Protagonists of War
Fagel, Raymond

Published by Leuven University Press

Fagel, Raymond.
Protagonists of War: Spanish Army Commanders and the Revolt in the Low Countries.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/95088

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3033426
Chapter II
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

A Spanish hero

Within Spain, Sancho Dávila (sometimes written as D’Avila) is undoubtedly the most famous military commander of the first phase of the Revolt, and perhaps even of the whole early modern history of the Spanish army. His fame started with the very positive judgement offered by the Duke of Alba and his secretary, Juan de Albornoz, in his own time: “without downplaying anybody, he is the best soldier His Majesty has in his service”.

1 A first biography of Sancho was published as early as 1713, written by his direct descendant, Gerónimo Manuel Dávila y San Vitores. The title of his book, El rayo de la guerra (the Lighting Bolt of the War), acknowledges his fame as an extraordinary military hero. In 1857 another of the commander’s descendants, Manuel Pando Fernández de Pineda, Marquis of Miraflores, and “holder of the house and goods of that famous military leader”, deemed it necessary to write another biography, and this nobleman was also involved in the publication of sources about Sancho in the influential national series Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España. In 2010, finally, a new and annotated biography of the commander was published, this time by a specialist in the history of Ávila, Gonzalo Martín García. In between, historian Enrique Martínez Ruiz published several articles on this commander between 1968 and 1976, while in 2007 he also produced a historical novel with Sancho as its protagonist, to which we shall turn at the end of the chapter.

Sancho’s noble descendants still live on the country estate in the vicinity of Ávila where the commander may have been born, proud of its heritage and cherishing the portraits of their famous ancestor.

1 Albornoz to Gabriel de Zayas, Brussels, 5 August 1571, EA II, 701; Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 23 May 1572; Idem, III, 119; Fagel, ‘Mejor soldado’.
2 Dávila y San-Vitores, Rayo; CD XXX y XXXI; Martín García, Sancho; Martínez Ruiz, ‘Sancho Dávila en las campañas’; Idem, ‘Sancho Dávila y la anexión’; Idem, Castellano; Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida; Martínez Laínez, Ocaso, II, 187-210.
In contrast to this overwhelming attention to Sancho Dávila in Spain, he remains a mere footnote in the history books of the Low Countries and, if mentioned at all, usually solely in relation to the famous Battle of Mookerheyde in 1574 and the infamous Spanish Fury of Antwerp in 1576. There are no specific articles or books published in the Netherlands or Belgium that use Sancho Dávila as their main protagonist. The only Dutch or Belgian biographical dictionary paying attention to him is that of 1852 by Van der Aa, who erroneously has him die during the siege of Maastricht in 1579. As we saw in the previous chapter, he is once mentioned as Sancio in a Beggar’s song, “Sancio, the drummer (trommelslager), who would make them all dance”. The use of just his first name may be considered evidence of his fame in the Low Countries during his lifetime, as was the case with Julián Romero. In general, Dutch anti-Hispanic texts have a tendency to emphasise the low birth of the Spanish commanders but, as we shall see, in the specific case of Sancho this was certainly not true. Interestingly enough, the seventeenth-century play about Julián does describe how this commander started off as the servant of a drummer, showing that rising high from low birth could also be considered very positively.

In this chapter we will try to understand these two diverging historiographical traditions and to connect them as much as possible, looking for a middle ground that gets us as close to Sancho Dávila as possible. We are aided in this task by the availability of a wide array of publications on his life and deeds, and a large body of preserved letters from him, which makes possible a chapter that is built less on chronicles and more on historiography and correspondence than the previous chapter on Julián Romero.

A hero in the family

Nobleman and politician Gerónimo Manuel Dávila y San Vitores stated on the title page of his 1713 biography of the commander that he was Sancho’s great-great-grandson, dedicating his book to King Philip V, a direct descendant of King Philip II through the female line, but above all the first Spanish King from the Bourbon dynasty. In the short preface to the book he explains that he was a servant of the last Habsburg King, Charles II, but now he was poor: “I do not have anything to eat, or

---

3 Van der Lem, *Opstand*, 100.
5 *Nederlandsche geschiedzangen*, II, 205.
anything to do good with”. Using Sancho as the perfect example of a good royal servant he hoped to obtain royal favour from the new Bourbon King, “that Your Majesty makes amends and supports me”. Though the subject of the book is war, the author makes clear he hates “our wars, that have put us into so much danger”, referring to the violent Wars of Spanish Succession between the followers of the Habsburg and Bourbon pretenders (1700-1714). From the licences and privileges we learn that the book was already under official scrutiny from August 1710, but it was three years before the official royal corrector gave his final approval to the edition. By that time the war was coming to a close. In 1710 the outcome of the succession wars was not yet clear, giving Sancho’s biography a role in the complicated political landscape during these chaotic years. Was Gerónimo perhaps changing loyalty at the time and did he need the help of his famous ancestor in order to succeed, or was he merely a poor nobleman trying to survive in dangerous times?

