then east to make landfall about San Domingo – the prevailing weather patterns made this route inevitable – only picked up the sloop on the 19th.

[Beatson’s text suggests a direct sailing from Jamaica’s eastern point to Cap Tiburon; either way the journey took them 9 days.]

Four days later, Vernon was ready to attack. France and Britain were not at war, but it seemed clear to all that war was inevitable, and that one or the other should take the initiative. The French had backed down on the 19th of January, how would they react when challenged to a full fleet action?

Fresh reports put the number of sail in the harbour at 16, but the information was contradicted. At last it was determined that, thanks to the haze, the sail had been misidentified – they were all merchantmen, save for one frigate. The ‘admiral’s pennant’ was a white house sited in a direct line behind the frigate! Confirmation was given in a parley with the governor of the town, who offered his hospitality and the unwelcome news that d’Antin had left 18 days ago, on the very day the British transports left Port Royal.

[There had been a window of four days in which there was no watch kept on Haiti, and the French slipped through it.]

There was no excuse now for an attack on Port Louis. Before carrying out the rest of the plan, however, the British had to make sure the French had really gone home. This wasted several more days. The window of opportunity for a successful attack on Cartagena was now small, but unfortunately it had not closed completely. A second council of war resolved that the operation

should be carried out. On the 23rd of February word came that de Torres had left the Spanish port with 14 ships, bound for La Habana.

[De Torres also took the San Nicholas sloop, and the San Ciriaco and La Flecha frigatas.]

[Beatson faults Vernon for not sending a couple of frigates with a team of expert observers and engineers to Port Louis. This would have prevented much waste of time.]

Don Rodrigo had had a trying time at Cartagena. Arriving there at the end of last October, he found it impossible to properly repair his ships. Of all the belligerents, only the Spanish had dockyard facilities in the region, but these were at La Habana, 1,000 miles away. There was no money to even pay for moderate repairs. And, Cuba was where he ought to be; the British would surely not attack a secondary port like Cartagena.

Food was another difficulty. He did not want to eat up the garrison's supplies – if the British did blockade them, both garrison and squadron would have no choice but to surrender – but very little was coming in; he had perhaps enough for a two-months cruise. In the interim, victuals were purchased from the French and Dutch islands; the follow-on vessels from Europe also began to arrive.

Thus it was not until February 7th, 1741 (coincidentally as d'Antin was sailing away), that Don Rodrigo left for La Habana (arriving February 24th), taking with him the ten best ships. But, though the Spanish left only six ships of the line and a few galleons behind to defend Cartagena, the news did not encourage Vernon. Perhaps d'Antin had gone to La Habana as well. Perhaps the combined fleet would move from there to Jamaica...

[The distribution of Spanish capital ships, as of February 1741, was:

Principe (70), Reina (70), Santa Ana (70), San Luis (62), Castilla (60), Nueva España (60), Real Familia (60), San Antonio (60), Santiago (60) enroute to La Habana.

San Felipe (80), Galicia (70), San Carlos (66), África (60), Dragón (60), Conquistador (60) at Cartagena.

León (60), Fuerte (60) in commission at La Habana.

The Barlavento vessels probably at Veracruz, though this is not confirmed.]

A Slam Dunk

Despite these fears Vernon decided to leave for Cartagena at once. The troops had already spent an extra month on board the transports. Besides, all preparations had been made and wood and water taken on board, by gracious permission of the French authorities.

The passage took a week (March 8th to March 17th – the Spanish sighted two ships off the coast on the 15th, but the bulk of the expedition arrived two days later). Anchoring in the Playa Grande, the outer roadstead, the British sent in their smaller boats to take a close look. The layout of Cartagena's defences was complex. (See the attached map.)

The coast was low lying, featuring batches of barrier islands amid mangrove swamps and lagoons. The town was situated on one such a barrier island, known as the Pascaballos. Cartagena was divided into two communities, one on the island itself and the other on an islet in the lagoon behind; they were connected by a bridge. The inner part of the town was connected to the mainland by a similar bridge.

To the north, the area was cut off by the La Boquilla, the entrance to the large lagoon of Cienaga de la Virgen, the bulk of which was mangrove swamp. No harbour lay on the open shore facing the

Playa Grande, indeed, a heavy surf and unfavourable winds made any landing impracticable.

Behind the Bahía de Cartagena was a ring of hills. To the east of Cartagena itself were two prominent features, the hill called Cerro de la Popa, so named because from the sea it resembled the poop of a galleon, and a ridge running southwest from the hill, on which sat the final bastion or 'citadel' of Cartagena, the *castillo* de San Felipe. De la Popa was a high hill, with abrupt sides and a convent at the top. Though in range of the citadel, it was not fortified.

[San Felipe is often called St. Lazare, from a nearby hospice of that name. Actually, it is the ridge that is called San Lázario.]

This was not the only defence. Both sections of the town were walled. The narrow entrance to the quayside was covered by the fort of Pastelillo and a boom, and the main anchorage by two fortifications: *castillo* Manzanillo on the east, and *castillo* Grande de Santa Cruz on the west.

The island of Tierra Bomba had a couple of villages and some cultivation, but was mainly jungly and swampy (it took days for the British to locate a potable water source). Very fine beaches, but Englishmen tend to peel quickly.

There are two entrances into the bay. Glancing at a modern map, the Boca Grande seems an ideal entry point. It is wide, close to the town, and in those days there were no forts directly covering it. But Vernon rejected it in favour of the Boca Chica. The reason is very simple – and explains why there were no forts. 'Grande' is a misnomer. In the 18th Century, the Boca Grande was *not* wide. It has been dredged out. Some period maps show it as a mere canal, but it was not even that. It was a gap of less than 7-800 yards between the southern tip of Cartagena's island and the shore of Tierra Bomba, and it was only one fathom (6 feet) deep at most and choked with mangroves. 'Crossing the bar' is tricky at the best of times. Trying to do it through a wall of mangroves is impossible.

But, just in case, the Spanish stationed the men-o-war *Dragón* and *Conquistador* behind it, with a sloop to serve them. By manoeuvring these vessels in and out of the main anchorage, it was possible to cover both the Boca Grande and the Playa Grande.

The Boca Chica was also far narrower than now, and there were the forts of Castillo San Luis de Bocachica (a.k.a. San Fernando) on the north, and to the south Fort San José, on an outcrop right next to the island of Barradera, or Baru. Nowadays, that outcrop remains, close to Tierra Bomba, but there is a wide gap between it and the main part of Barradera. So, on a modern map it looks as if all the defences were on the north side of the channel. Only a slim islet in mid-channel remains of the tongue land on Barradera that ran up towards Tierra Bomba, bulging at its tip just short of San José. Nothing remains of the tangle of mangrove swamp that composed it. The navigable entrance between the forts was actually very narrow.

San Luis only sported eight guns, six of which faced the channel, with one aimed to each flank. The garrison comprised 370 men. For outworks, the castle had the fortlets of Chamba, Santiago, and San Felipe. The first (lightly armed) faced the sea. Santiago (11 guns) covering the outer approaches to the Boca Chica, and San Felipe (5 guns) the immediate approaches. Between Chamba and Santiago was a newly constructed fascine battery, but it lacked cannon.

San José was more powerful, with twenty guns and three cohorn mortars, most aimed at an angle seaward and across the channel. It was supported by the battery of Punta de Fans (11 guns) facing the channel. Between the fort and the battery was a small cove,

called the Battery Dock, which was covered by four guns, themselves partially within the arc of fire of Punta de Fans. Farther south on Barradera was another battery, facing out to sea where the peninsula narrowed to a catwalk.

Jefe d'escuadra Espinola had command of these defences.

The channel between the main forts was protected by a boom consisting of two chains secured at each end by double anchors. Three ships of the line and a galleon covered the boom (*Galicia* (70) flag, *San Carlos* (66), *África* (50), and *San Felipe* (50)). The sloop *Jeronimo Luisaga* acted as tender for the ships and the San José positions.

[The Spanish warships were not fully manned, having dismantled roughly 150 guns of all calibres for use in the various land batteries.]

Despite these defences, Boca Chica remained the best – the only – way in.

There is one other very important point. The prevailing wind is from the northeast. Getting into the bay could only be done by towing or the slow process of warping (shoehorning the fleet in, without opposition, took two days).

[Warping involves using ropes, anchors, and capstans to winch a ship forward. A ship's anchor is towed out by a boat and dropped, or the rope is tied to something, then the capstan winds in the anchor, drawing the ship in the desired direction. Then the process is repeated.]

The attackers had some knowledge of the outer defences but none of the inner ones. Nor were they aware that the defenders had made strenuous efforts to improve them. Vernon possessed an account of the successful French attack in 1697 with which to formulate a plan, but the forts were much weaker then.

[According to Vernon, the Castillo San Luis 'appeared to be a regular square fort of four bastions containing 22 embrasures in the two faces, and I take it to be a fortress of upwards of 80 pieces of cannon. They seem to have raised some new works under it level with the water, and there was another fort [San José] built in the water on the opposite side of the channel.' Richmond, vol. p. 52.]

Don Blas de Lezo and *virrey* Eslava y Lazaga shared the defence, the former as naval commander and the latter in charge of the town. Their main problems were a lack of manpower, and a lack of supplies, but they also developed an unhealthy antagonism toward each other, which has gone largely unnoticed in English sources because of the British side's own command 'issues'. De Lezo was a Basque and Eslava was Navarrese.

[Unfortunately, little more can be said about their rivalry. Presumably there were arguments over what should be protected and whether counterattacks should be made, complaints about hogging resources, and refusals to act when messages for help arrived. The usual things. Don Blas seems to have possessed some of the characteristics of Vice Admiral Vernon – arrogance when dealing with Army and Civilian authorities, in particular.]

The Spanish garrison of Cartagena was comprised of:

- 12 companies (i.e. 1 battalion) each of: Regimientos de Infantería Aragón, España, Toledo, Lisboa, and Navarra.
- 9 companies of Regimiento Fijo de Cartagena de Indias.
- 3 white militia companies.
- 2 mulatto militia companies.
- 80 artillerymen.
- 6 companies of marines.
- 600 Indians (armed labourers).

According to Crespo, the raw numbers are much less impressive: 1,100 regulars, 400 recruits, 600 indians, 300 mulattoes, 600 sailors, and the civilian population of 20,000.

The line battalions were good quality and partly seasoned. The gunners, marines, and seamen were also reliable. The militia were very poor.

The British spent three days in reconnaissance. Reviews were mixed. There was only one small battery of six guns on Pascaballos, facing the Playa Grande, but it was obvious no landing could be sustained there.

But, Vernon ordered a feint made on the town from the north (March 19th), successfully tricking the enemy into throwing up more entrenchments.

For the main attack it was clear the British would have to force the Boca Chica and land their troops in a sheltered spot. But because of the prevailing wind ships could not enter at speed. This meant that the forts had to be disabled, the block-ships taken or driven off, and the boom removed.

To begin operations, on the 20th of March, the *Norfolk*, *Shrewsbury*, and *Russell*, all 3rd rates (80s), of Ogle's division (*Jersey* flag) were to close and bombard the forts. Vernon's division was to neutralise the minor batteries and cover the landing. Lestock's division was to protect the transports and act as reserve. While waiting, the grenadiers and sharpshooters were taken in close aboard longboats and fire-ships to harass the enemy gun crews.

Fort Chamba initiated the combat but was quickly blown apart by the *Princess Amelia* (80) – hard to compete with a massed battery of twenty-six 24- and twenty-six 12-pounders. The *Norfolk*, *Shrewsbury*, and *Russell* took on the other two fortlets, which were swiftly abandoned.

Only the *Shrewsbury* suffered damage. Her cable was shot away and she drifted right into the harbour entrance, taking the concentrated fire of both main forts, the Barradera batteries, and the four Spanish ships under command of Don Blas himself. She had to be warped out and suffered 20 dead and 40 wounded, besides taking 240 shot through the hull, including 17 near the waterline. It is said her captain maintained the combat for seven hours before withdrawing.

The covering bombardment commenced about noon and was over by 3pm. A body of 500 grenadiers were ashore by 2pm. Wentworth and his staff came next, followed by a few units, but the winds turned sour and the rest had to land the following morning. Because of heavy surf the artillery and stores took several days to come ashore – the landing was not complete until the 26th, in fact.

The troops remained on the beach until the 23rd, camped in some disarray. Temperatures averaged 80-90 degrees Fahrenheit (26-32° Celsius) and humidity was about 80-90%. The argument that the open air was healthier only held true when there was a sea breeze. At other times the soldiers were enveloped in clouds of mosquitos. At night, the sweat-soaked men caught chills.

Some sources ask why the troops remained on the beach for three days in the sun, when the trees were only a short march away. Richmond says the men were engaged in unloading guns and stores, and having to battle with a heavy surf. This is true, but eyewitness accounts write of the inactivity of much of the men. However, anyone who has served in the military will know that this often happens. Work cannot go forward until certain jobs are done, but only a certain number of men can undertake those jobs, otherwise the situation devolves into an unprintable phrase usually denoted by the call-sign *Charlie Foxtrot*. Nevertheless, with good junior leadership, the idle troops can be found useful tasks, for instance, searching for fresh water. The work of unloading, it appears, was all done by the sailors. *That*, is the iron hand of tradition making mockery of common sense.



This is the point in the narrative where partisan views begin to emerge. Richmond states that Vernon was ‘uneasy’ at the delay, implying it was Wentworth’s fault. Vernon and Ogle both wrote to the General suggesting he move inland and surround San Luis, but Wentworth ignored the suggestion. Supporters of Wentworth claim the General always deferred to Vernon’s advice, so that the delay was probably the Admiral’s fault. This is only the beginning.

The volumes of correspondence and doctoral theses championing either Vernon or Wentworth will not be discussed here. Both men were flawed. Vernon was arrogant, highhanded, abrasive, and short with fools and ditherers. He did not like sharing command, was unfamiliar with land operations, did not agree with the plan to attack Cartagena in the first place, and had his own agenda based on the needs of his party and purse. On the other hand he knew the Caribbean and her moods, and he knew how to command a fleet.

The General had a reputation as a man of sense and ability. But, he had never held a field command, and had only been in combat once, in a junior capacity. It seems as if he was working by the book, and the book says ‘first you build a camp, then you advance, then you invest the fort, then you make a breach’ and so on. He lacked initiative, probably because he was painfully aware he was out of his depth; from the same cause would stem a third-party perception of a deferential attitude toward Vernon. However, being an 18th Century officer, in purely Army matters, such as ‘how to assault a fort’, he would take the attitude that the Navy could tell him nothing of use. That would make Vernon see red.

Of course, with the commanders increasingly at loggerheads, each would attract partisans to his side. Not only would these muddy the waters for historians, they would extend the immediate

problem to every level of command, making even the smallest operations difficult to carry out successfully.

For instance. On the 26th, with all the equipment ashore and many men already incapacitated, Wentworth applied to Vernon for more troops. Vernon refused. Shorthanded from the start of the war, he needed bodies to crew the ships. He was living in constant fear that the combined Bourbon fleet would suddenly pop up. More immediately, the coast was exposed and the weather could change at any time. As a mater of fact, it was already ‘iffy’. Besides, the men Wentworth specifically asked for were Gooch’s Marines, and they, unlike the so-called Marines from England, were supposed to *be* Marines. (Remember also, the Administration stole Vernon’s idea of recruiting marine regiments and put them under Army control.)

[Extra bodies were always useful. Only a few ‘skilled hands’ were needed aboard a ship. The rest were muscle.]

Not all the soldiers can have been idle. A huge battery was erected: twenty 24-pounders (12 of them ships’ guns) and 38 ‘royals’ (5.5” Coehorn mortars). The mortars began firing on the 24th, and the cannon would be unmasked on the 1st of April.

A party of 300 from Gooch’s were sent over to Barradera on the night of the 29th to clear out the Punta de Fans battery, which had been galling the British fatigue parties. The troops on the beach had also been suffering casualties from stray shots. The raid was scheduled for an earlier date, but the winds prevented it.

[Lawrence Washington, George Washington’s half-brother, led one of the groups.]

The raid was highly successful, though poor reconnaissance failed to reveal the landing spot was directly under the four guns protecting Battery Dock. This was stormed straight out of the

boats. The main objective was also rushed in an assault through a clearcut mangrove swamp. In Beatson's words (p.92):

"at midnight, the boats set off, and landed about a mile to leeward of the Barradera battery, which consisted of fifteen twenty-four pounders: the place where they landed was between two reefs of rock, and under the very muzzles of a battery of five [sic] guns on the strand [Dock Battery]; from which the enemy immediately began to fire on them. Our people were at first a good deal surprised at this unforeseen reception; but their officers in an instant recovered them from it, by assuring them that their security and success lay in their resolution. On this they rushed forward with matchless intrepidity, climbed in at the embrasures, and became masters of the battery before the enemy had time to load their guns a second time; and this with a very trifling loss. The firing alarmed the Spaniards at the larger battery, who, guessing at what had happened, pointed three of their guns at the battery just carried, and fired grape shot on our people as they advanced: but they were in too great a hurry, otherwise the loss must have been very considerable. So badly did the enemy aim, that their shot flew over the heads of our men, who, pushing on with great spirit, after a short, but stout resistance, carried their point, spiked the guns, tore up the platforms, and set them, together with the gun carriages, magazines, and guard-houses, on fire: they then returned to their ships with six wounded prisoners, having sustained very little loss. The Admiral was so pleased with their conduct, that he rewarded the common men with a dollar apiece."

The battery was manned by soldiers from *Regimiento de Aragón*. From the Spanish side, it was impossible to tell how many British there were, and most of the troops abandoned the position. Only fourteen men stood to their posts, until captured.

The raid had to be repeated with fresh troops on the 4th of April, to prevent the Spanish re-erecting the batteries. In fact, they had replaced two or three guns on the 2nd of April, at which the *Rippon* was sent in to silence them. On the final, daylight, raid, the British portaged into the bay behind and burned the *Jeronimo Luisaga* ammunition sloop as well.

On the 1st of April the British grand battery was unmasked. The bombardment began at 7am, bolstered by mortar fire. The Spanish forts and ships returned the fire so that, as Beatson puts it, 'the work became extremely hot on both sides'.

The English sources differ at this point. Either shortly before the bombardment began (31st March) or shortly after (on the 1st of April), Vernon called a council of war. A question had arisen. Should matters be expedited by sending in the fleet to bombard the two castles?

Richmond says it was Wentworth's request, because the Grand Battery was taking heavy fire, but that the two admirals, Vernon and Ogle, were opposed, given the fact the ships would have to sit in the channel between the forts, though they agreed to try, mainly to prove it was a stupid idea (but it might just work, in which case the Navy would get the credit). Beatson, who says the council of war occurred first, implies Vernon was the one who was impatient with the slow progress of the operation. Either version could be correct. It is a question of whether Vernon allowed his impatience to get the better of his naval skills.

Be that as it may, on the 1st, Commodore Lestock led in the *Boyne*, *Prince Frederick*, *Hampton Court*, *Tilbury*, and *Suffolk*, to attack the main forts. Ogle stood by with five replacement ships. The attack was not a success. The water was too shallow to allow the ships to anchor closer than 700 yards from San Luis, and 900 yards from San José. At that range their fire was ineffective, while for the forts it was just right. The Spanish squadron and the remaining shore guns added their weight to the contest.

[At long range the fortress guns were more dangerous, turning the wooden ships into baskets of shrapnel, tearing off their masts, or setting them on fire with hot shot. If reconnaissance failed to determine the depths in the Boca Chica, it might have appeared possible to close with the forts, in which case the operation would have looked practicable.]

After a two day bombardment the forts were not even dented, while the British ships were out of ammunition, and *Boyne*, *Prince Frederick*, and *Hampton Court* were badly damaged. The *Boyne* had to be pulled out of the line the first day, and the other two the next. There were some small successes. *Princess Amelia* kept her reputation by annihilating a new fascine battery. And, the attack could also be considered a rather expensive means of diverting fire from the Grand Battery.

The latter was at last enjoying success, dismounting a number of enemy guns. On the 4th of April a breach appeared in San Luis, and the castle was stormed on the 5th. At 5:30pm, three mortars fired as a signal, then the Grand Battery fired twice into the breach, first with a volley of roundshot, and then with grape. Bomb ketches were used to suppress the flanking fire of San José. The Spanish reacted too late – the commandant was in conference aboard the *Galicia* – and a forlorn hope of a sergeant and 12 men gained the breach.

The Spanish could not bring their guns to bear and the place was carried, though the defenders fought for a time, supported by the Spanish ships, and the battery of San José firing grapeshot. British numbers involved are hazy, but Colonel Gooch was wounded and two other colonels killed, and Brigadier General Blakeney was in charge of the assault, so at least a brigade must have participated.

[Richmond says there were 500 defenders, and that they hung out the white flag as soon as the assault began, but that it was ignored or misunderstood, and that, fearing 'no quarter' had been ordered, they abandoned the place. Most of the Spanish did escape. Beatson says only 1 British soldier was lost.]

Fort San José was captured toward the end of the assault. Captain Knowles had taken a diversionary party over to Barradera, and was able to storm the fort from the rear using longboats.

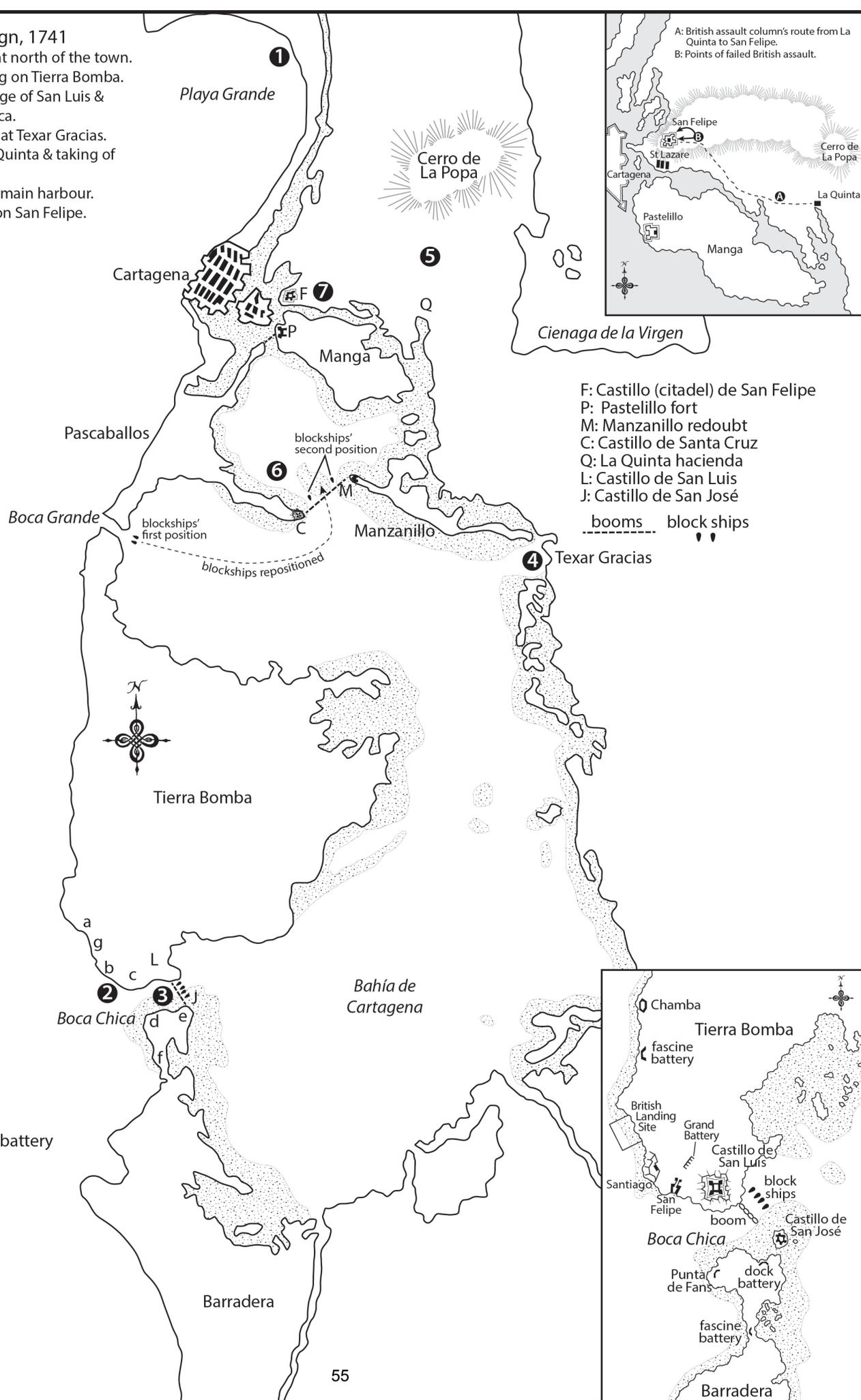
The land battle was over about 10pm, but Knowles then rowed over to the enemy flagship *Galicia* and captured it. According to Richmond all but '60 men', and including Don Blas, had fled the ships. It was not quite the rout he implies.

The Spanish admiral ordered the scuttling of all the vessels upon seeing the fall of San Luis. This was a part of his grand plan. The *San Carlos* and *África* were indeed sunk but the operation was not a smooth one. There was panic when the soldiers were evacuated from the forts, which nearly did cause a rout – and which is why de Lezo was not aboard *Galicia*; he was busy restoring control ashore. The *Galicia* was taken before she could be scuttled, along with her captain and about 50 men. Knowles also took Don Blas' pennant. *San Felipe* had to be burnt instead of sunk. This meant the channel was not completely blocked, though the wrecks made the passage hazardous.

Having control of both sides of the Boca Chica allowed the British to disconnect the harbour boom. Vernon was pleased enough to release the 1,600 additional men requested by Wentworth (troop losses for the British so far amounted to 500 dead and perhaps 1,500 sick, against 50 Spanish). The next few days were employed in shifting the wrecks and warping the fleet into the bay, an operation completed on the 10th of April. Just in time, as the seas were rising.

Cartagena Campaign, 1741

- 1) 19 March: British feint north of the town.
- 2) 20-24 March: Landing on Tierra Bomba.
- 3) 25 March-5 April: Siege of San Luis & forcing the Boca Chica.
- 4) 16-17 April: Landing at Texar Gracias.
- 5) 16 April: Fight at La Quinta & taking of Cerro de la Popa.
- 6) 17 April: Forcing the main harbour.
- 7) 17-22 April: Assault on San Felipe.



F: Castillo (citadel) de San Felipe
 P: Pastelillo fort
 M: Manzanillo redoubt
 C: Castillo de Santa Cruz
 Q: La Quinta hacienda
 L: Castillo de San Luis
 J: Castillo de San José

--- booms --- block ships

Boca Chica outworks
 a: Chamba
 b: Santiago
 c: San Felipe
 d: Punta de Fans
 e: dock battery
 f: unnamed fascine battery
 g: fascine battery

Mission Accomplished

'He has the unhappiness of seeing that the conquest which the English have just made, places them in a condition to become masters of the American trade and to carry further weight in the great affairs of Europe; and that if he wishes to oppose her in it he must come into a general war, which he greatly dreads.'

A correspondent to Frederick II describing Cardinal Fleury's feelings on hearing of the forcing of the Boca Chica. Quoted in Richmond Vol. 1 pp. 118-119.

If Vernon had not written a victory dispatch, Cartagena would have been just another failed operation. A disappointment, nothing more. But it all seemed so easy. Another push and the Dons would yield the town. Already *castillo* de Santa Cruz was under bombardment.

Unfortunately, by the time his dispatch reached Europe, where it made the rounds of the embassies, alternately causing dismay and delight, the British were pulling out with their tails between their legs and the hunt for a scapegoat was beginning. Commemorative medals had been struck. Ministers had lost face. Vernon would make sure he was not hung out to dry (in fact, he was promoted) and pitched on Wentworth as the goat – which has given the General the advantage of being the underdog in every rehashing of the story.

With the fleet inside the bay, the British took command of all the posts and navigable passages to prevent the use of pirogues and rafts being used to supply the town. Lestock's division reloaded the troops and guns from Tierra Bomba. The Spanish deployed their remaining great ships (7 in all) across the mouth of the inner harbour, crewed with picquets of 50 men, and anchored their last two men-o-war (*Conquistador* (56) and *Dragón* (60)) as floating bastions just inside.

The bombardment of Santa Cruz began on the 5th of April. Vernon's flagship, the *Jersey*, commenced alone, joined on the 6th by the *Burford* and *Orford*, and on the 7th by the *Worcester*. Santa Cruz was a sturdy fort, but it only had three cannon in front, and one on the flank. Ten more cannon faced the Citadel. Manzanillo across the harbour entrance had no guns at all; it was merely a redoubt.

[British sources claim Santa Cruz had 59 guns. Perhaps they counted swivel pieces and cannon in storage.]

Weymouth and *Cruizer sloop* also hammered Pastelillo and its supporting works (a battery of eight guns and another of four) on the 7th, and *Cruizer* brought off four hulks from the harbour.

These hulks were small, of 20 tons burthen, built from single tree trunks. Beatson mentions them specifically, and also the taking of a wharf, complete with crane, at a site where there was a spring of fresh water. He has a point to make: this spring was reserved for the Fleet and *not* the Army, and the hulks, which could have been used to ship fresh water to the troops, were *not* used in that manner. The Army had to use cisterns, which ran dry. This led to a great increase in sickness among the soldiers.

Similarly, the sailors enjoyed beef and even turtle meat, none of which was shared with the soldiers – Beatson says Vernon even refused to loan boats for turtle hunting, though he indicates elsewhere, with regard to similar cases, that it was more Vernon not offering to help and Wentworth not being able to bring himself to ask 'That Man' for assistance.

On the 16th of April the British landed troops at Texar (Jefar) de Gracias, on the eastern shore of the bay, about two miles from the citadel and three from the Cerro de Popa. In happier days the place was home to the South Sea Company factors. The plan was an obvious one: isolate the town by establishing a line of posts

from the bay across to the lagoon, by way of the Cerro de Popa.

The Spanish, meanwhile, scuttled their block-ships (April 10th) and their last two warships as well, and abandoned Santa Cruz (Manzanillo was unoccupied). The British occupied the fort the next day with 100 men of *Cavendish's Regiment*.

[The ubiquitous Captain Knowles captured the castle.]

Don Blas just did not have the men to be everywhere. He knew what was coming, and concentrated his forces. The Spanish admiral was unable to prevent the British bombs from firing on the town (April 13th) or to stop the *Weymouth* and eight fireships anchoring where they could prevent him interfering with the coming landing.

The hulks protecting the inner harbour were not actually to be raised by the British; instead, the masts were going to be detached. But even this did not have to be done. The work party found the stern of the *Conquistador* was still floating and swung her round like a door. This allowed the bombs, protected by two frigates, access to the harbour. Even the 4th rate *Weymouth* was able to get in.

On the 14th and 15th the town was bombarded. On the 16th, the landings began; they were completed the next day. It was more or less a repeat of the Tierra Bomba operation, and not just in terms of military routine.

Grenadiers first, then 1,400 regulars, then the heavy equipment (first off, eight *patteraroes* to cover the landing spot). Immediately upon landing, the British marched through a wood, via a narrow defile, to set up camp at a place called La Quinta, a hacienda that sat beside the road leading out of the town below the citadel.

With La Quinta occupied the enemy would have to get supplies from the other side of Cerro de Popa, which meant round the swamp via the coastline. That route ought also to be blocked, but Wentworth could not get to it by land, and Vernon was unwilling to risk ships on that section of open coast, despite the fact there would be no cover for the Spanish from naval gunfire.

They met only slight resistance in the wood (1 man killed) but found a battalion of 500 men (700 according to Beatson) drawn up between the La Quinta hacienda and the shore. A hasty attack by the grenadiers and the two veteran line regiments put these to the rout, but instead of pursuing, Wentworth recalled the troops and began establishing himself:

'The ground over which the troops were to march, admitted of a front of no greater extent than a sub-division, the lagoon lying on the left, and a thick copse on the right, into which the General [Wentworth] ordered a party of American soldiers who were to endeavour to take the enemy in flank and rear, and to dislodge whatever parties they might have there. The grenadiers moved on with great spirit; and having, with very little loss, received two fires of the enemy, they began a street firing ['fire & movement']. The front sub-division giving their fire at about the distance of half a musket-shot; and, wheeling to the right and left, to make room for the next to advance, the enemy conjectured the British had given way, and expressed their joy by a loud huzza: but they were soon convinced of their mistake, by the briskness of the fire of the troops; who, still advancing, the enemy fell into confusion, and fled towards the city.'

Beatson, p.102.

[Notice the Americans were given the role they were considered 'best' at – woodland skirmishing.]

Calling a council of war to determine how to take the Cerro de Popa, Wentworth was angered to hear that a party of 200 American 'marauders' had seized the convent on the summit on their own initiative – in total disregard of the Book of War! And in

disregard of his orders that they were to work alongside the negroes unloading stores! Nevertheless, the General did not hand the hill back to the Spanish. On the 17th he went up to observe the enemy defences.

Again, the sources differ. Wentworth called a council of war after taking observations. The question was whether San Felipe, the last fortification before the town, should be taken on the night of the 18th, before it could be strengthened. The Spanish were already digging trenches on the ridge.

According to Richmond, the General was urged in a letter from Vernon to strike fast. Vernon argued that the enemy were off balance and should be pushed immediately. Also that the Spanish had more engineers than the British and should not be allowed to strengthen their defences any further. The Admiral brought up the fact that the General had recalled his troops instead of pursuing the fleeing enemy and taking the town by a coup de main (even if this tactic were overly bold, in the present circumstances it would likely have succeeded).

Simply because this advice came from the Admiral, it is claimed the General focused on securing his camp and engaging in acrimonious letter writing to Vernon; the latter continued to offer unwanted advice, which only made the General cling stubbornly to the Book of War.

Beatson, on the other hand, says Wentworth understood the need for haste but his council, at which the Navy was not represented (*and why should it be*), determined that since the stores were not yet unloaded (*ah ha, the Navy at fault*) the attack would have to be postponed.

Again, something can be said for either version. To the wisdom that councils of war are only called for purposes of delay or covering one's posterior, it can be countered that Wentworth was 'sensible' but inexperienced, and undoubtedly needed the advice of his senior commanders, some of whom were very experienced – Colonel James Wolfe, for one, later to be Wolfe of Quebec.



[Photo courtesy of Bob & Wendy Darlington.]

San Felipe still stands today, a prominent tourist attraction. The fortifications are impressive, but most date from a slightly later time. In the photo above, the structure atop the walls was the original fortification. The remaining stonework is of Seven Years War vintage; at the time there were merely hasty entrenchments dug across the slopes. According to an eyewitness:

'This was a small square building mounting six guns on each face, the walls of which were about fifteen to twenty feet high. The western face is approached by a fairly gentle slope which was covered by the guns of the town. The approach to the southern face is very steep and inaccessible, and that to the eastern is also broken and steep. The northern face,

although narrowed, presented the best line of approach as it is led up to by an easy slope, but troops ascending it were enfiladed by the guns on the eastern bastions of the town.'

Lord Elibank, quoted in Richmond Vol.1 p.120.

[Crespo says the fort had 30 guns, not 24.]

Though strong, the fort was overlooked by the Cerro de Popa. A battery here would have reduced the place. Wentworth was unwilling to assault the fort without bombarding it, but also refused to set up a battery. He had with him on the 17th only two 12-pounders and three 3-pounders. Instead, he asked that the fleet bombard the citadel, although it was at extreme range. At this a paper argument broke out. Vernon could not see why a battery was needed. The fort was insignificant.

A second council of war was called on the 18th and gave the same opinion. Vernon had grudgingly landed more men.

[Crespo has a confusing account of two failed British daylight assaults against the 'Cruz Grande' conducted on the 18th and 19th. There is no record of these in the British accounts. Perhaps the present author has mistranslated an account of a couple of Spanish counterattacks – they cannot have been entirely supine. But Spanish casualties for the campaign were very low.]

A third council of war was called on the 19th. Vernon and Ogle were present on this occasion. The chief Engineer said he needed more men if he was to construct a battery. The rains had begun, men were dropping from sickness all around, fresh water was running short; it could not be done without more men than they had. But he believed the fort *could* be assaulted. The walls appeared scalable. The problem, to his mind, lay outside the fort, where the Spanish had been digging trenches ever since the British landed.

The Engineer's opinion, bolstered by insistent letters from Vernon, persuaded Wentworth an assault was the best course. Colonel Wolfe and Colonel Blakeney objected, in writing:

'It appears to the said council of war that the walls of the Castle of St. Lazar [sic] cannot be less than twenty-five feet in height, which is equal to the length of their longest ladders, that there is, besides, a ditch with water; and very muddy at the bottom, supposed to be about fifteen feet in breadth and about six feet in depth: we therefore, for these reasons, deem it impracticable to scale the walls: and do resolve, with all possible dispatch, to raise a battery, in order to make a breach.'

Quoted in America's First Marines, p. 32

The Navy insisted an assault would be relatively easy. The Engineer, strengthening his arguments with claims by enemy prisoners and deserters as well as close observation by his own team, claimed the obstacles were not so severe. The scaling ladders would reach the top; there was no muddy ditch; there was a wide road up to the fort; the fort's door was of wood. A guide was produced in the person of a raggedy Spanish deserter. Wentworth, unwilling to shoulder the blame of a Failed Expedition, caved in.

The attack would take place early on the morning of the 20th of April. 500 grenadiers and 1,000 line troops would rush the Citadel. 500 men remained to guard the camp – from 4,350 on the 5th, the General's command had been reduced to a mere 2,000 men, including the last-minute reinforcements. (*Although, Gooch's Marines are not included in the last count, nor the large body of slaves; both were being used for menial work.*)

[Perhaps the General was punishing the Marines for their precipitate taking of the convent. It is well documented that the Americans were regarded (wrongly) as inferior troops, 'poor soldiers, Irish Papists, and fit only for cutting fascines with the Negroes' (quoted in Franklin, p.89). The word 'American', as used by the British, was a pejorative one.]

The attack did not go well. After a 2am assembly, the advance began an hour before sunrise on the 20th, at 3- or 4am. There was no moon. Very likely it was pouring with rain. That was such a constant fact of life that it has not been recorded.

Colonel Guise commanded the attack, leading the column that would assault the eastern face. This was the steeper of the two chosen approaches. Colonel Grant led a second column against the north face. The men approached through a narrow defile, where only four could march abreast.

The troops were followed by unarmed men from Gooch's Marines and a body of slaves, carrying scaling equipment and boxes of grenades. Here was the first of several misfortunes. The Marines, though unarmed, were supposed to march on the left of the grenadiers, not behind them, but they fell behind in the darkness – walking a path eight abreast in the dark along a path designed to take four men easily causes such things.

[The weight of the grenade pouches was a significant issue in the humid environment.]

The next thing to go wrong was the misdirection of Guise's column. Instead of marching up the road, they somehow fell to one side of it, so that they had a steep ascent over broken ground. This was blamed on the Spanish guide, although after, he seems to have been exonerated from deliberate mischief. (He also died in the assault.)

The outer trenches seem to have been lightly occupied, but the attackers came under heavy fire once they reached the summit of the ridge. Most of the slaves dropped the scaling ladders and fled. Some accounts assume the Americans did so too, because they ignored the calls to bring up the ladders. Actually, they were busy picking up muskets from the fallen. But most were content to snipe at the fort or 'pepper-pot' forward, instead of rushing in.

From Richmond (Vol.1 p. 122):

'On the eastern side the enemy was ready and received the attack with a hot fire at twenty paces, and the troops, instead of rushing the entrenchments with fixed bayonets, advanced slowly, carrying out "street firing" and losing heavily. On the northern face no better result was obtained. No sooner was the alarm given by the outguards than the guns in the town joined in the defence with a flanking fire. In a description written by Colonel Burrard, he says,

"We received a continual fire of their cannon from the town and fort and their batteries, which swept off many of our men being quite exposed to their shot, and when we drew near enough for them to make use of their muskets their fort and batteries seemed one continuous light. The men behaved with the utmost resolution but 'twas our misfortune to attempt an impossibility. 'Tis true we got up to their breastworks and drove them from their trenches but what could we do when we came up to the fort we found it surrounded by a very deep trench and the walls of the fort too high by ten feet for our ladders, and we in return firing against their stone walls."

'A onesided battle in which Colonel Grant fell, mortally wounded, continued for over two hours, after which the attack was abandoned and the troops withdrew, having lost about 600 men and 43 officers.'

Colonel Grant was shot down just as he crested the ridge, along with his guide and several of the command party. The senior officer remaining lost control of the situation and the attack stalled. Wentworth quickly sent his remaining 500 effectives to reinforce the attack, or, if this was impossible, to cover the retreat – which is what they did.