The author also frames his work as destined specifically for Catholic readers, introducing the famous locally born Saint Teresa of Ávila, “my defending counsel and relative” and a declared enemy of heretics. In this way the author connects the wars in which Sancho participated with fighting heresy in general. An engraving of Teresa can be found at the end of the book, balancing the engraving of Sancho at the beginning. In 1713 it was not yet public knowledge that the female patron saint of Spain came from a *converso* family, and the author would probably have omitted this family relationship had he known. Together, Teresa and Sancho symbolise the struggle against heretics, the saint armed with her books and Sancho with his sword. The tone of the whole book is extremely anti-Protestant, always connecting the historical stories about Sancho with the political situation of his own time.

According to Gerónimo, Sancho’s father, Antón Vázquez, had gone to Worms in 1521 to meet Charles V on behalf of the rebellious Castilian Comuneros. In his book Gerónimo tries to defend the Comuneros as people looking for the “good government of these realms”, but he has to admit that the Emperor had him briefly incarcerated. Sancho was born on 21 September 1523 out of Antón’s marriage with Ana Daza. The fact that we actually know his date of birth already shows his relatively

---

6 Dávila y San-Vitore, *Rayo*, dedication.  
7 Saint Teresa was the daughter of Beatriz Dávila y Ahumada.  
9 Dávila y San-Vitore, *Rayo*, 348-349.  
high birth compared to those of commanders like Romero, Valdés and Mondragón. Young Sancho is supposed to have played with wooden swords, and he became angry when they were taken away from him, at least according to a side note in the margin of the book quoting ‘D. Fernando Davila, notice of his father’. However, the son of Antón Vázquez Dávila and Ana Daza, from a gentry family (*hidalgos*), first followed the path of the religious orders until an astrologist in Rome put him onto the military path, at least according to his first biographer. In 1569 Sancho would marry Catalina Gallo, the daughter of Juan López Gallo, Lord of Male, and Catalina Pardo. With Catalina Sancho had a son, Fernando, born in 1570 in the citadel of Antwerp, but she died soon afterwards. According to Gerónimo, Sancho never remarried, “nourished in the war he was holding on his shoulders”. However, we shall see that he did in fact remarry.

His son, Fernando Dávila, would become a page to Philip II, marrying twice in Ávila, first to Teresa de Toledo, with whom he had a young son, Sancho, who died at an early age, and a daughter, Catalina, who entered a convent; and secondly to Luisa de Guevara, with whom he had many children, among them his successor, also named Sancho. This Sancho became a knight of the Order of Alcántara and a governor of the province of Zacatecas in New Spain. In Ávila he married his cousin, Francisca del Peso y Guevara. Their son, again called Sancho, and also a knight of Alcántara, served both Philip IV and Charles II, and married three times. His first marriage was to Francisca de San Vitores from Burgos, who was related through her mother to the famous Maluenda merchant family. Besides the author of the 1713 biography they also had another son called Sancho Joseph, who became a Jesuit, and a son, Antonio, who died a captain during the war of Messina. Gerónimo ends his biography with a long genealogy of all the branches of his family, turning the biography of his most famous ancestor into a family memorial. His uncle on his mother’s side, Diego Luis de San Vitores, the last family member he mentions in his book, was an important but controversial Jesuit missionary in Guam, who died there in 1672.\(^11\)

Using Sancho’s service memorial (‘memorial de sus servicios’), Gerónimo stated that Sancho had been one of the ten Spanish soldiers who crossed the river Elbe in 1547 by swimming with their swords in their mouths, leading up to the famous Battle of Mühlberg.\(^12\) We will later see that an identical story is told about Cristóbal de Mondragón. The same source

\(^{11}\) Risco, *Apostle*.
\(^{12}\) Dávila y San-Vitores, *Rayo*, 5.
puts him in the city of Africa (Mahdia) in 1550 and with the fleet that accompanied Prince Philip to England to marry Queen Mary Tudor. Subsequently, Sancho, by then an infantry captain, served the Duke of Alba during the wars in Italy. We find in this book the complete transcription of the official appointment, dated 15 July 1561. Here the story does not follow a strict chronological line, as the author continues with the disastrous attack on Djerba in 1560, during which Sancho, together with his commander Álvaro de Sande, was supposedly taken prisoner by the Ottomans. We find a wonderful description of this last story in the fourth Turkish letter of the Flemish humanist and ambassador Boesbeeck who became friendly with Álvaro de Sande at the Ottoman court in Istanbul. Boesbeeck took care of the commander’s release, and together they travelled back to Emperor Ferdinand. However, Sancho is never mentioned in the story. Enrique Martínez Ruiz makes both Sancho and Álvaro de Sande row in the Ottoman galleys after their capture, and though not very probable, this detail does make for an interesting orientalist image.

After inspecting the fortresses in Valencia, he was appointed governor of the important Italian castle of Pavia, as evidenced by a document of 24 December 1562. Using the work of Gil González, the biography describes a duel between Sancho and monsieur de Molve, “a knight of disproportionate height”. Molve used a two-handed sword, while Sancho was armed with a simple sword and a shield. Gerónimo still possessed Molve’s arms as evidence of Sancho’s victory, which resulted in Molve’s death. We find a more exaggerated description of this heroic deed in a manual on weaponry:

He gave death to a giant in Moncalvo in single combat, though with unequal arms, as the giant fought with an enormous two-handed sword, and Sancho Dávila with his usual sword and his shield, of which Sancho Dávila came out victorious, like David to Goliath.

---

16 Pando Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 118.
Though clearly Sancho’s first biographer, Gerónimo was not the first family member to take Sancho’s history to the printing press. Somewhere between 1629 and 1637, Sancho’s grandson, Sancho Dávila y Guevara, prepared a printed version of the *Memorial de los servicios del General Sancho Dávila*. He considered that both his grandfather and his father had not been sufficiently rewarded for their services to the crown, and now asked for “the government of New-Biscay, or the government (corregimiento) of Zacatecas, any other government, or a similar function comparable to such important services”. Grandfather Sancho was highly praised as “an oracle” in matters of war and a defender of the faith. In order to achieve its goals, the document offers a series of quotations from letters by Philip II and official dignitaries from between 1568 and 1575, as well as a short paragraph on his earlier deeds, here quoted in full:

> He served in the expedition to Germany, found himself in Africa and in the war in Lombardy. He accompanied Philip II during his journey to England, who gave him the title of captain and he served with him in the wars of Piedmont, Naples and the taking of Africa.

This published memorial may have been the document Gerónimo used in his book, but there is as yet no mention of the Battle of Mühlberg. The memorial shows that the 1713 biography followed up on an earlier printed document, already asking for advancement for the author based on his ancestor’s deeds, and making use of official letters to prove his valour. In 1637 Sancho was indeed appointed the new governor of the rich mining city and region of Zacatecas (Mexico). Being the descendant of a hero was a valuable part of one’s inheritance.

In 1857 Manuel Pando Fernández de Pineda, Marquis of Miraflores (1792-1872) and also a descendant of Sancho, decided to follow the lead with a new biography. This high nobleman was an important royalist and conservative politician, ambassador to Paris, London and Rome, cabinet minister in various governments, and twice even briefly

---

19 Dávila y Guevara, *Memorial*. The document mentions the date of 20 June 1629, but the author is called a knight of the Order of Alcántara and his entry took place only in 1636. In 1637 Sancho was appointed corregidor of Zacatecas, placing the document between 1629 and 1637, but probably closer to the latter year. Muñoz Altea, *Blasones*, 362.

20 The lines quoted here have been erased in the copy of the memorial preserved in the Royal Historical Academy of Spain, together with the erroneous changing of grandson in the title to great-grandson.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

Prime Minister of Spain.\(^{21}\) In 1850 he had become a member of the Real Academia de la Historia. In his introduction the author highlights an interesting combination of three important developments from the sixteenth century: religious reform, the Jesuits and communism. Before the sixteenth century there was “a clear supremacy in the hands of kings”, but then a new society, defined by the “disturbing flag of free choice”, had come into being.\(^{22}\) The aristocratic author pleads for a larger place in society for the Jesuits as “a useful means for a prudent and wise religious and conservative restoration, so needed in the world, fortifying the few solid elements the states possess to fight the threatening monster of socialism”.\(^{23}\) Thomas More was a socialist, and as far as anabaptism was concerned it was nothing more than “communism lifted to the level of religion”.\(^{24}\) The fight against heresy addressed in Gerónimo’s book in 1713 was continued by Don Manuel in 1857, albeit with the Jesuits and not Saint Teresa of Ávila as religious champions.

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution are both explained by the author through this growing influence of communism. The Paris revolution of 1848 figures, of course, as the worst moment in history: “really mournful was the spectacle that France presented in 1848”.\(^{25}\) The anti-revolutionary aristocrat wished to demonstrate the sterility of revolutions in history, turning the directly following biography on Sancho Dávila and his activities during the Revolt in the Low Countries into an exemplary story of the continuing struggle against communism by a defender of the old order. However, it is important to remark that the Marquis had in his youth fought against the domination of the French imperial forces in Spain and had been both a refugee in and an ambassador to Paris. It takes the Marquis almost a hundred pages to start the actual biography of his ancestor. On the period up to Sancho’s departure to the Low Countries no new information is offered compared to Gerónimo’s in 1713, and he attempts to hide Sancho’s father’s Comunero past, instead highlighting that Sancho’s father had served the king against the French at Fuenterrabía in 1521.\(^{26}\)

---

\(^{21}\) Valle de Juan, ‘Manuel Pando’; Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida política* (1865).

\(^{22}\) Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 7-9.

\(^{23}\) Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 54.

\(^{24}\) Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 62-63.

\(^{25}\) Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 92.