Despite Vernon's theoretical objections, a 60-gunner (*Weymouth*) and a pair of 10" mortars, under Captain Knowles' command, did provide fire support. They were inside the harbour, and technically within range. According to British sources the fire was ineffective, but the Spanish accounts seem to indicate it had some

effect.

Colonel Grant's dying verdict is reputed to have been '*the General ought to hang the guide and the King ought to hang the General*'. During the burial truce that followed, the Spanish told their opponents they had expected to lose the fort 'if other methods besides a frontal assault had been tried'. Even a frontal assault might have worked if no mistakes had been made, and even a failed assault might have presented nothing but a temporary check if the British had any reserves to draw on.

Casualties according to British sources were: 179 killed, 459 wounded, and 16 POWs. Crespo gives 361 KIA, 64 WIA, all of whom became POWs. The Spanish lost 16 killed and 20 wounded.

This was the last push, though a siege was maintained for a day or two. Well, hardly a siege, given that the whole besieging force was concentrated in one spot. Say an Observation. A breastwork was constructed at La Quinta to protect the British camp from enemy fire, and on the 21st two large mortars were emplaced behind it.

Though the mortars duly began firing on San Felipe the next day, morale plummeted. At a council of war on the 22nd, the opinion was that the enterprise should be abandoned. Given their losses, the Spanish troops probably outnumbered them by now, and the navy was no help.

Hearing of this, Vernon deluged Wentworth with letters, offering to erect batteries, bombard the fort, and storm it, too. Nay, he would undertake to cordon the town as well. He also offer a ship to carry the poor remnant of Army troops away if they feared for their lives. His tone was sarcastic. What he did not do was reply to the request for reinforcements from the Fleet, which the Army laid down as a condition for continuing the siege.

Wentworth may have lacked experience, but he was not altogether a fool. It was plain to him that Cartagena was not going to fall just by snapping his fingers. They had come here with barely enough men and ammunition, and now both were expended.

After waiting a few days for tempers to cool, the General called a full council of war – both Army and Navy attending – on the 25th of April, at which he was able to persuade Vernon that they lacked the manpower to continue: 3,569 soldiers and marines left (only about 600 Americans were ashore), a mounting sick list, and the constant rain, which meant about two weeks before batteries could be constructed and a proper siege begun.

[The discrepancy between 3,500 and the 2,000 quoted earlier probably stems from the inclusion of garrisons and work parties dotted around the bay.]

'...it was agreed, that a general council of war should assemble on board the Vice-Admiral's ship the next day, the 14th; when General Wentworth laid a state of the army under his command before them, and declared, that he deemed it to be impracticable to go on with the enterprise without assistance from the fleet. The principal engineer was called in and examined. He informed the council of the places most proper for erecting batteries: to which he added, that not less than a fortnight would be required for raising them, considering the many interruptions to be expected from the enemy, and the sickness which was every hour increasing among the troops: that fifteen hundred men would be necessary for the proper reliefs for that service only; but that, with the troops now ashore, the siege could not be undertaken with any probability of success. The Vice-Admiral, who seems to have taken his resolution before the council assembled, was going to put the question, Whether the troops should be reimbarcked [sic] or not? when General Wentworth declared he would not give his vote, till he should be informed what assistance they were to expect from the fleet. He was interrupted by the Vice-Admiral in great heat and passion, and with the most unpolite [sic] language. To this the General made a proper reply; to which the Vice-Admiral made no

return, but immediately left the cabin. The debate was now carried on without heat, passion, or abuse: and the General having repeated his question, Sir Chaloner Ogle, and the rest of the sea-officers unanimously declared, that it would by no means be advisable to trust the sailors on shore, as they could be kept under no command, and would soon disperse themselves in the woods. To which Mr. Vernon (who sat in the gallery within hearing) added aloud, that some of them would soon ramble into Cartagena.'

Beatson, pp.107-108.

On the 26th the embarkation began. Before it ended, a rather odd action occurred. On the morning of the 27th, the captured *Galicia*, manned by 300 volunteers under a Captain Hore, was sent in under the guns of the town, very close to the walls, and commenced a bombardment 'to cover the evacuation'. The *Galicia* was of course sunk, losing 6 dead and 56 wounded. She grounded too far out but kept up a bombardment from 5am until noon. By that point she was a shattered hulk. However, Hore got her floated and pulled out of range, still firing. By grounding on another shoal he was able to rescue the crew.

The only partially sensible reason given for this stratagem – since the embarkation was almost complete by the time *Galicia* made her run – comes out of a letter Vernon wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, in which he stated that he wanted to show Wentworth just how little firepower the Navy could provide, given the layout of the harbour. Supposedly the bomb ketches were to fire on the town as well, but they were out of ammunition.

[Beatson comments on the surprising depth of the harbour. *Galicia* had been fitted as a floating battery, her holds filled with earth to add stability; she drew considerable water. He argues rather convincingly that if Vernon had sent ashore a battery or two of ships guns and sent a few 80-gunners into the harbour when the time came to assault the breach, the Spanish would have surrendered.]

The evacuation took some time. Not only did the fleet have to warp out of Cartagena harbour – and it had taken two days to warp in – but all the captured forts had to be blown up (along with the lime kilns needed for their repair), the captured ships sunk, and as much materiel as possible brought away. The Spanish made no attempt to hinder the British. The expedition finally sailed for Jamaica on the 20th of May, arriving there on the 30th – they travelled by way of Hispaniola to make sure the French were not up to any tricks. An expeditionary force of over 8,000 men had been reduced to 1,500.

[Strictly speaking, Vernon sailed on the 17th and the rear party sailed on the 20th.]

A question was raised by contemporaries as to whether the outer forts could have been held, which would have effectively blockaded the port, but it was clear to those on the ground that any garrison would not live out the season.

[Crespo, citing figures for the British military of 237 ships, 40,000 men, and 10,325 'marines' at the time of the expedition, demonstrates that this loss truly was a 'disaster', a reduction of Britain's military by 15-20%.]

Plan B

"We have decided to retreat but we will return to Cartagena after we take reinforcements in Jamaica."

Vernon

"In order to come to Cartagena, the English King must build a better and larger fleet, because yours now is only suitable to transport coal from Ireland to London."

Blas de Lezo

While resting at Jamaica (where the troops continued to die at an alarming rate) the team discussed ways and means. After this debacle, careers were on the line. Did they have enough men to

try La Habana? No. And anyway, the fortifications there had been improved. The Governor of Jamaica piped up with 'what about Panama?' but was stared down. At last, it was agreed to attack Santiago de Cuba. With the loan of 1,000 negro troops from the Jamaica garrison, they had just about enough men left for that. Vice Admiral Vernon, already possessing orders to return as many ships as possible to England as soon as possible, and knowing for sure now that the French had left the West Indies, also had just about enough ships; he did not have enough for an attack on La Habana.

The operation would benefit the Navy (and the merchants) by clearing out the enemy privateers and *guardacostas*. It was also resolved that Santiago should be held as a base for the duration of the war, providing a base close enough (weather-wise) to intercept any attempt of the French to link with the Spanish. As a sop to the Ministry, it could be claimed a 'first step' to the conquest of Cuba.

[After refit, Vernon sent eleven ships, mostly the big ones, home, under Commodore Lestock, who would later make waves in the Mediterranean:

Princess Caroline, Russell, Chichester, Norfolk, Princess Amelia, Shrewsbury, Torbay, all 80-gunners, Burford, Hampton Court, both 70s, plus Windsor (60), Falmouth (50), Diamond, Anglesey, Ludlow Castle, all 40s, plus Seahorse and Squirrel, both 20s.]

According to Spanish sources, La Habana may not have been quite so tough as the British thought. Vernon got his intelligence from a Spanish merchant with whom he was friendly. The man may have planted seeds of doubt in his mind. He certainly spent time writing to Santiago de Cuba and giving them descriptions of the Port Royal defences.

The Santiago operation commenced on July 17th, when *Rippon* was sent to cruise off that port. The expedition followed from the 20th to the 22nd, arriving at Guantanamo Bay on August 9th. (Remember, to reach that region of the Caribbean, ships leaving Jamaica had to swing southeast and up to Hispaniola. If heading northwest instead they would likely strike the Cuban coast too far west and have to beat to windward for days – not fun, especially with all those transports.)

Ships used were:

- *Boyne, Cumberland* – 80s
- *Prince of Orange, Orford, Prince Frederick* – 70s
- *Jersey, Lyon, Rippon, Weymouth, Defiance, Tilbury* – 60s
- *Tiger (32), Experiment (20)*
- Plus *Firebrand (8) fireship, Phæton (8) fireship, Etna (8) bomb, Strombolo (8) bomb, Princess Royal (18) hospital ship.*

There were 40 transports.

Left for the defence of Jamaica were *Suffolk, Strafford, Dunkirk, Bristol, Litchfield*, and *Vulcan bomb/fireship*, under Captain Davers. *York, Augusta*, and *Deptford* were under repair.

Reconnaissance of Santiago showed an attack from the sea to be extremely difficult. The winds were uncertain and weak, the entrance to the harbour narrow and strongly fortified, and dominated by high ground, highest on the right of the entrance to the channel, where the *castillo* del Morro sat. Below it, on a point jutting into the channel entrance was the *castillo* San Juan de la Roca, but even this fort was too high to engage with any success. Farther in, there were stone batteries, the fort called *Estrella* and the *Catherina* battery. These were the key to the defences, not the Morro. The British could perhaps get past the outer forts, but these were sited so the guns fired the length of the channel. If the British endured the cross fire, they could then be attacked in the usual manner. The town itself lay some distance to the north at the head of the bay, and was lightly protected.

So, the army would land at Guantanamo, march overland to the heights above Santiago, and attack Estrella and Catherina from the landward side. The first option would be a coup de main. If that were not possible, they would improvise. There was no dissent to this plan.

[Guantanamo was called by the British, Waltenham Bay; Vernon renamed it Cumberland Harbour; after the Duke of Cumberland (a.k.a Stinking Billy). It was one of the best harbours in the Caribbean.]



**Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas,
conde de Revillagigedo (1681-1766)**

Horcasitas was born in Cantabria, on Spain's northern coast, a region that seems to have produced some of the best generals and admirals in this period. By the time he was placed in charge of Cuba, in 1734, he was a *Teniente General* of the Army. Prior service included the Siege of Gibraltar and the reconquest of Oran.

In 1746, Horcasitas was appointed Viceroy of Nueva España. It is in this capacity that he left his greatest mark, reorganising the finances of New Spain and the bureaucracy, and fostering the settlement of new towns.

(He lifted a ban on playing cards imposed by his predecessor, so that their sale could be taxed.)

Though charged with amassing great wealth, which may be true, but at the same time he filled the state coffers and granaries, leaving a surplus for his successor. In all his affairs he maintained a reputation for honesty and square dealing.

Upon his return to Spain in the 1755, Horcasitas was promoted to *Capitán General* of the Army and became president of the Council of Castile as well as president of the War Council.



Sebastián de Eslava y Lazaga (1684-1759)

Teniente General Eslava was born in Navarre. Following an Army career, he attended the Royal Military Academy at Barcelona, rising to *Teniente-General*. He was appointed *Virrey* of Nueva Granada in 1740, upon the creation of that entity.

Rather than ruling from the capital, Bogota, he established himself at Cartagena de Indias, participating in the siege of that place in 1741. Before and during the siege he was responsible for all aspects of the defence as it pertained to the Army and the civil population.

After the siege, Eslava coordinated the defence of the Spanish Main and Panama; he also began to develop his colony and establish its finances and administration.

Eslava held the post of viceroy until 1750, when he returned to Spain, becoming *Capitán-General* of Andalucia and Minister for War (1754).

YELLOW FEVER

Excursus by David Hughes

The life span of a typical line regiment consigned to the West Indies was two years.

For almost a hundred years Yellow Fever has been little more than an inconvenience for visitors to the West Indies, at least for those sensible enough to be vaccinated against it. Four hundred years ago it was non-existent in the region, but in the intervening centuries a fear of what the English called ‘Yellow Jack’ and the Spanish ‘Black Vomit’ made brave men go pale and weak ones resign their commissions or take any, no matter how desperate means, to avoid sailing to the lands where death seemed inevitable. For apart from its ghastly symptoms (blood dripping from nose and ears, and thrown up as a black coagulate) the disease focused its virulence on men, especially men who had to work hard in a tropical climate – in other words slaves, soldiers, and sailors.

Men went, or were sent, to the area largely to nurture the sugar plantations that covered many of the islands – assets so valuable as to dictate national policy and naval dispositions. Yet without these sugar plantations it is unlikely that Yellow Fever would have appeared in the region and it is certain that it would never have become such a scourge. For the *A. aegypti* mosquito that carries the yellow fever virus is a delicate creature with very specific needs that must be satisfied to thrive (*Caveat: the author knowing nothing of virology has relied on a single superb work, “Mosquito Empires”, by J.R.McNeill in describing the biology of the disease*). For a start it is not native (as its name implies) to the Americas, but was brought, almost certainly as part of the slave trade, from Africa, finding the climate on arrival to be close to perfection. The insect is at its most active in temperatures of 24 to 35 degrees Celsius, which means that it thrives year round in the entire Caribbean area, as far north as the Carolinas and south through much of Brazil – indeed short-term outbreaks took place as far away as Quebec and Dublin when those places were unfortunate enough to have a coincidence of sugar ships arriving during a very hot summer.

Yet by itself the climate was not enough to ensure the spread of the mosquito. It also needed a plentiful supply of humans to feed the females, who lay comparatively few eggs. Also although there was much rain, the steep forested hills of the islands meant that few standing pools existed in which the eggs could be laid. It was the Europeans, more especially the ultra-rich sugar plantation owners, who made the West Indies the perfect home for the *A. aegypti* mosquito. Sugar cultivation needed two things in abundance, labor and wood. The owners solved the first problem with the mass importation of slaves from West Africa and since the mosquito was a stealthy, shy creature attracted to human sweat, the intense and unforgiving nature of slave labor served it to perfection. The second was solved by the speedy removal of the native forests in the region, the result being unchecked runoff and the creation of stagnant ponds. To make matters worse settlement saw the proliferation of cisterns, buckets and wells and as the best home for the *A. aegypti* mosquito larvae was on the damp inner walls of containers (safe from predators such as wasps and fish) the European planters cunningly managed to create conditions close to perfection for the spread of the Yellow Fever virus.

For an epidemic only comes when a mosquito carrying the virus bites and infects an individual and then (most important) other mosquitos bite that individual while infected, so collecting the virus and then going on to bite others. Clearly mass infection and death requires two simultaneous triggers: one being large numbers of fecund, infected and fertile female *A. aegypti* mosquitos – cunningly provided by nature and the decisions of man; the other, large numbers of men grouped together and engaged in physical activity. And of course the latter is adequately provided by at least three groups – slaves on a plantation, soldiers in camp or in a siege, and sailors in a large warship moored close off-shore. The latter point needs some clarification – the mosquito was a mediocre flyer and therefore instinctively preferred to travel to and on ships, finding suitable homes in the fresh water casks below deck, dying off only when the ships reached colder climes.

But this train of death and misery could be broken, and broken with ease if the mosquito bit a man who had some degree of immunity to the virus she transmitted. This is perhaps obvious, yet it had the greatest impact on war in the region. For immunity was neither absolute in degree of prevention nor automatically obtained with time and exposure, while understanding its nature took time and common sense, the latter seemingly a rare gift among military and naval planners. However, in the region and from the early 18th Century on it was realised that some groups had a lower, sometimes a far lower, rate of disease than others and that in most cases these were individuals and their children who were long resident in the region. This contrast was especially evident in the few larger population centres, all located on swampy coastlines. Of course we now know that this was because they were perfect breeding areas for *A. aegypti* mosquito and had a rotating population of visiting merchants, civil servants and minor nobility that existed beside one of stationary natives, slaves, local merchants and workers and garrison troops.

The Spanish were the first to take practical measures – with medicine unable to help (that would take another two centuries) they developed the practice of either maintaining static garrisons such as the sedentary (or *fijo*) regiments of Havana and Cartagena, or of simply abandoning other especially fever-prone if important locales such as Veracruz – knowing that any European invaders that occupied them would quickly wither away. The same concept was applied to the commercial works that were starting to appear, notable the famous shipyards of Havana where the workers were encouraged to remain in place over generations by granting freedom to slaves and land and titles to whites until epidemics among them were rare (it greatly helped that both women and children were much less likely to die from yellow fever, so accelerating the immunity process). The net result was what McNeill describes as ‘herd immunity’, a situation in which anywhere between 60% and 80% of the population is immune, which means that it is increasingly likely that the mosquito will die before being able to transmit a virus to a non-immune. Such ‘herds’ could be city- or region-wide or be a smaller ‘immune herd’ within a larger group – a classic example being long serving soldiers in a regiment that was periodically filled up with fresh and easily infected replacements. The English as a group were far less innovative as a combination of greed and stupidity led to endless importation of highly susceptible white overseers from Europe and black slaves from Africa. Even worse were when ‘new settlements’ such as Scottish Darien or French Guiana were proposed and above all when large numbers of Europeans or Americans were sent into the region to conquer or retain its valuable islands and cities.

The Second Killer – Malaria

There is one caveat to the story of the ravages of yellow fever – that in truth we are not certain as to its relative impact compared with that other destroyer of lives - malaria. This is because the effects of yellow fever were dramatic, disgusting and utterly recognisable, while those of malaria are much more subtle if also deadly. We do know that then (as now) it was both far more widespread, and native to the region. For while the yellow fever virus was limited to one type, *A. aegypti*, the malaria parasite can be transmitted by many species of the *Anopholes* mosquito. Only some could carry malaria, and some were much less ‘active’ than others (the most deadly being in Africa and

the southern American colonies, the least deadly in some of the smaller eastern Caribbean islands), but in all infections the parasite quickly moved to the host's liver where it multiplied.

Malaria can best be described as an enervating rather than a killing disease, causing fevers, pain and malaise which often went in short cycles – hence the contemporary description of ‘tertian fever’ (once per day) and ‘quartain fever’ (once every two days). It relapses after several weeks, only to recur several months or a year later, usually in the same warm season, and often for decades. By itself it rarely kills but it creates great risk to someone suffering from lack of food or who is infected by another disease, whether yellow fever or typhus. There is no doubt that the catastrophic loss rates experienced by Caribbean expeditions was the result of a combination of these, because to make matters worse while one can be immune to yellow fever there is no common immunity to malaria.

Just as with yellow fever, man's action hastened its spread in the region. The *Anopheles* mosquito has a short life and cannot travel far, so that deforestation and the consequent creation of swamps only expanded its transmission. Even more dangerous was the introduction of rice cultivation which of course created large static fields of shallow water fed by widespread irrigation channels. Rice was grown throughout the Caribbean (plantation owners could use female slaves while the men worked on the sugar fields), but especially in the Carolina Colonies on the American mainland. One other point should be noted – malaria, unlike yellow fever, is more dangerous to the young than to the mature, and equally affects female and male. The inevitable result was a shortage of young slaves and therefore the need to import more from Africa, they often bringing with them another surge of mosquito!

Yellow Jack on Your Side – the Caribbean Campaigning Season:

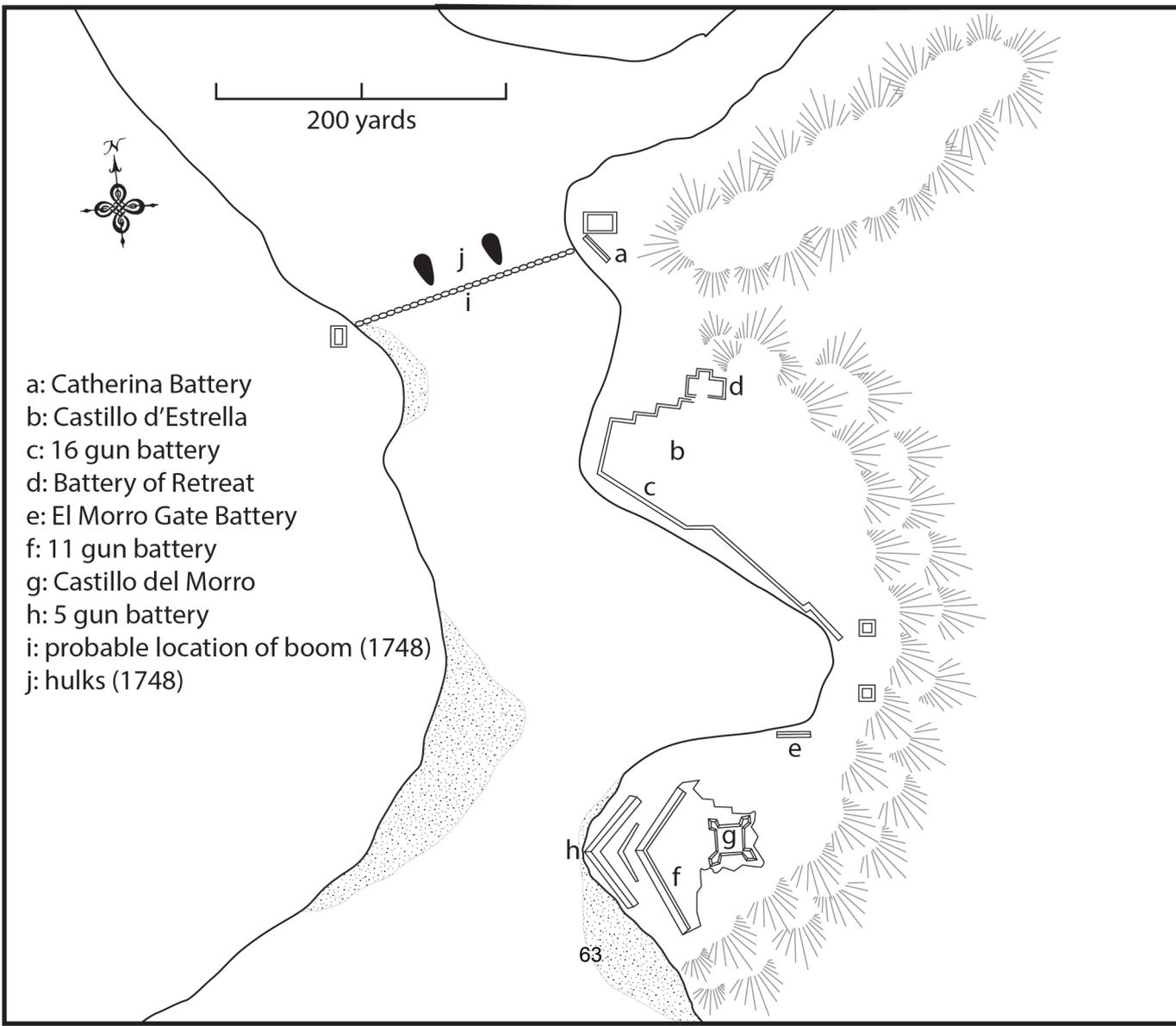
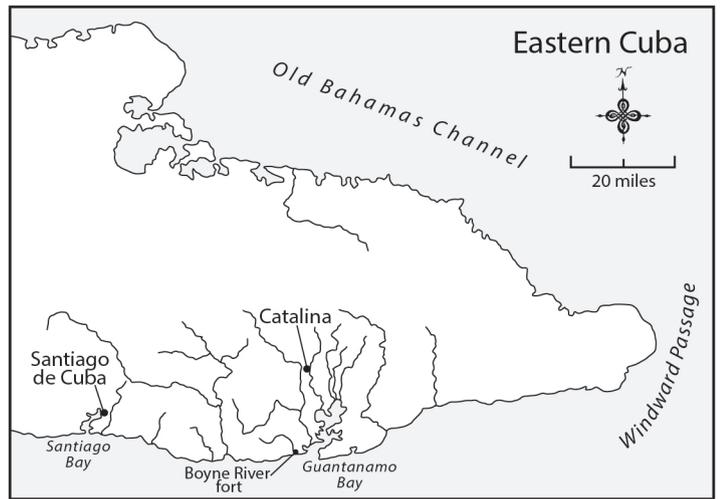
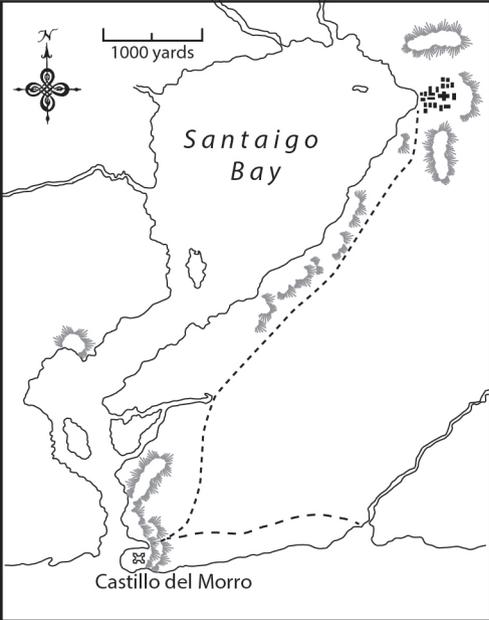
Although disease could strike at any time, military men were aware that there were ‘seasons of death’ during which epidemics were much more likely to strike. The British called the period from early May to October the “sickly season”, one in which the intense heat and humidity made it difficult to work (to be accurate it rained from April to November with the greatest intensity in May-June and September-October) and illness was at its peak. Of course we now know that the listless behaviour characteristic of the season might equally be caused by the onset of malaria and that the *A. aegypti* mosquito was most active in the summer temperatures and inevitably attracted to the sweat that poured from active sailors and soldiers. The risks were accentuated by the parallel hurricane season, which in this period ran from June through October, and meant that large military and naval actions should have been confined to the winter and spring.

As the Spanish were normally firmly on the defensive in the Caribbean they were able to take into account the short ‘safe season’ when planning their simple but effective strategy which boiled down to “delay, delay ‘til Yellow Jack takes enemy”. Permanent small squadrons based in Cartagena and Havana ensured that enemy fleets and expeditions could not be modest in size, useful, as in this period the larger the force the longer it took to prepare, the slower it sailed and the later it reached the region. The Spanish created two different types of fortification. At places like Porto Bello, Veracruz and La Guaira the forts were designed to merely ward off privateers and foreign merchants. If attacked, the towers would be abandoned and the garrison would retreat inland where they would wait for the invading force to break down in the sickly season. They considered formidable but isolated fortresses (an example being Louisburg, built by the French in modern Nova Scotia) to be a waste, only constructing major works around the two great coastal cities of the Spanish Americas – Cartagena and Havana. Slaves and easily accessed limestone meant that some of these could be impressive in their own right and comparable to those of second-grade European fortifications, but the theory behind their design differed. In the Americas the primary function was to force prevarication and hesitation until the sickly season arrived and then hopefully any siege, no matter how powerful, would inevitably falter and fail. So while both cities had adequate inner defences, what mattered equally were the outer lines, such as San Luis in Cartagena and El Morro at Havana. These were also intended to deny a secure anchorage, so forcing the attacker to keep a large proportion of his force on the ships, especially when a substantial Bourbon fleet was also in the region. At Cartagena, excellent Spanish commanders and the active use of six ships of the line delayed the capture of the outliers until April, by which time the British expedition was wrecked. At Havana, 20 years later, the city fell even though the siege started much later (in June) because by some freak yellow fever struck the city the previous year, while the British remained unaffected until the month of August – mere days after the city had surrendered.

The ravages of disease during the War of the Austrian Succession are described in detail, but it should be realised that this was the norm not the exception, and applied in peace as well as war. From the limited British perspective two events were still vividly remembered as the plans for war with Spain were being drawn up. The most famous was the Settlement of Darien, a purely Scottish ambition undertaken between 1698 and 1700 that used up about 25% of the entire capital of the nation. The target was present-day Panama where the colonists founded New Edinburgh. As usual some 10% died of dysentery but that was just the start. There followed abandonment (by England), war (with Spain) and repeated epidemics until in the end just 500 of the 2,500 who had left returned to a bankrupt Scotland. More recently, in 1727 a squadron commanded by Vice-Admiral of the Blue Francis Hosier, which had been sent to patrol the Spanish West Indies, was struck by disease and of the 4,800 or so men aboard (many replacements were seized in Jamaica and forced aboard) all but 6-700 died. Losses would be far higher in later wars – the British Army averaging 10-20% each year when stationed in the Caribbean and an estimated 70,000 in the campaigns of the Revolutionary Wars. Of course neither yellow fever nor malaria could claim all the credit, with three other causes often active. One was Typhus, caused by a parasite that was associated with crowded quarters – it was traditionally known as ‘jail fever’, but of course a crowded ship of the line had very similar conditions. A second was Typhoid Fever, triggered by the salmonella bacteria and instead associated with contaminated water and food. At this distance the relative impact of the four factors, taken together with the third disease, the almost universal Dysentery, is difficult to measure – but we do know that virtually every voyage from Europe to the Caribbean suffered long before arrival and long before either yellow fever or malaria could have been the cause. A good voyage might cost ‘just’ 10% of the crew and passengers, but there are cases of 20% being lost, with typhus and dysentery being the most likely causes. In these cases it was time that mattered, time measured from when the soldiers went on board – hence the serious losses when convoy departure was delayed by weather, policy or plain incompetence.

Fighting Death

Of course the real issue was that in the 18th Century there was no way of preventing most of these diseases and very few ways of minimising their effects. The least helpful tended to be the medical profession and their favoured treatment of bleeding only encouraged the severity of a disease like malaria. It was only the immune who could feel safe and be eager to serve, the best example being Vice-Admiral Vernon. The rich and powerful would bend influence to be ‘overlooked’ or spend money to be sent elsewhere – the rest ensured that their wills were up to date. The fortunate would serve under leaders with some knowledge of the conditions – for example a sensible naval captain would moor his ship well off-shore in the day when the breeze was blowing from the land (most mosquitos had a limited range), while a regimental colonel would insist on putting up tents and screens at once, so reducing the risk of yellow fever and malaria. But that was about all – in practice very little when faced with the power of Yellow Jack.



The landing at Guantanamo was made without incident on August 14th. While the squadron anchored in the bay, the transports proceeded up the Guantanamo River and deposited the troops near where a track from Santiago skirted the hills north of the river on its way to the village of Catalina – the old name for the town of Guantanamo.

In all, three camps would be established, the last being fortified and protected by earthworks erected on a height that overlooked the river valley, north of the camp. Once all was secure, the British began to take stock of their environs.

Catalina, which held a tiny garrison, was cleared out, but otherwise there was no opposition. Down the track to the west, an unknown number of partisans and local militia lurked. From Catalina it was 64 miles to Santiago.

And now the charges of Vernon's and Wentworth's own partisans begin to fly again. The General was accused of timidity. Rather than marching swiftly to Santiago, taking the town by coup de main, and storming the coastal batteries on their undefended side so that the fleet might enter in, he kept his men in camp, where they sickened and died, while he made excuses about the strength of the enemy and busied himself with demanding the Navy force Santiago harbour – despite the fact that he himself had earlier agreed it was impossible.

In Vernon's view, Wentworth simply refused to believe Santiago was an empty shell and cravenly hid in his camp. Some 3,000 friendly reinforcements were expected, and with these a push could surely be made. Failing that, the troops could be used to build a fort and a permanent settlement.

But what no one seems to have grasped prior to landing was the sheer difficulty of a march from Guantanamo to Santiago. The track was narrow, skirting the rugged Gran Piedra where Fidel Castro would one day defy the Cuban Government. It was an impossible route for artillery, sodden in the rainy season and parched in the dry; there was little water and no animal transport to be found.

In the Army's view the thing was simply not possible. In reality, a bold push by a flying column just *might* have done the job, because the Spanish had almost nothing – 400 men at Santiago and 130 militia in the neighbourhood of Guantanamo. This is where the slow, deliberate nature of Wentworth's character became an obstacle. Surely Colonel Wolfe would have tried it if he had been in command, though it is a point in the General's favour that Wolfe and the other army officers agreed with his assessment – because really, the British were not much stronger.

[There are some sources which describe small ambushes, taking place. Possibly there were instances of franc-tirailleur activity.]

A month was wasted. On the 13th of September, Vernon tested Santiago harbour but found the winds impossible to work with. September passed, and the soldiers took sick and died in the double-digits each week. Some companies were down to six men apiece. By the end of September, the commanders had got to that point, familiar to married couples, where all dialogue has to be conducted through a third party.

October passed in the same fashion. On November 18th, Wentworth called a council of war which agreed with him that any advance would be 'ruinous'. On December 5th a combined council of war saw the same split between the Navy and the Army.

The Navy, seeing that neither the Army nor the Enemy were inclined to do anything, took up its usual cruising duties, calling the office periodically to see if there was any news. Vernon had standing orders to harass Spanish trade.

Richmond (Vol.1 p.128 note 2) lists the various stations as:

- *'To windward of [Rio del] la Hacha, to intercept ships outward bound from Spain to Cartagena or Porto Bello;*
- *Between Cape Corrientes and Grand Camanes [Caymans], for ships from Cartagena, Porto Bello or the Caraccas [sic] going to Vera Cruz or Havana;*
- *On the north side of Cuba to intercept ships going to Havana by the old Bahama Channel;*
- *To windward of Cape François to protect British trade coming from North America;*
- *Off Cape Bacca to protect trade passing along the south side of Hispaniola; and,*
- *Off Santiago.'*

At Guantanamo the British retained enough ships to match the Havana Squadron, should it sortie. The balance changed in October, when Vernon received orders to send home 11 more ships. De Torres at La Habana was said have been reduced to 16 ships, but now Vernon, having already sent five back and making ready four more, would have only 12. He refused to part with the additional two requested.

[The four latest returnees were Orford, Prince of Orange, Suffolk, and Prince Frederick, all 70s. Vernon gave them skeleton crews. How they would be manned when they got home was not his problem.]

Though the Expedition was proving a dismal failure, the routine work was gleaning results. The *Worcester*, *Defiance*, *Shoreham*, and *Squirrel* each took a prize of some value – a hold full of pieces of eight, garrison stores, and in the last case a packet of despatches.

Squirrel was Captain Peter Warren's ship. While enroute to England she engaged a notorious French privateer, the largest and last of the Santiago flotilla. The enemy crew were taking on wood and water when *Squirrel* appeared, and the picquet abandoned ship. Though the enemy fired muskets at the British from the shore, Warren's crew boarded the privateer and began to fire broadsides from both ships until the corsairs took to the woods.

A sailor found the despatches. He had seen a dead Spaniard lying on a fallen Union Jack, felt this to be a gross insult and tossed the body overboard. As he did so, a packet was revealed under the flag. This, though kept secret at the time, is said to have contained conclusive evidence that the Duc d'Antin intended to combine with de Torres for an attack on Jamaica.

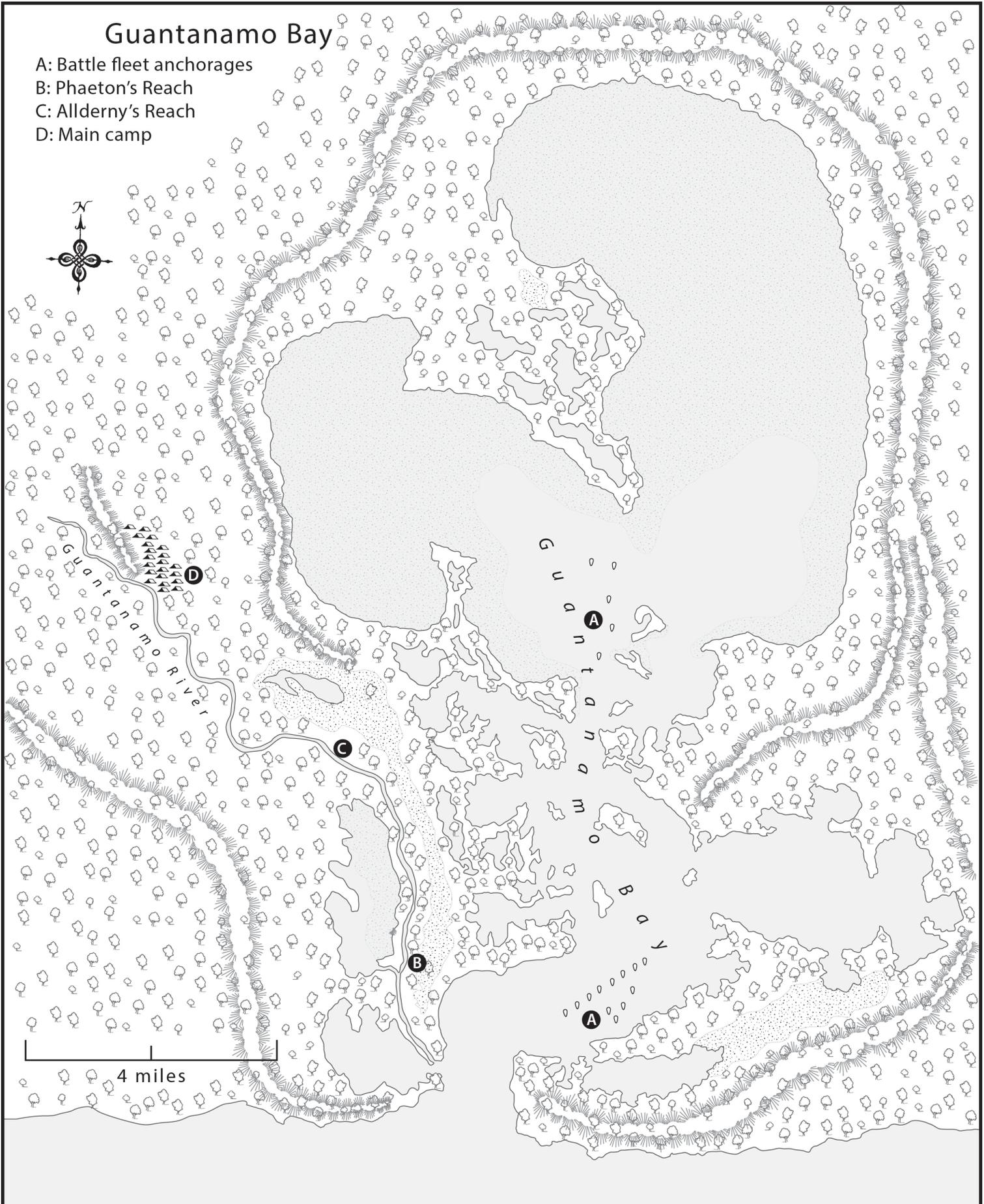
Once again the Royal Navy's job was becoming difficult. Not only were new enemy squadrons expected to come from Europe, but his cruising successes backfired on Vernon. The Spanish privateers were driven north into American waters, where they had a field day with British shipping. Given the fact that there were so many more shipping lanes in that region, the only solution was to establish a regular convoy system in those waters. The change in circumstances called for yet another council of war, held on October 31st. Any guesses as to the result?

Actually, the British lingered for another three weeks, until the rate of sickness was so great they had no other choice. The hoped for reinforcements had not arrived. Out of (on paper) 3,500 men, 2,260 were sick. The Army reembarked on November 20th – though they did not sail until the 28th (arriving at Jamaica on the 10th of December).

Vernon remained with his squadron at Guantanamo until the transports were safely away then sailed to Cap Tiburon in search of prizes, not returning to Port Royal until January 16th, 1742. He

Guantanamo Bay

- A: Battle fleet anchorages
- B: Phaeton's Reach
- C: Allderny's Reach
- D: Main camp



wrote to the Duke of Newcastle asking to return to England; he refused to cooperate any longer with Wentworth.

Donde es de Torres?

While the British were messing about, the Spanish enjoyed an unspectacular but critical success. They had been in enforced inactivity for much of the year. First, there was the lightning strike on the brand-new 70-gun *Invencible*, which blew up catastrophically, damaging three other vessels as well (*Principe*, *Reina*, and *Santa Ana*). Northwest Cuba was saturated by a series of violent storms that spring. Then, they had been hampered by a lack of money and materiel for repairs.

Badly needed supply vessels were on the way from Spain. On March 13th, the *León*, *San Isidro*, *Galga*, plus *San Francisco d'Asis* and *San Lorenzo* pingües, sailed from Spain. Around the third week of March, *Rosario* and another vessel sailed back to Spain, to be replaced by the *San José* leaving Cadiz on May 6th. In all, 13 victualers followed in de Torres' wake; 10 made the trip successfully.

Money remained short. Since the enemy's Great Expedition was still floating, ships were forbidden to leave Veracruz. This meant the withholding of pay for the garrisons of the islands and the fleet; desertion, always a problem, became rife.

According to Spanish sources, de Torres had about 5,000 troops on Cuba at this time; this may include ships' crews. (For the upcoming St. Simons island campaign of 1742, he would be able to spare only 1,300 soldiers, including militia, leaving him a mere 500 or so in the garrison of La Habana.)

The condition of the soldiers also affected naval operations. De Torres had a sizeable squadron, varying in readiness, perhaps as many as 13 capital ships on a good day. But the admiral never once used them offensively – not even on convoy sweeps near Cuba – because he feared that, in the event of a British landing, the troops would not hold unless they had naval support. (As late as May of 1741 he remained convinced La Habana was the British expedition's target, learning of the siege of Cartagena only after the enemy retreated.)

[De Torres' inactivity earned him his recall, but the Captain General of Cuba, who also feared a British descent, retained him at his discretion until 1744.]

Then, on November 2nd, the *Barlavento* sailed from Veracruz with 2.5 million pesos in silver and two shiploads of vitally needed naval stores, mainly masts and spars. Rendezvousing with de Torres and ten of his squadron at the Tortuga Banks, they arrived safe at La Habana on the 13th, hotly pursued by a British patrol.

[The ships involved were Europa, Bizarra, San Nicholas pingüe, and Aurora sloop. Alternate dates for the convoy are October 10th to November 13th.]

A small Spanish troop convoy also sailed from Cadiz in October. The ships bore familiar names: *Elena*, *San Andreas*, *Susana*, *San Andreas brigantine*, and *San Nicholas* – all Caracas Company vessels making their second voyage of the year. They carried 1,000 soldiers and provisions for the garrison of La Guaira. Upon arrival they would be used to shuttle men and supplies to and from La Habana and Cartagena.

1742 – SPANISH FLY

Fresh Horizons

1742 brought a political sea-change. In Germany, the Austrians went on the offensive against France. In Italy, a Spanish expeditionary corps landed and began a campaign against the Austrians in the Po Valley, but was isolated when the King of Sardinia refused to open the passes through the Maritime Alps. And in England, there was a change of ministry.

The failure of the Cartagena expedition was not the primary cause of the Administration's fall. It began to topple in January of 1742, when the City of London and the principal towns petitioned the Government to do something about losses suffered at the hands of enemy privateers. This issue came on top of some rather close-run local elections, and became a stalking horse. The Government retained a majority but lost much support. The Country Party, the alliance of conservative Whigs and moderate Tories, split with the Administration on the issue.

Desperate times lead to desperate measures. Walpole's bloc resorted to bribing the Prince of Wales with an offer to increase his income (paid out of State revenues) and pay his (considerable) debts, if he would reconcile himself to his father, the King. Now remember, the Prince was the titular head of the Opposition. If he and the King were reconciled, there would be a split between the Patriots and the Opposition moderates. But the Prince would not take the bait. Instead, he counterattacked, saying he was open to reconciliation without demanding any terms at all, save the dismissal of Robert Walpole.

Walpole fought on for a time, but each vote in the House came with less and less of a majority. Eventually, an important motion was passed with only three votes. Seeing the writing on the wall, Walpole saved face by turning a minor vote on an election question into a vote of confidence. It could have been worse. With such a slim majority, his enemies in the House could have successfully voted his impeachment, meaning a trip to the Tower. Instead, he was kicked upstairs, created Viscount Walpole and Earl of Orford. He retained the favour of the King. The Prince, by the by, was publicly reconciled to the King at this time.

[Though as a Peer he was banned from the Commons and all the exciting legislative work, and, more importantly, lost his power base – since he no longer had the means to reward his followers with election plums and ministerial jobs – Walpole remained something of a 'grand old man', especially after the new Administration proved itself worse than his.]

The New Face of Britain is generally termed the Carteret Ministry. Lord Carteret was Secretary of State for the Northern Department, not Prime Minister – that was Henry Pelham, brother to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, the Duke of Newcastle. But, from 1742 until 1744 King George lent Carteret his ear; H.M. preferred flunkies who agreed with a "Hanover First" policy. Carteret began to turn most of the war effort toward the Continent and the buildup of an army in the Low Countries.

[There is irony in Carteret's choice to serve the Hanoverian Interest; his family owned land in the Carolinas. Within a few months the new Administration demonstrated that its claims of patriotism and reformist agenda were a mere cloak for self-interest; the new Government was even more corrupt than the one it replaced.]

Back in Jamaica, the councils continued. Guatemala was put on the table. The natives were hostile to Spain and there were some good harbours, frequented by British pirates. But it was rather out of the way and prizes were few. Because the locals hated the Spanish the latter had built no ports of consequence on that coast.

Governor Trelawny was still harping on Panama, and pulled out a knowledgeable ex-pirate – surprise, surprise, Captain Lowther – to

prove his case. There was the added argument that Commodore Anson ought to be on his way to Panama from the Pacific side. The Local Expert thought it would be possible to sail up the Chagres River and get artillery onto the Panama Road. The town itself was usually lightly guarded.

There were two difficulties with Panama. First, it rained almost every day, and when the rainy season came it rained double. Second, the Isthmus was to leeward of Jamaica and a long way off. If the enemy launched an amphibious operation of his own, Jamaica would be in danger. There were rumours (false ones as it turned out) of a naval disaster in Europe and the immanent arrival of a French squadron.

But, if the Governor was keen, and if Anson had not drowned coming round the Horn, and if it was not raining too hard... And Vernon learned the bad news from Europe was not true – he had a letter sent to the Governor of Saint-Domingue as a ruse, to allow the bearer to pick up information.

The promised troop reinforcement also arrived, on the 26th of January, 1742. It consisted of 2,000 men:

- St. Clair's 1st Regiment of Foot (1 battalion) from Ireland.
- Guise's 6th Regiment of Foot from Ireland.
- Blakeney's 27th Regiment of Foot from Ireland.
- Duncombe's 8th Marines or 50th Regiment of Foot.
- Powlett's 9th Marines or 51st Regiment of Foot.
- Agnew's 10th Marines or 52nd Regiment of Foot.

Their escorts were *Greenwich* (50), *St. Albans* (50), and *Fox* (20), plus four bomb ketches.

[The reception committee missed the convoy, which passed them in the night.]

By the end of the month the Navy was prepared for Panama, as were the troops. But there was a delay in obtaining sufficient slaves for the supply train. The planters were always loath to take men off the fields, and harvest time was coming.

[By the by, negro regiments were proposed more than once, but the masters naturally feared placing weapons in the hands of slaves. Some of the original Jamaican companies were black, but they were not augmented by fresh units.]

So, once again, there was delay. Wentworth absolutely refused to embark without his labour pool, which meant a departure date around the end of March.

To kill time, on March 16th Vernon took a few ships (*Boyne*, *Montagu*, *Worcester*, and *Defiance*, plus two boats) after a Spanish squadron of six ships reported (March 13th) to be conveying 4,000 troops to Cartagena and 'the richest cargo ever to sail from Cadiz' (to paraphrase Beatson). It was said they were currently at La Guaira. *Greenwich* and *St. Albans* were already cruising on either side of Cartagena, mainly to confuse the enemy. The Admiral traversed the Main from La Guaira to Cartagena, but without success.

[Beatson gives a different mix of British ships: Boyne, two sixties (Montagu & Worcester probably, then Fowey and a fire-ship. York was to follow him when ready. Parker warns that Beatson should not be consulted for the following incident, as his account is garbled and grossly inaccurate.)]

The enemy were not a rumour, though they were not at Cartagena. A squadron of five ships under *capitán de fragata* José de Iturriaga (a director of the Caracas Company), put to sea out of Pasajes (on the north coast of Spain) on February 12th, carrying ammunition and the men of two regiments: *Regimiento Dragones de Almanza* and the *Regimiento Infantería de Portugal*. Though originally intended for Cartagena, their secret orders revealed a change: they were now to proceed to Cuba.

Running into bad weather, only one ship, the *San Ignacio de Loyola* (50), continued on, against orders. The others took shelter and tried again on the 22nd.

San Ignacio paid for her disobedience. She was wrecked off Anegada in the British Virgin Islands, April 10th. 200 of the troops aboard (*Almanza*) drowned and 500 were taken prisoner.

Of the remaining ships, *Nuestra Señora del Coro* (50), *San Sebastian* (20/24), and *San Joachim* (30), found themselves about four leagues (20 Km) off Anegada on the 12th of April. The fifth ship, *San Antonio de Padua* (12) became separated early on in the voyage, but arrived safely.

The three ships were spotted that day and engaged by the *Eltham* (40) and *Lively* (20), on patrol in those waters. As always seemed to happen, one of the Spanish ships – *San Sebastian* – was slower than the others. Being Company vessels, with lighter 'broadships', they were at best a match for the British, but no more. Parker thinks *Coro* might have been more powerful than *Eltham*, but is doubtful. Iturriaga took the British ships for a '50 and a 30'.

The British kept the weather gauge, but the commander, Captain Smith, saw only a '60' and two '30s', and decided it would be too risky to close. Instead, he discharged a quantity of shot at long range, to which the Spanish replied. Spanish sources report two engagements, with an interval over the lunch hour (9am – 12pm; 3pm – 7:30pm).

This would indicate a pursuit battle, with Spanish either trying to gain the weather gauge or to escape; the pause would come when the British fell away with damaged rigging. After repairing it they came back within range. Eventually, the Spanish made their escape in the night.

Casualties were light on both sides (3 KIA, 6 WIA for the British; 3 KIA, 7 WIA for the Spanish) but one of the dead was Don Joachim de Aranda, the new governor of Cartagena.

This was not the end of the tale. Iturriaga took a British merchantman before putting in to San Juan (April 16th). *San Sebastian* grounded entering the harbour, but was floated off. The merchant had been carrying, of all things, a supply of masts and ships' timbers, which made repairs very simple. On the 20th they sailed for Santiago, reuniting there with the *San Antonio* on the 27th. Here the surviving troops were disembarked, before the ships left again (September 6th) for La Habana (September 20th). On October 20th they sailed again for Puerto Rico, before finally reaching the Company headquarters at Puerto Caballo on the 7th of December. The ships never did go to Cartagena on this voyage.

[The supplies destined for Cartagena were transhipped onto naval vessels at Puerto Cabello. The side trip to La Habana may have involved Company business (their Havana Company rivals had Basque connections, with a factory at San Sebastian).]

[The following ships, also sailing under the auspices of the Caracas Company, were in the Caribbean at the same time: El Nompapel, La Elena, El San Andreas, La Susana, San Andreas brigantine, and San Nicholas. Some of these are the same as those dispatched from Spain as de Torres' followup ships. It is not certain, but it may be those vessels were collected at Puerto Rico for use as transports. From the names, one can see they included hired French ships.]

Panama Junket

While the Spanish were having their adventures, Rear Admiral Ogle was to bring the Panama expedition and rendezvous with Vernon off Cartagena in a further ploy to deceive the Spanish. *Greenwich* and *St. Albans* were also to rejoin the fleet. A delayed rendezvous took place on April 5th, and the expedition immediately proceeded to Portobelo, arriving there on the 8th.

When combined, the squadron consisted of:

- *Cumberland, Boyne* – 80s
- *Kent, Orford* – 70s
- *Montagu, Worcester, and Defiance* – 60s
- *St. Albans, Greenwich* 50s

Plus three frigates and two hospital ships. There were 3,000 men, counting the remnants of the Cartagena debacle and the new arrivals, and 500 negroes. All in 40 transports.

The plan of operation was to first rendezvous with Lowther, who had been sent off on reconnaissance (*Triton sloop* and *Experiment*), off the Bastimentos. Then, a party of 600 men was to be landed at Nombre de Dios. These would move inland to cut the escape route of the Portobelo garrison. The landing at Portobelo would take place next day. But, when no sign was seen of Lowther, Vernon modified the plan, making a single landing at Portobelo. This was a mistake.

[The Army could protest but nothing more. On water, the Navy called the shots.]

There were three companies of Spanish and two of ‘mulattoes and negroes’ in the town, but Portobelo made no resistance. The troops withdrew to Panama. The British sent 80 men to occupy the customs house but otherwise agreed to leave the inhabitants alone. The next step was to send a unit to block the Panama Road. But...

This time it was Governor Trelawny who balked. He took Vernon aside privately and asked that the expedition be called off. General Wentworth had told him Panama was not attainable, and he wanted to get back to the Assembly at Jamaica.

The General was quite right, although Vernon once again faulted him for his ‘timidity’. Thanks to the delay in starting, the rainy season was upon them, just as in 1741. An unusually long voyage (3 weeks as against the usual 8 days) had resulted in the loss of nearly 1,000 of the 3,000 soldiers on board (935 according to Beatson). Finally, Lowther, who appeared out of the blue while Portobelo was being secured, reported Panama to be well defended.

New, landward-facing fortifications had been constructed, and besides being augmented by the Portobelo garrison, which thanks to Vice Admiral Vernon had escaped, there were also elements of the four-battalion *Regimiento de America*, rebased from Lima. These units could be reinforced by the crews and guns of several ships. There was not even a rumour that Commodore Anson had made it into the Pacific.

Wentworth’s subordinates backed his opinion. Now, the Army was in charge; Vernon had no authority on land. By bringing the Governor over to his side, Wentworth ensured the cancellation of the operation. He was learning. Vernon mumbled something about Henry Morgan and his 500 pirates, but gave in. The General was not even willing to send a party in pursuit of the Spanish garrison.

The return journey was a mirror image of the outward one. The expedition straggled off between April 14th-20th. Vernon remained until the 25th, then took his ships of the line (minus the 50s, which may have been used as escorts) to cruise off Cartagena again before arriving at Jamaica a month later, on May 25th.

[According to Richmond the escorts were: both flagships, two 70s, four 60s and three small craft.]

The only gain for the British from this campaign was the opportunity to trade with the Spanish at Portobelo, This is why they postponed their departure. The locals were quite keen on the idea!

Beatson mentions a minor but interesting action that occurred around the same time. The *Tyger* (32) had been wrecked off Tortuga. Getting ashore on the cay with most of their stores and guns, they built a fort and sat down to wait for rescue. The *Fuerte* (60) discovered them while monitoring the St. Simons Island campaign (see below), but, manoeuvring against the fort, she also struck the cay! The crew of the *Tyger* were marooned for two months, until they surprised a sloop with their ships’ boats. Taking this vessel, they used to capture a schooner, and with the two ships sailed back to Jamaica.

[Beatson also recounts a less edifying story, of the destruction of the Tilbury (60), which burned to the waterline. A purser’s boy was carrying a bottle of rum out of the purser’s office, using a candle to light his way. As he passed a marine, the man snatched at the bottle, demanding a drink. The boy struggled with him and dropped the bottle, and the candle. The fire spread to the purser’s office, igniting other bottles stored there. They tossed the gunpowder overboard, but could not put out the fire. Over 100 men were lost.]

The final operation of any consequence this year (if one can call it that) was the taking of Roatán. After that operation was launched, the bad blood between Vernon and Wentworth virtually paralysed the British ‘high command’, to the extent that Governor Trelawny indicted Admiral Ogle for assault at the Governor’s residence, for which he was found guilty!

As Beatson puts it, the agony only ended with the arrival of the *Gibraltar*, with orders for Vernon and Wentworth to return to England. They did so separately, the Admiral sailing in the *Boyne* and Wentworth with his few remaining troops in convoy, escorted by *Defiance* and *Worcester*.

The Admiral and the General

Taken as a whole the War of Jenkins’ Ear certainly qualifies for the label ‘forgotten war’. Except for the debate over the merits and faults of Vice Admiral Vernon and Brigadier General Wentworth.

Vernon, besides being a naval officer, was a politician. In the aftermath of the Great Expedition he went for the General with gusto, attacking him in the press and in the House; Wentworth was forced to pick up a pocket borough just so he could sit in the Commons and defend himself. Each attracted partisans, and the split has continued among historians to this day. Currently, Wentworth is in favour; a hundred years ago it was Vernon, and a hundred years before that they were both in the dock of public opinion.

Neither man suffered in his career because of Cartagena or the other failed operations of 1741-42. Wentworth was promoted to Lieutenant General and served in Flanders, then in Britain during the Jacobite rebellion. He died in 1747. Vernon was promoted to Admiral of the White, the second highest position in the Navy, and commanded the Channel Fleet during the critical period of the war. Admittedly, in a very rare move he was struck from the flag list, but that was because he publicly opposed the Admiralty’s policy on Patronage; he remained a ‘talking head’ on naval matters.

The million-dollar question is why the two men had such a violent dislike for each other – or rather, why Vernon got it into his head that Wentworth was a dead weight. It may have been nothing more than the incompatibility of their personalities. But, was the General a dead weight? Was Vernon actually incompetent?

The current verdict is that the General was not the complete duffer portrayed by Vernon. This author feels he was working too much by the book, but the situation he faced must have been appalling; at least The Book works, given time – which is the one thing Wentworth lacked. It may be he was in charge of a larger

force than he was comfortable with. He probably had no experience of working with a separate service, and dealing with a caricature of a red-faced crusty old sea-dog like Vernon would have been a thankless task.

Neither man made major mistakes with respect to their own branch of service, but seem to have had only vague notions of what was important to the other. It may be important that while Vernon bombarded Wentworth with advice at Cartagena, at Guantanamo he mainly urged him to 'get a move on', and at Panama gave in to the Army's verdict without much ado.

Ironically, as the Admiral and the General learned the limitations of their command and the needs of each other, they grew increasingly unable to cooperate! One wonders if they would have 'got over the hump' and become a fearsome team given another year. Or two.

At Cartagena the lack of cooperation between the services may or may not have prevented victory, but it certainly caused needless casualties. To list just two of the issues, there was the refusal to give the Army access to fresh water, and the refusal to give the Army more men. The justification is that the Fleet needed these items desperately, but to withhold them put men's lives at risk.

[And Vernon managed to save some of the marines by refusing to land them. They were Navy boys.]

The entire concept of the Cartagena campaign was a mistake. Vernon understood this. He had warned the Government that there was no use sending out so many men and ships. There were not enough resources to maintain them, and the men were all going to die (the casualty rate was in fact about 90%). It was particularly, um... stupid... to time the expedition to occur during the rainy season. But this was the same Government that ordered Commodore Anson to capture Panama and gave him a landing party of 500 Chelsea Pensioners to do it with. And it was an era when the lives of subordinates mattered less (*significantly* less, that is) than one's own career.

[One wonders what hidden departmental fights were going on between the Duke of Newcastle and Lord Carteret, with the latter husbanding the best parts of the military for his grandiose Continental schemes and the über-corrupt Newcastle being forced to take the scrapings while at the same time trying to figure out how he could turn a profit on them. Ministers really need to be shot periodically, as a example to the others.]

The Spanish had a winning strategy in terms of port defence: a slow withdrawal from outworks to the inner defences, while allowing Nature to fight on their side. Their commanders also squabbled, but their success has allowed that fact to be forgotten. If Cartagena had fallen, perhaps historians would now be arguing whether Governor Eslava or Admiral de Lezo was more to blame.

Cartagena might – *might* – have been taken if the British acted with excessive boldness. The Spanish defenders believed it was possible. But it would still have been a gamble. Since they lost so many men by not gambling, one may say they ought to have given it a shot. Alternatively, if they had quit after destroying the outer forts there might have been some gain, since it would have allowed the British merchants to sell their wares in the bay.

For conspiracy theorists, remembering Vernon's 'hidden agenda' of opening the Spanish ports, one wonders if this is what he had been aiming at all along, using the Home Government's ludicrous plan as justification. (*You want to send me more ships and men? Sure, come on down, I'll find work for them. And you'll only need to pay them for six months.*) In that light, his victory dispatch at the taking of Tierra Bomba would not be premature, but a signal to his cronies that the job was done. After this, he could sit back and watch until the Army decided to quit.

But, mostly likely he was just too sanguine to begin with. There has always been a cult of 'the efficacy of surprise descents' among British military thinkers (Cartagena, L'Orient, La Rochelle, the Dardanelles, Dieppe...) As the extent of the looming disaster became clear to him Vernon began to realise he had made a mistake in trumpeting the Navy's personal successes. Now he needed to distance himself from the campaign; it was the Army's fault they lost...

Every author points out that the British should have attacked La Habana. That was the *Armada's* base of operations. By taking it the flow of New World bullion would be stopped entirely, or would be forced to transit past a nest of British privateers backed by a British naval squadron; Spain would fall into France's position, unable to support a Caribbean squadron of her own for any length of time. Ultimately, this is what did happen, in 1762. But even that siege barely came off.

That coast is not suitable for naval landings. It lacks anchorages and is exposed to hurricanes in summer and storms out of the northwest in winter. It is a very long way (taking into account wind and water) from Jamaica. The fortifications were more fully developed than Cartagena, the squadron defending it was formidable, and the garrison was stronger. If the city were taken and Spain did not sue for peace (unlikely now that she was at war in Europe) the Cuban population would have to be held in check. It would be an expensive occupation, and the Spanish would not oblige by continuing to ship silver there. Yes, the British had a massive fleet, but that would simply mean more mouths to feed and more chances for ships to be wrecked. Vernon was dead set against La Habana, and there seem to be no reasons why other than the very sensible military ones just listed.

The Great Expedition was to be the decisive stroke of the war. The remaining two operations were hastily contrived as a means of saving face. Neither was really practicable. The British tried the direct approach on Santiago in 1748, as will be recounted, but even the hard-charging Rear Admiral Knowles balked at that task, though he put the blame for quitting on his subordinates. A 70-mile march over the Gran Peidra by a flying column might have taken the town in a surprise attack. Maybe.

The delay in leaving Guantanamo was Vernon's fault. He wanted a successful campaign, and held on, hoping for reinforcements that would allow the British to establish a permanent base. This would ease the transit of the Windward Passage immeasurably, make it easier to prevent the Spanish and French from joining forces, and allow British privateers to raid the ports of Hispaniola. Instead, the expedition just lost more men.

Panama was the Holy Grail. It captured the imagination. But the time to have attacked it was at the start of the war, before the Spanish were able to improve its defences. And it could not have been held, so if there were no bullion the campaign would be a waste of time. Sending Anson into the Pacific was a much better approach (except that it was a shoestring campaign). In executing the Panama operation, the biggest mistake made was in not cutting off the garrison of Portobelo. Wentworth made the right choice in cancelling the landing.

Why Vernon altered the plan is not clear. Surely he was not so ignorant of land warfare as to fail to appreciate the concept. The sources merely give his stated opinion that a single landing would be no different than two landings. The non-appearance of Captain Lowther is supposed to be the catalyst for the change in plan, but why? Was he an expert pilot needed to make anchorage at Nombre de Dios? But, Vernon had accurate charts of that section of coast. One might suspect that, again, the Admiral was merely opposed to the idea of large amphibious operations and was

pretending it was all Wentworth's fault again, but... it was *Panama*.

Throughout all these operations there runs a common thread of overoptimism, about resources and time needed, a lack of planning, and a repeated failure to respect one's enemy. Examined in isolation, individual actions were conducted with skill equal to anything one might expect from a modern military – the reduction of forts, the landings, the minor combats – but the whole did not become more than the sum of its parts. The drills did not gel into a successful campaign. This is a peculiarly, though not exclusively, British trait.



Edward Vernon (1684-1757)

Vernon was 55 when he was given command of the West Indies station. A Londoner by birth, and a son of William III's Secretary of State, he joined the Royal Navy in 1700. Though he enlisted young, as did most of his peers, he also attended secondary school, which made him unusually well educated.

His service in the War of the Spanish succession took him first to the Channel Squadron, and then to the Med. He was present at the taking of Gibraltar (1704), the Battle of Málaga (1704), and the Siege of Barcelona (1705). In 1702 he was promoted to Lieutenant, and in 1706 was made Captain. His first ship was the *Rye* (24). In 1707 he was involved in a major disaster off the Scilly Isles, but escaped. In 1708 he was sent to the West Indies, returning to Europe in 1710, where he dispersed a Spanish squadron. After the war he served with the Baltic Squadron (1715-1719) and then as commodore of Port Royal, Jamaica, in 1720. However, he was placed on half-pay in 1721.

Vernon entered Parliament while unemployed and retained his seat, though returning to active duty in 1726 aboard the *Grafton*, where he served first in the Baltic, and then in Spanish waters, during the Anglo-Spanish War. In 1728 Vernon was back in Parliament, championing his favourite cause, the Senior Service,

and in 1731 championing one Captain Robert Jenkins, 'falsely' accused of smuggling by Spain.

Vernon was promoted Vice Admiral of the Blue on July 9th, 1739, as part of his appointment to command the West Indies Squadron. In 1742, after the success of Porto Bello (1740) and the failures of Cartagena (1741) and Santiago (1742), he was recalled to England.

His career did not suffer. *In absentia* he had been elected MP for Ipswich, and he continued to be an advocate for the Navy, including publishing anonymous pamphlets lambasting the Government for its ineptness. In 1745 he was made full Admiral (of the White) and given command of the North Sea Squadron during the '45, when the Jacobites raised a rebellion in Scotland.

Depending on one's source, he was either retired at his own request after being refused the top command of First Sea Lord, or, he was dismissed for refusing to comply with the Admiralty's Patronage regulations. He remained active in Parliament until his death.

Roatán

Roatán, or Ruatan, or Rattan, is the largest (60 Km by 8 Km, and fairly rugged) of a small group of islands lying off the northern coast of Honduras. The name means 'Rich Island', in honour of a Lord Henry Rich, but it could just as well refer to the other sort of 'rich'.

To the west lie Belize and the Yucatán. In the 18th Century the coast to the south was held by Spain; Belize was nominally Spanish but infested with British logwood operations and buccaneers. Roatán itself was claimed by Britain as a proprietary colony, and there were actually a couple of English planters in residence, holding patents from the local Spanish governor at Trujillo on the mainland. But British involvement with the island went back a couple of centuries.

In the 16th Century the Spanish used the island as a depôt for the *flota*. This turned the place into a magnet for pirates, who established several colonies. Their depredations were severe (the islands have been the scene of numerous treasure hunts). About 1640, a pirate named William Jackson formed a fleet of 16 ships and led 1,500 men to sack Trujillo. The Spanish sent 30 ships in reprisal and cleared out the pirates and their Paya Indian allies after a hard fight. By 1650 the island was deserted.

In 1660 the pirates came back. Bloody Morgan based himself at Roatán and the Spanish suffered worse than before. By 1670 there were an estimated 5,000 pirates operating out of the archipelago!

At the time of the present war buccaneering operations had dwindled. The pirates now sailed out of Belize. However, it was still a place of interest. The prime mover of the present campaign was a certain Lieutenant Hodgson, serving under General Wentworth. He had connections with the island and believed it could be revamped as a base for protecting the logwood operations and the trade in cochineal and indigo carried on with Spanish plantations in Guatemala. The place was also a healthy refuge during the rainy season.

Wentworth initially vetoed the plan. However, Governor Trelawny received correspondence from other men who held interests in the island, asking for protection. The Governor saw a base on Roatán as a tool for re-instituting the great pirate raids of the past. Long term, it was hoped the island could be settled and granted cession from Spain as a 'colony' of Jamaica.

So, in February of 1742, Hodgson and a commercial representative set off, escorted by the *Bonetta* sloop, to talk to the

logwood men, buy the loyalty of the Mosquito Indians, and test their theories. By June they were back, full of good reports.

On July 9th a council of war was held at Spanish Town (the original capital of Jamaica) and Hodgson's plan was placed front and center. But there was an alternate proposal in the offing: an expedition to sack the French privateer base at Leógame. This was an equally tempting idea, since war with France was believed to be immanent; it would please the Traders just as much. However, though the council of war was unanimous in choosing the latter plan, Vernon changed his mind, plumped for Roatán, and was backed by Trelawny.

In addition to the advantages indicated by Hodgson, Vernon pointed out, rather speciously, that it would be a superb base for operations against the galleons coming from México – or, at the peace, of opening up trade with México; currently Veracruz was too far away from the nearest British base. There was also a question of what to do with the remnants of the American Marines and it was thought they might enjoy the climate and settle there.

The council agreed to the proposal, but Wentworth, with some insight, suggested waiting until the Americans had been consulted and all the details ironed out. Presumably this was done, because on August 24th, the *Litchfield* and *Bonetta* were sent to the island escorting a contingent of Gooch's Marines (200 men) and the remnants of the other six 'marine' regiments (all of 50 men), under a Major Caulfield (later Governor of the island) with supplies for six months and the means of erecting fortifications.

Landing unopposed on September 3rd, they quickly established two stone forts to protect the harbour of Port Royal (yes, another Port Royal). These were Fort Frederick (6 guns) on a headland overlooking the harbour and Fort George (17 guns) on Fort Morgan Cay, which guarded the primary channel into the harbour. The town of New Port Royal was laid out, with the intent that the soldiers would settle there on their discharge.

Everything seemed to be going splendidly until Christmas Day, when a group of 47 'papists' and some others attempted to take control of the colony by seizing the fort and burning the ville. The revolt was speedily quelled, the ringleaders shot, and the others flogged. After that, Roatán became a deadly dull place.

Most sources claim that this campaign was as futile as all the others, probably because it was justified to the Home Government as a means of harassing the nonexistent Spanish coastal trade in the region. Actually, it was never intended to do that; in what it did intend – providing a base for the logwood men – it was quite a success. And, longterm, it facilitated the economic penetration of the Gulf of México.

[Postwar the island's fortunes fluctuated. The garrison was removed in 1749 due to a minor clause in the treaty with Spain, but the island remained unofficially 'British' until the American Revolution. Conflict with the Spanish mainland never entirely ceased. In 1782 Spain occupied the island, and her ownership was confirmed in 1789. But English is still the primary language. The island officially belongs to Honduras but most of the inhabitants, regardless of race, see themselves as British subjects.]

Mundane Matters

After Vernon and Wentworth were recalled in October, Sir Chaloner Ogle (not withstanding his assault charge) was promoted to command of the Jamaica Station (he received his orders on September 23rd). A disciple of Vernon's, he was also 'in' with the same crowd, and was immediately, on top of his regular duties, under pressure to do something to curtail the activities of the Caracas Company, whose grip on the Venezuelan trade was as tight as ever. That would be a project for next year.

Several more ships and most of the troops had also been recalled since the end of the Cartagena expedition. Most of Ogle's

command was in refit, its most common state. Port Royal (Jamaica) remained woefully ill-equipped to maintain any sort of squadron. Four large ships were out cruising, and two smaller vessels were headed for Roatán – throughout the war the British maintained a patrol of 2-4 ships there. A further two ships were sent to aid Governor Oglethorpe in Georgia. Plans concerted for a descent on Petit Goave and Leógame were shelved when the French remained neutral.

According to Richmond, in November, 1742, Ogle had at his disposal (including North America):

Jamaica Squadron

- *Cumberland (80), Kent (70), Grafton (70), Lyon (60), Montague (60), Rippon (60), York (60)*
- *Assistance (50), St. Albans (50), Litchfield (50)*
- *Eltham (40), Fowey (40), Ludlow Castle (40), Adventure (40)*
- *Shoreham (20), Experiment (20), Seahorse (20), Astraea (20), Bonetta (4), Spry (6), Strombolo and Vulcan fireships, Thunder, Basilisk, and Blast, bombs.*

Leewards

- *Launceston (40), Gosport (40), Eltham (40), Lively (20), Pembroke's Prize (20), Otter (14) newly arrived.*

Barbados

- *Norwich (50), Advice (50), Scarborough (20)*

Newfoundland

- *Sutherland (50)*

North Carolina

- *Swift sloop (8.12)*

South Carolina

- *Rye (20), Flamborough (20), Hawk sloop (8.12)*

Virginia

- *South Sea Castle (44), Hound sloop (8.12), Cruizer sloop (8.12)*

New York

- *Launceston (44)*

New England

- *Gosport (44)*

The danger from La Habana was estimated at 12 ships of the line, of which 6 were in service:

- *Reina (80)*
- *Principe (74)*
- *Leon (70)*
- *San Isidro, Africa, Andalusia, Hercules (French loan), Fuerte, Glorioso – 64s*
- *Nueva España (54)*

plus *Real Familia (60)* on patrol along the north Cuban coast. The Havana Squadron also had 3 frigates, a brig, a fireship, 1 pink, 1 dispatch boat, and 1 sloop.

No Spanish or French ships of significance were believed to be anywhere else in the theatre. During 1742, apart from the Caracas Company convoy the former limited themselves to runs between Veracruz and La Habana and short cruises:

- June: Victuals shipped. A bullion transfer to La Habana, using *Castilla, Fuerte*, a sloop, and a prize taken off Campeche.
- A schooner and sloop to patrol the Old Bahama Channel for privateers.
- July 14th: *Jefe de Escuadra* Reggio on a cruise to the Dry Tortugas (*Fuerte, Reina, Nueva España*) to collect a second bullion transfer.
- Also in July a brig and a sloop sent to chase a British bark off Cape San Antonio.
- Early August (2nd and 3rd): the arrival of four French ships at La Habana – a big event.
- August 14th the *Maria* and *Marta* frigates arriving at La Habana from Cartagena with 250 ‘useless mouths’.
- August 15th a sloop and brig sent to escort some victualers.
- Another small bullion transfer to La Habana in September.
- The reestablishment of communications with Cartagena in October – when it was learned the garrison had been dying at the rate of 120 per day!
- The transfer of troops from Cuba to Veracruz on November 10th – so uninformed and insecure were the Spanish that they believed the British planned to pay the port a visit.

There was only one ‘large’ Spanish campaign: the expedition to St. Simons Island on the Georgia coast.

The French threat oscillated from month to month. It was never clear whether a squadron would escape the watch of the Home or Mediterranean fleets. Even if one *were* spotted the patrol commander might judge there was nothing he could do. It appeared, however, that the French were becoming seriously annoyed. As auxiliaries of Spain they were supporting her war effort in Italy, and as auxiliaries of Austria, the British were boarding their vessels in search of what they called ‘illegal’ war materials. Ogle decided to pull in his horns and concentrate at Jamaica once more. Without radios, the first news he received of war might be a broadside from a French ship of the line.

[The same pattern repeated itself each time there was an ‘immanent threat’; when the threat receded, long range patrols started again.]

England’s poor track in spectacular combined operations masks the considerable success she was beginning to enjoy in the routine chore of prize-taking. From being a victim in 1740 and 1741, she had turned the tide and was starting to systematically sweep the seas of Spanish shipping, and of French and Dutch ships carrying contraband for the Spanish war effort.

For the West Indies alone this year, Beatson lists as prizes a total of three privateers, eight merchantmen – including three carrying quicksilver (one of which was French) – and a *guardacosta* vessel commanded by the man responsible for cutting off Jenkins’ ear.

And, while all eyes were on the Caribbean, the British did enjoy one amphibious success, in Georgia.

The St. Simons Island Campaign

‘Your Excellency is informed in respect of the motives which induced His Majesty in the year 1737 to resolve upon the extirpation of the English from the new colony of Georgia and from the territories of Florida which they have usurped, as well as of the orders sent out to this end, and of all dispositions made for their execution, until a suspension was commanded. I bring these past matters to the recollection of Your Excellency, because we are now in a state of open war, and under no necessity to practice the caution which in the former conjuncture of affairs compelled us to give pause. His Majesty considers the time opportune to accomplish the destruction of Carolina and of its dependencies, thus compensating ourselves for the ancient perfidies of which the English have made the colony the seat, as well as for the present hostilities, by inflicting a damage that will ruin and terrify them, seeing the affection in which they hold that country, and the benefit they derive from its commerce. Accordingly His Majesty has directed the organization of an expedition from that Island [Cuba] to be composed of some regular troops and of as much militia as may be necessary, and that it pass over to the aforementioned province of Carolina with its appurtenant territories, and devastate it by sacking and burning all the towns, posts, plantations and settlements of the enemy, for the purpose of this invasion must be solely to press hostilities until the effort shall have gone home, and success be achieved. It will help you to know that the English Colonies in America are so weakened by the men and supplies drawn off to lay siege before Cartagena that their relief from England has been under discussion.’

Preamble of a letter to de Güemes from Madrid, dated October 31st 1741

Oglethorpe had been right to attempt preemptive action in 1740. Though in hindsight neither side had the strength to conquer each other’s colonies, and though it might appear that in this current initiative the Spanish were merely taking revenge for the Governor’s aggression, the Spanish were desirous of ridding themselves of the thorn of Georgia, and, if they could manage it, the other North American colonies as well. Don Montiano, Governor of Florida, had long believed the British planned to use their tribal allies to raid and eventually seize Pensacola by land. And, the sieges of San Agustín in 1728 and 1740 were sword thrusts against the seat of Spanish authority.

Furthermore, Georgia’s coastline had a number of superior anchorages. San Agustín’s harbour was poor, accessed across a shallow bar. Ships often had to wait for hours before they could enter or leave; in bad weather they could wait days. The appearance of a new British colony reminded the Spanish of this fact. Previously, acquisition of better ports could await a natural expansion of Florida’s colony, but now... action had to be taken.

A descent on Charles Town (Charleston) had been planned for 1738. The goal was not conquest, but devastation, so that colonists would be discouraged and the region’s economy would decay. By helping the slaves to free themselves a buffer zone could be reestablished, and by removing the presence of British traders the Indian threat would die away. Spanish forces would withdraw to Florida rather than establish garrisons of their own.

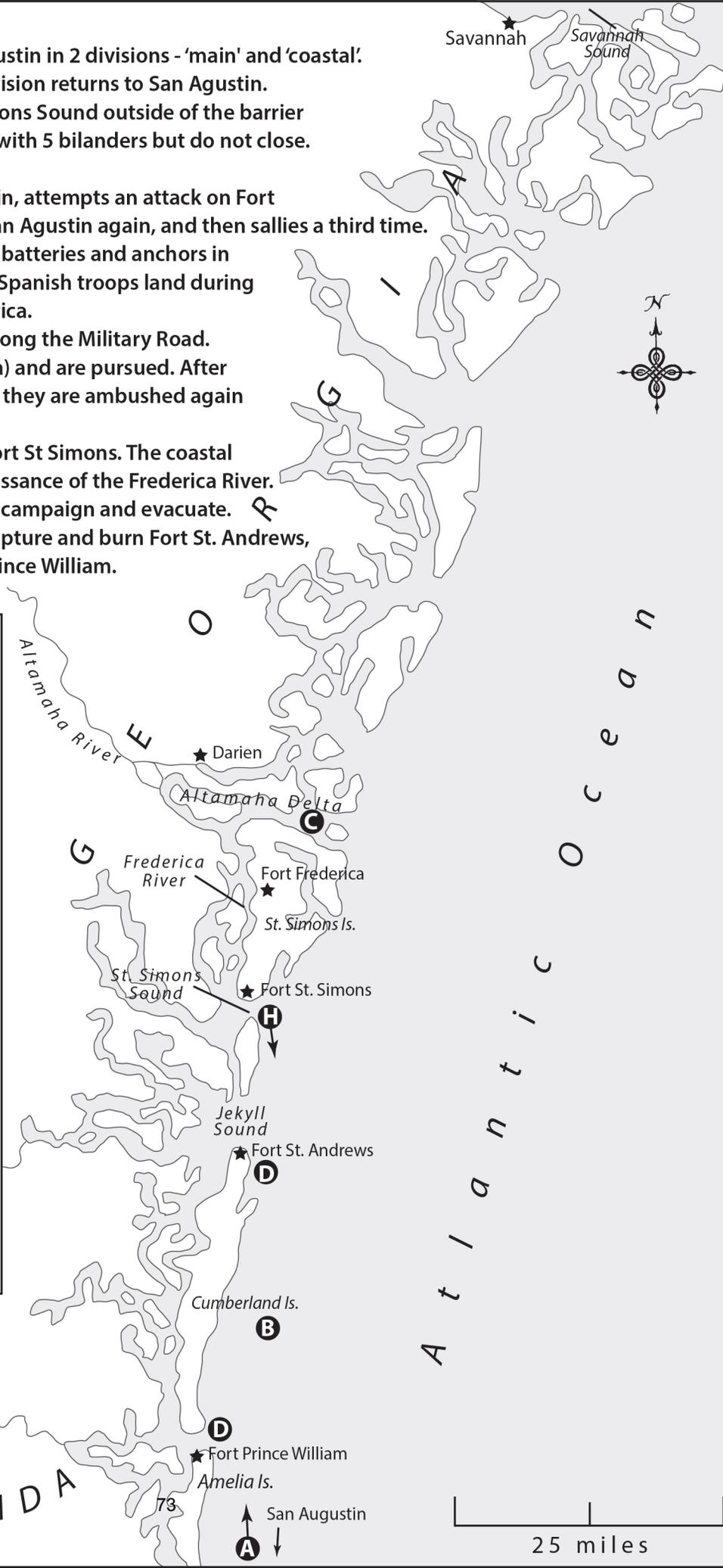
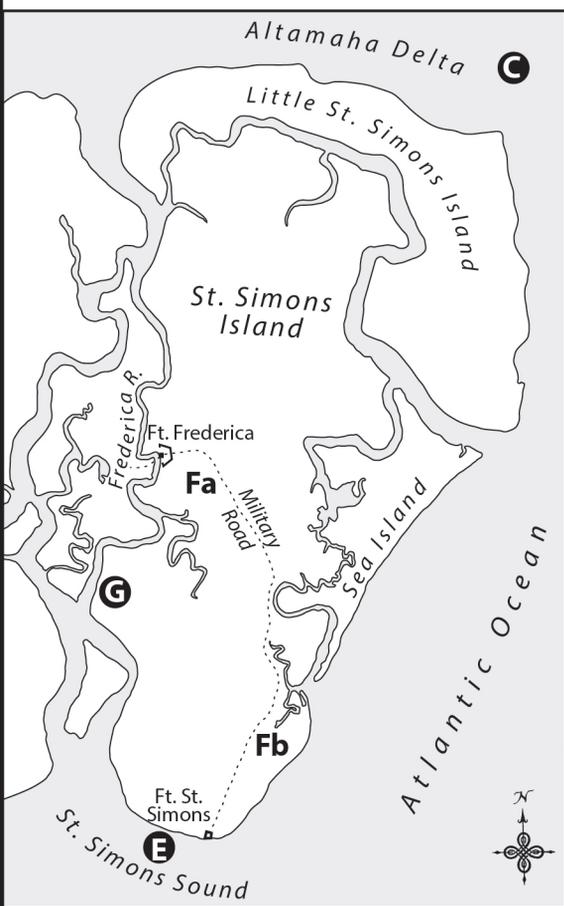
In 1739 the plan was dusted off, but Oglethorpe’s attack in 1740 and the anticipated Great Expedition delayed matters until 1741, when some modifications were made to the original concept. The first question to be tackled was nature of the campaign, and the second was its target.