\(^{26}\) Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 97-98.
The 2010 biography, on the other hand, calls Sancho the son of a Comunero immediately on the first page of the presentation by the provincial president of Ávila, and their revolt makes up one of the nine chapters of the book.\textsuperscript{27} In twenty-first-century Castile, Comuneros are regarded more as patriots \textit{avant la lettre} than as rebels.\textsuperscript{28} The commemoration of the defeat of the Comuneros at Vilallar on 23 April 1521 has since 1986 even become the national holiday of the autonomous Spanish region of Castilla y León. With the information from this new biography we get a better grasp on the family of the future commander. The marriage of Antón Vázquez Dávila and Ana Daza produced three children: Beatriz, who became a nun, Tomás and Sancho. In 1534 Charles V stayed in Ávila for five days, and this visit may have had an influence on young Tomás and Sancho. Their father died in the 1530s, but we may presume that by that time Sancho had heard his father’s stories of his two important journeys to the Low Countries in 1517 and 1521. Little would he have known that he would go there himself in 1559 and again in 1567. After his father’s death, his mother looked for support from her uncle, Pedro Daza, the important arch-dean of the cathedral. Sancho’s brother Tomás would participate in the failed 1541 expedition to Algiers, and a few years later Sancho probably went to Rome, although the 1713 biography is the only evidence of the astrologist’s prophecy turning a man of the cloth into a soldier.\textsuperscript{29} If so, did Sancho indeed at first follow a clerical career because of his influential uncle, or did he possess a religious vocation which may have influenced his outlook on Protestantism in later days?

**An international soldier (1554-1567)**

Sancho’s first moment of fame – if we leave out the duel with the giant – is the crossing of the river Elbe as one of ten Spanish arquebusiers who swam the span. His 1713 biographer Gerónimo was sure his forefather had been one of them, and the 2010 biographer follows this lead: “It is possible. We do not have data or motives to doubt the truthfulness of the information”.\textsuperscript{30} However, the most recent biographer is mistaken. The fact that the same story has also been fabricated around Cristóbal de Mondragón makes it already less probable, but neither man is mentioned.

\textsuperscript{27} Martín García, \textit{Sancho}, 7.
\textsuperscript{28} Martín García, \textit{Sancho}, 37-41.
\textsuperscript{29} Martín García, \textit{Sancho}, 47, makes use of the preserved testament of Ana Daza. Idem, 64, 69-70, 73-74.
\textsuperscript{30} Martín García, \textit{Sancho}, 84.
in a chronicle written by a witness to the events who lists all the eleven (!) Spaniards who actually performed the hazardous crossing. This shows that biographers have a tendency to enrich the unknown part of their protagonists’ life with heroic moments.

In the case of Sancho Dávila this means that we do not have any reliable evidence of his presence during the wars in Germany, and considering the fact that the first Italian period is also solely based on one quotation from Gerónimo in 1713, we are left completely without reliable evidence about his military life for this early period. What to do with the 2010 affirmation that Sancho in Germany “participated in many skirmishes, ambushes and surprise actions ordered by the Duke [of Alba?]”? Apart from Gerónimo’s biography we have only a short description by Antonio de Cianca, and this might well have been a main source for the biographer:

One of the valiant and prudent soldiers that the Spanish nation has had, as is well proven by his deeds and exploits, from the war Emperor Charles V, our lord of good memory, fought against the rebel princes and their allies in Germany, where he became a soldier, and afterwards in the conquest and the destruction of the city of Africa, and from there to the wars in Lombardy, Piedmont and the Roman countryside, where he became a captain of Spanish infantry.

The next military stop in the 1713 biography was the expedition to the city of Africa (Mahdia). And, again, the 2010 biography does not offer any additional documentation. Of course, Gerónimo was his descendant and he quotes a memorial of his services, but the fact that the Mühlberg story does not hold good makes us wonder about all the other information on Sancho’s early career. This reservation also extends to his participation in Philip II’s journey to England in 1554. This last unproven fact coincides with the theatre play on Romero in which – and once more unproven – he was said to have participated in the English journey. It seems that Philip II’s English expedition was another good story to use both in memorials and plays.

31 Bernabé del Busto, ‘Quadernos’; Idem, Geschichte, 179.
32 Martín García, Sancho, 83.
33 Cianca, Historia book III, 40.
34 The soldiers in the fleet did not disembark in England, but went straight back. Martínez Ruiz, ‘Sancho’, 646.
The first documentary proof Martín García provides dates from 1559, when the Duke of Alba recommended Sancho Dávila to Philip II:

[... ] Captain Sancho Dávila, carrier of this letter, has served Your Majesty for many years in all the journeys that have presented themselves, and, as from five years, with an infantry company, proving himself as a good soldier on the occasions that have arisen [...].

The letter proves that he was an infantry captain from around 1554, at that time under Maestre de campo Sancho de Londoño of the tercio of Lombardy, and that he had been fighting in many other expeditions before that date. As Philip II lived at the time in the Low Countries, Sancho must have travelled there in 1559. But the document does not place him directly at famous historical events like those in Mühldorf, Africa and England. And we must also question his presence in Djerba, as even here his last biographer is quite negative:

However, it is not clear that Sancho Dávila was at Djerba [los Djelves] nor that he was one of the captured men. This is only affirmed by Gerónimo Dávila, who is always inclined to sing the praises of his ancestor, and by father Juan de Mariana in his Historia General de España. And we do not have any other source of information that can prove this.