The overall strategic goal would remain unchanged: an attempt to devastate the colony. Though it would be wise to retain a base on the coast of Georgia, this might not be possible in the short term, since Madrid was emphasising the need to husband resources, especially manpower. So, it would be a great raid.

A march by land would not be an easy task. The region was low lying and swampy, with dense woods and ‘quaking earth’ – patches of quicksand and reed islands riding on bogs. The tribes were hostile. Therefore, the Spanish would travel by sea and

Campaign of 1742

- A) July 1:** Spanish convoy sails from San Agustin in 2 divisions - 'main' and 'coastal'.
- B) July 2:** Storm scatters convoy. Coastal division returns to San Agustin.
- C) July 12:** Main division anchors off St. Simons Sound outside of the barrier island chain. The British challenge them with 5 bilanders but do not close. British test fire their batteries.
- D) Meanwhile,** the coastal division sails again, attempts an attack on Fort St Andrews but is repulsed, retreats to San Agustin again, and then sallies a third time.
- E) July 16-17:** Main division runs the British batteries and anchors in St. Simons Sound. After an artillery duel, Spanish troops land during the night and the British retreat to Frederica.
- F) July 18:** The Spanish reconnoitre north along the Military Road. They are ambushed at Gully Hole Creek (a) and are pursued. After being reinforced by a party of grenadiers they are ambushed again at Bloody Marsh (b).
- G) July 19-24:** Spanish remain camped at Fort St Simons. The coastal division finally arrives, allowing reconnaissance of the Frederica River.
- H) July 25-29:** Spanish decide to call off the campaign and evacuate. Enroute to San Agustin and Cuba they capture and burn Fort St. Andrews, but are dissuaded from attacking Fort Prince William.



supply themselves the same way, bringing overwhelming force to bear at the critical point. Which was to be...?

Applying superficial logic, Charles Town or the growing community of Savannah ought to be the first target. Instead, the Spanish chose St Simons Island. All reports indicated that Oglethorpe had concentrated his forces here and at nearby Darien rather than at Savannah. It was his point of departure in 1740. By defeating the English here, the entire colony would be laid bare, whereas if they landed away from the enemy troops, Oglethorpe would be given time to muster more men, rouse the Indians, and chose his own time and place to counterattack. To clinch the argument, the harbour of Gualquini, as the Spanish named the anchorage at St. Simons, was one of those most desired by them.

1741 was taken up with planning, letters back and forth from Madrid and La Habana, the approval of the scheme, the appointment of commanders, and so forth. Once the British attack on Cartagena and the subsequent attempt on Santiago de Cuba had been dealt with, Spain had, in theory, sufficient forces to completely overwhelm the defences of Georgia. Madrid gave the go-ahead on October 31st, 1741.

As originally drawn up, the plan required 3,000 men. Don Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, *capitán general* of Havana and Cuba, could not spare that many troops. He also lacked the transport and supplies to move and support them. The Royal Navy maintained a strong presence even after the Cartagena expedition had sailed for home, reducing the number of Spanish vessels available for this operation. In the end, Don Juan managed to scrape together 1,950 men (1,000 of them regulars) by stripping the garrison of La Habana to the bone and calling upon Montiano at San Agustín to supply half the force.

[Havana's garrison was reduced to a mere 400 men.]

600 regulars and 700 militia, plus all the supplies, were to be shipped from Cuba in 30 transports (some of which were frigates – including a commandeered French one). San Agustín was to provide 400 regulars and 100 militia, plus her six galliots and a number of launches and pirogues that would be invaluable for working the coastal belt. Two engineering officers would join the expedition, one of whom, Don Antonio de Arredondo, had local knowledge. Montiano was to be overall commander, with Don Francisco Rubiani, CO of the *Dragónes de Itálica*, as his second and Don Antonio Castañeda as the senior commander of the ground forces.

Don Rodrigo de Torres was called upon to provide assistance:

The King having resolved upon an expedition from that Island [Cuba] against the enemy, and having decided that its Governor General, Lieutenant Don Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas should organize it according to the orders sent him, and deeming it proper that whatever betide, the troops to be selected for the said expedition shall have their place taken by detachments from the squadron under the orders of Your Excellency, in such numbers as shall not interfere with its navigation, or other functions, His Majesty commands me to say to Your Excellency that you are to furnish these detachments and that if any naval officers should wish to go as volunteers on this expedition, you are not to hinder them. You are to help the aforesaid Governor to the limit of your powers and of the necessities of the case, in order to bring about the end confided to him, by reason of the great interest taken in this matter by the royal service. God keep Your Excellency many years.

Letter from Madrid to Don Rodrigo de Torres, October 31st 1741

Don Rodrigo cried off, citing the poor condition of his ships and crews, and the fact that the ships drew too deep a draught. Another black mark in the Crown's book. But, in the event, he supplied a small escort: two 60-gunners, the *Fuerte* and the *Castilla*.

The expedition proper consisted of four frigates, four pingües, a packet (*Diligente*), a galley, ten schooners or sloops, and two armed *bilanders*. Some of these were:

- Frigates – *Santa Barbara*, *Triunfo*, *San Cayetano*, plus one of the French 24s still at La Habana (possibly *Nomparel*).
- Lighter vessels – *Santa Ana*, *Nuestra Señora de la Popa*, *San José*, *Sacra Familia*, *Escalera*, *Guaraia* schooner.
- The *bilanders* carried 120 men and an 18-pounder gun each.

[The 60s were a 'stand-off' patrol, never espied, and are thus only mentioned in Spanish sources.]

A detailed composition of the troops is not easy to come by, but included were a battalion of the *Regimiento Fijo* [Fixed Regiment] *La Habana*, the Militia of Guanabacoa (a town near Havana), and the *Dragónes de Itálica*. Two companies of grenadiers were formed.

The Cuba convoy would proceed to San Agustín and pick up reinforcements, then sail to St. Simons Island. After leaving San Agustín the convoy would be divided into 'heavy' and 'light' elements, with the latter cruising close inshore and dealing with any defences that might be encountered, while the larger ships stood off. After rendezvousing off the harbour of St. Simons, a dawn landing would be effected at the north end of the island to cut the garrison off.

Once Oglethorpe's command had been dealt with, the expedition would fan out, raising the negroes and ravaging the countryside all the way to Port Royal (South Carolina). Speed was essential, and as soon as the mission was accomplished, the entire force would race back to St. Simons and reembark.

[Refer to the accompanying maps.]

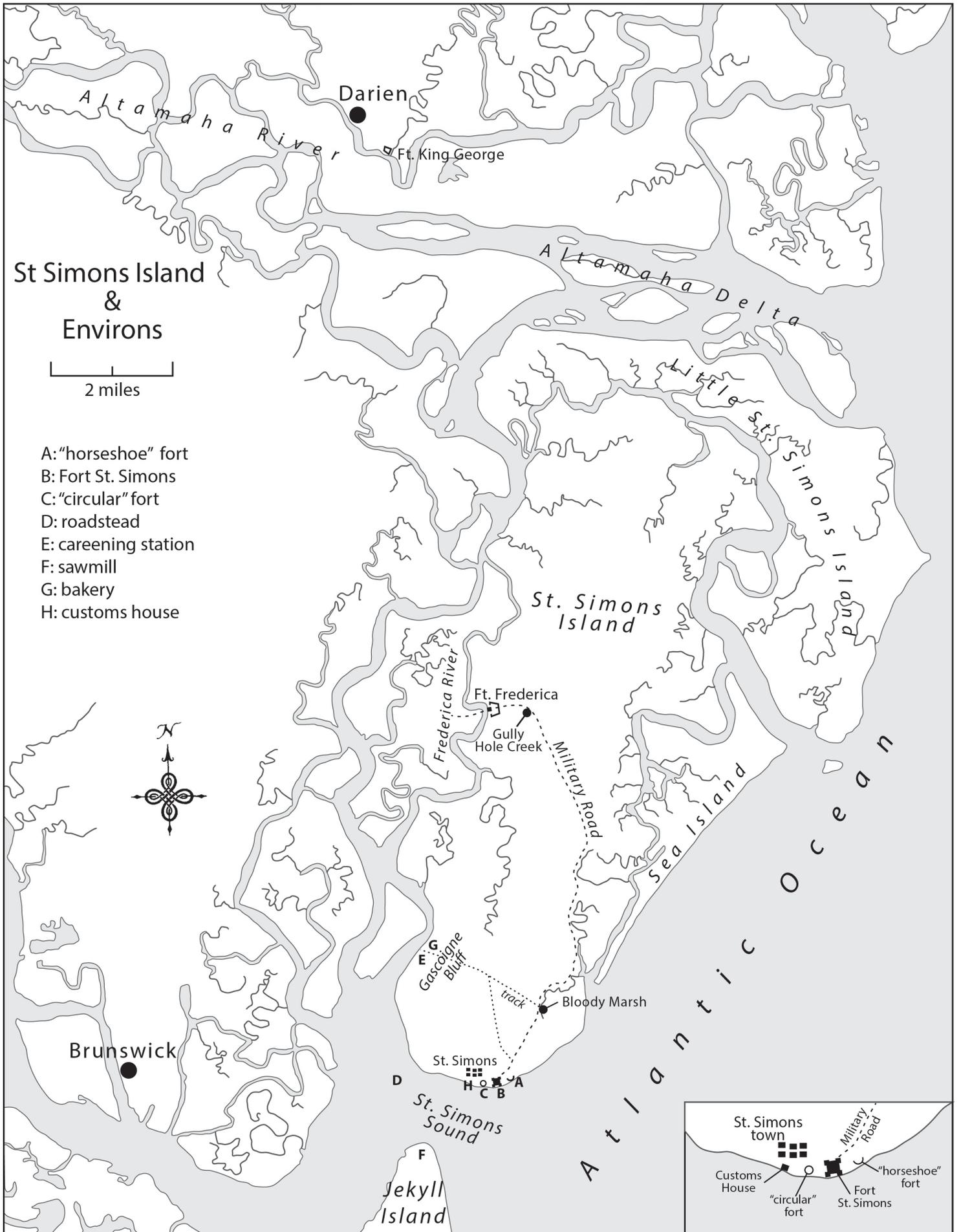
From San Agustín north to Jekyll Island (a.k.a the Isle of Whales) the coastline is one long beach, broken by a number of islands, low-lying and covered in pines and oaks draped with Spanish moss, behind which lie a variety of narrow straits, bays, marshy creeks, and river mouths. Communities were small, and few. Even Savannah consisted of no more than 200 houses seated on a bluff and protected by a stockade with ten 8-pounders.

The naval defences at each port on this coast consisted of a single pirogue armed with a swivel gun and a mixed bag of unarmed boats. Amelia Island had a British lookout tower named Fort Prince William, sporting a cannon, a stone mortar, and a garrison of four men. There was also a schooner of 14 guns to service it. Another small fort, St. Andrews, sat at the northern tip of Cumberland. It had a garrison of 30-40 men.

[Some accounts put Fort St. Andrews on Jekyll Island, but this is incorrect.]

The village and fort of Frederica lay on St. Simons Island. A road of sorts ran from Frederica to the community of Darien on the Altamaha. Darien, the Independent Highland Company's settlement, sat on an island of high ground jutting south into the flats. It consisted of 30-40 houses. A little to the east was a stockade called Fort George, with 6 guns. From Darien the road ran north to Savannah and civilisation. There was no bridge over the Frederica River, only a ferry. On the road from Frederica there was a sister stockade to Fort George – Fort Augustus. Both forts were primarily a defence against Indian raids.

On St. Simons Island, a Military Road ran down the length of the island to Fort St. Simons at the southern tip. Like St. Andrews, this was primarily sited to cover the anchorage and the approach to the Frederica River, rather than out to sea.



Fort Frederica had ten guns and St. Simons had sixteen. Three of the guns were 18-pounders, but six were only 6-pounders. There was also a shell mortar, which the invading Spanish discovered in an earthen blockhouse, sited facing the entrance to the bay. A second battery of six 6-pounders and two 4-pounders had been erected to augment Fort St. Simon's firepower.

To defend his colony, Governor Oglethorpe had less than 1,000 men, including 300 part-time militia. His regular forces included the Independent Highland Company and the Rangers. According to Spanish prewar intelligence he may have had a few hundred more, though these have not been assigned unit names in the sources and probably correspond to the units from which the Rangers were formed. The Spanish estimated about 600 men on St. Simons Island and a further 200 at Fort St. Andrew. There were about 200 'civilised' Indians living in two small hamlets in the vicinity.

By mid-March of 1742 preparations had advanced far enough for Horcasitas to report to Madrid. He expected the expedition to sail between the 2nd and 4th of April, but the departure did not actually occur until June 5th (or May 28th). Almost immediately after sailing there was a small action between elements of the convoy, escorted by a galley, and a British 24-gunner from Charles Town (*Flamborough*). Although three boats were forced to disgorge their cargo of artillerymen and dragoons on a Cuban beach the Spanish fought back:

The convoy of ten small vessels manned by a few militiamen and escorted by a galley, sent in advance by the aforesaid Lieutenant General [de Torres], fell in on June 6th with an English coastguard man-of-war of 24 guns [Captain Hamer; Flamborough], which with its artillery, launch, and boats, attacked a few of our vessels beforementioned. And as our galley could not go to the help of all of these, they presently found themselves in danger so great, that two of them were compelled to run ashore, one of them having lost a lieutenant of artillery and a corporal killed, and had a lieutenant of militia wounded. One of their boats tried to board a sloop of ours aground, but our troops that were on shore began to fire and so forced the crew of the English boat to ask for quarter. We thus captured one officer and 18 sailors.

[Taken from the "The Spanish Official Account of the Attack on the Colony of Georgia, America, and of its Defeat on St. Simons Island by General Oglethorpe" Georgia Historical Society, p.89. Captain Hamer had to retire to Charles Town for repairs.]

Meanwhile, the rest of the convoy made good progress. Long Key was sighted on June 8th, and Biscayne Key on the 9th. After spotting the 'palm grove of Ays' (Port St. Lucie) on the 10th, the ships headed into open water, not making landfall until the 14th, at Mosquito Inlet (New Smyrna); San Agustín was raised the same day. Because an enemy sail was sighted, and because of the surf, the convoy did not actually land until the 15th. The missing elements beat them to the finish line, arriving on the 9th.

The enemy ship proved to be a British schooner that had been trying for some time to unload a French passenger. After this was managed, the Spanish questioned the man and learned that the defences of Fort Frederica were in bad repair. Oglethorpe's garrison was said to number no more than 600 men, demoralised by bad food and worse weather. It was said that the Carolinas were unwilling to send the Governor any aid unless ordered to do so by King George. Of course, it was possible the Frenchman was a plant.

Meanwhile, the Spanish had problems of their own. All 900 water jars brought from Cuba proved to be defective. Other shortfalls also had to be made good. By the time this was done, the weather had become unfavourable. A handful of ships loaded 600 picquets for an advance party, but none could cross the bar, and after a few days the men had to be unloaded again.

The Spanish remained cooped up for two weeks, finally sailing on July 1st. On the 2nd, the convoy (now 51 or 52 vessels) was scattered by a gale. The 'coastal division' of shallow draft vessels (perhaps fourteen in number) made an attempt on Fort Prince William but were driven off. Making their way north, they probed Jekyll Sound before returning to Cumberland Island, where General Oglethorpe himself had a narrow escape:

'I received advices from Captain Dunbar, who lay at Fort William with the guard schooner of 14 guns and 90 men, that a Spanish fleet of fourteen sail had attempted to come in there; but being drove out by the cannon of the fort and schooner; they came in on Cumberland. I followed on myself, and was attacked in the Sound by fourteen sail, but with two boats fought my way through.'

Oglethorpe had three boats in all, carrying two companies of soldiers originally intended for the reinforcement of Fort Prince William. Though he says 'sail', his main opposition came from the armed *bilanders*.

'Lieutenant Folson, who was to have supported me with the third and strongest boat, quitted me in the fight, and run into a river; where he hid himself until next day, when he returned to St. Simon's with an account that I was lost; but soon after found that I had arrived there before him. For which misbehaviour I put him in arrest, and ordered him to be tried.'

The enemy in this action suffered so much, that the day after they run to sea, and returned to St. Augustine, and did not join their great fleet till after their grenadiers were beat by land.'

From a letter of Governor Oglethorpe, July 30th 1742 (OS), to the Duke of Newcastle.

[Some of the vessels did join the main expedition after a few days.]

Having chased the enemy away, Oglethorpe embarked the garrison of St. Andrews, spiked its guns, and sailed up to Frederica on the schooner.

The Spanish ships straggled up to anchor some two leagues off the coast and three leagues north of the St. Simons Island. (Oglethorpe merely says 'off the bar', implying they were closer than that). The 'inshore' elements – the *bilanders*, galliots, and pirogues, were nowhere to be seen. The Spanish presumed – correctly – that they had stopped to engage the enemy forts on Amelia or Cumberland Island, which were discretionary targets. Thanks to the defective water jars everyone was put on half water rations, while ships were detailed to run back and forth to San Agustín.

When the Spanish first arrived, the British made a great show of force with five *bilanders* of their own, which sailed out of the mouth of the Frederica River several times, to just outside cannon range, before returning. The enemy could also be heard test firing their batteries. But the Spanish were unconcerned. Of more interest to them was the state of the weather, which continued foul.

Originally, the intention had been to land on the northeast shore of St Simons, at the mouth of the Altamaha. But though there was a nice beach, solid ground beyond it was some distance away across a tidal marsh and a further channel, and anyway the weather prohibited a landing on that side. On the first day the winds blew from the west and the northwest; on the next they blew from the west-southwest and southwest. There was heavy surf. On the third day the seas were calm, but before a landing could be attempted a squall sprang up and the boats were recalled. There was nothing for it but to force the harbour mouth down by Fort St. Simons and anchor in sheltered water.

According to General Oglethorpe:

'Another Spanish fleet appeared on the 28th [9th July NS] off the bar. By God's blessing, upon several occasions taken, I delayed their coming until the 5th of July [16th July NS]. I raised another troop of Rangers, which, with the other, were of great service. I took Captain Thompson's ship [a 24-gun frigate] into the service for defence of the harbour. I embargoed all the vessels, taking their men for the service, and gave large gifts and promises to the Indians, so that every day we increased in number. I gave high rewards to them who distinguished themselves upon any service. Freed the servants brought down by the Highland company, and a company of boatmen filled up as far as we had guns.

All the vessels being thus prepared, on the 5th of July [16th July NS], with a leading gale and spring tide, 36 sail of Spanish vessels run into the harbour in line of battle.

We cannonaded them very boldly from the shipping and batteries; they twice attempted to board Captain Thompson's ship, but were repulsed; they also attempted to board the schooner, but were repulsed by Captain Dunbar, with a detachment of the regiment on board. I was with the Indian Rangers and batteries, and sometimes on board the ship, and left Major Heron with the regiment.

It being impossible for me to do my duty as General, and be constantly with the regiment [the Rangers]; therefore it was absolutely necessary for his Majesty's service to have a Lieutenant-Colonel present, which I was fully convinced by this day's experience. I therefore appointed Major Heron to be Lieutenant-Colonel, and hope your Grace will move his Majesty to approve the same.'

From the same letter of the 30th of July

The landing began on the 16th of July, taking all day and most of the following night. Though the British batteries engaged them as the ships entered the harbour, minimal damage was incurred. The guard schooner was sunk and one of the shore batteries disabled. The worst moment for the Spanish was when a *pink* grounded on the bar, but she was got off eventually. There was enough room for the fleet to anchor more or less out of the arc of the batteries. Montiano decided to land immediately, to prevent the enemy from establishing new batteries facing him. His troops began ferrying in at 6pm under cover of friendly fire.

An advanced guard of 50 men crashed ashore in heavy surf near Gascoigne Bluff, west of the fort and its settlement, quickly followed but 450 more. They set up a picket line and all night long the landings continued, the grenadier companies of the reserve appearing at 10pm and then Don Montiano's HQ. By now there were perhaps 1,000 Spanish ashore.

At this point, General Oglethorpe gave the order to 'bug out'. The remaining vessels, two schooners and a prize that had been taken (presumably in the action at Cumberland Sound; it may have been the armed *bilander* mentioned in the Spanish account below) took advantage of a favourable breeze, and on Oglethorpe's orders, escaped to Charles Town.

Until midnight the Spanish could hear movement and see fires as the enemy *bilanders* (merchantmen all) were burned. Once, there was a large explosion as an ammunition dump was torched. Most of the guns were spiked, but not all, and few very effectively. It was rather a hasty departure. The Governor was the last to leave.

[An alternate account tells of Oglethorpe sending his little flotilla back to St. Simons after the action at Cumberland Sound, and returning with the bulk of his men by land, arriving a day after the Spanish landing (i.e. on the 17th). If this alternate account is correct, perhaps the place was abandoned because of the rumour that he was dead or taken.]

'At the entrance of the harbor was constructed a fort of sod with brick parapets, in the shape of a horseshoe, containing a bronze shell mortar, and five for smaller shells. It had in its neighborhood a large trench mounting 3 guns to sweep the entrance. At a distance of two musket shots, and to the west, was another fort, of square trace, with four bastions, one in the middle of each curtain, constructed of heavy timbers and of earth,

and having a ditch one toise and a half [9.6 feet] wide and four feet deep. On its parapet were a few rows of barrels filled with earth, and planted with thorns, to serve as a parapet. Along the interior ran a stockaded covered way to prevent a surprise, on which were mounted 7 guns, 3 of them 18-pounders and six grenade-mortars [Coe horns]. Between the first and this second fort they had constructed a strong trench mounting 5 guns: to the west of these works was yet another large trench of circular form, whose purpose it was to annoy us by musketry.

Within this harbor between the forts mentioned were stationed a 24-gun frigate, a schooner of 14, then a bilander of 10 guns. Behind these came a line of eight bilanders and schooners well manned to defend the entrance with musketry; but in spite of all this, we took possession of the Port and anchored at five of the afternoon.'

The Spanish Official Account p.90.

Montiano immediately dispatched friendly Indians as scouts. They returned around 2am with positive news: the entire site seemed to be deserted. (In the days to come there would be much grumbling as these men managed to pocket all the loot they could and ruin the rest of the captured stores for everyone else.)

At 6am the grenadiers took command of the empty fort while the main body marched north along the shore of the Frederica River. It was observed that the British warships were gone, while three of the *bilanders* remained as burned-out hulks. A prisoner, one of the merchant captains, told the Spanish that Oglethorpe had retired to Frederica with 500 men.

The Spanish began to set up camp, allocating the gap between the two forts as a rallying point and garrisoning each. Most of the men were billeted in the site's village of 60 houses.

On the 18th they began what would become a wearisome routine. Each morning, at 6am, Indians (of whom there were about 40-45), supported by a few regulars, would be sent out on reconnaissance. They were instructed to find a suitable route to Frederica. Late in the day they would return to report that there was (still) only one route, the narrow track that the British had glorified by the title of Military Road. All else was jungle and swamp. During the day, the British fortifications continued to be dismantled and anything in the nature of war material loaded on the ships. Parties going for water to nearby lagoons would be ambushed by enemy Indians. At night, the soldiers would 'stand to' for one or more false alarms, until Montiano decided to dig in properly.

The 18th of July saw the only combat of any consequence. Curiously, for such a small affray, it has been well documented.

The Spanish Account

The Georgia Historical Society possesses copies of the official Spanish documents – letters, diaries, and reports – dealing with the campaign.

According to the diary of one of the Spanish officers, *who did not actually take part in the battle*, on the morning of the 18th, a *rece* party consisting of a company of men from San Agustín and a *picquet* of 40 volunteers, all commanded by Don Sebastian Sánchez, set out to find a route to the British careening site on the west side of the island. A second patrol, of 25 soldiers and 40 Indians, under Don Nicholas Hernández, followed the so-called Military Road north, to see if it was suitable for artillery. Don Sebastian lost his way and joined up with Don Nicholas, and the whole party continued on to Frederica:

'At 8 o'clock we [i.e. men still in the camp] found a dragoon dead at the edge of the woods, and some other people who were accustomed to use in these parts, brought the news of having found one of our Indians dead. As some hostile Indians also brought in this news, and we ourselves heard shots fired in the wood, the troops stood to arms and orders were given to send out two pickets as outposts. At ten o'clock, came a soldier sent by Don Sebastian Sanchez with the report that he had found a very narrow trail, and that Don Antonio Barba, who was in command of the

reconnoitering party [actually, this was Don Hernández; Barba commanded a reinforcement of grenadiers] had succeeded in going, say two leagues, and that nearly the entire trail was nothing but a path passing through thick woods, leading at intervals into a few savannahs or clearings of a swampy nature, and going across on a causeway made of brush wood no wider than the trail; that thus, no formation whatever was possible nor any manner of march than single file because any one leaving the brush wood would be mired; and he reported further that two miquelets [scouts] and a corporal with two Indians whom they had found and carried on with them, and four grenadiers, had noticed on the path something novel, consisting of a cut-log stockade, and also here and there some brush wood arranged like a parapet, none of which they had observed before. He, therefore, halted to reconnoiter the place, and at the same time they began to fire on him from the right and the left without his being able to see anything more than the flash of discharge. This fire he undertook to return for more than one hour without knowing whom he was engaged with because of the thickness of the forest. He continued firing until he had used up all his ammunition and then retired in good order; so as not to have his retreat cut off, seeing that the ground gave all the advantage to the enemy. In this action, the two companies lost seven men killed and eleven wounded; among the killed, the ensign of the company of Havana, Don Miguel Rucardi. The militia suffered no loss, because they formed the rear guard, which was not reached by the fire of the enemy.

'On receiving this news, the troops stood to arms and continued from this night to sleep on them in hammer-like formation. Two other advance outposts were turned out and their reserves indicated for each one.'

'On this day, we noticed a few pirogues going about with people of the island on board. They were waiting to pass through the channel that goes to Frederica. We sent out a little boat with six sailors through this channel to get water, but they were all killed by hostile Indians.'

The Spanish Official Account p.73.

According to Montiano's official report, which contains inaccuracies but is generally correct, Sánchez and Hernández were about a mile short of Frederica when they were ambushed at a defile – Gully Hole Creek – by a mixed force of British and Indians. Both captains were taken prisoner. Casualties were otherwise 12 KIA, 10 WIA, 11 POWs. Montiano sent up two companies of grenadiers as reinforcements, but these were ambushed enroute while crossing a swamp – Bloody Marsh – and suffered one officer and six men killed. They withdrew, being unable to see their attackers.

The British Account

From the British perspective there are a number of first and secondhand accounts, local tradition, and General Oglethorpe's own correspondence. The General's account (dated 30th of July) substantially matches the other British sources:

'On the 7th [18th of July], a party of theirs marched towards the town; our Rangers discovered them, and brought an account of their march; on which I advanced with a party of Indians, Rangers, and the Highland company, ordering the regiment to follow. Being resolved to engage them in the defiles of the woods before they could get out and form in the open ground, I charged them at the head of our Indians, Highlandmen and Rangers, and God was pleased to give us such success that we entirely routed the first party, took one Captain prisoner, and killed another, and pursued them two miles to an open meadow or savanna, upon the edge of which I posted three platoons of the regiment and the company of Highland foot, so as to be covered by the woods from the enemy, who were obliged to pass through the meadow under our fire. This deposition was very fortunate. Captain Antonio Barba, and two other Captains, with 100 Grenadiers and 200 foot, besides Indians and negroes, advanced from the Spanish camp into the savanna with huzzas, and fired with great spirit; but not seeing our men by reason of the woods, none of their shot took place, but ours did. Some platoons of ours in the heat of the fight, the air being darkened with the smoke, and a shower of rain falling, retired in disorder. I hearing the firing, rode towards it, an at near two miles from the place of action met a great many men in disorder, who told us that ours were routed, and Lieutenant Sutherland killed. I ordered them to halt, and march back against the enemy, which orders Captain Demere and Ensign Gibbon obeyed; but another officer did not, but made the best

of his way into the town. As I heard the fire continue, I concluded ours could not be quite beaten, and that my immediate assistance might preserve them; therefore spurred on, and arrived just as the fire was done. I found the Spaniards entirely routed by one platoon of the regiment under the command of Lieutenant Sutherland, and the Highland company under the command of Lieutenant Charles Mackay. An officer, Captain Don Antonio Barba, was taken prisoner, but desperately wounded. Two others were made prisoners, and a great many left dead upon the spot. Lieutenant Sutherland, Lieutenant Charles Mackay, and Sergeant Stewart, having distinguished themselves upon the occasion, I appointed Lieutenant Sutherland Brigade Major, and Sergeant Stewart Second Ensign. Captain Demere and Ensign Gibbon being arrived with the men they had rallied, Lieutenant Codogan, with an advance party of the regiment, and soon after the whole regiment, Indians and Rangers, I marched down to a causeway over a marsh very near the Spanish camp, over which all were obliged now to pass, and thereby stopped those who had been dispersed in the night there, the Indian scouts in the morning advanced to the Spanish camp, and discovered they were all retired into the ruins of the forts, and were making intrenchments under shelter of the cannon of the ships; they guessed them to be about 4,000 men.

I thought it imprudent to attack them, defended by cannon, with so small a number; but marched back to Frederica to refresh the soldiers, and sent out parties of Indians and Rangers to harass the enemy. I also ordered into arrest the officers who commanded the platoons that retired.'

Frederica lay five miles distant from the Spanish camp. According to third person accounts, the General was in town when he was informed the enemy were only a mile or a mile and a half from the stockade. Mounting the first horse he could catch he galloped off with about 60 Rangers behind him, and the Highland Company and some Indians following at a run.

[The latter were led by a man named Noble Jones, whose descendant would be a prominent Revolutionary, and whose role in the battle has therefore been given prominence – he is supposed to have won the battle himself.]

With only the Rangers and the ten fastest Highlanders the General came upon and routed 170 Spanish soldiers and 45 enemy Indians [these numbers tally with the Spanish records], chasing them about a mile. This action became known as the Battle of Gully Hole Creek. The length of the battle varies in the accounts from an 'instant rout' to an 'intense firefight' lasting less than an hour (or in Spanish accounts, about an hour). The latter is probably closer to the mark. British casualties were 'light'.

After the pursuit, Oglethorpe deployed his men in ambush and returned to Frederica to muster the rest of his forces. When he marched forth again he was dismayed to see two platoons of the Rangers and all his Indians in full retreat, crying the Spanish had outflanked them through the woods and were in hot pursuit.

The reverse turned out to be true. The Highland Company, aided by four Indians, had just routed a column '600 strong', killing more Spaniards than the number of their own company! (So says local history.) One may assume General Oglethorpe's estimate of 100 enemy grenadiers and 250 others to be about right, if still a little high.

Apparently, the Rangers and Indians had been routed, but the Highlanders did not approve of this and managed to rally at another defile, setting up a second ambush. Immediately after, the enemy, led by the grenadiers, came marching along the defile, and halted in the center of the kill zone.

The British rout may have occurred because Noble Jones took his Indians farther down the track in pursuit of the first Spanish party, ignoring Oglethorpe's instructions. They would have collided with Don Antonio Barba's grenadiers and a road party (the negroes) who were coming up the track after having rallied their compatriots. This seems borne out by both the Spanish account and the local history.

Don Antonio chose to halt where he did because he had lost contact with the British – his victory had come only after some skirmishing and he feared an ambush – but, as all could see, the enemy’s tracks indicated a panic flight. He assumed his work was done for the day. Or, perhaps, he needed to examine the road with an engineer’s eye. No need to keep the men standing in single file in the summer heat. They fell out for lunch. It seemed safe enough. On the right was the tidal marsh. On the left, there was a sandy strip, and then a wall of thick underbrush. They were not that far from the Spanish camp.

The Highland officers, Lieutenants MacKay and Sutherland, had deployed their men so that their fire would (fortuitously) converge at the exact spot where the Spanish halted. Simultaneously raising their hats on their swords, they initiated a bloodbath. The Highlanders poured volley after volley into the enemy. The Spanish officers could not rally their men, who fled madly back down the track, out into the marsh, or into the bush. To complete the rout, the Highlanders charged with their claymores and began cutting down anyone still resisting.

This was the Battle of Bloody Marsh. The most accurate British accounts claim 166 enemy KIA, plus Barba, and 19 POWs. Other accounts say anywhere from 7 to 50 Spanish dead. The Spanish claimed 36 men lost on the 18th, not counting those who fled into the bush and turned up later, more dead than alive.

[One of the British privates was awarded a plot of land that included the battlefield as a reward for his bravery.]

On pages 110-111 of the Georgia Historical Society’s book is given a ‘modern’ (1912) examination of the Bloody Marsh battlefield:

‘...after going over the ground very carefully, there seems to be no doubt that this memorable battle was fought at a point upon the margin of the marsh about two miles from the south end of the island, and about one mile from the hotel, where the road from Gascoigne’s Bluff enters the road to Frederica...’

The marsh runs the length of the island, lies between the woods and the sea and is cut by creeks.

The traditions of the people living upon the island all agree that the marsh just east of the causeway is the true battle ground of Bloody Marsh. There is scarcely a doubt that the ambush was laid at the two points of the crescent woodland where the road from Gascoigne’s Bluff enters the main road to Frederica, and that the Spaniards were entrapped in the curved roadway around this crescent. In their confusion the Spaniards attempted to retreat along the road over the causeway, but when they were met by the claymores of the Highlanders, they were forced into the marsh just east of the causeway where much of the execution took place.

Extrication

This decisive repulse was one of the reasons Don Montiano remained inactive for the next few days. But he had to do something. Supplies were already running short. As a face-saving gesture he spent several days searching for an alternative route to Frederica – he had yet to unload his artillery because there was no way it could traverse the so-called Military Road.

July 19th: from 6am to 12pm a second Indian recce party searches for an alternate road. None found. Skirmishing close to the camp. The enemy Indians snipe at them when the Spanish try to coordinate an attack using gunboats. Reports that Frederica is abandoned. Stragglers from the actions of the previous day turn up. Don Sanchez is reported captured & Don Hernández is MIA. Water short. Trips to the freshwater lagoon are subject to enemy harassment.

July 20th: at 2am Don Hernández returns – while being escorted under light guard he manages to overpower and kill his two captors, fleeing down the trail and into the woods. 6am, another

recce sent out. The water situation has improved. Day spent razing forts and loading enemy guns for shipment. At 8am a council of war decides that a water route to Frederica may be practicable. A ‘great’ galley and two galliots – newly arrived after an engagement with four enemy pirogues carrying troops near Amelia Island (one sunk) – are dispatched north to test the river and locate enemy positions. At 2pm, 100 picquets from San Agustín arrive by schooner. In all, fifteen shallow draught vessels are now available, permitting an attempt up the Frederica River.

July 21st: at 5am Montiano orders the fortifying of his camp to stop the endless false alarms. 6am another recce patrol sets out. A launch is sent to the Isle of Whales (Jekyll Island) to investigate the fort there (St. Andrews). At 4pm the river boats return with both good and bad news. The good news is that the river is navigable all the way up, and though there is a battery of four 8-pounders and a mortar at Frederica it has only a narrow arc of fire; beyond, there is a large ‘savannah’ with sufficient room for the entire expedition to form up. The bad news is that the engineers are not sure if the landing spot is solid or swamp.

[According to Oglethorpe, Frederica’s guns ‘received them warmly’, and he followed the Spanish back with some boats of his own, until they reached their anchorage.]

July 22nd: 6am dawn patrol. Another look at the water route is begun. Casualties from the action on the 18th are confirmed at 36. A trench containing three 6-pounders is found. The guns cover the harbour entrance. Complaints against the Indian scouts are made: now that they have plunder they are less willing to risk their skins.

July 23rd: more razing of forts. An important council of war is put off because Don Castañeda is sick, possibly for political reasons. Oglethorpe’s letter comments that the Spanish had divided into a Cuba faction and a Florida faction; disagreement was so strong the troops also had to be bivouacked separately.

Because of this dissension, and rumours of despair in the Spanish camp, on the 24th, Oglethorpe probed the defences. At 2am the Spanish diarist records hearing four shots and then drums beating. The Spanish stood to arms. An hour later the diarist was informed the enemy had approached the camp with 500 men, but when the sentries had fired warning shots, had retreated with drums beating. A deserter was picked up.

This deserter had a tale to tell. He was a Frenchman in Montiano’s service who had been ‘immersed’ in a party of Indian braves; during the night skirmish he simply rushed on into the Spanish lines instead of retreating. He gave the Spanish an accurate report of Oglethorpe’s dispositions during the attack: 200 regulars, 200 militia, 50 Indians and 50 sailors had taken part. Oglethorpe had beaten his drums in the hope of convincing the Spanish he had more men. However, the Frenchman also said that the British had another 900-1,000 men at Frederica, and that reinforcements were daily expected from Boston. He confirmed the British had twelve Spanish POWs taken on the 18th.

A council of war was called at 8am. The Spanish suspected the man to be a plant, and their suspicions were confirmed when a letter was discovered, written by Oglethorpe to the Frenchman, encouraging him to ‘keep downplaying the British numbers, as a strong force of reinforcements was soon to arrive by sea’.

To counteract the damage the Frenchman might be doing, Oglethorpe had had the novel idea of writing him a letter:

‘The next day I prevailed with a prisoner, and gave him a sum of money to carry a letter privately and deliver it to that Frenchman who had deserted. This letter was wrote in French, as if from a friend of his, telling him he had received the money, that he should strive to make the Spaniards believe the English were weak; that he should undertake to pilot up their boats and galleys, and then bring them under the woods, where he knew

the hidden batteries were; that if he could bring that about, he should have double the reward he had already received.

The Spanish prisoner got into their camp, and was immediately carried before the General De Montiano. He was also asked how he escaped, and whether he had any letters; but denying his having any, was strictly searched, and the letter found, and he, upon being pardoned, confessed that he had received money to deliver it to the Frenchman, for the letter was not directed. The Frenchman denied his knowing anything of the contents of the letter, of having received any money or correspondence with me; notwithstanding which, a council of war was held, and they deemed the Frenchman to be a double spy; but General Montiano would not suffer him to be executed, having been employed by him; however, he embarked all their troops, and halted under Jekyl [sic]; they also confined all the French on board, and embarked with such precipitation that they left behind them cannon, and those dead of their wounds unburied.'

Oglethorpe's letter of July 30th (OS).

[The Spanish say the letter was found on a Spanish POW who had been one of several exchanged later that morning; Oglethorpe (see below) does not mention any sort of parley, but that the Spaniard was released, acting as if he had escaped.]

Fortune took a hand as well. Between 12pm and 1pm, five unknown vessels were reported to the north. One was a 30-gunner, and two others were a sloop and a brigantine. This seemed to clinch the presence of seaborne reinforcements. The Spanish decided to call it a day.

The Spanish description of the withdrawal is a bit muddled, possibly because the withdrawal itself was a bit muddled. Don Montiano left the next day (the 25th), taking a portion of the fleet with him. Don Castañeda was left to get the army embarked and the convoy underway at best possible speed. This took until the 27th.

[Oglethorpe says 20 sail, all belonging to the Cuba faction (i.e. Don Castañeda) left first, and then Montiano with the San Agustin faction. Clearly, there were severe disputes among the Spanish which have been glossed over in the official records.]

The Cuban ships stood out to sea and were gone. Montiano's group – about 15 galleys and lesser vessels – sailed first to Cumberland Island, where he burned Fort St. Andrews and the local houses. Oglethorpe followed with a group of boats but was too weak to attack the Spanish. The latter spied the British and, fearing Indians had been landed on Cumberland, took themselves off to Amelia Island. Here, Fort Prince William put up a stout resistance for three hours, aided by some of the Georgia Rangers. Unable to land, the Spanish sailed for San Agustin, monitored by Oglethorpe.

[In the Spanish account, they observed the Rangers ferrying to Amelia on the 27th, and had no intention of landing a party, merely firing at the fort as they put out to sea. Oglethorpe mentions a group of about 14 sail, waiting off the bar at Amelia, which did not close to assist Montiano. Either they belonged to the Cuba faction, or the Spanish account is correct and they were just passing by.]

The Spanish left off trying to reduce the British forts on the 29th. The same day, 12 British ships (4 RN and 8 'provincial') under Captain Charles Hardy (*Rye*) sailed from Charles Town to assist Oglethorpe, arriving at St. Simons Island on the 6th of August.

[Rye (22), Flamborough (22), plus Swift and Hawk sloops; and from South Carolina, Success (22), Carolina and San Juan Bautista brigs, Charleston and Beaufort galliots, Ranger schooner, another schooner, and another sloop.]

On the 30th of July, bad weather scattered the Spanish convoy. The lighter vessels made for San Agustin but most were blown past that port during the night so they sailed straight for La Habana. Mosquito Bar (New Smyrna) was passed on the 31st and Biscayne Key on the 9th of August. On the 12th they were off Key West. The winds were sometimes favourable and sometimes

not, but they had to contend with the Gulf Stream and spent two days off the Keys. The crossing of the Florida Channel was swift, though. Matanzas was sighted on the 15th and at 2:30pm the next day the first of the convoy made anchor at La Habana.

The campaign was not quite over. Oglethorpe could not resist trying San Agustin again. Hardy had withdrawn most of his ships (except 2 galleys) on August 10th, fearing an attack on Charles Town – the British had lost all contact with the Spanish – but returned to St. Simons on August 25th. This allowed the Governor to embark his entire command for a five-day raid against the environs of San Agustin (September 7-11) before returning to St. Simons Island on September 15th. So much for hurricanes preventing naval operations.

Governor Oglethorpe had managed to prevent the rape of Georgia, not entirely through his own efforts. Though his men were few, they knew the ground. And the alliance with the Creek Confederacy was critical. Historians rate the Governor's military skills as mediocre, but consider what he had to work with. And his military operations came on top of his political duties. He failed at San Agustin in 1740 partly through a false assumption that the Spanish would be surprised and surrender, and partly because the senior naval commander displayed unusual timidity.

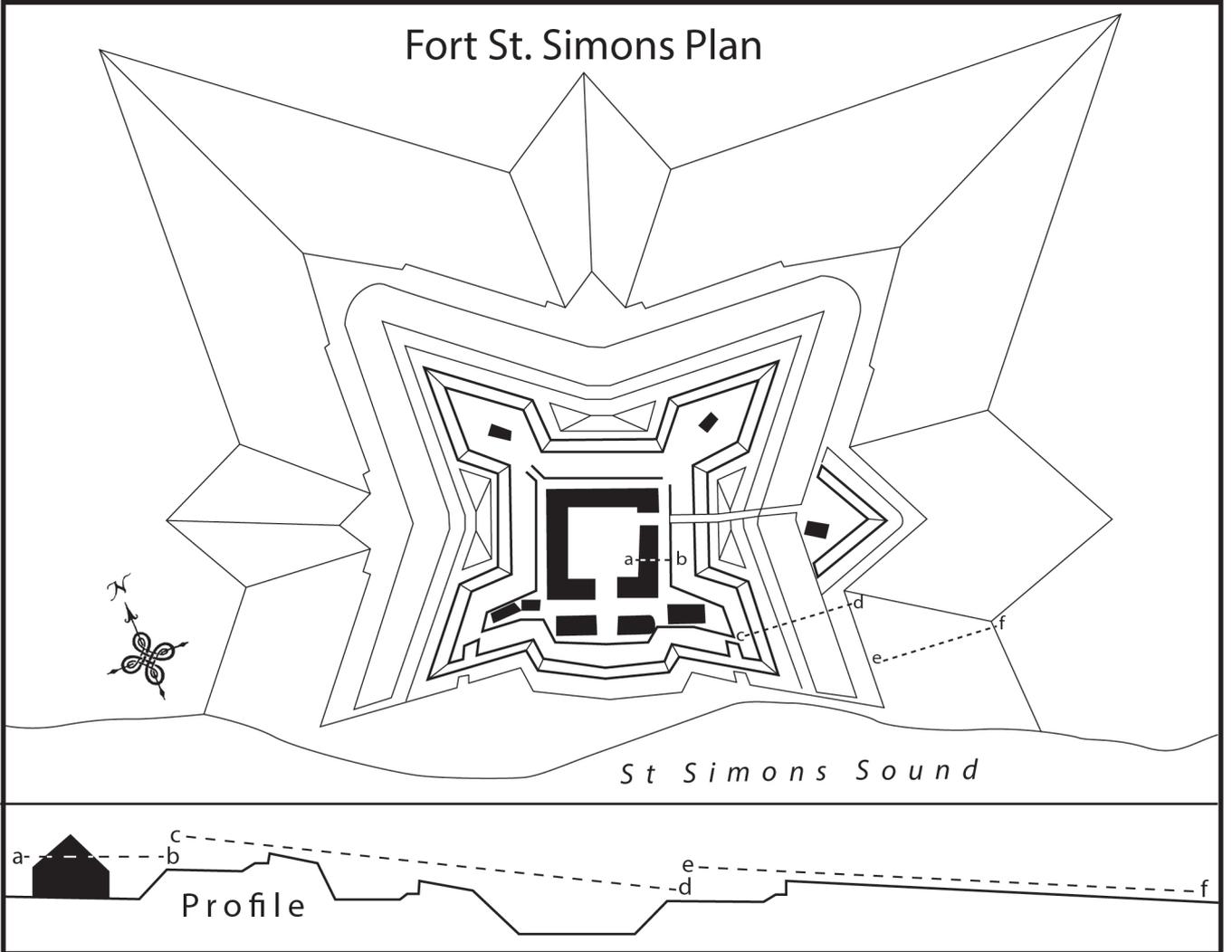
In his attack on St. Simons, Don Montiano suffered from ignorance of the terrain, which was unsuitable for formal combat, and from a succession of small mishaps. However, by themselves these would not have been insurmountable obstacles. The real problem was the heavy emphasis in Madrid's instructions not to risk his command, and the additional emphasis of the same point by the Cuban commanders, who certainly did not want to risk any part of *their* command.

The bloody nose the Spanish received on the 18th of July redoubled Montiano's concerns. Similarly, rather than investigate the question of enemy reinforcements, the Spanish chose to take the fortuitous approach of British ships as confirmation that they should be leaving.

In his letter to Madrid after the affair the Governor cited as reasons for his withdrawal his inability to find a better path through the woods, the larger enemy naval presence (he inflated the lone frigate into three 'cruisers'), the late arrival of his light vessels, the fact that his supplies were only good until the end of August, the consistently bad weather and the approaching hurricane season (*what a great excuse, it works every time*), and his belief that through the various pre-start delays the British must have been alerted to the Spanish plans ahead of time.

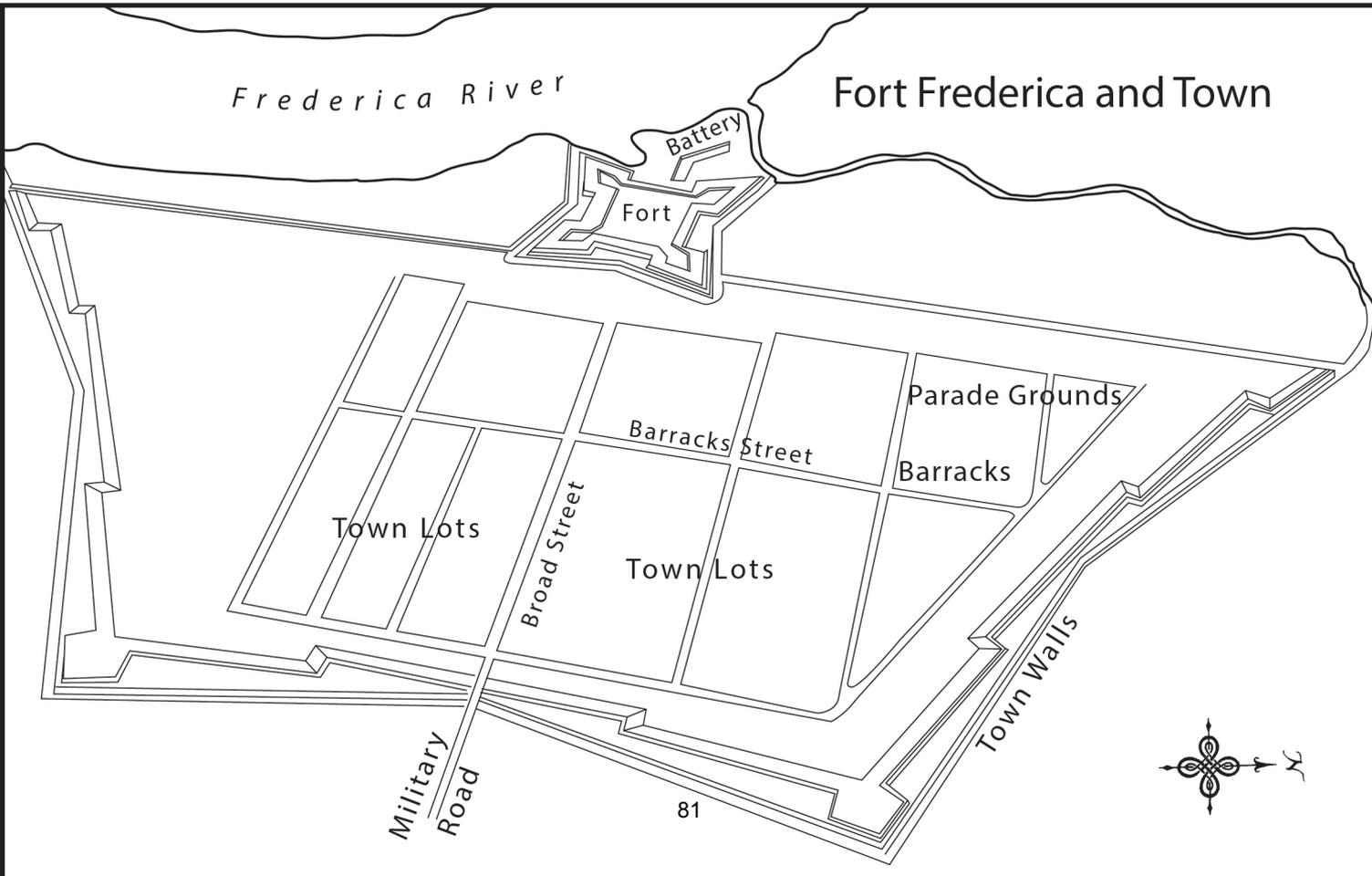
Making the best of it, he touted the estimated value of British war materials destroyed or carried off (not contrasting this with the cost of his own expedition) and said he had thought about reducing the fort at San Pedro (Amelia)... before skipping to another topic.

Fort St. Simons Plan



Frederica River

Fort Frederica and Town



James Edward Oglethorpe (1696-1785)



Oglethorpe had a varied career. He began it with military service, as an aide-de-camp to Prince Eugene of Savoy (on the Duke of Marlborough's recommendation), participating in the Austro-Turkish War of 1716-18.

In 1722 he was elected Member of Parliament for Haslemere, campaigning on a humanitarian platform; he was the author of *The Sailors Advocate*, which exposed the dreadful conditions of service in the Royal Navy.

Debtors were another cause he championed. In his day, people were imprisoned if they could not pay their debts. He chaired a parliamentary committee which obtained the release of many such people, but no provision was made for their support after their release. This led him to propose the founding of the colony of Georgia as a refuge for the indigent. Protestants from the Continent, and Jews, were also invited. Only Roman Catholics were barred (because of the danger from Florida). Oglethorpe spent the 1730s setting up his model colony, which included the oldest Masonic Lodge in the New World.

[His secretary was the future Methodist, Charles Wesley.]

At the start of the War of Jenkins' Ear, Oglethorpe was made a Brigadier, and military governor of Georgia and the Carolinas. When the Florida-Georgia situation eased in 1743, he returned to England and military service on the Continent. In 1745, while recruiting additional men for his Georgia Rangers, he was co-opted to lead them against the forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie. The Rangers assisted in the pursuit of the Jacobites after the Battle of Preston, fighting an inconclusive skirmish at Shap Fell. Foul weather led them to pull back for an overnight rest; Oglethorpe was court-martialled for failing to pursue aggressively (*his wife belonging to a Jacobite family, there were insinuations*). Acquitted, he attained the rank of General but held no further commands.

Manuel de Montiano y Luyando (1685-1762)

Montiano was, like several of the Spanish commanders in the Caribbean, a Basque. His younger brother founded the Royal Historical Academy.

Choosing an Army career, Montiano served for three years in the *Regimiento de Aragon*. This took him to Panama. Surviving that posting he rose to captain of grenadiers, and was deployed to Oran in 1719, which was under attack by the Barbary pirates.

Montiano was named Governor of Florida in 1737. Immediately he had to deal with the British threat, founding Fort Mose in 1738 and strengthening his garrison. Defeating a British attack in 1740, his own counter-thrust against Georgia, in 1742, was an equal failure.

Despite his failure, in 1748 Montiano was named Governor of Panama and promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. He remained in the post until 1758, when he retired to Madrid; his residency trial, undertaken by all returning governors to evaluate their performance, gave him a 'clean bill of health'. In 1759 he was promoted to *Teniente-General*.

1743 – HOT COCOA

1742 marked the end of major operations in the West Indies. Strategic emphasis had shifted to the Continent. The Royal Navy was needed to protect the transfer of an army to the Low Countries, and the Spanish were trying vainly to support their army in Italy.

Both sides would spend the next few years beating off each others' privateers and trying to maintain fleets in being. The British took their convoys through the Windward Passage, and the Spanish ferried silver (including two years arrears of pay for the Havana Squadron), food, and wood for ship construction from México to La Habana, where it piled up. Operating in completely separate areas, the protagonists rarely caught sight of each other. The entry of France in 1744 did not at first alter matters. But, there were some interesting minor operations.

Company Business

After some months of inaction, Ogle ordered his ships out on cruises again. Their fears of France receding, the Powers That Be ordered him to take on the Caracas Company. This led to the botched attacks on La Guaira and Puerto Cabello.

Militarily, the attempt made sense; the Company had been of assistance to the King of Spain; Puerto Cabello was the careening station for their ships, and La Guaira their headquarters.

London believed the ports to be weakly defended and the locals ripe for revolt – it will be remembered that the Company's unofficial rule, and its monopoly on domestic trade, was highly unpopular. The Merchants hoped to open the ports to British Trade.

That ubiquitous officer, Captain Charles Knowles, was given command of the expedition. He angled for the job, almost invented it as a role for himself, while on a visit to England. It should be noted that, like all Vernon's circle, he had 'interest' with the West Indies Traders; also, he was about to rise in rank, possibly as a consequence of his willingness to help his friends. (But having said that it must also be pointed out that he was a good officer, if something of a risk-taker.)

Knowles' orders were quite detailed (see Richmond, Vol 1. pp. 245-248). He was to attack the Caracas Company ports in any manner he chose, using the ships *Burford (70)*, *Suffolk (70)* (flag), *Falmouth (50)*, *Comet bomb*, and *Scarborough*. The last was to be specially fitted with an 8" mortar. He was to take 400 men from Dalzell's Regiment at Antigua in case any landings were to be made. Knowles was also empowered to take command of a short list of ships that he might meet on enroute.

[*The 70s he brought from England. Falmouth and Comet had come out with a convoy and were to be seconded to him.*]

The attack was to concentrate solely on Company facilities, sparing the local population and assuring them of British goodwill and support should they choose to take advantage of this golden opportunity to rise up and free themselves.

At the last moment – and this is important – by an addendum to Knowles' instructions, Puerto Cabello was made the primary target. Secondary targets, should the entire operation be impractical, emphasised Puerto Rico, or, if war with France had broken out, any French settlements.

The details were left to Knowles' discretion, but there was a very elaborately worded clause that allowed the Army to sit in on councils of war, but not to receive an equal vote, and that gave the Navy control in any possible 'grey areas' of command. There was also an exhortation to avoid needless delays.

The other interesting point is that the station commander for the Leewards was Commodore Peter Warren, the same man whose sailors discovered the French dispatches. Warren, now in charge of the New England coast, was doing double duty by patrolling the Leewards during the busy seasons. He was senior to Knowles. Not only was he separately instructed not to interfere with any requisitions the latter might make, but he was ordered to take himself off cruising.

Commodore Knowles made landfall at Barbados on January 23rd, 1743. From there he sailed to St. Kitts to pick up the rest of his forces, leaving that place on February 22nd. On the 27th, he called a council of war at the Tortugas off the Venezuelan coast (*there are so many Tortugas, they need to be labelled*). Here it was decided, notwithstanding London's instructions, to attack La Guaira first.

Richmond lays out the thinking: a) Puerto Cabello was leeward of La Guaira, so, if it were attacked first, the other port would be alerted before the British arrived there; b) if shipping were attacked at La Guaira first, but not the port – as if the British squadron were merely cruising by – and the British went on to tackle Puerto Cabello's defences, the Spanish at La Guaira might simply pull their ships into harbour and only Puerto Cabello yield any prizes; so, c) La Guaira should be reduced first, after which, even if the British had suffered damage, they could get to Puerto Cabello within a day, before any Spanish courier. Richmond goes on to say the thinking was rational, but in the event, unfortunate.

In line of battle, Knowles had:

- *Burford, Suffolk (flag) – 70s*
- *Eltham (40)*
- *Norwich (60)*
- *Advice, Assistance – 50s*
- *Lively (40)*
- *Scarborough (20)*
- *Comet bomb, and Otter sloop.*

Per instructions, *Scarborough* had the 8" mortar. Knowles also mounted mortars on *Suffolk's* poop deck. The Commodore was mad keen on mortars. At Santiago in 1748 his ships fairly bristled with them.

[One can imagine Knowles commanding anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa in the modern Royal Navy, his destroyer festooned with all manner of non-regulation galling cannon, rocket launchers, torpedo tubes, flamethrowers, and a 4.5" howitzer bolted to the deck.]

The attack was scheduled for the 2nd of March. As usual in these actions, the ships would close and anchor, firing at everything in sight until it stopped moving or fell down. So far so good. On the evening of the 1st...

There Once was a Man From Caracas...

Every hear the joke about the Highland regiment ordered to make a sneak attack? They creep out of the trenches into no-mans-land quiet as mice, and as they leave the start line the colonel orders the piper to start playing.

This was a surprise attack, so naturally the British sent the *Otter* in the evening before to make a reconnaissance, its sails all lit up by the setting sun... Of course the Spanish sent off ships to warn Puerto Cabello.

The defence was not lethargic. In command were Gabriel José de Zuloaga *capitán general* of Venezuela and Sebastian de Eslava, Viceroy of Nueva Granada. The three Company ships currently at the quay had been stripped of cannon to form batteries and stripped of crews to resist any landing. They were commanded by José de Iturriaga.

[Never mind the Otter. Although knowledge of the operation prior to its execution was supposedly confined to a small circle, the Spanish were forewarned by a letter from Madrid, dated November 27th. Contemporaries speculated that one of the Admiralty clerks was a spy, which is entirely possible. Or, if someone in the City was passed a 'tip', the French, or the Portuguese, or the Dutch, would certainly learn of it and pass the information along. Small operations spell surprise only when there is no money to be made.]

The attack on La Guaira began at dawn, but the British were not anchored for firing until nearly 1pm. Light winds made it difficult to close. The forts opened up first with hot-shot and filled the roads with smoke so British could not judge if they were in position. They had anchored too far out.

Despite a heavy swell, after about two hours the British seemed to be winning. Then, at 3pm, a lucky shot took off the *Burford's* cable, and another the *Eltham's* (though that breakage may have been due to the heavy swell). Both ships drifted into the *Norwich* and carried her away too. Simultaneously, fire slackened from the other ships as they paused to reload. The Spanish, nearly ready to quit, redoubled their efforts. Still the fire was maintained on both sides. One of the forts' magazines blew up and the combat continued. Firing only ceased at 8pm.

Knowles planned to send boats in under cover of night, but his crews were exhausted and many of the boats were smashed. The *Burford*, *Norwich*, *Assistance*, and *Otter* had withdrawn to a bay farther down the coast. Instead, the British remained out in the roads all night and spent the next day making repairs to the boats. The *Comet* bomb kept the Dons amused by peppering their shipping.

Knowles had not given up. A new raid was planned for 3am on the 4th. The order was given to set fire to all the enemy ships but the raiding party got out of hand. One lieutenant got greedy and tried to make off with a ship while others of the party began to plunder. The Spanish, alerted, opened fire with grapeshot and the raiders bolted.

Knowles gave up the attack, though the town was rubbled (so much for public relations). Many of his ships had badly damaged masts and rigging and he had lost 400 men. The *Suffolk* was hit 140 times. The Spanish were estimated to have suffered 700 casualties – wildly optimistic: they actually lost nine (9) men.

[Spanish sources put the British casualties at 600.]

The British stood off to the Keys of Barbaratt, where repairs would be made and an attack launched on Puerto Cabello (if only to obey their original instructions). The *Burford*, *Norwich*, *Assistance*, and *Otter* did not turn up. They were among the worst damaged. Guessing they had made for Curaçao, Knowles joined them there.

[Beatson compresses the action, writing of only a single raiding attempt, made in daylight during the main battle, around 3 or 4pm, and saying Knowles sailed away that night.]

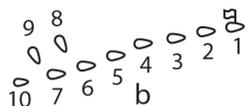
Curaçao was not the best place to refit. Owned by the Dutch, it did have the necessary stores, but it also supplied Puerto Cabello, and gave the Spanish news of the enemy. That target would be well prepared.

[The place was insalubrious, a haven to which all the criminal elements of the Caribbean eventually drifted. Allying themselves with the Spanish on the coast opposite, they practiced piracy against all and sundry, even nonlocal Spaniards.]

Not until March 16th were any ships fit for sea. Four of the small ones were sent to the Keys of Barbaratt, where they could blockade Puerto Cabello. As ships were completed they were dispatched thither, but it was the 31st before the last one left Curaçao.

Spanish Works

- q. La Trinchera Bastion
- r. St. Barbara Bastion
- s. St. Fernando Bastion
- t. Caracas Gate
- u. Ft. Palomo
- v. Ft. Gavilan
- w. Ft. St. Miguel
- x. Ft. St. Augustin



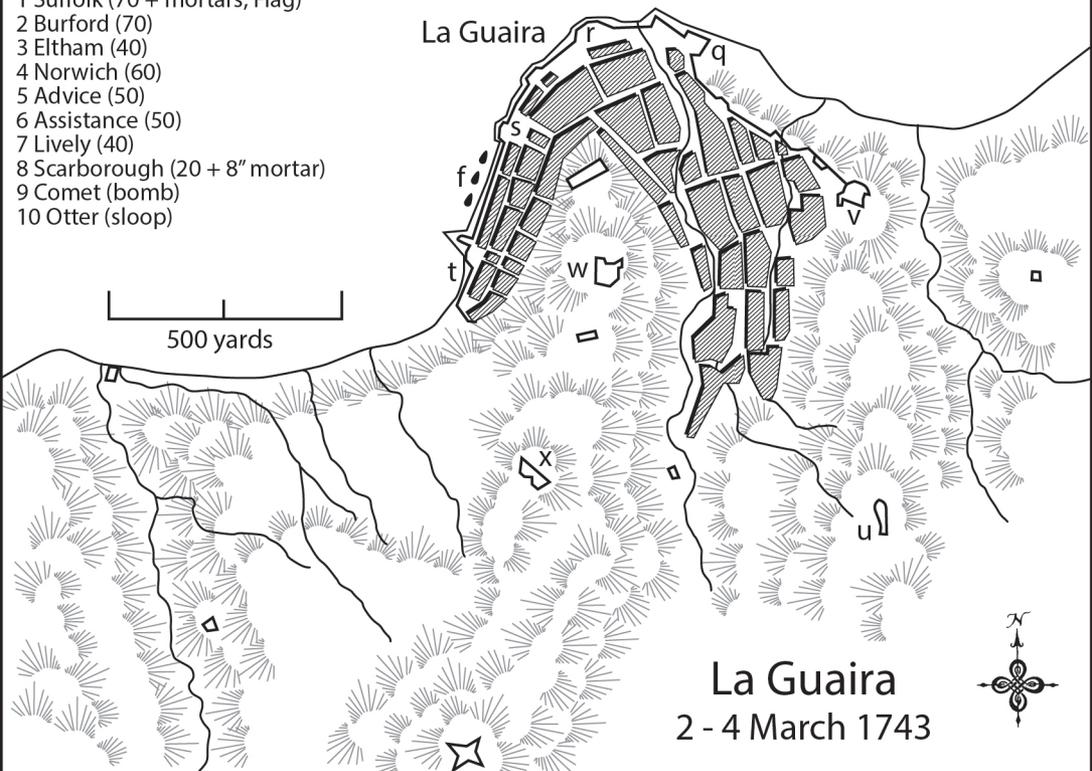
2 March 1743

- a. British fleet approaches at dawn.
 - b. British in firing position by 1pm, already under fire from Spanish batteries.
 - c. At 3pm Burford's and Eltham's cables are shot away, both ships drift into Norwich and carry her off.
 - d. The firing continues until 8pm with other ships.
 - e. British withdraw, badly damaged.
- 4 March 1743
- f. Failed amphibious night raid

British Vessels

- 1 Suffolk (70 + mortars, Flag)
- 2 Burford (70)
- 3 Eltham (40)
- 4 Norwich (60)
- 5 Advice (50)
- 6 Assistance (50)
- 7 Lively (40)
- 8 Scarborough (20 + 8" mortar)
- 9 Comet (bomb)
- 10 Otter (sloop)

La Guaira

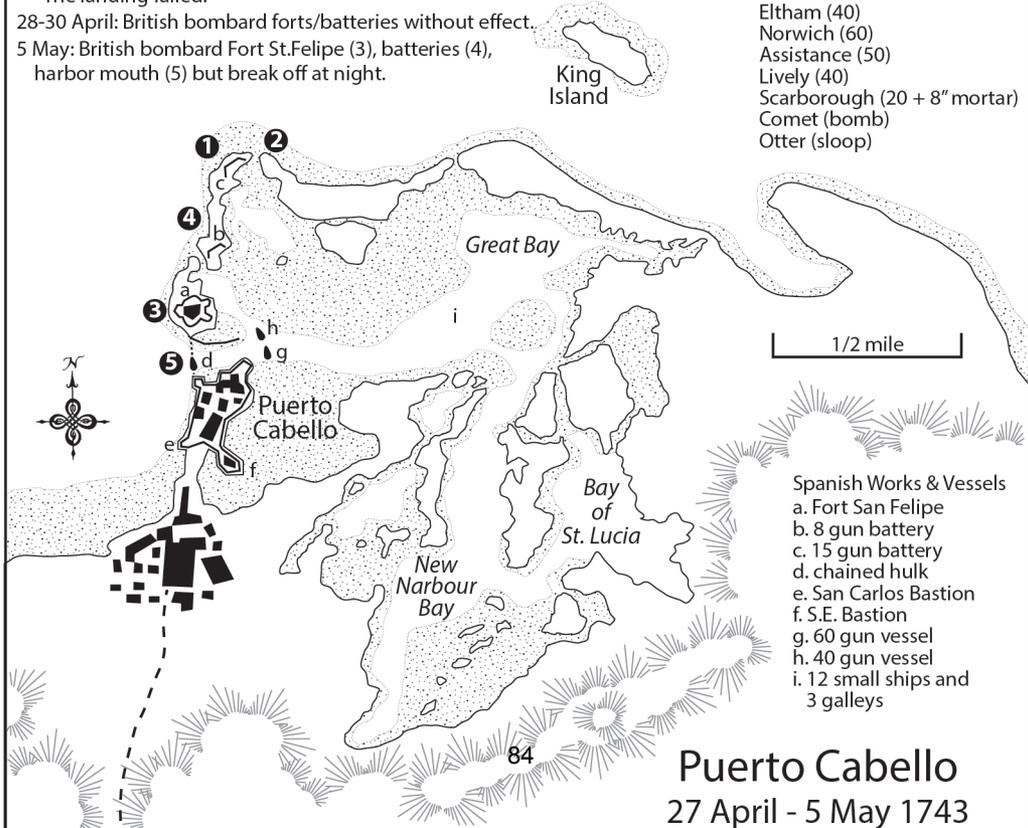


La Guaira
2 - 4 March 1743

- 27 April: British plan to take out the batteries on northern point (1) with an afternoon bombardment followed by a night landing of 1,100 men (2). The landing failed.
- 28-30 April: British bombard forts/batteries without effect.
- 5 May: British bombard Fort St.Felipe (3), batteries (4), harbor mouth (5) but break off at night.

British Vessels

- Suffolk (70 + mortars, Flag)
- Burford (70)
- Eltham (40)
- Norwich (60)
- Assistance (50)
- Lively (40)
- Scarborough (20 + 8" mortar)
- Comet (bomb)
- Otter (sloop)



Spanish Works & Vessels

- a. Fort San Felipe
- b. 8 gun battery
- c. 15 gun battery
- d. chained hulk
- e. San Carlos Bastion
- f. S.E. Bastion
- g. 60 gun vessel
- h. 40 gun vessel
- i. 12 small ships and 3 galleys

Puerto Cabello
27 April - 5 May 1743

[Beatson says some Dutchmen were taken on as volunteers; not all the Dutch liked the Spanish, even though they did business with them. Other sources say the men were 100 negro labourers.]

Knowles himself only arrived at Barbaratt on April 26th. He had had to sail all the way to Hispaniola (April 19th) before he could pick up a wind that would take him to the keys!

Charlie Foxtrot

Puerto Cabello was a tough nut. The harbour opened on the west, and consisted of a complex set of bays, protected to the north by a long, thin isthmus that hooked south at its western end (see the attached map). Between the end of the isthmus and the mainland south of it was a narrow channel only 'a pistol shot' wide. On the north side of the channel, at the end of the isthmus, was the *castillo* de San Felipe. On the other side was the town, walled, with a bastion on each southern corner. The quays were on the inner shore of this isthmus. North of San Felipe, at the bend of the long isthmus, was a fascine battery of 15 guns, and between it and the fort was another battery of 8 guns. Within the harbour, guarding the entrance, were a 60-gunner and a 40-gunner. A large hulk was set in the channel, chained to either shore; it could be sunk on command. The remaining vessels (twelve small ships and three galleys) were at the far end of the harbour, out of range. The prevailing wind is from the east. It was not possible to rush the entrance.

[Beatson says there were 3 fascine batteries on the town side; he gives 12 and 7 guns for the batteries on the peninsula.]

Knowles plan was to take out the fascine batteries with a landing party. He would use 1,100 men (400 sailors, all the marines, and some of Dalzell's). To wear out the batteries, *Norwich*, *Lively*, and *Eltham* would harass them during the afternoon of the 27th. To prevent relief, the *Assistance* would cover the isthmus farther east. The landing would take place at dusk and the assault be made in the dark. The batteries would be turned on the fort. Once a breach was made the ships would close in and support the assault.

[The remaining troops may have included members of the 7th–10th Marine Regiments, which had been raised in 1741/42 as replacements for the original six such regiments. Like the others, these were Army units labelled 'marines' for recruiting purposes. Or, they may have come from the 1st, 6th, or 27th Regiments of Foot, all of which were sent out with the Marines in 1742. On the other hand, and this is likely, they may have been militia from the islands (since the other units were probably at Jamaica) or simply sailors.]

The initial phase went off smoothly. The troops made contact with an enemy advanced guard around 11pm. The Spanish were surprised, but instead of binding and gagging them all quietly, one of the junior officers fired a shot. Not only were the Spanish alerted, the landing party began shooting in all directions, including at themselves. The guns of the nearest battery began to fire (out to sea). That did it. Everyone tore for the boats. Knowles, keeping pace in a barge beside them, could not halt the rout by shouting.

[A lack of training & unit cohesion was a common problem with these scratch assault forces.]

The next day, Knowles ordered a lengthy bombardment, assisted by the fire of a mortar landed on the shore (April 30th-May 1st). This had no effect. On the 1st of May, a council of war decided a final push by the entire squadron might save the situation. *Assistance*, *Burford*, *Suffolk*, and *Norwich* would bombard San Felipe, the *Scarborough*, *Lively*, and *Eltham* the batteries. The need to reorganise and light winds delayed the attack until the 5th.

Meanwhile, the Spanish were heartened by the arrival of Zuloaga, who though wounded on May 3rd, continue to command effectively.

On the 5th, the squadron again had difficulty in closing thanks to the lack of wind. Still, they kept up the combat for seven hours (2pm-9pm, or from 11am according to Beatson), inflicting damage on the fort, but eventually running out ammunition. (750 shots were fired against the castle, yielding 70 hits.) The captain of the *Norwich* was relieved of his command for not closing. The Spanish sunk the block-ship in the afternoon.

[The Advice did not take part in the attack; she had gone astray after leaving Curaçao and only turned up on the 26th of May. One of the dead in this combat was the lieutenant who spoiled the raid on La Guaira; he was thus spared a court martial.]

Knowles decided to withdraw at dusk, but the winds again being light, the ships had to be warped off, taking damage as they slowly crawled through the forts' optimal range. That night, *Assistance* and *Burford* drifted back into range and had to be warped out a second time.

The British, their ships once more in bad shape, at last got away to Barbaratt (May 7th). There, it was agreed to give up the project. They had no ammunition and not much water. Knowles left the coast on May 13th. Since this had been a special mission, he did not keep the squadron in being, but dispersed the ships back to their original commands.

[Uh, sorry about the holes on the waterline. You can patch that forecandle. That mast was crooked when you gave it to me.]

Once again, the casualty figures are all over the page. Richmond gives 100 British dead; Beatson says 200. Crespo claims the British admitted to 235 dead, including those who succumbed to disease. The Spanish lost 25 or 26 men. Crespo gives a total of 2,000 British losses from all causes for the operation as a whole.

[The Spanish must have taken some prisoners, because they agreed to an exchange – they also agreed to allow the British to water nearby, on pain of another attack.]

There was no significant political fallout from the failure. Knowles went on to bigger and better things.

This operation against the Caracas Company was the only one of note for the year. Admiral Ogle kept his main fleet at Port Royal, sending out ships to cruise for prizes and hunt privateers. Ships needing to be exchanged went home with convoys. Roatán continued to be supported, though the post had little impact on enemy trade.

The British merchants complained, loud and long, but Ogle could prove that none of his ships were idle – Beatson as usual provides a list of prizes taken for the year, in this case eight privateers destroyed, besides commercial prizes; he also mentions the successes of British privateers. To the Merchants' complaints, Ogle also countered truthfully that they never bothered to defend themselves. (Something about the insurance premiums.)

A Last Kick at the Cat – San Agustín Again

The action in North America had not completely died away. It would flare up once the French entered the war in 1744, but those operations are not germane to this commentary. In 1743, however, Governor Oglethorpe, encouraged by his success in 1742, thought to surprise San Agustín with a raid. According to rumour, the *capitán general* of Cuba was talking of invading Georgia with 10,000 men. This raid was intended to put the Dons off balance.

General histories of the campaign do not mention this operation; the best description comes from the General's own letters to the Earl of Oxford (taken from the Georgia Historical Society records):

'The Spaniards at Augustine were so strengthened by the troops left there after the invasion of Georgia, amongst which were the dragoons of the

regiment of Italica, that they repulsed all the parties of Indians that I could send out against them.

I had also intelligence of a strong party of men marching towards the river St. Mathew. As I concluded, this was to enlarge their quarters, ready for the next body of troops that they expect in the spring, from Havannah, and with which they propose to invade all North America, and begin with the conquest of Georgia and Carolina. I, therefore, thought the best means I could take was to oppose them in time, and myself in person, to lead the Indians, and dispute with them the field, before their troops came from Cuba.

I, therefore, with a detachment of the Highland Company of Rangers, and of the regiment, landed in the night in Florida, and had such success that the Indians advanced, undiscovered, and attacked the Spaniards, and killed upwards of forty of them; but one of their own party being killed, they would give no prisoners quarters, therefore I have no intelligence.

Taking boats and schooners behind the barrier islands, the British landed at the mouth of the St. Johns on March 28th, 1743. They – 300 Europeans (Highlanders, Rangers, and militia) and a party of Indians – then marched down to San Agustín.

I march to-morrow, and if I have success I trust in God I shall be able to force the Spaniards once more to take shelter in their town, which I shall look upon at a great point gained, since it will delay their intended operations, and give heart to our Indians, and keep them steady to his Majesty's interest, who were a good deal staggered by some strange steps taken by the Lieutenant-Governor of South Carolina, which Captain Dunbar will inform your Grace of; but any success I can now have, will only be putting off for a short time the fatal blow which must attend the vast operations making at Cuba, &c.

From the Camp, on the River St. Mathew, or St. John's, Florida, 18th March [OS: it would be the 29th], 1742-3'

[The dating '1742-3' is explained by the fact that the English New Year on the Old Style Julian calendar was on March 25th.]

And again, from the same camp on the 1st of April:

'I am to acquainted your Grace of his Majesty's arms. The Spaniards have quitted the field, and are retired into St. Augustine. The troops made a very extraordinary march in four days, of ninety-six miles, for so many it is from this place to St. Augustine and back again, and this we performed without leaving one man sick behind us, and the whole party is in strength and health. I hear from all hands that there is a strong body of troops at St. Augustine, and can hardly conceive the reason of their behaviour and precipitate retreat, from numbers so much inferior to them, unless they have orders from their court to preserve their strength entire for the intended invaders. I did all I could to draw them to action, and having posted the grenadiers and some of the troops in ambuscade, advanced myself, with a very few men, in sight of the town, intending to skirmish and retire, in order to draw them into the ambuscade, but they were so meek there was no provoking them. The Indians advanced so nimbly, as to get up with a party of the enemy, and killed forty of them under the cannon of the town.'

The raid terminated on April 9th. The Navy had nothing to do with this operation. By coincidence, Captain Hardy, still in command of the *Rye* (22), came by Fort St. George with a couple of sloops as Oglethorpe was reembarking, but refused a request to take the column round by sea for a second raid. An independent attempt by the Georgians to land on Anastasia Island on the night of April 9th-10th came to nothing. Spanish casualties for this 'campaign' totalled exactly seven.

This was the final flicker in the war for Georgia, excepting unrecorded Indian raids. Whether the Spanish had really intended a second campaign or whether this was just an excuse for the Governor to carry out his raid, they made no such attempt during the remainder of the war; some sources say explicitly because the Creeks did such an effective job of devastating the environs of San Agustín.

Spanish Naval Operations

In 1743 the Spanish once again confined most of their activities to the Gulf of México and the waters north of Cuba. Portobelo had long been abandoned. Cartagena held a garrison of only 250 men. Venezuela and the Caracas Company lived in their own world.

The British were increasing their patrols around Cape San Antonio. On the 26th of January the Spanish spotted and pursued a 60-gunner; on the 28th, a frigate, both times without success.

[Ships used included *Europa*, *Castilla*, *Real Familia* and *two sloops*.]

Two substantial convoys (*Bizarra*, and *San Antonio*, *Santiago* sloops) sailed from Veracruz in the spring, one on April 17th, and one on June 12th.

Bizarra made another silver run from Veracruz in September (taking until May 1744 to get to La Habana) but no *flota* was formed in 1743. Next year there would be a big one.