After Alba’s letter from 1559, the next piece of documentary evidence can be found in a royal letter from June 1561, with Philip II already back in Spain. The letter proves that Dávila had been serving with his company in Naples during the government of the Duke of Alba in Italy. There is nothing to be found on Djerba. In June 1561 Sancho was probably in Spain, as Martín García has found him present at a procession in April of that year in his home town. He may have used his stay to secure payment of his wages at court. According to seventeenth-century local historian

35 ‘El capitán Sancho Dávila, llevador desta, ha servido a Vuestra Magestad muchos años en todas las jornadas que se han ofrescido y, de cinco acá, con una compañía de infantería y señalándose como buen soldado en las ocasiones que han ocurrido [...]. Alba to Philip II, Milan, 10 May 1559, AGS, E. 1210, quoted in Martín García, Sancho, 81.
36 Martín García, Sancho, 91; Juan de Mariana, ‘Historia general’, II, 394.
37 Philip II to the Marquis of Pescara, Madrid, June 1561, AGS, E. 1212, quoted by Martín García, Sancho, 90.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

González Dávila, he had returned to Spain, having “decided to lay down his arms”, but at court the Duke of Alba convinced him “to return to [military] service”.38 The next document is his new appointment to infantry captain of 15 July 1561, already published in full by Gerónimo in 1713. He was to earn 50,000 maravedís a year.39

In this new office Sancho’s first task was the control of the fortresses on the Valencian coast and the construction of a new fortress in Bernia, a task comparable to Julián Romero working on Ibiza during those same years. We know of these activities from letters written by Sancho to the Duke of Alba in 1562.40 For the first time we hear from Sancho directly, making it possible to offer a better picture of his career from this moment onwards. For the period up to 1562, the first almost forty years of his life, we have nothing but second-hand stories and a few scattered pieces of documentary evidence that have been preserved. The history of this early period was fabricated mainly after he had become an important military commander. Connecting him to important events in history including royal visits and crucial heroic battles may have been part of the myth-making process of a military hero. In part the same process took place around Julián Romero. However, in both cases it seems probable that they had acquired experience both in Italy and the northern territories of the Habsburgs.

After asking the Duke of Alba for a new posting in a letter from June 1562, he was nominated as the new governor of the fortress of Pavia, a wonderful promotion, most surely the result of the Duke’s protection. On 17 February 1563 Sancho was back in Madrid where he swore an oath as an infantry captain, before travelling to Italy to occupy his post.41 In 1566 his cousin, Rodrigo Orejón, became his lieutenant in the fortress, and he stayed there quietly for a few years between 1563 and 1567. Martín García found only one letter that showed some tension when the city guards and the soldiers from the castle had been fighting, using arquebuses and pistols. In October 1566 he informed the Duke of Alba that he was bored and begged for action:

> When Your Excellency favoured me by giving me the government of this castle of Pavia, I did not think this was to stay behind,

41 CD XXX, 433-435; CD XXXI, 15-18; Martín García, *Sancho*, 103-104; AGS, E. 1130, 93.
but I saw it as an intermediate period until an opportunity or journey presented itself in which I could be employed similar to my services, as these have always been, thank God, with so much caution as suits a soldier worthy to be called a servant [criado] of Your Excellency.42

Sancho wanted to join the Duke of Alba on the expedition he was preparing:

This has made me dare to ask Your Excellency, understanding that there will be a journey on which Your Grace will go, to employ me in his service and go with him, as the whole world understands that I am a servant [criado] of Your Excellency and it would give me great shame if I were to remain stuck over here.43

We hear the voice of a commander who wants to be part of the action. Until then his career had been successful but not extraordinary, he having become an infantry captain around the age of thirty and having got his tenure as governor of an important fortress in Italy when he was not even forty. But still, until then there had not been much evidence to suggest that he would become a famous early modern military commander, least of all a national hero. Brantôme wrote that people were surprised that the Duke took Dávila with him as he was not yet considered an important captain.44 When looking back at his departure in 1567 for the Low Countries, he was described by the famous poet, Pedro de Padilla, in 1583 as “a highly esteemed man, fortunate and valiant”.45 Baltasar Vargas, who published his Breve relación en octava rima on Alba’s journey

42 ‘Quando Vuestra Excelencia me hizo merced en que se me diese la tenencia deste castillo de Pavia no pensé yo que fuera para quedar atrasado sino en un ínterin (hasta) que se ofreciese ocasión o jornada en que poder ser empleado conforme a mis servicios, questos an sido siempre, bendito Dios, con tanto cuidado como conviene a un soldado que se piensa valer en ser llamado criado de Vuestra Excelencia’. Dávila to Alba, Pavia, 24 October 1566, AA, 433/24, quoted in Martín García, Sancho, 106.

43 ‘Esto me a atrevido a significar a Vuestra Excelencia, entendiendo que se haze jornada en que Su Merced va, para que me empee en que yo pueda servir y pasar adelante, pues todo el mundo entiende ser yo criado de Vuestra Excelencia y es me gran verguënça quedarme aquí estancado’. Idem. According to Maltby, Alba did not accept to go to the Low Countries until 29 November. Maltby, Alba, 134.