De Torres' principal lieutenant, *jefe d'escuadra* Andrés Reggio – he was proving himself a far more aggressive commander than de Torres – sortied with *Europa*, *Castilla*, *Real Familia*, *Fuerte* (a second, new ship of that name) and the brig *San Mateo*, to sweep for British privateers operating along the convoys' routes. *Castilla* and *Nueva España* later chased an enemy frigate off Matanzas.

There was a new Viceroy for Nueva España (Pedro de Cebrián y Agustín, *Conde de Fuenclara*), even more nervous than the last one. Once again, the bullion needed to pay the island garrisons and the fleet was withheld; Veracruz was vulnerable! Once again, desertions increased and the materials needed for ship repairs were used up.

At Cartagena there was open revolt, with the rebels surrounding the Viceroy's palace; Eslava managed to disperse the mob by emptying the treasury.

Routine activities were not unduly hampered by these problems, but any buildup with a view to expanding operations was simply not possible for the Spanish.

[So much for invading Georgia with '10,000 men'.]

Meanwhile, on all side reports were coming in of an increase in British trade at Spanish ports. The *guardacostas* had been crippled, the lesser ports reduced, and Spanish privateers driven into North American waters, where they remained a nuisance but could not interfere with Caribbean trade.

Since the lawful authorities refused to supply them, local communities bought necessities from whomever they could, even from the enemy. Despite the fiasco of the Cartagena Expedition, Britain was achieving her desired objective – not necessarily the Government's objective, nor the Public's, but that of those who had started the war in the first place.

FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE CARIBBEAN

1744/1745

1743 marks the official end of the War of Jenkins' Ear. Fighting continued in the West Indies until the end of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748, but neither side received much from Europe in terms of reinforcements. Even though France signed on at the start of 1744, she did not play much of a role in the region until 1746 – and not much even then. Despite this fact, the British immediately switched their focus to the age-old Enemy, allowing Spain to go about her business for some time without interference.

War with France broke out at the beginning of 1744. There were several reasons for the rupture, the most important being the death of Cardinal Fleury in 1743 and his replacement by an anti-British faction, coupled to: a) King Louis' guilt at doing so little to help his Spanish relatives in Italy, b) the concomitant signing of the Second Family Compact which provided for a full alliance rather than low-grade 'armed assistance', c) general irritation with the British on the high seas, and for the defeat at Dettingen (1743), and d) the violent debates in the British Parliament in which not only the Administration was castigated but the King himself – which gave the Jacobite faction and their French supporters the erroneous impression that England was ripe for rebellion.

The Marquis d'Argenson was running French strategy. He was an anti-Habsburg zealot with absolutely no interest in colonies; Spain was useful to him only as a tool for fighting Austria in the Po Valley. As far as war with Britain was concerned, the man of influence was Cardinal Tencin; he favoured a Jacobite coup to overthrow the Hanoverian dynasty, which meant a naval invasion of England, and consequently a concentration of naval force in European waters.

In 1745, Lord Carteret was removed from English affairs of state by being made the Earl Granville, and the Pelhams took full direction of the war. But, though this may have contributed to an overall increase in naval activity, it did not shift the strategic focus away from the Low Countries. In any case, 1745 was the year of the great Jacobite Rising, which came close to toppling the Georgian regime. They were rather busy.

Division of Labour

1744 and 1745 were thus quiet years in the Caribbean. British and Spanish forces conducted their routines in virtual isolation, plagued only by the other side's privateers. 1745 was also the year Louisburg, Nova Scotia was attacked by the British, and both sides perforce sent ships up that way, reducing their options in the Caribbean.

To combat the French threat, the British made a formal division of the theatre into a Jamaica and a Leewards Station (the latter, despite its name, to include the Windward Islands as well). Each station operated almost independently of the other; in fact, the Leewards had a closer connection to the North American Squadron, because the latter was in the habit of escorting convoys to the Windwards and wintering there.

The Leewards had twin commanders, Commodore Peter Warren (America) and Commodore Charles Knowles (West Indies). Knowles was the official commander in chief, but confusingly, since he was junior to Warren, had to yield command to him during the winter. The two received title to the command on the same date. To avoid complications, Knowles took a shore command when Warren was present.

[Some sources suggest the two were antagonistic. Knowles was inclined to be sticky, but Warren was possessed of superior tact and an attractive

personality. He was about the only senior officer that Knowles could work with.]

Both British squadrons concentrated on the French, with the Leewards trying to intercept the enemy upon their arrival in the Antilles and Jamaica covering Hispaniola. Both were at a disadvantage because they were to leeward of their enemy. This meant either that their timing be perfect (not possible in the Age of Sail) or that they hold station for weeks astride the enemy's sea lanes; all too often, the British were forced to return to base just before the French showed up. Or, they would pursue one set of ships downwind and have to beat back into position for a couple of weeks, missing the really valuable target. They did not have enough vessels to work a rotation.

The French could, when their escorts combined at Hispaniola prior to returning home, match British numbers, but, bound to their strategy of close escort, they never attempted anything other than that. It was enough that the British were too weak to stop the trade and were similarly prevented from chasing privateers.

[It should also be noted that the French and Spanish never cooperated. Richmond points out that the British consistently overestimated their enemies, seeing grand strategy where there was none.]

The Spanish were left alone; that is, the battle fleet left them alone. Unless La Habana were to be taken, which was impossible now, the British could not spend so much time so far to leeward. If the French showed up in force, Jamaica would fall. Spies in Cuba would alert the British should any major Spanish projects begin.

This allowed the Dons to put together a large *flota* in 1744 and dispatch it home in safety. Otherwise, they confined their activities to the Gulf of México; the Caracas Company continued shipping to and from Venezuela and launched some reprisal raids against British shipping in the Windwards.

However, the Leewards Squadron was able to harass the Spanish Main as well, because during the hurricane season the capital ships were routinely sent down to Barbados, where they could patrol the gap between Grenada and Trinidad.

New Kid on the Block

News of France's entry into the war came when the *Biddeford* (20) arrived at Antigua on February 29th, 1744. Her convoy had been chased by French ships. Official confirmation came on May 22nd (Antigua) and May 30th (Port Royal). By that time, the first Anglo-French fleet action of the war had been fought, off Toulon (February 22nd, 1744).

The Leewards Station began 1744 with the following composition:

- *Superb* (60) Flag
- 50s – *Severn*, *Argyle*, *Woolwich*
- 40s – *Lynn*, *Launceston* (Flag), *Hastings*
- 20s – *Biddeford*, *Deal Castle*, *Lyme*
- plus *Otter* (14) and *Comet bomb*.

Launceston was Warren's summer flagship, and *Hastings* also came from the American Station.

The *Biddeford's* news was enough for Commodore Warren to order the Leewards Squadron out in pursuit of French shipping long before the official declaration of war was received.

Knowles took over from Warren at the end of May, per arrangement. He had spent the winter fortifying English Harbour and other spots around Antigua. Now he continued the work, while dispersing his command on cruises and convoy duties.

Richmond gives a representative example of a convoy operation from this summer. The first sugar convoy that year sailed on June 17th. It consisted of 85 merchantmen and an escort of five ships: *Superb*, *Severn*, *Otter*, *Scarborough*, and *Lyme*. (*Superb* was technically the Leewards flagship but Knowles had transferred to the *Woolwich* since it needed careening and he was remaining at Antigua.) The whole escort accompanied the convoy 400 miles north of St. Maartens, and the *Scarborough* and *Lyme* as far as latitude 34°. *Scarborough* continued home with it since she was due for a break.

Other operations included the blockade of Martinique, where *Superb*, *Lynn*, *Deal Castle*, *Woolwich*, *Fame*, *Sea Horse*, and *Severn* penned in 150 fully laden French merchantmen for months. Three French sloops were burned at Guadeloupe. In September, *Superb*, *Argyle*, *Severn*, *Woolwich*, and *Lynn* cruised to windward to intercept a nonexistent French squadron. On October 1st, a French 24 was sunk in action under the guns of the enemy forts at Artois Bay – actually within musket range of the shore.

The island of St. Barts and the French half of St. Martin (it was shared with the Dutch, and very nice for both of them, considering the Dutch were British allies who remained neutral and sold war materiel to the French) were occupied by the British volunteers from Anguilla.

In mid-October, Warren took command again. He arrived at Barbados from New York and Knowles had to go and meet him. At the same time, a convoy of the Caracas Company was rumoured to be sailing from Puerto Cabello through the Mona Passage between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico – five ships, including two of the 60-gun class. Eager to take them, Knowles dispatched *Superb*, *Severn*, and *Lynn*, transferring his flag into the dinky 20-gun *Lyme* for his rendezvous with Warren.

[The Caracas Company had three 'navios' – ships of 50+ guns – active in 1744: Nuest' Señora del Coro, El Guipuzcoana a.k.a. Nuest' Señora de la Asunción, and San José. The last two are the obvious choices for this convoy. There would have been either 2 frigata and a sloop, or 3 frigata accompanying them.]

Knowles never had any luck dealing with the Company. One ship (this author believes it to have been the *San José*) fled into St. Francis Bay and the others escaped. After returning to Antigua with Warren on December 13th, Knowles took the same three ships, plus two sloops and a zebec, and went over to burn the blockaded vessel. But he could not get into the bay. Having no pilot, two of his ships ran aground. Besides, the enemy ship lay under three shore batteries. Using the sloops as fireships he tried to burn it, without success. The few shots fired at extreme range had no effect. Knowles gave up.

In contrast to the Leewards, the Jamaica Station was tranquil. Just as well, since Admiral Ogle (Admiral of the Blue as of June 1744) was strapped for resources. Substantial reinforcements were to have been sent him, but after various problems arose elsewhere in the world, most did not arrive.

When *Biddford* brought news of France's belligerence at the end of March, 1744, the Admiral promptly called in his cruisers. There had been a minor scare in February when it was reported the Spanish planned to sortie and retake Roatán, but nothing more was heard of the scheme. At that time he had four ships stationed there (*Montagu*, *Greenwich*, *Adventure*, and *Assistance*).

Ogle had had no ships off La Habana for some time, so it was not until May 8th that he learned via 'other means' that the Spanish had sorted with nine ships and were cruising the Tortuga Banks. This was standard practice when awaiting the Veracruz galleons, and the Admiral chafed at not being able to send out his own ships and pluck such a juicy plum.

The idea of attacking Hispaniola was discussed again, but there were insufficient ships to carry out a descent on even one port. Out of the ten ships of the line based at Port Royal, only five were fit for sea. Like everywhere else in the theatre, the enemy had strengthened his defences. At Leógane, the only place an attack might conceivably be made with the ships to hand, it was estimated that the garrison had been upped to 1,500 or 2,000 troops.

So, the Admiral spent the month of June cruising the south side of Hispaniola with all the vessels that could be spared: *Cumberland*, *Oxford*, *Prince of Orange*, *Montagu*, and *Greenwich*. No results. Having suffered some damage from the weather, he took the *Cumberland* to Port Royal for repairs and split the squadron:

- Two ships to cruise between Cap François and the 'Wet Corcasses' (Caicos).
- Two ships to cruise between Cap Tiburon and Alto Velo (that is, along the south coast of Haiti between longitude 74° and longitude 71°).

Ogle had only those four ships fit for sea.

In September, there was news of the French ships *Neptune* (74) and *Fleurion* (64) at Port Louis; they were supposed to be reinforced, or replaced... anyway, the French were said to have warships up there, but although Ogle sent out three ships to investigate, there was never a sign of them, nor of the convoys they were supposed to be escorting. (They had been there all right, too sly to be caught.)

[*Neptune* and *Fleurion* escorted a few ships home to France; on January 18th, 1745, they were pursued by the British in those waters but escaped when the latter would not close for action.]

Among some minor actions (Beatson records 1 Spanish, 23 French prizes taken by the Leewards Station alone in 1744 – 4,332 tons of shipping) there was one that took the British back to Portobelo. The *Triton* brig had been taken by a Spanish privateer working out of that port. The *St. Albans* (50) and *Falmouth* (50) were sent to demand its return – a different Spanish governor had given the brig permission to trade! Tired of the Portobelo governor's evasiveness, the British bombarded the town for some hours, taking particular care to wreck the Governor's house. On the way back to Jamaica they captured two privateers.

[*Triton* had been Captain Lowther's vessel; it is not clear if he still commanded it, but given that two ships of the line were sent it must have been someone with influence.]

1744 was a bad year for hurricanes. In January, a convoy in the Gulf of Florida was hit and the *Orford* (70) wrecked on Inagua Island. The worst storm came later than normal, on October 20th, hammering Port Royal among other places. Two major ships were sunk – *Greenwich* and *St. Albans* – plus the *Bonetta* sloop, *Thunder* bomb, and the hulk *Lark*. All but one of the other RN ships were badly damaged. The *Prince of Orange*, *Montagu*, and *Experiment* were beached, but refloated. The only ship to survive untouched was the *Rippon*. Fortunately the rest of the fleet was out cruising. 96 merchantmen were sunk or beached. Kingston was flattened and all her wharves destroyed. Even a newly built harbour fort collapsed. Though their loss is not ascribed to a hurricane, the *Loo* (40) & a prize vessel were also wrecked in the Bahama Straits.

The Flota

Although the *Barlavento* had been running silver to La Habana since the start of the war, the Spanish had not shipped any of it home since the prewar convoy of 1739. Both the Crown's and the various merchant houses' accounts were falling into arrears. Therefore, Don Rodrigo de Torres was ordered to return to Spain with as much silver as he could. This would be the largest such convoy of the war.

Left alone by the British, the Spanish had at last managed to muster a sizeable *flota* and arrange for a general rotation of ships and personnel. In fact, there was quite a lot of minor activity:

- *Castilla* and *Europa* sailing from Veracruz to La Habana on January 14th. This pair routinely worked the Campeche coast, under *Jefe d'Escuadra* Espinola.
- *Real Familia* and *Santiago* likewise on January 17th.
- *San Antonio* and *Nueva España*, with two brigs, on February 3rd.
- Then, on February 13th, *Reina*, *Principe*, *Fuerte* (#2), and the frigate *San Criaco*.
- On March 2nd, *Glorioso*, *Real Familia*, *Santiago*, *San Luis*, and the <French hire> *Nomparel* frigate put out from La Habana to escort *Bizarra*, laden with treasure.

All these activities were in preparation for the departure of the *flota*.

De Torres had been under a cloud since 1741. He was not energetic enough. He did not 'push'. He had completely failed to prevent the attack on Cartagena, or to defeat Vernon, or to join forces with the French and attack Jamaica, or even to keep the numbers of Spanish privateers from dwindling. The inhabitants of the Main were now enjoying British beef and rum, and wearing the latest style of uncomfortable 'woollies'.

In 1742, he received orders (dated August 7th) for his relief, and for the return of almost the entire Havana Squadron to Spain. Those thirteen capital ships were sorely needed in Europe. However, Horcasitas, *capitán general* of Cuba, was given the discretionary power to retain him and the squadron, which he did. With the British messing about at the other end of the Cuba that year, the squadron was needed where it was. Later, the concentration of British ships at Port Royal was misinterpreted as preparation for a sweep against Spanish convoys, making for further delays.

France's entry into the war changed things. On August 2nd, 1744, orders were sent from Madrid for de Torres to sail with just four ships and whatever convoy he could muster as soon as said orders were received (October), in the hopes that he could mate up with one of two French squadrons off the Azores for the most hazardous part of the journey – near to home.

Deceiving British spies with the story that the Havana Squadron was sortieing against Jamaica, (only the Captain General was informed of the true plan) Don Rodrigo sailed in early November, 1744. He took with him:

- *Glorioso*, *Principe* – 70s
- *Europa*, *Castilla* – 60s
- Plus frigates *Flecha* and *San Ciriaco* (presumed British prize).

Glorioso and *Castilla* carried 8.275 million pesos in silver; some merchantmen carried 700,000 pesos more.

The actual voyage was uneventful, barring a hurricane that struck Cuba and delayed the sailing. *Principe*, developing a severe leak, was forced to shelter in the bay of San Francisco, at the western

end of Puerto Rico. The French were not found, since their sweeps were out of sync with the Spanish, and *Europa* and the merchantmen became separated, but all otherwise arrived safely by the end of the year.

[The official accounts amounted to 9 million pesos, but there was a lot of unregistered silver as well, so the full amount may have been nearer 12 million pesos. De Torres' sailing dates are confused, possibly due to aborted attempts and bad weather. To give some idea of the value of these sums, they enabled the Spanish Crown to pay for perhaps 2-3 years of wartime naval expenses.]

In the midst of this spate of activity, the British only managed one successful (recorded) action against Spain: the taking of the *azogue* ship *Conde de Chinchón* (24) by *Rippon* (60), as she was making a solo run from La Habana.

With the departure of Don Rodrigo, *Jefe de Escuadra* Andrés Reggio took command at La Habana. The squadron was down to nine capital ships, not all of them in commission:

- *Real Familia* (60), *San Antonio* (60), *Invencible* #2 (70), *Fuerte* #2 (60), hunting the British to keep them from interfering with the *flota*.
- *Reina* (70), *Santiago* (60) at La Habana.
- *Conquistador* (60), *Dragón* (60), the first built at the La Habana yards, and the second newly arrived with a small convoy.

But the Spanish grew stronger the following year, at least in numbers, with six new ships arriving at La Habana in April, 1745; raising the total number of capital ships to fifteen.

Rising Tempo

Sir Chaloner Ogle was himself now due for relief, having been four years on the job. His replacement, arriving with a convoy escort in February, 1745, was Vice Admiral of the Red Thomas Davers. Ogle left with the homebound convoy.

Richmond (vol.2 p. 200) gives the order of battle for April 1745 as:

- Off Cap François – *Strafford* (80)
- Off Roatán – *Plymouth* (60)
- On Convoy – *Enterprise* (40), *Rippon's Prize* (20) (ex-*Conde de Chinchón*)
- Off the Bastimentos (Panama coast) – *Falmouth* (50)
- Off the west end of Jamaica – Merlin sloop
- Off the east end of Jamaica – Blast bomb
- Windward Passage – Drake sloop
- Port Royal – *Cornwall* (80), *Prince of Orange* (70), *Adventure* (44), *Seahorse* (20), *Biddeford* (20), *Basilisk* bomb

[*Adventure* was one of the rare 'real' frigates, recognisable in the accounts because she had 44 guns instead of 40 or 32. The differences extended to more than number of guns; the ships were of an entirely new class. Notice that Davers was so short of ships that he had to use an 80-gunner as a cruiser. *Seahorse* and *Biddeford* were refitting at this time, while the rest of the ships at Port Royal were set aside as replacements for the vessels out on cruise.]

This list excludes the Leewards Squadron and the ships of North America. The composition of the latter was about to change; there were plans afoot to seize Acadia and Cape Breton from the French. But those operations are beyond the scope of this commentary.

All the same, some digression should be made, because of the light which it throws on the attitudes of the various admirals. The proposal for an attack on Louisburg was made by the governors of the New England states. They applied to the West Indies for aid since they had no capital ships. Ogle and Davers decided they

could not help. They did not think much of the idea. Ogle even disdained to loan any of his homebound vessels, though he was passing that way. Commodore Warren, on the other hand, was supportive.

Warren, though a Royal Navy officer, was for all intents and purposes an American. He had served six years on the coast; 18 years in the Navy. He owned much land in New York, and had married a Boston beauty. Warren could not spare many ships, but he promoted the scheme, and the Admiralty backed him up.

[Commodore Warren, though his decision risked his own career – he was thwarting the will of the Traders – rose to Vice Admiral of the White before the end of the war.]

Ultimately, *Superb* (60) – replacing *Weymouth*, which had been wrecked on Sandy Island, Antigua, shortly after returning to the Caribbean (her pilot got two years in Marshalsea prison) – *Mermaid* (40), *Launceston* (40) and *Ruby* (40) were sent from the Leewards Station. Warren accompanied the squadron. Knowles protested, but was overruled.

As a sop for kicking him out of the *Superb*, Warren allowed Knowles a subordinate captain; a subtlety which allowed Knowles a cut of any prize moneys. But Knowles threw a tantrum, saying he now had ‘no ship’. Considering that Warren had given him the *Severn* (50) for his flag, and that he had not minded rendezvousing with his superior the previous year aboard the sixth rate, *Lyme*, this was a bit thick. Warren was forced to give him a direct order in the presence of witnesses. At that, Knowles campaigned among his captains, but, though sympathetic, they counselled him to obey ‘for the good of the service’. He went aboard the *Severn*.

After the campaign was over, Warren remained at Louisburg as Governor, promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue, and safely out of the clutches of the Windwards Syndicate. He did not send any ships back. As a replacement, London sent out Captain Henry Fitzroy Lee to be ‘Commodore and Commander-in-chief at Barbados and the Leeward Islands’ (the full title to the station). His instructions, dated February 20th, 1745, were the usual ones: secure British trade and make insecure the enemy’s trade.

Les Français Arrivent

Making up for lost time, the French were to send four convoys to the Caribbean in 1745. Their movements have been badly documented, not only in British sources, but in French ones as well. The following can be gleaned:

- *Capitaine de Vaisseaux* Charles Tubières Grimoard Pestel Lévis, *Chevalier et Marquis* du Caylus arrived at Martinique on March 28th. He had been appointed Governor of the Windwards and his squadron (*Espérance* (74), *Northumberland* (70), *Trident* (64), *Serieux* (64), *Diamant* (50), *Aquillon* (42), 2-3 frigates, 2 bombs, and some fireships) was primarily an escort for him, though some merchants accompanied them with a load of *Compagnies franches de la Marine*.
- *Capitaine* Henri-François des Herbiers, Marquis de L’Estenduère sailed directly to Cap François from Europe, arriving in May, with escorts *Juste* (76), *Caribou* (60), *Ardent* (64), *Alcide* (66), and *Mutine* (26).

[British reports described this squadron as ‘two ships of 66, two of 56, one of 50, and one of 30 guns’.]

- *Chef d’Escadre* Jean-Baptiste Macnémara arriving October 31st; escorts *Invincible* (74), *Jason* (36), *Atalante* (34).
- *Capitaine de vaisseaux* du Guay, most likely arriving at the same time as Macnémara; escorts *Magnanime* (80), *Rubis* (54).

Du Guay and Macnémara may have sailed together, but apparently made landfall separately; the former encountered the British off Martinique, with dire consequences, but Macnémara seems to have sailed directly to Cap François.

The British had poor hunting, despite this flow of enemy merchantmen. Commodore Lee, busy escorting a convoy, did not arrive at Barbados until May 13th. He brought with him the *Suffolk* (70) and two other ships of the line. In the interim, Knowles’ worst fears were being realised with the arrival of du Caylus. But, the danger was not as acute as the British believed. The French were merely reacting to the arrival of Vice Admiral Davers forces, which seemed to suggest another amphibious expedition – *les Anglaise*, they are mad for *l’amphibie*. The new governor would soon be fretting over the news from Louisburg and thinking he should be doing something about it.

Nevertheless, Lee redeployed: *Argyle* (44) and *Lyme* (44) to Barbados to cruise, the rest concentrated at Antigua, where a boom was laid across the harbour, covered by *Woolwich* (50) and *Severn* (50). Additional batteries were erected, using 41 guns from the wreck of the *Weymouth*. This was at English Harbour. On the other side of the island, at Falmouth Harbour, similar arrangements were made, using *Lynn* (44) and *Rippon* (60) to guard the entrance. *Hind* sloop cruised to leeward to screen local trade and *Fame* sloop was sent to Guadeloupe to observe. *Lynn* soon had to be sent away to calm the nervous governor of Barbados.

[This was the beginning of the development of Antigua as a major base; the Admiralty sent out 32-pounders to replace the 9-pounders Knowles was using, and made other recommendations.]

As a reserve were the *Deal Castle* (20), *Otter* sloop, and *Comet* bomb. *Deal Castle* had been sent to New England in hopes of gaining additional reinforcements, but the authorities there delayed – the operation against Louisburg was in full swing – and she returned empty handed.

Though shorthanded, the British kept up the pressure on enemy corsairs. The *Merlin* sloop was especially distinguished in taking no less than eight privateers, some of them as heavily armed as she was.

Du Caylus was minded to capture the island of Anguilla, the most northern of the Lesser Antilles, in reprisal for the taking of St. Maarten’s the year before. What impact that might have had on offshore banking in the 21st Century is speculative – he was defeated.

On May 21st, the French sent a small squadron to the island (a 36-gun and a 30-gun frigate, and three privateers) with a landing party of 700 from Martinique, commanded by a *capitaine* Fouché or Touche. The local militia, consisting of the white servants of the planters – no more than 150 men – positioned themselves behind a breastwork up in one of the passes of the island and routed the landing party, inflicting losses of 35 killed and 65 wounded. The French captain was wounded. Commodore Lee reacted by sending out the *Dreadnought* (60), *Deal Castle*, and *Lyme*, but of course could not catch Fouché.

[Beatson says the French lost 32 killed, 25 wounded, and 50 prisoners.]

The attack on Anguilla was the only aggressive move made by the French, other than the inevitable privateering.

The arrival of so many French warships also put Admiral Davers in a sweat. He had reports that, after shipping 1,500 volunteers from Martinique to Hispaniola, a portion of the French force (two 74s, three 64s, and a 36-gun frigate) was now cruising off Cuba, but he lacked the strength to challenge it. All very well to say they were just covering their own merchantmen, but what if they had

some nefarious scheme afoot? A plot for revolt was revealed among the Jamaican negroes.

[Richmond points out that this was the weakness of dividing the Jamaica and Leewards commands – it was impossible to concentrate forces. In consequence, the smaller French squadrons could keep the British guessing. But the nature of the theatre, with the constant Trade Winds blowing east to west, meant a divided command was better for most purposes than a unified one. The weakness of the arrangement was balanced by the hidebound doctrine of the Bourbon navies.]

The French squadron must have been that of *capitaine de vaisseaux* Hubert de Brienne, *comte de Conflans*, escorting the homebound trade of Hispaniola. He left for France on June 12th. He arrived home just as the British reinforcements being sent to deal with him were fitting out. He also snapped up three British prizes enroute.

Conflans, a famous name in French naval history, was at this time just another captain under du Caylus' command. (He was, however, a nobleman, and a skilful publicist; there was no question of his remaining in obscurity for long.)

The ships off Cuba were probably a mix of du Caylus' and l'Estenduère's ships, the bulk of them probably the former's, since l'Estenduère kept his own schedule and left with the Hispaniola trade on August 5th, while Davers' ships were 'down' for repairs.

The 74s will have certainly included *Northumberland*, Conflans' own vessel. *Espérance* is preferred over *Juste*, which will have been l'Estenduère's ship. Of the 64s, if they really were 64s, *Trident*, *Serieux*, and *Ardent* are indicated. The frigate may have been one that came with du Caylus, or a privateer. It appears that all of l'Estenduère's remaining ships (*Juste*, *Caribou*, *Ardent*, *Alcide*, and *Mutine*) also left the theatre. De l'Estenduère sent his convoy on ahead and paused to take five British privateers that had been lurking in the vicinity of Saint-Domingue.

With the departure of both sides' summer convoys, Commodore Lee sent his best ships to cruise the Spanish Main, where he met Vice Admiral of the Blue Isaac Townsend, who arrived at Barbados on August 30th, bringing a large reinforcement from the Mediterranean. After the Battle of Toulon in February, part of the French squadron had broken out – and turned up at Martinique) – while what was left behind was a minimal threat; ships could therefore (barely) be spared:

- *Dorsetshire* (80) flag
- *Princessa*, *Lenox*, *Worcester* – 70s
- *Ipswich* (70 or 60)
- *Pembroke*, *Kingston* – 60s
- *Hampshire* (50)

Despite following the French, Townsend had not actually been sent in pursuit. He was here because the Leewards Planters petitioned the Duke of Newcastle for more protection – he was originally to command the Leewards exclusively, and *not* Jamaica, whose Planters had been remiss in their lobbying. Later, though, he was ordered to leave sufficient force in the Leewards and serve under Davers.

Since the French appeared to be gone, Townsend turned to the second page of his instructions, tacked on by the Administration without the Planters' approval. These were to attempt the seizure of some of the more lucrative French or Spanish islands. The two islands of choice were St. Lucia and Puerto Rico. The first was not colonised, but claimed by the Duke of Montagu by a charter from George I and possessed of excellent harbours. The second was rather more of a job. Unfortunately, the local governors in the Leewards, who would have to provide the troops, were given final authority.

The Governor of St. Kitts concluded he had no troops to spare. (A truthful excuse covering the fact that he did not want competition from new settlements.) He recommended the elimination of the French trade around Martinique and the starvation of that island. The naval authorities deemed this impracticable.

The Governor of Barbados was willing, but wanted Tobago, or a raid on Trinidad instead. At least he was honest enough to admit he did not want competition from a new colony at St. Lucia.

From Barbados, Townsend sailed to Antigua, arriving September 21st, and taking *Pembroke* (60) and *Woolwich* (50) under his wing. After hearing all arguments, he decided the best course was to blockade Martinique after all – not to destroy the place, but to wage economic warfare. Cruising began on October 3rd and had great success, freezing the shipping of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Dominica.

Then, on the 31st of October, a heavier blow was dealt the French. The *Hind*, scouting for Townsend's main body, spotted about 40 sail off the south side of Martinique. Townsend ordered his ships to close. Blowing off the paltry escort (*Magnanime* (80) and *Rubis* (54), under *capitaine* du Guay), the British rampaged through the convoy. Many ships escaped by sailing straight on downwind, but many more were driven ashore, and 14 were captured outright.

Magnanime and *Rubis* both grounded, the latter deliberately when attacked by the *Lenox*, under the guns of Fort Royal; the former by accident under a secondary battery. Townsend continued the slaughter into the next day, until there were no more merchantmen in reach. An attempt by *Ipswich* and *Dreadnought* to destroy *Rubis* failed. *Magnanime* had already been refloated. The final tally was at least 30 enemy sail captured, burnt, or sunk.

This victory, coupled with the fact that there were believed to be no more than three French warships in the area, allowed Townsend to send *Lenox* and *Worcester* to Jamaica, and to begin cruising to windward of Martinique, so as to intercept future French convoys at sea. Two ships watched Martinique, and five more cruised the islands between Dominica and Barbados (working out of Prince Rupert's Bay). Commodore Lee was allowed four ships to escort the homebound trade. In November, Townsend shifted his base to Barbados.

[Notice that he did not join Davers, where he would have been in a subordinate role, twiddling his thumbs.]

In actual fact there were five French ships of consequence in the Antilles: *Magnanime* and *Rubis* at Martinique, and Macnémara's three ships, *Invincible* (74), *Jason* (54), *Atalante* (34) frigate, at Hispaniola (probably at Cap François).

[Some sources give Macnémara a count of 5 ships by adding more 2 frigates, possibly privateers.]

Davers was still bound to Port Royal. Not only was he unable to intercept the French autumn convoys, he could do nothing to prevent *jefe de escuadra* Reggio sortie from La Habana with five ships (out of 11 available) and cruising the north shore of. Unable to match either enemy, the best the British admiral could do was ensure his homebound convoys had strong escorts.

It will be remembered the Spanish 70, *Principe*, had been forced to take shelter in the bay of San Francisco. Now virtually a hulk, she was under watch by three British ships. Reggio sallied in an effort to drive them off and recover the cargo of silver. Taking part were *Reina* (70), *Invincible* (70), *Real Familia* (60), *San Antonio* (60), and the frigate *Nuestra Señora de la Peña*. Giving out that he was bound for Cartagena to escort a troop convoy, Reggio instead sailed to Puerto Rico. There (March 25th, 1745), he found the British gone and quickly unloaded the *Principe*.

During his return journey to Cuba, the Spanish admiral had the rare delight of pursuing those same three British ships. He arrived at La Habana on April 10th. *Real Familia* and *Fuerte (60)* were then sent on a fifteen day cruise off Puerto Rico.

The receipt of *Lenox* and *Worcester* helped Davers. In September of 1745, the Vice Admiral conducted a ten-week cruise of his own, to the windward of Jamaica, but without any encounters. This cruise exhausted his supplies and bound the squadron to Port Royal for some months more; it missed out on a chance to intercept a convoy of six ships of the Caracas Company that sailed in December. One of Davers' subordinates, however, would be given a chance of glory.

Townsend in the Leewards had more luck. His command took a 20-gun French privateer and five St. Eustatia Dutchmen smuggling contraband to Martinique. Though allies of Britain, the Dutch made a lot of money selling naval stores and luxury items to the French. With Martinique under blockade, even staples became valuable cargo. By treaty the British had the right to board, search, and capture ships engaged running blockades.

[Since ninety-nine times out of a hundred merchant ships never attempted to resist it was unlikely that a nasty incident would occur between the so-called allies.]

Like the French, the British also dispatched separate convoys from the western and eastern Caribbean. A convoy from the Leewards took *Severn* and *Woolwich* away from the station, but it had an uneventful voyage. The Jamaica convoy, sailing on December 8th, had a run-in with the French.

In addition to 32 merchantmen, there were the *Strafford (60)*, *Plymouth (60)*, and *Lyme (20)*, under command of Captain Cornelius Mitchell.

At 6am on December 26th, the convoy was 30 miles west-by-north of Cap Nicholas (*the tip of the northern arm of Haiti*). *Lyme* was leading, ahead of *Strafford*, with *Plymouth* detached to the rear, playing sheep dog. *Lyme* signalled 'fleet to south and east', Mitchell, on the *Strafford*, ordered the escort to close and the convoy to hold their place.

At 11am, the sail were seen to be French: three warships (*Invincible*, *Jason*, *Atalante*) and 23 merchantmen – a convoy from Cap François, bound for Petit Goave, and under the command of Macnémara. At noon, a breeze came up and the French merchants headed for the bight of Leógane, screened by their escort.

Around 3pm, *Plymouth* came back into line and Mitchell, after assuring himself his captains were eager to engage, ordered the attack. At 4pm the French fired the first broadside.

From 4pm to 6pm the ships were in constant action. Macnémara did not stand, or manoeuvre for advantage, but slowly retired in front of his retreating convoy. The British held the weather gauge and would not give it up. But they did not close. At the end of the two hours Mitchell decided to break off the action. Macnémara followed them for a little, chasing down three of the more unhandy British merchantmen and bringing them to port.

The French source, Guérin, asserts Macnémara fought the British off alone in the *Invincible*, ordering the others to shepherd the convoy. This makes sense, as she was a 74, capable of taking punishment, and Macnémara did not let himself be outmanoeuvred. Other sources indicate the other French ships came back and helped, which is equally likely – witness the taking of three enemy merchantmen. Richmond and other British sources appear to think all three, or at least two, French ships fought in the battle line.

[From the tally of the damage, Lyme seems also to have remained unengaged – she was only a 6th rate, after all.]

At the time, little notice was taken of this affair, but two years later, Mitchell found himself under court martial and the matter was raked up. His argument was that he was in the Windward Passage with a valuable convoy; he had tried engaging the French, but when it was apparent Macnémara was not making any mistakes – Mitchell may also have felt himself outgunned, although this is debatable – he withdrew. The captain was acquitted on this charge, but would be found guilty on a second one, of much the same nature.

At the other end of the Caribbean, the Spanish continued to keep a low profile. July of 1745 was an active month, with *Bizarra* sailing to Veracruz and *Fuerte* and *Conquistador*, aided by some French privateers, conducting sweeps. Seven British corsairs were netted.

Reina, *Invincible*, and *Real Familia* sortied to help the above mentioned ships hunt a British convoy in the Old Bahama Channel (giving Admiral Davers heartburn) – but without success. Similar sweeps became a feature of Reggio's command.

In October of 1745, *jefe d'escuadra* Espinola was dispatched to Spain with a small *flota* carrying 4 million pesos, but had to turn back due to bad weather; he was then pinned to La Habana by fears of British interference. Though several vessels would manage solo or paired runs over the next few years, no further *flotas* sailed for the remainder of the war.

1746

1746 was the year of Rocoux, the biggest battle of the war to date, which took place in the Low Countries. It also saw the end of the Jacobite Rising in Britain, which released some naval forces for use elsewhere. However, the Admiralty kept their mind on Home waters. This was to pay off handsomely, but affected the Caribbean only indirectly.

The Pelham Administration fell as a result of its inept handling of the Jacobite crisis, which made King George look bad. The new Ministry was that of the Earl of Bath, formerly Walpole's old rival, William Pulteney, leader of the Patriots (yes, he finally made it). But with him, the Government finally hit rock bottom. Bath's ministry lasted exactly '48 hours, three quarters, seven minutes, and eleven seconds'. He was jokingly praised for having made no mistakes during his term and for leaving the Treasury exactly as he found it. The King reluctantly asked the Pelhams to return; Henry would remain 'prime minister' for the rest of the war, and beyond.

[Walpole reputedly greeted his rival in the House of Lords, 'well, here we are, the two most useless men in England'.]

In the Caribbean, the French presence grew, but at the same time their trade suffered severely. Spain, for her part, was nearly out of the war. Her Italian campaign had backfired, and she was soon to have a new king, who began seeking ways out of the conflict. Only the unchronicled privateering waxed hotter than ever.

Out of Step

Admiral Townsend did not remain at the Leewards Station for long. Despite the protests of the Sugar Lobby, the Government ordered him to reinforce Warren at Louisburg.

Thanks to difficulties with the weather, he did not depart until May 9th, 1746, taking with him *Dorsetshire*, *Pembroke*, *Princessa*, *Kinsale*, *Kingston*, *Hampshire*, and *Hind*. (Some of these had come out with another convoy during the winter.)

Townsend's first attempt at departure took place in January, with a different mix of vessels, but met with a storm that forced a return to St. Kitts. The ships *Ipswich* and *Princessa* were the worst hit and had to be sent to England for extensive repairs. *Ipswich* could not even rendezvous with the squadron but sailed on alone in critical condition:

'In this storm, the Ipswich lost her fore-mast, main-mast, mizen-top-mast, top-sail, and cross-jack yards; her boats were all stove, and eighteen guns thrown overboard to ease the ship. She was several times pooped by very heavy seas which carried away the stern and quarter galleries, and all the bulkheads of the Captain and Officers cabbins [sic]. But the greatest distress of all was, the loss of her rudder; which, notwithstanding the strength of the chains, was washed away, so that the ship was tossed about at the mercy of the waves. In this emergency, several experiments were tried to steer the ship, but to no effect; when a machine was contrived by one Andrew Anderson, a Scotsman, at the time when the whole crew were almost reduced to despair. They were restricted to a quart of water each man per day; were obliged to eat raw meat for nearly three weeks; and after being fatigued with duty, when they went to their hammocks, their rest was very uncomfortable, all the bedding being drenched with sea water. Add to this, that coming directly from a warm climate, the cold they experienced rendered many of the crew unfit for duty: even the jury-masts which they had set up, were sprung in several places. They arrived at Plymouth, the 22nd of April; the storm continuing almost the whole of the voyage. Fifty men died on the passage, and two hundred were sent to the hospital, most of whom never recovered.'

Beatson, p. 318.

Commodore Fitzroy Lee resumed command. At his disposal remained:

- *Suffolk* (70)
- *Dreadnought* (60)
- *Argyle*, *Woolwich*, *Severn*, *Sutherland* – 50s
- *Gosport* (44)
- *Frigates Lyme* (20), *Richmond* (20), and *Comet* bomb.

[*Sutherland* and *Gosport* arrived February 8th. *Richmond* was a purchased prize.]

The French were now no match for Lee. *Rubis* and *Magnanime* were isolated at Martinique and in any case were slated to escort a convoy of 40 sail, if it could escape the vigilance of the British. Macnémara, delayed by the fight with Mitchell, was preparing to head for home. A new convoy with four more escorts (*Terrible* (74), *Neptune* (58), *Alcion* (50), and *Gloire* (46) under Conflans) was expected from France, but united action was not possible.

In early February, Lee was warned the French at Martinique were making preparations for sailing, and clamped down on the island, even turning away neutral shipping. But, the new convoy escaped before Lee arrived. Its members decided to join Macnémara and head for home in a single body.

For the same reason – the fact that he lacked the resources to maintain a constant watch – Lee missed the inbound convoy which arrived in early June. Having only the *Dreadnought* and *Woolwich* to windward of Martinique, and they with orders to intercept a pair of French South Sea Company ships, Lee left port too late and spent a fruitless month cruising for ships that had already arrived. He found the convoy at Fort Royal on the 20th of June (Conflans arriving there on the 16th).