44 Brantôme, Oeuvres completes, I, 150-151; Cornejo, Sumario, 103.

45 ‘Hombre de muy grande estima, dichoso como esforçado’. Padilla, Romancero, 31. The original was published in Madrid in 1583.
to the Low Countries in Antwerp in 1568, in his epic poem called him a good soldier, “always loved by the general [Alba]”\textsuperscript{46}.

\textbf{Battling against the rebels (1568)}

The Duke of Alba asked Sancho to raise a company of light cavalry that could serve as his personal guard, and it was in this capacity that he left Italy for the Low Countries in 1567, with one hundred lancers and fifty men armed with arquebuses. We can presume Sancho stayed close to Alba during these first years, in part because we do not have any correspondence between Sancho and the Duke until 1569. His company was at first lodged in a village five miles outside Brussels, as in general cavalry regiments remained in the countryside for reasons of provision and accommodation.\textsuperscript{47}

The first episode Sancho played a part in concerns the imprisonment of the Count of Egmont on 9 September 1567, very shortly after the arrival of Alba and his troops in Brussels. It is one of the most dramatic moments in the early history of the Revolt. Egmont was invited to Alba’s residence to discuss the defence works of Thionville and Luxembourg with other noblemen, but then at the end of the meeting Sancho Dávila told Egmont very politely to hand him his sword and he was then taken prisoner. However, in Hogenberg’s engraving of the event it seems that Alba approached Egmont himself.\textsuperscript{48} Chronicler Mendoza tells that Alba:

\begin{quote}
had ordered that the Count of Egmont and the Count of Horne were to leave through two different doors; at one door there was Sancho Dávila, captain of the Duke’s guards, with orders to apprehend the Count of Egmont, and at the other door captain Jerónimo de Salinas, governor and castellano of Puerto Herculis, to apprehend the Count of Horne.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Hooft, of course, made the most of this dramatic moment:

\begin{quote}
And then, with the closure of the meeting, Egmont, leaving the room, was told that the Prior [Fernando de Toledo] was waiting for him to continue the game. Then he turned around through a
\end{quote}

\\textsuperscript{46} ‘Siempre del general [Alba] ha sido amado’. Vargas, \textit{Breve relación}, 68.
\textsuperscript{47} Martín García, \textit{Sancho}, 115; Dávila to Alborno, Milan, 23 May 1567, AA, 433/26; CD XXX, 435-436.
\textsuperscript{48} Vandormael and Goosens, \textit{Slachtoffer}, 146-148; CP, I, 573; Nievas Rojas, ‘Nuevos datos’.
\textsuperscript{49} Mendoza, \textit{Comentarios} (1948), 408.
certain room, where he was met by Sancho Dávila, who, as captain of the ducal guard, and by order of the King, took away his weapon, taking him prisoner. The count, not understanding what was happening to him, wanted everything that was said repeated. Then, finding it hard to separate himself from his sword, he stated that it had so often loyally served the King. However, he had to hand it in and remain there, complaining about the force and violence used, and referring to the freedom of the Order [Golden Fleece] and the laws of the country, stating that he did not need to remain. However, the Spaniard’s ears remained deaf to his complaints.\(^{50}\)

In a letter written from Brussels and sent on 11 September we find another description of the event that had taken place only two days earlier:

When they were all standing, they said to Egmont that the Prior [Fernando de Toledo] had asked if he wanted to play piquet, and going towards the room of the Prior, Sancho Dávila, the captain of the guards of Your Excellency, approached him, telling him that he was arrested by His Majesty and that he had to enter the room. On entering, he told him to hand over his sword, which he did much against his will, saying that with it he had always served Your Majesty, defending these lands.\(^{51}\)

The story we find in Hooft’s history reflects the same dialogue as the Spanish letter written only two days after the event. An interesting new detail is the name of the game they were presumably going to play, ‘los cientos’, also called piquet, a fashionable card game of probably Spanish origin that had reached England in 1554 with the wedding of Philip II and Mary Tudor, and that can already be found in Rabelais’ work.\(^{52}\)

Sancho would in 1568 be involved in various battles and skirmishes, including three major battles: the Battle of Dahlem, the Battle of Jemmingen and the Battle of the river Gete. He would also be hurt in

\(^{50}\) Hooft, Historiën (1972), 163.

\(^{51}\) ‘Y así estando todos en pie dixieron al de Agamon que el prior [Fernando de Toledo] dezia si queria jugar a los çientos y yendo así al aposento del prior llego a el Sancho Dabila capitán de la guardíãa de Su Excelencia diziendo que fuese preso por su Magestad y que entrase a aquel aposento y al entrar del le dixo y dexè la espada, la qual se le hizo muy mal de dexar diziendo que con ella abia servido sienpre a su Magestad y defendido estos estados’. Ochoa de Arizpe to Pedro de Acuña, Brussels, 11 September 1567, RBM, Gondomar Collection, II, 2212, doc. 6.

one of the lesser battles taking place between the armies of William of Orange and the Duke of Alba.

We find Sancho with his guards at Maastricht on 23 April 1568, and in the following days he was involved in the fighting near Roermond under Maestre de campo Sancho de Londoño. In Londoño’s description of the events, Dávila clearly stood out, together with some others like Francisco de Valdés. Near Dahlem he attacked the enemy, “and though the country was filled with fences, ditches and woodland, Sancho’s attack made their cavalry abandon the battle and start running”. Alba sent Londoño’s letter with one of his own to Philip II, and the King congratulated Sancho on his brave behaviour, writing, “I will keep this in mind for when the occasion comes to reward you”. This important letter containing a royal promise was preserved in the family archive.

In another letter, to paymaster Castellanos in Antwerp, written in June 1568 while the promised royal reward had not yet arrived, Sancho spoke of “the success that God has given to me in Dahlem against those heretics and rebels”, further emphasising the fact that he had not received royal rewards for the last twenty-five years. Sancho was ordered by Alba to take the most important prisoners to Brussels, but he had to hang all others in the vicinity of Maastricht, gruesome details that show the harshness of early modern warfare.

He would also be present at the Battle of Jemmingen on 21 July of that same year, together with other Spanish army commanders like Julián Romero. And again he could be found among those who had done particularly well “up front only he [Lope de Figueroa] and Sancho Dávila, who were in the vanguard of all the army”. As in Dahlem, the

53 Londoño to the Duke of Alburquerque, Roermond, 26 April 1568, CD XXX, 438-443; Idem, CD XXXVII, 234-239; Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 29 April 1568, CD XXXVII, 240-244; Alba to Alburquerque, 3 May 1568, EA I; Philip II to Dávila, Aranjuez, 22 May 1568, Martín García, Sancho, 127; Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 128-129; Dávila y San Vitores, Rayo, 39; Dávila y Guevara, Memorial. In a letter from Philip II to Alba (minuta) Philip ordered Alba to congratulate Londoño, Count Heberstein, and Dávila ‘De lo bien que se hubieron aquel día’. Philip II to Alba, Aranjuez, 23 May 1568, CD XXXVII, 261-262.

54 ‘El subceso que Dios fue servido de darme en Dalem contra aquellos herejes y rebeldes de Su Magestad’. Dávila to Castellanos, Brussels, 21 June 1568, BL, Add. 28.386, f. 152.

55 Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 10 May 1568, CD XXXVII, 249-250. See on Sancho’s actions at Roermond and Dahlem Padilla, Romancero, 37-38.

enemy ran away and many were killed. And, again, a victory was a good moment for Sancho to ask for rewards. Again he spoke of a large victory given to them by God. About his own activities at Jemmingen he was rather modest: “I only shall say that I did in this day like in all others where I have participated, as much as possible”. However, and probably supported by the victory at Dahlem, he was less modest about deserving a good reward: “a reward worthy of my services, that if I was not confident that I really deserved it, I would not dare to put it in this way”.  

Bernardino de Mendoza’s chronicle also shows Sancho as the most active commander at Dahlem and describes how he had the honour of taking the most important prisoners to Brussels. Just before the Battle of Jemmingen, Sancho caught up with some enemies, “taking one with his own hands”. However, his further role during the battle was minimal. During the Battle of the river Gete on 20 October he is mentioned as leading four hundred cavalry, but nothing more is said of him. It is surprising that this last battle is little known in the historical literature of the Low Countries, though Mendoza claims that some three thousand enemies were killed, counted by the villagers that had buried them. Chronicler Antonio Trillo also highlights Sancho’s cavalry attack at Dahlem, but leaves him out of the stories of Jemmingen and the river Gete.

Another Spanish chronicler, Pedro Cornejo, turned Sancho into the great hero of Dahlem, and even as one of the main heroes of his book:

This was the first time Sancho’s valour was made known in these states, for his qualities as a commander and for his spirit, courage and his fortune in fighting and defeating the enemy, elements that in our days very seldom are found together in one man, but all came together in this knight, as you shall see in the continuation of this history.

Dutch Protestant historian Emanuel van Meteren mentions Sancho as leading commander at Dahlem, but clearly does not see him as a hero; “continuing his victory he did a lot of evil in the land of Julich and its vicinity”. Van Meteren tells that just before the Battle of Jemmingen Sancho went on a reconnaissance mission with thirty horsemen and later on he engaged in combat with Louis of Nassau and his army,

---

57 ‘Solo dire que yo he hecho en esta jornada, como en las demas donde me he hallado, quanto me ha sido possible’; ‘La que mis servicios mereçen, que sino estuviese confiado de que la tengo muy mereçida no me atreveria a representallo desta suerte’. Dávila to Alba [?], Hieme [?], 23 July 1568. BL, Add. 28.386, f. 162.
58 Mendoza, Comentarios (1948), 411-413, 423-427, 436.
59 Trillo, Historia, 60-61.
60 Cornejo, Sumario, 113; Ulloa, Comentarios, 19r, 33v.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

commanding 1,400 horsemen.  