[*The source for the 'South Sea Company' ships is Richmond. The existence of a French South Sea Company at this date is unconfirmed. Such a company did exist (founded in 1698 by a St Malo privateer who was also intimately connected with the French East India Company, but there appear to be no records for it after the founder's death in 1731. It is unlikely Richmond would mistake them for ships of the French East Indies Company. The Company had a contract to trade with Chile and Perú.)*

Lee had only a few days provisions, so he could not blockade Martinique, instead sailing down to Barbados to meet some new

store-ships. Conflans left for Hispaniola on June 22nd. The French were not looking for a fight. During the passage from Europe an epidemic broke out among the crews of the *Terrible* and *Neptune*; 800 of the crew fell ill and over 500 had to be hospitalised at Martinique.

Commodore Lee's story was repeated in the Windward Passage. First, Davers sent out Mitchell in the spring to intercept the convoy leaving Leógane, but Macnémara left early. Mitchell then cruised off Cap François until mid-May, ran low on provisions, and returned to Port Royal. Mid-June, Port Royal was alerted to the sailing of Conflans' convoy from France and Mitchell was rushed out again on June 15th in case the French made it past Lee. The French were just making landfall at Martinique when he sortied.

Mitchell's command consisted of:

- *Strafford* flag, *Lenox*, *Plymouth*, *Worcester* – 60s
- *Falmouth* (50)
- *Torrington* (40)
- *Milford* (44)
- *Seahorse* (24)

[*Seahorse* appears to have been detached prior to the action described below; she does not appear in it.]

Davers complicated Mitchell's job by first of all saddling him with a large homebound convoy before he cruised off Cap Nicholas to intercept the enemy's homebound June traffic. Conflans, meanwhile, proceeded without incident to Port Louis.

Mitchell saw his convoy safely through the Windward Passage, detaching *Falmouth* (50) and *Torrington* (40) to remain with it. By the 9th of July he was cruising off Cap Nicholas as planned. On the 26th, the *Drake* sloop arrived from Jamaica with a warning from Davers that Conflans had escaped Lee's clutches. Mitchell was to cruise the Grand Anse (the gulf enclosed by the Haitian peninsulas) from Cap Nicholas to Cap Tiburon.

Mitchell sent the *Drake* south to scout Port Louis, but on the 28th she encountered Conflans just getting started on his return journey to France – 93 sail and his four escorts. Picking off a straggler, *Drake* hastened north to warn Mitchell, meeting the captain off the coast between Cap Nicholas and Gonâve on August 1st. The British set course to intercept the French.

Around 3pm on August 14th, Mitchell spied Conflans to leeward. Though he had the advantage of the wind, they were light, and Mitchell was unable to close before night fell.

Now, Mitchell habitually sought his captains' advice. This can be a good trait, and it can be a bad one. It depends on the man. On this occasion, *they* gave good advice – wait until dawn to engage, but stick close to the enemy all night. Unfortunately *he* chose to do otherwise, withdrawing farther north. At his court martial (another habit of his) he said he knew where the French were going, so what need of keeping his crews on tenterhooks all night. Uh huh.

[*The present author made that mistake on a training exercise long, long ago. Not smart.*]

The following <long> excerpt is from *Richmond*, Vol.3, pp.54-58. It is included verbatim as it gives a good idea of the conduct of a sea fight – even though Mitchell flubbed it. The reason the account is so detailed, of course, is that it comes from the court martial proceedings.

'At 6 A.M. on the 4th [OS] the enemy bore about S.E. and was from six to nine miles distant. There was a light breeze between east and south during the forenoon and Mitchell, keeping close hauled, slightly improved his position bringing the bearing of the enemy from S.E. to S.S.E. The French picked up a light southerly breeze and brought it along with them;

Mitchell, with his squadron heading to the eastward, waited for them with his maintopsail aback. The breeze died down however before the squadrons had closed, and when it came up again at about half-past two in the afternoon it settled down to its true direction E.N.E. Conflans then hauled his wind, and Mitchell also made sail by the wind. But now doubts and anxieties began to assail him. He feared the enemy was "intending to gain the weather gage" and to fight at a long range at which the heavy 38-pounders of the French would give them an advantage. He therefore sent one of his officers, Lord Bellenden, down the line to ask all the captains whether it would not be best to try and get the wind of the enemy. As so frequently occurred, all the captains gave the answer the Commodore's question invited, and agreed. Mitchell therefore went about and stood to the northward. Conflans, seeing that he had nothing to fear for his convoy, now tacked to the southward to rejoin it.

There were not a few officers who considered that Mitchell had it in his power to engage the enemy that afternoon and that he threw away the chance. At the same time let it be allowed that the gaining of the weather gage was a tactical doctrine much insisted upon, and that situated as Mitchell was, the French could not get through the Windward Passage without fighting him. He held a secure position which they must force, and he may well have considered that he had no reason to throw away any advantage for the sake of bringing them to action in a hurry.

By 4 o'clock Mitchell had made so much northing that he could fetch to windward of the enemy; he therefore tacked and stood after Conflans till dark, when he called all his captains on board and held a council of war, at which it was agreed to continue to work to get the wind of the enemy, especially "to prevent them from engaging in what manner they pleased": and not to fight a night action. At 11 P.M. he tacked to the northward.

Next morning at daylight the wind was east and the enemy was seen to the S.S.W. about twelve miles distant. Mitchell tacked to the southward, formed line [Worcester, Lenox, Strafford, Plymouth, Milford] and made all the sail he could towards the enemy, but in ordering Captain Andrews of the 'Worcester' to lead, he could not forbear indulging in his fatal habit of asking for opinions. At 9 o'clock he hailed him and asked whether he thought they should now bear away and engage, to which Andrews replied "the sooner the better." The Commodore therefore ordered him to lead large. Shortly afterwards Conflans went about to the southward. At noon when the French bore S.W., six or seven miles distant, the wind which had been gradually dying away fell altogether, and both squadrons lay becalmed till nearly 3 o'clock. Then a small breeze sprang up, and Mitchell continued to bear down on the enemy, but at the same time he sent Bellenden down the line with a message to Andrews telling him that if he could not get down to the enemy while there were still two clear hour's daylight he wished him to bring to to windward of them. Some mistake seems to have arisen in delivering this message, for on receiving it the 'Worcester' brought to at once, and Bellenden was sent a second time with the message with the addition that he left it to Andrews to carry the squadron down as he thought proper. The 'Worcester' on this made sail again.

In the meantime the 'Drake' which was some distance to the northward, had been detached at about 2 o'clock to cut off one of the French convoy which had slipped away and now bore N.N.W. Conflans at once sent a light frigate after her, and at 4 o'clock, Mitchell sent the 'Milford' to support the 'Drake.' As the British squadron was now standing towards the enemy and there appeared every hope of bringing them to action if they continued on this course, Mitchell's action in detaching one of his more important ships for a trivial duty while he still had the business of beating the enemy excited the greatest surprise, and Captain Rich of the 'Milford' did not hesitate subsequently to say that "some thought he was sent as a pretence to avoid engaging." The result might well be held to justify the suspicion, for about half-an-hour to an hour later, when the 'Milford' had got some two miles to the northward, and the two squadrons were only about three miles apart, Mitchell hailed Captain Dent of the 'Plymouth' and asked him whether it were not now too late to engage. To this Dent replied that it would be if he waited for the 'Milford' to rejoin; and Mitchell, saying that he considered it necessary to wait for her, asked whether it would not therefore be best to bring to for the night and wait to windward till daylight. What Dent replied, or whether he received this message is uncertain; Mitchell asserted that he agreed it was the best course to pursue. But whatever may be the truth, Mitchell hailed the 'Lenox' and told Captain Lawrence it was his and Dent's opinion that there would not now be daylight enough to go down to the French – he made no mention of the condition which Dent made regarding the

'Milford's' rejoining – and that if Lawrence were of the same opinion he should ask Andrews what he thought, and if he also agreed, the Commodore would bring to. Such indecision and complete abdication of leadership are fortunately rare.

Without waiting for the replies to his string of leading questions, Mitchell signalled to the 'Worcester' and 'Lenox' to shorten sail and haul to the wind, and immediately afterwards he put the 'Strafford' about and formed line to the northward the wind had just come to east followed by the two ships in their stations. Conflans stood a little further to the southward until he could fetch into Mitchell's wake; he then went about and pressing sail began to chase. He must have seen that he had a most half-hearted adversary and resolved to drive him far enough off to ensure the safety of his own convoy for another night.

The 'Milford' and 'Drake' rejoined before dark, and Mitchell redistributed his ships, ordering the 'Lenox' to bring up the rear of the line instead of 'Worcester,' and placing the 'Plymouth' and 'Milford' ahead. He now had his whole force with him, and there still remained about an hour's daylight.

Shortly after the French had gone about, the wind shifted to the southward, with a nice breeze. The enemy came up fast and by 8 o'clock Conflans, who was leading [Terrible (74)], was up to and engaging the 'Lenox' [firing commenced at 7:15pm; Conflans reported putting three broadsides into Lenox before she replied]; his next astern also got into action with the 'Lenox' which had to sustain the fire of the two French ships unaided, for Mitchell continued under sail and instead of assisting his rear ships, bore up and edged to leeward. This running fight continued until between 9 and 10; after that time Captain Lawrence stated that he never saw the stern lights of the Commodore [supposedly it was put out on Mitchell's orders 'to prevent the enemy from following!']; Conflans, having made certain that his convoy was safe, and that he had considerably reduced the strength and mobility of the British squadron, bore up and returned to the merchant ships.

Mitchell's squadron was now scattered. When the firing ceased the Commodore hailed the 'Plymouth,' which had kept with him, and asked where the 'Lenox' was; to which Dent replied "Astern of the 'Worcester,' and now on our starboard quarter." Mitchell then brought to, and the 'Plymouth,' which went to find the 'Lenox' picked her up at 1 A.M. some way to the northward, whither she had gone not knowing the Commodore had brought to. At daylight the 'Lenox' rejoined.

Her crew felt that they had been shamefully deserted and when the 'Strafford' passed her in the morning the whole ship's company of the 'Lenox' saluted her with three "dumb holloas," followed by three loud cheers for the 'Worcester' who passed immediately afterwards – a demonstration which showed the state of feeling in the squadron.

The day was spent by the British squadron waiting for the 'Lenox' to repair her damages. The French had devoted most of their attention to her spars and both her fore and main masts were shot through and her rigging much cut about, but her losses in men were slight. The French on the other hand were little damaged aloft – what loss they sustained is unknown – and were able to spend the day working to windward.

For the next two days Mitchell tacked between Cape Maize and Cape Nicholas without seeing the enemy; at daylight on the 9th August [OS] he caught sight of them again, now dead to windward and a good way off. All day he tacked to endeavour to come up with them. On the morning of the 10th [OS] Tortuga was in sight bearing eastwardly, and Mitchell had shortened his distance considerably and nearly come up to the enemy, the 'Strafford' and 'Milford' being to windward of the other three ships. Conflans, who had his squadron well together, bore up and stood down; but Mitchell did not wait for him. He at once dropped to leeward to join the remainder of the squadron, and Conflans, as before, hauled his wind again and rejoined his merchant fleet. So the chase continued for four more days, the French Commodore steadily maintaining his position between his charge and the enemy. Then at last at noon on the 13th [OS] Mitchell saw the whole convoy sail serenely into Cape François, followed by their escort.

This deplorable exhibition of irresolution and shyness on the part of the British Commodore surely needs no comment. The part played by the French Commander is more interesting. He deserves all the praise he received for the mixture of boldness and skill with which he shepherded

his convoy of over 90 sail for ten whole days, mostly in comparatively restricted waters and all the time working to windward.

He started with a disadvantageous position ; he exposed his convoy to no risks; he made the most of every mistake of Mitchell's. But a criticism which may be invited is that, when he had got his convoy into safety in Cape François, he did not, seeing what a half-hearted antagonist he had to deal with, come out and give him battle and clear the way for his homeward journey. There are, however, arguments why he should not have done so. He had the whole voyage to Europe ahead of him, and even if he defeated Mitchell there were still lions in the path which, with his squadron disabled, might make short work of his convoy. The destruction of Mitchell's squadron would not necessarily clear his way, and he certainly acted in conformity with the doctrine of convoy protection as practised both by the French and ourselves at the time. He lost one ship only in the course of the chase, a straggler which was captured by the 'Drake,' as for Mitchell, he continued cruising for a few days off Cape François till sickness and lack of water after the two months at sea obliged him to return to Port Royal where he anchored on August 19th [OS].'

[Interestingly, the French believed the British 60s to be an 80, two 70s, ad a 60. French sources also mention about a dozen British privateers. It is highly unlikely these were anywhere in the vicinity; the reference, if accurate, would be to enemy ships supposed to be operating in the area, and therefore a risk to Conflans.]

Mitchell dodged a bullet, at least for a while. The rage against him in England was high, and his own subordinates were disgusted with him. Admiral Davers, however, put off any inquiry for two months, and then very conveniently died of Yellow Fever. Mitchell, as senior captain, took over the station. He immediately began covering his rear quarters.

Conflans would be rewarded with promotion to *chef d'escadre* and (eventually) the governorship of Saint-Domingue and the Leewards.

[He was captured in 1747, enroute to his post, and not freed until the peace.]

In Europe, the French had already sallied with a new force, but this one seemed bound for Nova Scotia, and so it proved – it was d'Anville's ill-fated attempt to retake Louisburg. Mitchell felt safe refitting his ships to escort the next British convoy, due to sail the third week in October. Conflans sailed away on September 7th, with orders to rendezvous with d'Anville.

On the Leeward station Commodore Lee now had little to do. After failing to catch Conflans he sailed to Barbados to sit out the hurricane season, sending ships (*Suffolk*, *Sutherland*, and *Dreadnought*) to cruise the Main, as usual. Grenada, a French island at the time, was now a target. The passage between there and Tobago was heavily patrolled by the British. *Hampshire*, a loaner, was sent to Cape Breton.

On September 1st, the Leewards Squadron sailed back to Antigua. Lee kept his main force (the *Suffolk*, etc. plus the *Gosport*) at that island and sent his light vessels to cruise about Martinique.

Lee, like every other British commander, still suffered from a shortage of 'cruisers'. He had only three: *Lyme* (24), *Richmond* (20), and *Saxon sloop*. Thus, after sailing on November 9th to intercept the French homebound convoy, he missed the inbound one, escorted by *capitaine* Emmaneul-Auguste de Cahideuc, Comte du Bois de la Motte.

La Motte commanded the escorts *Magnanime* (74), *Alcide* (64), and *Arc-en-Ciel* (54). After putting in to Fort Royal, Martinique, and leaving part of his convoy (about 20 ships) to disperse its goods from there, on the 28th of November La Motte headed with the rest of the convoy, about 64 sail, plus the *Magnanime* (74) and *Étoile* (48), to Hispaniola.

Lee pursued with two ships, *Suffolk* and another 60-gunner. (Some French sources say the British had four ships.) La Motte sent *Étoile* on with about 40 sail toward Port Louis and prepared to engage Lee alone in the *Magnanime*. The rest of the convoy headed for Cap François, on the north coast of Hispaniola.

[Alcide and Arc-en-Ciel did not take part in the action described below. However, they feature a subsequent convoy battle taking place in February 1747, when with La Motte was marshalling the shipping around Hispaniola, so they either sailed with the portion of the convoy that travelled direct to Cap François, avoiding the British, or they remained at Martinique and brought the Windwards convoy to La Motte at Cap François early in 1747 – at which point only Étoile is missing from the list, probably because she remained at Port Louis or Leógane after having escorted her fraction of the convoy there.]

The chase began on the morning of the 29th. By 4pm the British had closed, and La Motte and Lee fought an inconclusive duel throughout the night and into the following day. Reportedly, *Magnanime* was a beast to handle. She could not haul close to the wind in poor weather (and all the French ships suffered from having small crews). About 4pm on the 30th, Lee missed the French (or, according to some sources, simply abandoned the chase) and returned to base, hoping to catch some of the homebound ships at Martinique.

[Six (or four) French prizes were taken during the pursuit of La Motte, but by privateers, not Lee.]

Anchoring at Basseterre on the 11th of December, the Commodore was chagrined to see the Martinique convoy sailing away to the north. He pursued to latitude 21° (about level with the Turks and Caicos) but could not catch up.

[Notice how many more days were required when traveling up wind: one day to chase and catch de Motte and 12 days to get back.]

Mitchell also missed de Motte's inbound convoy. The latest Jamaica convoy was to sail on November 22nd. Mitchell gave it *Strafford* (60), *Lenox* (60), *Cornwall* (80), *Worcester* (60), *Milford* (44) and *Biddeford* (24) as escorts, and sent *Plymouth* (60) and *Merlin* sloop to clear the Windward Passage of any 'unfriendlyes'. *Drake* went out scout Port Louis. But Mitchell himself did not sortie until November 29th, when most of the escorts had returned.

La Motte reached the safety of Cap François on December 8th, picking up the frigate *Zéphyr* (36) – probably a privateer – to replace the *Étoile*, which was on the other side of the island.

This time, Mitchell did not make a hash of things. For two months he kept over 200 merchantmen bottled up in the ports of Saint-Domingue. La Motte was too weak to sortie. Even the French privateers that infested the island remained immobile.

Eventually, however, Mitchell needed to refit; he left *Lenox* and *Plymouth* to cruise the Windward Passage, supported by a number of privateers. The watch on the ports was relaxed.

Long Live the King!

What of the Spanish? Their privateers were highly active, but the Havana Squadron made no noise at all:

- *Reina, Invencible* – 70s
- *San Antonio, Real Familia, Nueva España, Fuerte #2, Dragón, Conquistador* – 60s
- *Bizarra* (50)

Soberio (66), *León* (70), and *Castilla* (60) made their way out of the Caribbean, though the latter was wrecked on her passage. They were carrying bullion. *Principe* (70), at last returned to La Habana, had to be broken up.

At the shipyard they were building a 70 (*Africa* #2) and two 80s, *Vencedor* and *Tigre*.

The most exciting work in the summer of 1746 was the transfer of *capitán general* Horcasitas from La Habana to Veracruz (escorted by *Reina* and *Dragón*), where he was to take up his duties as the latest Viceroy of Nueva España.

[*Horcasitas was replaced as Captain General by Juan Antonio Tineo y Fuertes (1746), Diego Peñalosa (1746-1747), and Francisco Antonio Cagigal de la Vega (1747 on).*]

A small affray (for which there are no details) took place in November. Two Spanish schooners successfully fought a British frigate – or at least, they survived the encounter.

[*Beatson usually gives a list of prizes taken for each year. In 1746, the balance of tonnage was against Britain, by 120 ships, but the value of the cargoes was in her favour:*

Spanish prizes 78; French prizes 183; British prizes from Spain 88; British prizes from France 150. These are the counts for non-European waters.]

King Felipe V died of apoplexy on July 9th, 1746. His heir was his son by his first wife, by name, Ferdinand VI. The new monarch had a significantly different outlook on European affairs than his stepmother, Elisabeth Farnese; he began to seek ways out of the war.

The man most committed to continuing the struggle was the *Marqués de la Ensenada*, effective prime minister of Spain. But even he only wanted to strengthen Spain's bargaining position. Other members of Ferdinand's council would have been happy to simply walk away from the war cold. The *Marqués de Villarias* suggested a separate peace with Britain and Austria. The latter, enjoying renewed success, was cool to the idea, but Britain exchanged ambassadors with Madrid. However, it would be another two years before these moves finally bore fruit.

A fast settlement was rendered impossible by Spain's intransigence over the questions of Gibraltar, Minorca, and the *Asiento*. She wanted the two territories back, and the contract cancelled (technically, it had only been suspended for the duration of the war). Given that Britain's bargaining position was growing stronger by the day, this was shortsighted.

1747/1748

1747 was in many respects a repeat of 1746. In Europe, another big battle (Laffeld). In the Caribbean, not a peep from the Spanish (apart from a dwindling number of privateers). The French continued their round-robin of convoys. The balance of trade losses was now heavily in Britain's favour; the unglamorous attritional routine was paying off.

1748 was the final year of the war. Holland was overrun by the French and the British cut off from King George's Continental possessions and the Austrians. Peace negotiations began in earnest in the spring, curtailing the campaigning season, but the treaty signing did not occur until October, which allowed operations to continue in various corners of the world.

In the West Indies, the French were exhausted. Thus, curiously but inevitably, the last fight would take place between Britain and Spain – an attempt by the British to take Santiago de Cuba, probably in hopes of acquiring a base they could hold at the peace or exchange for concessions, followed by (at long last) a fleet engagement. Huzzah!

Empty Purses & Courts Martial

For the Jamaica station, the first action of 1747 came early. Commodore Mitchell had no sooner returned to Port Royal (February 4th) than word came of yet more enemy merchantmen arriving at Hispaniola. This was a convoy of '13 large Spanish and French ships out of Cadiz' (so it was reported) with an escort of two warships. This set the British in motion.

[*The convoy most likely came from France, not Spain. The only names given as escorts are Alcide and Arc-en-Ciel. This lends weight to the idea those ships remained at Martinique when La Motte had his autumn encounter with the British; it is unlikely they could have proceeded to Hispaniola with La Motte, sailed for home alone, and immediately returned to the West Indies.*]

The standing squadron in the Windward Passage was augmented to three ships of the line (*Lenox* (64), *Plymouth* (60), *Worcester* (60)), plus the *Milford* (44) under Captain Digby Dent.

The French, meanwhile, were coordinating their homebound convoy. In La Motte's opinion, much of the reported British activity in the area was that of privateers, not capital ships. On April 1st, he sortied from Cap François, bound for Petit Goave and Léogane. Accompanying the *Magnanime* (74) and *Zéphyr* (36) were the merchantmen from the north coast, plus *Alcide* (64) and *Arc-en-Ciel* (54) with the '13 large sail of Cadiz'. La Motte still had to rendezvous with the merchants of the south coast, who would have to run the Windward Passage.

[*Étoile seems to have vanished during this period. She may have returned to France or have been at Port Louis.*]

On the 2nd, La Motte ran across two suspicious vessels west of Tortuga (*off the north coast of Haiti*) and pursued them. One turned out to be a Dutch slaver (with whom he had high words), but the other was a British privateer which proved elusive. After a day or two, she left him alone – racing south to warn Captain Dent.

The opposing forces collided 20 miles west-by-north of Cap Nicholas on the 5th of April. La Motte sent *Zéphyr* (36) toward Léogane with the convoy, while he squared off against the British with *Magnanime*, *Alcide*, and *Arc-en-Ciel*.

The enemy were coming up from the south, *Lenox*, fouled, lagging. The French charged down from the northeast, a little to windward so they could screen the convoy.

Dent, leading in the *Worcester*, tried to fall in with the French, by tacking to port, matching ship for ship, but she 'missed stays' and all three Frenchmen had their turn at her. After that, the two squadrons crossed paths several times, wearing round and 'charging' again and again – six times in all. La Motte lost the weather gauge after the third pass. *Arc-en-Ciel* lost her main and mizzen topmasts. *Alcide* had difficulty turning and gradually fell out of the line. *Magnanime* bore the brunt of the combat.

But at 4pm *Lenox* lost her fore topmast and La Motte broke off the action; now the British could not catch his convoy. Dent returned to Port Royal (March 30th). *Lenox* was almost immobilised and had to be towed by the *Worcester*.

[*110 major casualties for the French, 57 for the British.*]

Dent made Port Royal on the 10th of April. From his information, Mitchell perceived it should still be possible to catch the homebound trade from Hispaniola (for some reason assumed to be at Cap François), but once again he was too late. The problem this time was a lack of manpower, and the only remedy was to requisition soldiers. Ironically, a local law had recently been passed prohibiting impressment! The negotiations with the civil authorities, which would have naturally dragged, went even

slower because of this. Thus La Motte sailed for home unhindered on May 4th, with a convoy of 163 sail.

[Mitchell took Strafford (60), Plymouth (60), Lenox (60), Cornwall (80), Wager (24), and Worcester (60) out. The rest of the Jamaica Squadron was deployed as follows: Biddeford (24) and Drake sloop exchanging places off the east end of Jamaica; Milford (44) and Merlin sloop ditto at Roatán; Rye (24) on convoy duty; Enterprise (44) and Rippon's Prize (20) refitting.]

And then, after returning from this latest cruise, Mitchell was suspended by Dent, who in the interim had received orders to try him by court martial for his two badly handled operations (or it may be, because his orders focused on taking prizes instead of protecting the Traders' interests). Tried in December of 1747, Mitchell was acquitted of blame in the first action, but not the second, and was cashiered.

'for that by his misconduct and irresolute behaviour he had brought discredit on his Majesty's arms'. A violation of Articles 12 and 14 of the Articles of War.

Quoted in Richmond, Vol.3 p.62.

Change in the Weather

After this action the Jamaica station had a quiet summer, as usual. Meanwhile, the Leewards saw a change of command. Very early in the year Commodore Fitzroy Lee had been replaced. The Assembly of Antigua complained, 'the trade has not been protected, there having been taken in these seas... upwards of 170 vessels of his Majesty's trading subjects, some of which have been taken within ten leagues of the islands and even at the mouths of the harbours.' *[quoted in Richmond, vol.3 p.66.]*

The good merchants also charged Lee with taking his ships off for the summer to 'cruise for profit', which may have been true, but was also in accordance with the Navy's standing orders. Other charges included failing to bombard the French ports and engaging convoy escorts instead of the convoys themselves (one feels the Assembly was scraping together all the mud it could fling, hoping some would stick). Lee was slated for court martial and replaced by Commodore Legge, a veteran of Anson's harrowing circumnavigation of the globe, and the former captain of the *Severn*. He arrived at Barbados on April 14th.

[Lee remained under suspension until 1748, when he was restored in rank, all charges dropped. The Sugar Lobby was unwilling to go as far as a proper court martial. Having him suspended served their purpose equally well and the charges were too flimsy to stick.]

Legge's orders were to make defence of the British trade his priority, and only after harass the French. Also, if the local communities could be persuaded, he was to try and secure St. Lucia. Lastly, he was to organise proper convoys – the Leewards had been rather slack in this regard – but only so far as the local governments agreed. Legge complained about the defensive nature of his mission and got his orders amended, receiving an additional 70-gunner (*Captain*) as well.

The Leewards was now a respectable force, with many more light ships:

- *Suffolk* and *Captain* – 70s
- *Dreadnought*, *Dragon*, *Sunderland* – 60s
- *Sutherland* (50)
- *Mary galley*, *Ludlow Castle*, *Gosport* – 44s
- *Centaur* and *Lyme* – 24s
- *Richmond* (20)
- *Dreadnought's prize*, *Porcupine*, *Saxon*, sloops

But there was no sign of the French Spring Convoy. The Western Squadron had locked down the Bay of Biscay. In the West Indies, local traffic had been completely disrupted; only two prizes were

taken in the first seven months of the year.

While cruising the Main that summer, Legge fell ill. On September 18th he died. Captain George Pocock took command. Pocock was a fighter – he would go on to find fame in the Indian Ocean during the Seven Years War, and would lead the successful expedition to La Habana in 1762.

One of the new Commodore's first actions was to blockade a squadron of five French East Indiamen which had stopped to refresh themselves at Martinique on the way home to France.

[The ships were Achille (74), Penthièvre (36), Argonaute (36), Balène (36) and St. Malo (20). In some sources these ships make it onto the Navy order of battle by mistake. The famous La Bourdonnais, recalled from his India campaigns, was aboard the Achille with his family, and had to slip out of the port as a private individual.]

The hurricane season was late in 1747, and severe. As the fall convoys assembled, storms battered the Lesser Antilles, the Bahamas, and the Carolinas. The worst damage to ships came on November 4th, when 20 ships foundered at St. Kitts. Eight ships had been lost in the Carolinas in September and October; those hurricanes left many dead.

[It will be remembered the 1744 hurricane season saw the loss of British warships at Jamaica. There was also great loss of life then, and in 1743. In 1746, 13 ships were recorded lost in the Caribbean; in 1740 and 1742 Puerto Rico was badly hit; also Louisiana, where the town of La Balize was wiped out. In 1748 the Carolinas and Bermuda were devastated.]

It was while Mitchell's court martial was in session that news came (November 29th) of a great breakout from the Bay of Biscay. A huge convoy was on its way with ten (!) escorts. But Admiral Hawke's Western Squadron sank, captured, or drove off all but 'a single 64'.

[l'Étendue was in charge of this convoy, which is frequently given a 64-gun escort, the Content. The Content does not appear to have been a royal ship, and therefore was not a '64'. The only royal escort remaining to l'Étendue had been the frigate Castor (28), which returned to France once the merchants were out of European coastal waters. Content would not have been the East Indiaman of the same name, either; since she was currently in the Indian Ocean. She was probably just a large armed merchantman commandeered to act as escort.]

The French Hispaniola convoy avoided the Windwards kill zone by travelling to the north of the islands. Despite this easing of the odds, the Jamaica Squadron yet again failed to intercept. As many ships as possible put out from Port Royal, in record time, only to run into unusually strong northerlies; they did not make Cap François until December 18th. After waiting a few days, Dent returned to base (January 5th, 1748).

The Frenchmen bound for Martinique were in for a tougher time. Commodore Pocock was waiting. The Windwards trade were traveling in small groups, unescorted, and the only difficulty he had was mustering enough ships to corral the herd. All the same, he does not appear to have been as successful as he could have been. When it left France, the combined convoy had about 250 sail, of which roughly 100 were bound for the Windwards. Pocock and British privateers accounted for a round number of 40. The lowest 'accurate' estimate is 33 captures, or by Pocock's own account, 37.

Thus, even after being attacked at both ends of the route the French managed to salvage 85% of the convoy, enabling Martinique and Hispaniola to survive the British blockade until war's end. However, the losses sent insurance rates through the roof. Few owners could be found who were willing to ship to the West Indies. This was the last French convoy.

Pocock also took 900 POWs. Their capture crippled the Martinique privateers, not to mention the East Indiamen still trapped at Martinique, who were short of crews already. Large numbers of prisoners were also taken in the Finisterre battles, which had a similar effect on *La Royale*.

[The good burghers of Barbados refused to pay maintenance on the prisoners, citing the cost (despite the easing of the privateer threat). Soldiers had to be sent out from England to guard them – let the Home Government pay!]

On December 28th, Rear Admiral Knowles – *admiral*, now – arrived at Barbados from New York. He had been appointed to Jamaica in August, but only sailed on November 30th, since he was required to escort an American convoy.

Knowles was pleased by Pocock's successes, but being an impatient man wanted some great stroke against, say, Grenada or Martinique. Pocock managed to persuade him this was asking too much. Knowles passed on to Jamaica, where he took command on January 27th, 1748.

He found Commodore Dent at Port Royal with most of the squadron, to which he added *Canterbury*, *Norwich*, *Lark*, *Fowey*, and *Achilles* sloop.

Under Repair:

- *Cornwall* (80)
- *Lenox*, *Elizabeth*, *Worcester* – 70s
- *Plymouth* (60)
- *Biddeford*, *Enterprise* – 20s
- Sloops *Drake*, *Merlin*

Fitting Out:

- *Strafford* (60)
- *Rye*, *Experiment* – 20s
- Sloops *Vulture*, *Vainqueur*, *Weazel*

¿Qué Noticias Hay de los Españoles?

At last, as the war drew to its close, Rear Admiral Knowles, seeing that the French were under control, looked northwestward once more. What were the Dons up to?

Spain's naval forces were almost all at La Habana, with Reggio. There is not much information for 1747. For January of 1748, Richmond lists the following: three 70s, four 60s, and two 50s in commission, two newly built 70s, and two 80s under construction (*Vencedor*, *Tigre*). Small craft amounted to two 14-gunners and 19 privateers out and about, and 12 more in port.

- *Invencible* #2, *África* #2, *Reina* #2, *León* – 70s – *Soberio* (66)
- *Dragón*, *Conquistador*, *Real Familia*, *Fuerte* #2 – 60s
- *Galgo* (56)

Nueva España, a.k.a *Rosario* (60) was in Puerto Rico with *Bizarra*.

[The above list is a compilation derived from multiple sources; detailed information about Spanish dispositions in the later war years is even more sparse than for the War of Jenkins' Ear.]

For Andreas Reggio there were alarms and excursions in his own backyard. First, in January, 1747, came a rumour of a British expedition against San Agustín; supplies were dispatched and the sloops *Teresa* and *Susana* sent north to provide early warning. In May, two sloops were sent to find an enemy convoy, but it turned out to be French.

The Spanish Admiral was plagued with a dearth of victuals and ships stores worse than any of the previous years. Desertions had reached epidemic proportions – hence his use of sloops to confirm whether it was worthwhile committing his capital ships; *Real*

Familia and *San Antonio* had to be decommissioned, the latter permanently. The hills of Puerto Rico and the jungles of Yucatán were crawling with runaways.

There was plenty of silver, but few means of distributing it beyond La Habana. Two small bullion runs were made, in October, from Veracruz to La Habana, and thence to Spain. Early in 1748 another run was made from La Habana.

In the opposite direction, three *azogues* sailed for Veracruz in October of 1747, but due to the manpower shortage, which affected Spain as well as her colonies, they did not arrive until June of 1748, in company with a French convoy. Other vessels were unable to sail at all.

[From Beatson comes the following comparison of prizes taken for 1747 and 1748:

In 1747, in non-European waters, 89 Spanish, 194 French, 55 for Britain from Spain, 143 for Britain from France; counting all prizes a balance of 96 in favour of Britain.

In 1748, from all locations, 106 Spanish, 203 French, 218 for Britain from Spain, 37 for Britain from France; counting all prizes a balance of 77 in favour of Britain.]

The British were only vaguely aware of these movements. They still lived in an optimistic haze through which could be seen vast treasure fleets. As 1747 came to a close, a rumour began circulating that a large *flota* was scheduled to sail from Veracruz in the new year.

Rear Admiral Knowles decided he would intercept this prize. While waiting, he hoped at last to seize a base for protecting his own convoys – Santiago de Cuba.

Santiago Again

Knowles always enjoyed sea-land operations. Two weeks after his arrival at Port Royal, he sailed against Santiago with eight ships (*Cornwall*, *Elizabeth*, *Lenox*, *Canterbury*, *Plymouth*, *Strafford*, *Worcester*, and *Warwick*). He also took 240 men of Trelawny's Jamaican Regiment (recently incorporated as a regiment and awarded the title of 63rd of Foot).

[Meanwhile, the light vessels cruised as follows:

- *Rye* between *Savanilla* and *Pedro Shoals* against the *Mississippi* trade.
- *Vulture* and *Vainqueur* off *Santiago*.
- *Biddeford*, *Fowey*, and *Aldborough* between *West Caicos* and *Cape François*.
- *Merlin* west of *Hispaniola*.]

But, meeting with headwinds, the Admiral changed the plan and turned on Port Louis instead. On the 27th of February his ships watered in Tiburon Bay. There was a French garrison there, but Knowles promised not to attack them or ravage the country if they let him carry out his resupply (in French accounts, mention is also made of the fact that the French cordoned off the 'designated bathing area'. From there the British sailed to and based at *Île de Vache*, facing Port Louis.

The preparations for the attack on Port Louis were meticulous; there was to be no repeat of La Guaira '43. On March 11th the winds were favourable and the squadron swept in. The fort, of 78 guns (garrison 600), began firing at five minutes past noon but the British made no reply until every ship was anchored within pistol shot of the walls. Then they opened up with everything they had, musketeers picking off the French gun crews from the topmasts.

Although the enemy tried an attack with a fireship, which forced the *Elisabeth* to pull out of line, they were soon beaten down. The fireship was towed away and two others 'cut out' before they could be used. At 3pm the fort's guns were silenced and the

French were parleying. Knowles would accept nothing less than the complete surrender of the garrison. The fort was blown up and seven vessels made prizes (a snow, three privateer sloops, and three 'ships' – i.e. merchantmen of moderate tonnage).

[Losses to the garrison were 160, to the squadron, 19 killed and 60 wounded.]

Lacking the troops to attack and garrison any other French ports, Knowles returned to the Santiago project around March 18th. This attack did not go as smoothly – Captain Dent eventually taking his turn as the subject of a court martial.

If the reader remembers from the last attempt, in 1741, the entrance to Santiago harbour is long and narrow, snaking north-south, and dominated by high ground. This not only gave the defending batteries an advantage, but meant that the wind could not be relied upon; the ships would have to be towed in. As at Port Louis, no one was to fire a shot until the ships were right against the forts. Landing parties would also be used to help silence the enemy guns. Dent, senior captain, requested that he lead the attack.

The squadron watered at Tiburon Bay from the 19th to 25th of March, sighting Cuba on the 28th. Dent had been sent ahead (his ship was the *Plymouth*) to reconnoitre. In his opinion the harbour entrance would not be difficult. The *castillo* del Morro perched high above the right of the entrance, with the *castillo* San Juan de la Roca below it on the point. Farther in, stonework indicated the presence of two low batteries facing the entrance (Estrella and Catherina). But once past these there were no further (known) obstacles.

[The defences had not changed, but the attitude toward them had.]

Knowles now had to wait for a favourable breeze. This did not rise until the afternoon of the 29th. Meanwhile, the Spanish moved two (in some sources, four) block-ships into position.

The Admiral had just ordered the bombardment of the enemy battery at the harbour mouth – he had mounted a 10" mortar on the *Canterbury* – when the wind came up. Fearing to lose it again he cancelled the bombardment and ordered his squadron to close immediately.

Despite this deviation from the plan, all seemed to be going well. The squadron was making four knots, and *Canterbury's* mortar managed to score two hits out of three shots on the Morro (castle). Just as the third bomb went off, Dent was told, supposedly by an officer of the South Sea Company acting as pilot, that there was a chain across the harbour. This was confirmed by a Spanish POW being employed as pilot. The ship had only a cable's length to travel before it would be too late to turn away. For better or worse, Dent chose to come about. The *Cornwall* followed him. The Spanish guns, which had remained silent, now fired raggedly, slicing off *Plymouth's* mizen topmast.

Knowles was in a rage. As *Plymouth* passed him he called Dent aboard and berated him,

'Knowles asked him why he came back, to which Dent replied that there was a chain across the harbour. "Then pray, Sir, why did you not cut it? If there is one I will give you leave to hang me with it. Did you see it, Sir?" Dent answered "No, upon my honour I did not." "Who did?" asked Knowles. Dent replied that "many people called out they saw it" "Pray who? Pitch upon your man," said the Admiral furiously; and at length Dent replied that the pilot had seen it, and many more.'

Richmond, Vol.3 p.128

The attack was called off, and though the council of war discussed ways and means of cutting the cable, if there was one, the Admiral did not make a second attempt. Knowles' excuses for not attacking a second time were rather lame – they could have

justified his not attacking in the first place.

[Dent was sentenced to court martial, but not until 1750. Knowles did not charge the captain outright, but only dropped hints in his correspondence which were eventually acted upon. Against Dent was the fact that Knowles had publicly told him he did not care if Plymouth and Cornwall were lost in the attempt (though one of the justifications Knowles gave for not continuing the operation was that the Plymouth had to be sent home!) and the fact that he accepted as gospel the confirmation of his Spanish pilot that 'si, señor, there is certainly a cable, a great big one', when no English witnesses could be brought forward who had seen it (the SSC agent seems to have vanished); other captains had told him to rely for local knowledge on members of his crew who had been prisoners at Santiago in the past. In the end, Dent got off, mainly because Knowles could not justify his own failure to renew the attack.]

Knowles conduct in this operation is curious. The most obvious solution is that he castigated his lead captain and then saw for himself what the difficulties were but did not want to lose face by apologising. Perhaps, too, he had all along been nursing the idea that he could make a better job of it than Vernon, and found his old boss had been right. Remembering the fiasco of Venezuela, he would not have wanted to press an attack that had lost the element of surprise.

Operations in the Leewards, meanwhile, went on as before. At the turn of the year, the British forces were deployed as follows:

- Off Barbados: *Ludlow Castle* (44) and *Richmond* (20)
- To windward of Barbuda and Deseada (protecting ships going to Montserrat Nevis and St Kitts): *Poole* (44), *Centaur* (24), *Dreadnought's prize* (12.14)
- Between St Maarten, St Barts. and Barbuda: *Dreadnought* (60)
- Between St Kitts and Montserrat: *Speedwell sloop* (10.14)
- At Martinique: *Dragon* (60), *Sunderland* (60), *Rippon* (54), *Mary galley* (44), *Sutherland* (50)
- Careening: *Captain* (70)

This was sufficient force to curb French trade almost completely. It had taken five years of attrition, but the French had finally been mastered. Their privateers were still active; hence the emphasise on securing British trading routes. But, the war was nearly over. Admiral Henry Osborn took command of the Leewards in May.

After refitting at Port Royal, Knowles began to deal with the next expected French convoy to Hispaniola, again reputed to be commanded by Conflans (in reality, he was already a prisoner of war).

On patrol the British had *Worcester* (Cape Tiburon and Port Louis), *Strafford*, and *Canterbury* (off Cap François). *Lenox* and *Elizabeth* were sent to strengthen these last on the 28th of April, when a report was received of a new French convoy of 100 sail and four escorts (an 80, two 64s, and a 44).

Captain Powlett commanded at Cap François. On the 3rd of May he captured a *snow*, from which he understood that there was a convoy of twelve large Spanish merchantmen and three escorts enroute to Veracruz from Cadiz. Powlett reported this to Knowles on the 30th and left for Cape Antonio, to watch for the enemy.

[It seems odd that he would do so, but presumably he expected the Spanish to travel by the Yucatán Channel, not the treacherous Bahama Channel. It was a moot point, since there was no convoy.]

Still expecting the French, too, Knowles sent *Warwick* and *Fowey* to bolster the *Lenox* and *Elizabeth*, who were alone at Cap François. *Tilbury*, appearing on the 25th of May, was also sent. But before the Rear Admiral could join his anti-French patrols, orders came to cease hostilities with France (10th July).

On August 3rd, Powlett returned to Port Royal with little to show for his cruise. The Spanish did not appear.

[There were azogues afloat; these may have used the immanent French convoy as cover and perhaps slipped through the net disguised as Frenchmen.]

Havana: the Last Battle

Knowles meanwhile redeployed against the Havana Squadron. In August or September, if his Intelligence was correct, he could expect the convoy from Veracruz to put in an appearance. It was purported to be a rich one. The usual rendezvous was Tortuga Banks, so thither did the British steer.

Knowles had five ships with him: *Cornwall* (flag), *Canterbury*, *Tilbury*, *Strafford*, *Oxford*, plus a sloop as tender. The rest of the squadron was on escort or patrols. The ships cruised line abreast, a mile apart, sweeping for prizes. The course was first to Cape Antonio and thence to Tortuga Banks.

For six weeks Knowles cruised the Banks, reinforced at some point by the *Warwick*, from the Dry Tortugas to Cape Catoche. Some prizes were taken but the galleons did not show.

Then, on October 11th, he was joined by *Lenox*, whose captain reported being chased by eight sail the day before. *Lenox* had been on convoy duty and chose to use the Florida Channel instead of the Windward Passage because the current through the latter place was unusually strong. He was aware Knowles would be nearby if he ran into trouble. And he did – the convoy had run smack into the Havana Squadron.

[The Captain of the Lenox was tried for abandoning his charges, but acquitted, given the circumstances.]

Reggio was cruising the Florida Channel. This departure from doctrine had come about because the bullion transfer from Veracruz was cancelled. And, this was his fault. With the British operating around the west end of Cuba he needed to go to Veracruz personally, but two of his ships were sporting weak masts and he feared he could not make it. So, he cruised, partly to watch for Knowles, and partly for prizes, especially enemy privateers.

The Spanish began their sweep at Cape San Antonio and moved northeast, following the Cuban coast in case they had to make port in a hurry. As they did so they caught up with the British convoy.

Reggio's main force could not keep up, but the privateer *Galga* and the recommissioned *Real Familia* shadowed the enemy. It appears Reggio also lost contact with his own scouts for a period of time, but calculated the British would make for the Bahama Channel and managed to catch up with his outriders. Unfortunately, *Lenox's* captain had ordered his convoy to disperse. Soon after, Knowles showed up.

[Galga (30) should not be confused with Galgo (56). The former was a privateer.]

On the morning of October 12th, 1748, seven months after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, the British and Spanish met for the last battle of the war. The wind was from the E.N.E. The British stood to the southeast with *Oxford* (50) about two nautical miles (2.3 miles) ahead; the rest of the squadron was straggling a long way behind the flagship:

- *Tilbury* (60)
- *Cornwall* (80) flag
- *Lenox* (56 – she was a '64' but under-gunned)
- *Warwick* (60)
- *Canterbury* (60)

The Spanish were observed to the south, sailing north, a scattered group, with five ships about six nautical miles away (7 miles) on a bearing of S.E. or S.E.S and two more at S. by half-east two or three nautical miles (about 2.5 miles) astern of the others.

On paper, the arrangement was as follows:

- *Invencible* (70) (*jefe d'escuadra* Spinola) and *Conquistador* (60) were in the lead.
- *Africa* (70) (*jefe d'escuadra* Reggio), and *Dragón* (60) in the middle.
- *Nueva España* (60), *Real Familia* (60), and *Galga* (30) frigate in the rear.
- *Galga's Prize*, a small vessel attached to the frigate.

Dragón was fouled and leaking, and before the action opened had drifted back to join *Galga*, which was carrying battle damage from an earlier encounter; these made the 'second group' of Spanish ships. During the battle *Dragón* formed up with the rest of the squadron, but could not hold her station.

Warwick was also slow, and this would likewise create problems for the British, because her place was not at the tail of the battle line, but in the middle.

Once again, Richmond provides the narrative (Vol.3 pp, 133-143); the accompanying maps are also reproduced from Richmond but are fairly close to Spanish representations of the battle:

When Admiral Reggio sighted the strange vessels to the N.W. he first took them to be the convoy he had previously chased. He therefore made sail, bore up and chased with his five leading ships, steering direct for the British squadron. Knowles, whose leeward-most ships were as much as a mile to leeward of the flagship and the others a good way astern, brought to to collect his squadron. When he saw that the Spaniards were coming up fast and had the weather gage he made sail again a few minutes later and wore, and stood to the northward forming line as he went, at the same time clearing decks for action and hoisting his colours. The sight of the colours and the movement of the ships forming line showed Reggio that he had a force of men-of-war to deal with. Instead of continuing in chase he bore up and ran down to leeward to join the straggling ships to the westward.

By a combination of these manoeuvres on the part of the opposing Admirals, Knowles, soon after 6.30 when he had made about a league to the northward, had reached a position from which he could weather the enemy. He at once signalled to tack, ordering the same ships that were leading on the starboard tack to lead on the larboard tack, thus reversing the order of battle with larboard tacks on board. His ships were now formed in a good line, and he began to stand to the southward with his squadron well closed up. Reggio at about that time joined his laggard ships to leeward, and the Spanish squadron then stood to the S.E. by S., about a point free.

Knowles's object now was to overhaul the enemy and engage them as soon as possible, and with this in view he set all sail he could. Nor did the Spaniards show any disinclination to meet his wishes; they bunted their mainsails and keeping only so much canvas abroad as was necessary to maintain the ships in good order, jogged along to await the attack.

The British squadron quickly began to open out, the ships at the rear dropping astern; and signals were put abroad for closing the line. The 'Warwick' next astern of the flagship, was soon out of station and was ordered by the Admiral to cut away her long boat, but nevertheless she continued to fall to the rear. The gap was increased by a misinterpreted signal. Between 9 and 10 A.M. Knowles, finding himself well to windward of the enemy, wished

Battle of Tortuga Banks

October 1 1748

Diagram 1

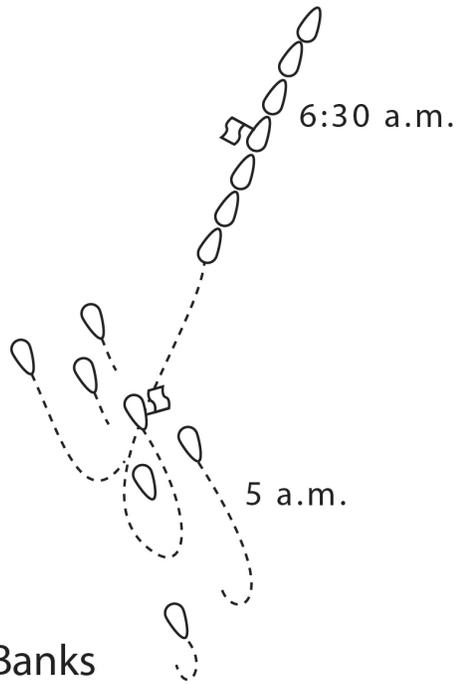
Movements between
5 a.m. and 6:30 a.m.

0 1 2 3 4 Miles

○ English
● Spanish



← Wind East
3-4 knot breeze

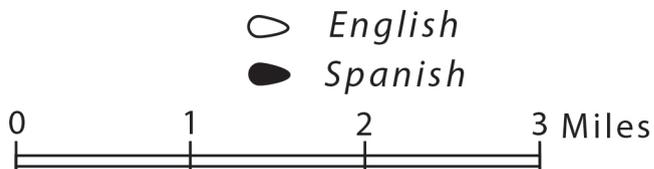
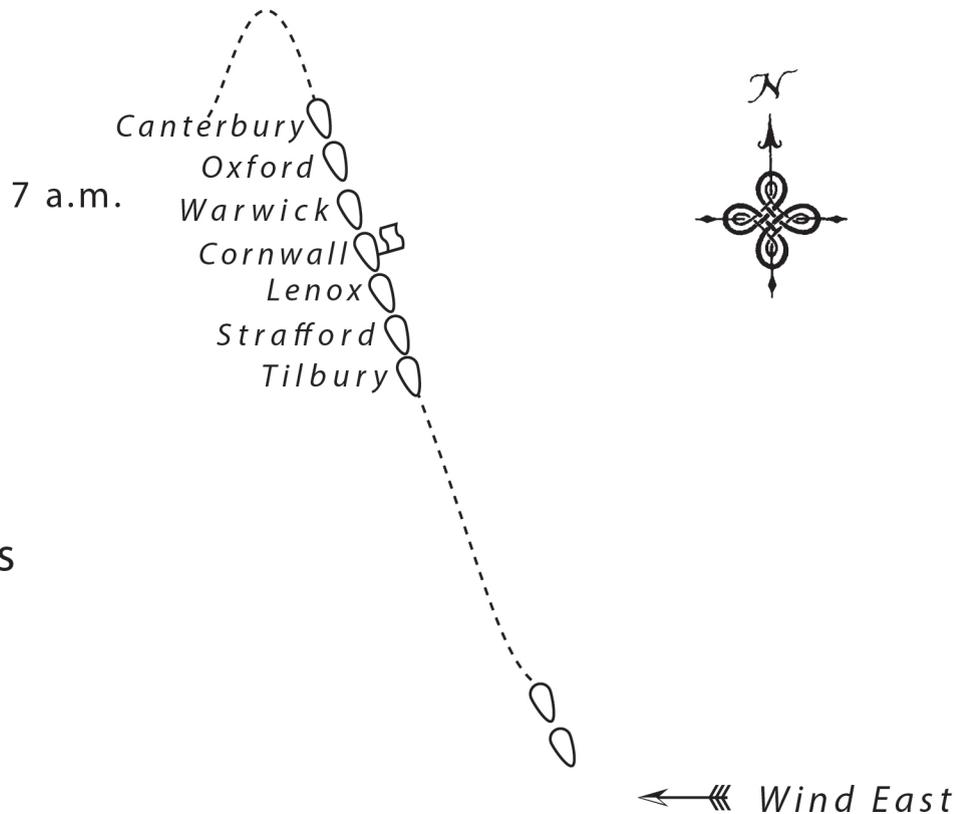


Battle of Tortuga Banks

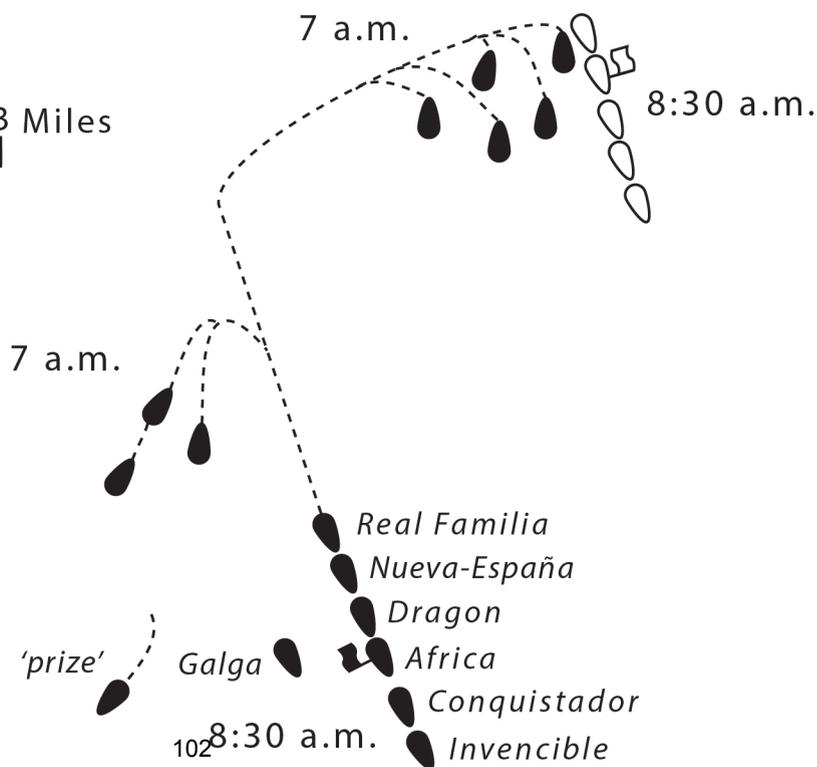
October 1 1748

Diagram 2

Movements between
7 a.m. and 8:30 a.m.



○ English
● Spanish



to close them and hoisted a Genoese flag which was the signal "for those ships that are to lead in a line of battle by the wind with the larboard tacks on board to lead in the line of battle one astern of another with a large wind." Knowles's intention was obvious he desired to close the enemy; but three ships the 'Warwick', 'Oxford' and 'Canterbury' interpreted the signal as referring not to those ships which were actually leading, but to those which in the established line of battle were to lead with the larboard tacks on board. Knowles's signal to tack in succession had reversed the line; the ship appointed to lead on the larboard tack was the 'Canterbury' and this ship at once put her helm up and set her topmast studdingsails, the 'Oxford' prepared to form astern of her, and the 'Warwick' hauled up her mainsail, backed her mizen topsail and rigged out her studding sail booms to fall astern of the 'Oxford' and be ready to make sail so soon as she had got into place.

When Knowles saw this misinterpretation of his intention he at once signalled the 'Warwick' to make sail and hauled the signal down. But great harm had been done. The gap between the 'Warwick' and 'Cornwall' had been considerably increased while the former ship was brought to, and without reducing sail in the whole squadron this gap could not be filled. The rear ships hauled down their studding sails and luffed back into the line astern of the 'Warwick.' This ship continued to drop, and Knowles, who since the 'Canterbury's' upper deck guns were 12-pounders as against the 'Warwick's' 9-pounders, wished to keep her as his rear ship to oppose the 'Real Familia' did not order her to close up and pass ahead of the 'Warwick.'

Two causes were thus at work to separate the British squadron. First, the slow sailing of the 'Warwick'; next the mistake in the signal which caused that ship to bring to. The gap obliged Knowles to shorten sail to allow the rear ships to come up, and by his so doing the leading ships went further ahead before they brought to and made an interval between 'Cornwall' and 'Lenox.' Then Knowles, observing that the Spanish Admiral altered the disposition of his line by shifting one ship from ahead of his flagship to astern of her, ordered the 'Lenox' to change places with the 'Cornwall' and thus increased the gap between the flagship and the leading ships. Finally, seeing Reggio drop the frigate 'Galga' out of the line Knowles, in order to equalise numbers, ordered the 'Oxford' out of his line to act as a corps de reserve, following the practice initiated by Vernon, by which any such ship was to go without orders to the assistance of any other which was hard pressed.

By noon the 'Warwick' was fully two miles, or even more, astern of the 'Lenox.' 'Cornwall' was about a mile astern of 'Strafford' and 'Oxford' was broad on 'Lenox's' weather quarter. The wind had gone to east during the forenoon, but Knowles still had the weather gage. The enemy meantime continued to go under easy sail. The breeze however was dying down and soon after noon it fell nearly calm for some time, during which the squadron did not make more than a knot and a half, or about three knots in the puffs.

Between 1 and 2 P.M. the wind again freshened from a quarter rather to the northward of east, and the British squadron began to draw up again, so that by about 2.30 P.M. the 'Tilbury,' Captain Powlett, reached a position a little before the enemy's centre and about a mile to windward of it. In this situation Reggio opened fire on the 'Tilbury' and 'Strafford' from his centre ships. Although Powlett had orders from Knowles not to engage at a long range nor to fire until the signal was made, some of his guns replied to the enemy. Seeing this, and feeling that when once fire was opened it was undesirable to stop it, Knowles, although two ships only were in a position to come into action, made the signal for the leading ships to lead large and to engage. This signal was not acted upon by the 'Tilbury' – the court martial found that the

signal was not seen on board her – and she continued to edge down very gradually towards the enemy in order to draw up to his leading ship, followed by her next astern, the 'Strafford' Captain Brodie, who having seen the signal, expected to see 'Tilbury' bear up every minute and waited for her to do so. After an ineffective cannonading at long range had gone on for some time, Knowles, seeing that his order was not being carried out, hoisted the 'Tilbury's' signal to come to a close engagement. This signal was not clearly made out on board the 'Tilbury,' the Dutch flag which formed the signal being mistaken for a blue and white flag; but although it was obvious that this could not have been the signal, since its interpretation was meaningless in the situation, and although he could make out his own pendants and had no doubt that it was addressed to him, Powlett took no steps to find out what the signal really was. He was afterwards in some uneasiness as to his conduct. In his Journal he wrote: "At 55 minutes past [2] our signal was made, but the Admiral being then engaging, [1] could not distinguish what it was." In a letter written to Knowles a day or two later he said that there was "some misunderstanding" about the signal. But whatever may have been the misunderstanding the result was that the 'Tilbury' remained at an ineffective range and threw her shot into the sea. When tried by court martial Powlett was found guilty of negligence. He was reprimanded for neglecting to send his boat on board the Admiral when he saw the ship's signal flying, but he was acquitted of the charge of holding back from the engagement.

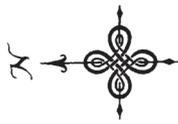
His next astern, the 'Strafford,' Captain Brodie, saw the signal for leading large, and, in accordance with custom, waited for the leading ship to bear up. When some time passed and she still held a lasking course, Brodie put his own helm up frankly and standing down to the second ship of the enemy's line, the 'Conquistador,' engaged her with admirable vigour and determination.

In comparing Powlett's conduct with Brodie's it is necessary to remember that it was proved to the satisfaction of the court that he did not see the signal to lead large, while Brodie did see it. Brodie had, therefore, an order upon which to act, while Powlett had not, and the latter would have been acting in deliberate disobedience of orders if he had borne down on the enemy without permission. It may be said that when he saw Brodie bearing down he should have followed suit, but this would not be a wholly just criticism. The Admiral had not yet come up, most of the ships were far astern, no signal to lead large had been seen. In such circumstances, and in view of the instructions of the time, it was but natural as he omitted to inform himself of the meaning of the signal, that he should keep his wind, and perhaps wonder why the 'Strafford' was bearing away and going prematurely into action, possibly to the detriment of the achievement of the Admiral's intentions. But as he had seen his pendant flying he had a clear indication that some action on his part was required, and we can only feel that the court took a lenient view of his conduct.

The engagement having now begun, Knowles saw that he must get all his ships into action as soon as he could, and that considerations as to which ship should engage the 'Real Familia' must give way to the major object of employing as much of his force as possible. The Admiral therefore sent a message to the Captain of the 'Canterbury' to make sail and pass the 'Warwick'; the officer carrying the message was also directed to order the 'Warwick' to make all possible haste to get up to the enemy.

Knowles's signal to the leading ships to lead large and engage was, as before, the Genoese flag at the mizen peak. Although Captain Innes of the 'Warwick' had seen on the previous occasion that Knowles did not intend this signal to be interpreted as an order to invert the line, and that in the situation in which the squadrons now were it could not possibly be intended to bear any such meaning, he chose to understand it according to its most rigid meaning, and for a second time he hauled up his mainsail

Canterbury
Warwick



Battle of Tortuga Banks

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Diagram 3

Positions at Noon

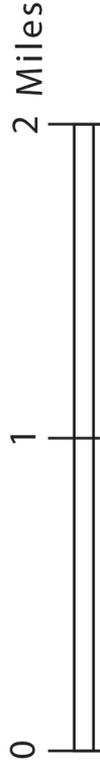
← Very light
Calm to
airs

Lenox Oxford
Cornwall

English
Spanish

Stafford
Tilbury

Real Familia
Nueva-España
Dragon
Africa
Galga Conquistador
Invencible



Battle of Tortuga Banks

October 1 1748

Diagram 4

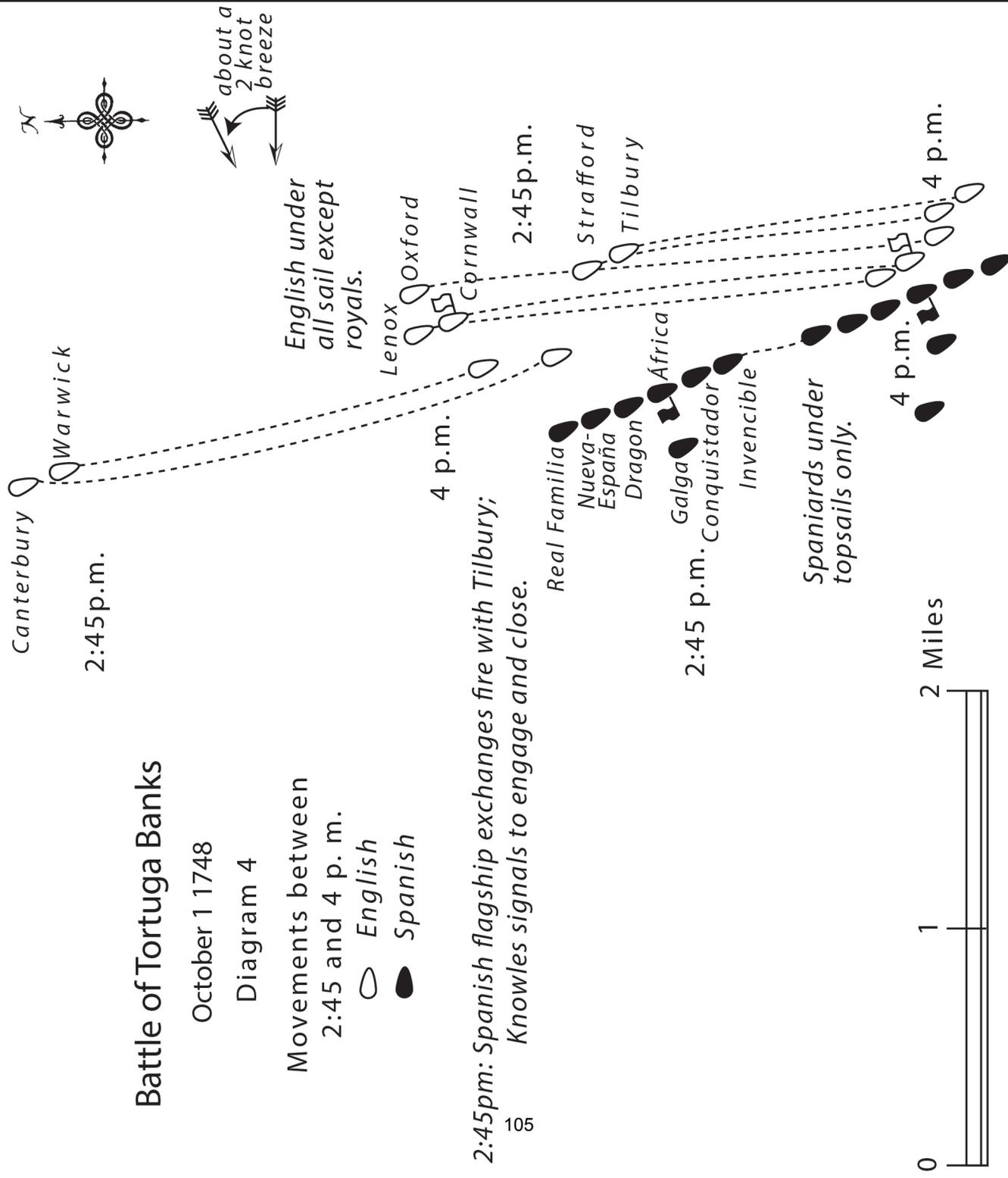
Movements between

2:45 and 4 p. m.

○ English

● Spanish

2:45pm: Spanish flagship exchanges fire with Tilbury;
Knowles signals to engage and close.



and backed his main topsail. He records in his Journal that the "same mistake" as before was made by the Admiral in hoisting the Genoese flag, and lays the whole blame for his not coming into action on the signals made by the Admiral. Yet the Admiral's meaning in making this signal must, at this stage of the action, have been clear to any man. There is no suggestion that Innes was lacking in courage. When he did get into action later he engaged his adversary closely. But there is ground for believing that his judgment was warped, possibly by dislike of his Commander-in-Chief, and that like Lestock [at the Battle of Toulon], he chose to observe every punctilio of the meaning of signals rather than read them in the sense in which they were applicable to the situation.

For a full hour the brunt of the action was sustained by the 'Strafford,' with the 'Tilbury' firing ineffectually outside range. Knowles, who had crowded sail, came up about 4 P.M., having received the fire of the ships astern of the Spanish Admiral's second for some 30 minutes without returning a gun. As he drew up abreast the Admiral's second he returned her fire, and ordering the 'Oxford' ahead to assist the leading ship, as the Spanish Admiral's ship, the 'Invencible,' appeared to be a heavier vessel than the 'Tilbury,' he bore close down to the Spanish Admiral and engaged him at half pistol shot, never touching his main clew-garnets until he was actually in position. The 'Lenox,' which had kept close astern of him, opened a smart fire at the same time, but shooting ahead of the 'Cornwall' was out of action for some time.

At half-past four the 'Conquistador,' with which the 'Strafford' was engaged, had been set on fire for the third time by the British cohorn shells [another patented Knowles modification – he had no less than 8 mortars firing from his ship!], her yards were all shot down and her sails and rigging cut to pieces. Shortly afterwards she struck, but as neither the 'Strafford' nor the 'Cornwall' had a boat to send to take possession of her, Reggio fired three shot at her to bring her back, and she rehoisted her colours. The 'Strafford' had by then passed clear of her.

At about the same time as the 'Conquistador' was disabled, Knowles drove the Spanish Admiral out of the line. Reggio set his spritsail and mainsail, loosed his topgallant sails and bore away before the wind. His example was followed by the rest of the Spanish squadron. Knowles bore up to follow them, but as he did so an unlucky shot brought his foretopsail down; another cut away his maintopmast; and though he then set his spritsail and mainsail to pursue he made little way. At the same time he hauled down the signal for the line and made that for general chase to leeward, "which not being taken notice of so soon as it ought, I sent away my captain aboard each ship with orders for them to pursue the enemy and lay close alongside of 'em and not lay firing at so great a distance as they did or I would send other officers on board to command their ships." The 'Strafford' at once bore away and closed the 'Africa.' The 'Lenox' was less prompt, and Captain Taylor, who was sent by Knowles to deliver his message, said that Holmes did not make all the sail he could in pursuit. Taylor insisted further that after receiving the Admiral's message Holmes sprang his luff. This Holmes indignantly denied. The fact remains on the one hand that the 'Lenox' followed the 'Strafford' at some distance, whereas if she had borne up at once she would have been close to the 'Strafford.' On the other hand, the members of the court martial were satisfied that Holmes's conduct was open to no censure.

By about a quarter past five the 'Canterbury' came up and joined the 'Strafford' in attacking the 'Africa,' behaving, in Knowles's words "exceedingly well." The 'Warwick' joined soon after and ran abreast the 'Conquistador,' which had now become the rear ship of the enemy and fired into her. At the same time the 'Cornwall,' which was toiling slowly in pursuit, did the same. "Observing the Admiral's second disabled (who struck once before), I run up alongside of her with intentions to board her,

when she struck and called out for quarters." Knowles and Captain Innes each claimed that she struck to his own ship a claim on the Admiral's part which was strongly resented by the Captain of the 'Warwick,' who made trenchant remarks in his Journal, shewing considerable animus against his Commander-in-Chief, and saying that the Admiral concluded his share of the engagement by laying to and exchanging the prisoners of the 'Warwick's' prize. Knowles's claim to the capture of the 'Conquistador' was sustained by Brodie, who recorded in his Journal, "5.30. The Admiral bore down to the 'Conquistador' (which had previously struck to the 'Strafford') and took her." Knowles, in his charges against Captain Innes, made the following statement regarding the latter's claim: "When Captain Innes came on board the 'Cornwall' and said it was he that made the 'Conquistador' strike, I bid him ask the Spanish Captain of her then present, who it was he struck to, who told him he would have fought him at that distance which he engaged for two years (if he had ammunition) for he was sure they would have killed more fish than me."

The 'Conquistador' having struck, Knowles sent orders to the 'Warwick' to pursue the enemy, who were now flying. The situation of affairs at about this time between 5.30 and 6 P.M. was as follows. The 'Tilbury' and 'Oxford' were engaging the 'Invencible' and 'Galga' at a range, which though fairly close was not such as to satisfy Knowles, who had sent his flag captain on board at about 5 ordering her to engage yard arm to yard arm. When the 'Oxford' came up to second her the Spaniard was seconded by the 'Galga,' but, as in the 'Tilbury's' case, Knowles was not convinced that the 'Oxford' was doing as much as she ought and he signalled her to come to a closer engagement. Captain Toll was subsequently tried for his conduct. The court found that "It does appear that in the situation of the Tilbury, Invencible and Galga, when the Oxford got up into the van, if Captain Toll had placed his ship on the Tilbury's lee quarter instead of astern he would have been in a better situation to annoy the Invencible and Galga." Toll's conduct was attributed at his court martial to an error of judgment, and he was reprimanded only a verdict and sentence which are extremely lenient, and compare unfavourably with those of the court which tried Captain Fox after Hawke's action.

Astern of the 'Tilbury' and 'Oxford,' and separated from them by some distance, the 'Canterbury' was engaging the 'Africa,' which she had gone down to attack after the 'Conquistador' had first struck. The 'Africa' had been driven out of the line by Knowles and was supported by the 'Dragon' and 'Nueva España,' which in their turn were being engaged by the 'Canterbury' and 'Lenox.' The 'Real Familia' had hauled away in consequence of the combined fire of the ships of the British rear as they came up, and the 'Warwick' was still lying near the 'Conquistador.' Knowles had ordered her to join the pursuit of the flying enemy, but Innes did not hasten to obey the order, and though he made sail to follow them he might have made more.

A running action now continued into the night. The 'Warwick' followed the 'Strafford' and 'Canterbury,' which stuck to the Spanish flagship, shot away her main and mizen masts and battered her severely. The British ships also suffered considerably aloft, and when the 'Africa' lost her way, the 'Strafford,' unable to bring to through having all her braces and bowlines cut, shot ahead "contrary to our inclinations," as Brodie wrote. About 10 at night the British ships found themselves close upon a lee shore; so, having rove some new gear, they went about and stood to seaward to rejoin the flag. The 'Tilbury' and 'Oxford' had followed the 'Invencible,' a ship whose stout sides enabled her to stand much battering. By 9 at night the Spaniard appeared to be silenced, and the 'Tilbury,' then much damaged aloft, was somewhat astern. The 'Oxford' moved up and gave her another

Battle of Tortuga Banks

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Diagram 5

Positions 5:30 - 6 p.m.

○ English

● Spanish

Conquistador ● Cornwall

Warwick ○

Real Familia ●

Nueva-España ●

Dragon ● Lenox ○

África ● Canterbury ○

Strafford ○

Oxford ○

Tilbury ○

Galga ● Invincible ●



British with orders to close yard-arm to yard-arm.
Spanish out-sail them.



broadside which was not returned, and she was about to repeat it and call upon the 'Invencible' to surrender when a fire broke out in her gun room where some loose powder was lying. Confusion followed. The 'Invencible' observing it rallied, poured in a broadside and a smart fire of small arms, and made off to the westward. From Captain Toll's account of the affair, the 'Tilbury,' from the time he joined her till the escape of the enemy, conducted herself indifferently.

The squadron began to rejoin Knowles in the morning. The 'Strafford' and 'Canterbury' brought him the news that the 'Africa' was dismantled close in shore, but in such a situation that without pilots it was difficult to attack her. Knowles, having repaired his damages, went himself early next morning to endeavour to take or burn her. She was found lying at anchor, her masts gone, in a small bay about 25 miles to the eastward of Havana. When the English ships were seen coming in, her crew deserted their ship and set her on fire.

Having seen the Spanish flagship blow up Knowles stood away to Havana to land his prisoners. Here he learned that the remaining four Spanish ships had got into harbour; greatly disabled, the 'Invencible' in particular being reduced to a wreck. As the British ships lay off Havana that afternoon a Spanish sloop came into the squadron and gave Knowles the news that the preliminaries of peace had been signed, and that hostilities were at an end. Knowles sent an officer into the harbour with a flag of truce and received confirmation of the report in a letter from the Governor of Havana.

Spanish casualties were 87 sailors and 11 senior officers killed. 200 men were wounded. The British lost 59 killed and 120 wounded.

[An alternative account says Knowles maintained his cruise, hoping to find the flota, until an 'advice boat' from Spain fell into his clutches. On board were documents signifying the end of the war.]

Though the news was only of the preliminary signing, Knowles stood his forces down and returned to Jamaica. The Spanish began slowly to send their troops and ships back to Europe. After ten years, the war was finally over.

[Characteristically, Knowles brought the captain of the Lenox to trial for abandoning his convoy, despite the fact that it was that action that brought on the battle. Knowles himself was then tried for negligence in not fighting his squadron properly! The captain was acquitted and Knowles was reprimanded. He continued his career, however, and wound up as a Russian admiral.]

Don Andrés Reggio y Brachiforte (1692-1780)

Born in Palermo, Sicily, Reggio first saw service during the War of the Quadruple Alliance, fighting for the King of Spain in the Sardinian campaign and at the Battle of Cape Passaro.

In 1720 he participated in the relief of Ceuta (besieged by the Berbers) before transferring to the West Indies, where he commanded the galleon fleet. In 1732 Reggio assisted at the capture of Oran, and in 1733 the taking of Naples. From then until the outbreak of the *Asiento* war he served as commander of the El Ferrol Squadron.

Reggio was sent to La Habana in 1739, nominally in charge of naval forces in the theatre, but actually subordinate to first de Lezo and then de Torres; he spent much of his time improving Cuba's defences. In 1744 he took over officially from de Torres.

After the war, Reggio returned to Spain. Court-martialled for his 'defeat' at the Tortuga Banks (on 30 counts), he was exonerated

by King Ferdinand VI, and praised for his efforts. In 1749 he was made Captain General of the Navy, remaining in that post until his death.

VICTORY?

The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (18th October 1748) satisfied no one. France was forced to hand back all her gains in the Low Countries, plus Madras in India. In compensation she reacquired Louisburg in Nova Scotia. This annoyed the American colonists.

The British and Spanish accused each other of violating the peace. The Battle of Havana was fought seven months after the preliminary peace agreement made in the spring; the grace period was only six months. Britain in particular pointed out that Reggio had made no attempt to attack their convoys *during* the war, but once it was over, that was the first thing he tried to do! The Spanish said Knowles should have stood down once he received the notice of peace with France. The wrangling continued into the 1750s.

Both the Spanish and the British could claim some measure of victory, though at the time, it seemed no one had really won. Spain neither regained Minorca nor Gibraltar. The *Asiento* and the Annual Ship were not cancelled, but renewed. The contract would last until 1751, when the British were bought out by a payment of £100,000.

The British had failed abysmally to make any new conquests of Spanish territory that could be developed or traded off. The various sums owed by the SSC and the Spanish were buried in the general costs of the war. Britain's official *causis belli* – freedom of navigation – was not even mentioned in the treaty.

In overall terms the price paid in lost shipping by either side just about balanced out.

Spain could claim the maintenance of her territorial integrity as a victory, by the rules of dynastic warfare that she was accustomed to. She had defeated England at Cartagena, San Agustín, Santiago, and in Venezuela. Only the 'surprise attack' on Portobelo had succeeded. Furthermore, Britain had not prevented her from maintaining her armies in Europe; the silver had continued to flow, albeit intermittently. By the rules of European warfare, this was a great success.

And yet, the balance of naval power had definitely shifted in Britain's favour. Britain's navy had grown while both her Bourbon opponents' had shrunk. Critically, she was still able to crew sufficient capital ships and cruisers, while her enemies were not.

Furthermore, the economy of the New World had become even more dependent on British goods. The Spanish had been unable to supply their colonies with the most basic of commodities, although there was no blockade upon any of the ports for more than a couple of days at a time. Their enemy had actually supported the economy of New Spain during the war. The Spanish simply could not afford an empire any more.

There was one other, rather dull item, that would have significant impact on the next conflict. During the war, the bulk of *all* shipping, enemy as well as friendly or neutral, was insured through Lloyd's of London. In other words, the British financed the naval war for both sides! Only in 1748 did Parliament pass an act forbidding the insuring of enemy merchant ships. Next time, losses to their merchant marine would truly cripple the Bourbon war effort.

APPENDIX A: CARACAS COMPANY VESSELS, BY YEAR

The Company listed their ships as navios (ships – similar to ‘East Indiamen’ – typically of 50 guns), fragatas (frigates – usually 20-30 guns) and paquebotes (sloops or ‘packets’)

Navios (#)

1739 (4): Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #1, San Ignacio de Loyola, San José #1, Santa Ana #1

1740 (4): Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #1, San Ignacio de Loyola, San José #1 (wrecked), Santa Ana #1

1741 (3): Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #1, San Ignacio de Loyola, Santa Ana #1

1742 (6): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #1, San Ignacio de Loyola (wrecked), San José #3, Santa Ana #1, San José #2

1743 (5): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #1, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3, Santa Ana #1

1744 (3): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3

1745 (4): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3, Santa Ana #2

1746 (4): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3, Santa Ana #2

1747 (4): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3, Santa Ana #2

1748 (4): El Guipuzcoana (Nuestr’ Señora de la Asunción) – Flagship of 64 guns, Nuestr’ Señora del Coro #2, San José #3, Santa Ana #2

Fragata (#)

1739 (5): El Júpiter, El Santiaguillo (Santiago), La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Sebastian

1740 (6): El Harrison-La Vizzara (Santiago), El Júpiter, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1

1741 (9): El Harrison-La Vizzara (Santiago), El Jasón, El Júpiter, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Antonio de Padua, San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1

1742 (13): El Harrison-La Vizzara (Santiago), El Hércules, El Jasón, El Júpiter, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Presa (San Francisco-Xavier), La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), Neptuno (Santa Bárbara), San Antonio de Padua, San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1

1743 (16): El Hércules, El Jasón, El Júpiter, La Amable Julie, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Hermiona, La Presa (San Francisco-Xavier), La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), Neptuno (Santa Bárbara), San Antonio de Padua, San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1, San Vicente Ferrer (La Sirena), Santa Teresa de Jesus y las Animas

1744 (15): El Júpiter, La Amable Julie, La Chata (Santiago), La Concordia, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Sirena, La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), Neptuno (Santa Bárbara), San Antonio de Padua, San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1, San Vicente Ferrer (La Sirena), Santa Teresa de Jesus y las Animas

1745 (11): La Concordia, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Sirena, La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), Neptuno (Santa Bárbara), San Antonio de Padua, San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1, Santa Teresa de Jesus

1746 (9): La Concordia, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Sirena, La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1, Santa Teresa de Jesus

1747 (9): La Concordia, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Sirena, La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Joaquin, San Sebastian, San Vicente Ferrer #1, Santa Teresa de Jesus

1748 (8): La Concordia, La Felicidad, La Galera Guipuzcoana (Santa Bárbara), La Sirena, La Susana (Nuestr’ Señora de los Dolores), San Joaquin, San Sebastian, Santa Teresa de Jesus

Paquebotes (#)

1739 (1): El Réal de Portobelo

1740 (2): El Réal de Portobelo, San Francisco-Xavier

1741 (3): El Réal de Portobelo, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Francisco-Xavier

1742 (4): El Réal de Portobelo, Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1743 (4): El Réal de Portobelo (sunk), Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1744 (3): Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1745 (3): Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1746 (3): Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1747 (3): Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

1748 (3): Nuestr’ Señora de Aránzazu, Nuestr’ Señora de Soledad, San Vicente Ferrer #2

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<http://threedecks.org/index.php>

A Spanish site of similar quality is:

<http://www.todoababor.es/listado/index.htm>

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The cover illustration shows Captain Robert Jenkins exhibiting his ear to the authorities in a rather informal setting, while the Spanish ambassador is driven forth, the document he has brought is burned, and one of the company is paying his attentions to a lady rather than attending to business.

Commentary by Ian Weir & David Hughes, with assistance from Albert C.E. Parker. Maps by Paul Dangel.

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