Historian P. C. Hooft also mentions Sancho at Dahlem as one of two outstanding commanders and states how they captured the Lords of both Villers and Huy, who were then taken to Brussels. At Jemmingen, Hooft mentions Sancho but clearly gives prominence to Julián Romero, while at the Battle of the river Geete he is not mentioned at all.  

There is a clear difference in his importance and role during these three main battles, depending on the sources. The Spanish letters and accounts from 1568 place him in a prominent light, while some of the Spanish chroniclers pay less attention to him, as a secondary figure, and the Dutch even less. However, the hero of Dahlem is one of the favourite soldiers of chronicler Pedro Cornejo, publishing between the events themselves and the chronicles of Mendoza and Trillo. It proves that his fame as a good commander of horsemen on the field of battle was constructed during this year. In an account of all the Spaniards who had served well during this first campaign he was, strangely enough, mentioned for his participation at Jemmingen, and not for the victory at Dahlem. 

Following Orange’s army in the direction of France, Sancho stayed with the Duke of Alba’s army. Near Binche the troops engaged by the end of 1568 with some of the enemy infantry, “whom they slaughtered close to a village, although not without danger for captain Sancho Dávila, who was hurt in his thigh by a halberd”. According to the Marquis of Miraflores, after having “his thigh pierced by a halberd and his face splashed with his own blood” he shouted to his soldiers, “this blood that stains my face is blood that bleeds from my own face because of the shame of seeing you flee”. In the 1713 biography we already find the same story with beside it in the margin “noticias de su padre”, indicating that this was perhaps a family story that was passed down from generation to generation. 

While chronicler Bernardino de Mendoza does not make much of the encounter in which Sancho received his wound, there is a different version of this story that has turned the event into a real battle. The ‘Battle of Le Quesnoy (1568)’ has its own page on Wikipedia in which Sancho

---

61 Van Meteren, Belgische ofte Nederlandsche historie (1599), 42r, 44v.
62 Jean de Montigny, Lord of Villers, and Philip of Namur, were both beheaded in Brussels.
63 Hooft, Nederlandsche historiën (1972), 176, 187, 198.
64 CD XXXVII, 365; Martínez Ruiz, ‘Sancho Dávila en las campañas’, 105-142.
65 Mendoza, Comentarios, 439; Martín García, Sancho, 130.
66 Pando y Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 135-136; Dávila y San Vitores, Rayo, 58. Both early biographies situate his injury during the Battle of the river Geete.
stars among the wounded. During this victory of the Prince of Orange on 12 November, “the Spanish commander Sancho D’Ávila, along with his officers Francois de Tolede and Ruy de Lopez, was wounded, and the son of the Duke of Alva Don Rufille Henrikes died in the action”. 67 In Mendoza’s chronicle there were two confrontations: Sancho received his injury during an earlier confrontation, followed by the fighting in which Ruy López de Ávalos, captain of light cavalry, died, and Francisco de Toledo, a brother to the Count of Orgaz, was wounded. 68 Trillo also distinguishes two different encounters but does not mention Sancho. In the second he describes the death of Ruy López de Ávalos in more detail. 69 Dutch chronicler Van Meteren mentions the battle won by Orange near Cambrésis on 12 November, “where many noblemen were killed or taken prisoner”, mentioning the son of the Marquis of Olivares, Don Juan de [Tallen] and Don Ruffin Henricus. 70

Perhaps the connection between Sancho’s injury and this encounter on 12 November originates with the Italian seventeenth-century historian Famiano Strada, who combined two events that had in reality occurred a day apart:

They arrived around Quesnoy, and as Alba was following him from a close distance, it occurred that in a more than normal skirmish, he dispersed some Spanish and High German banners, and Sancho Dávila, with César Dávalos, who in vain tried to keep their men together, were seriously hurt, serving at least partially as revenge for his [Orange’s] earlier defeat. 71

In particular, the detail of their attempt to keep the troops together coincides with Sancho shouting to his troops in his biography. But who invented the story that the Duke of Alba’s son had died in the fighting, a fictitious story that was already circulating in 1680 and was subsequently forgotten, but that has fairly recently made its reappearance on Wikipedia?

68 Mendoza, Comentarios (1948) 439.
69 Trillo, Historia, 80.
70 Van Meteren, Belgische oft Nederlandsche historie (1599) 45v.
71 Strada, De thien eerste boecken, 491-492; Reijner, Italiaanse geschiedschrijvers.
It shows how episodic narratives can resurface in totally unexpected places.

The castellano of Antwerp (1568-1572)

Alba was well aware of Sancho’s skills as governor of the citadel of Pavia as well as of his abilities as a good commander in the field, and therefore promoted him around May 1568 to captain of Antwerp and governor (castellano) of its citadel which was under construction, as can be understood from a letter from Morillon, Granvelle’s confidant in the Low Countries. At this time, Morillon still saw this nomination as “la préservation de la ville”, putting his faith in the Spanish commander as he had also done with Romero, and probably reflecting the general opinion of Catholic Netherlanders at the time. However, a modern American historian described Sancho at this same point in his book anachronistically as “of all his race the most hated in Antwerp”.

Beginning on 1 January 1569, there has been preserved a whole series of letters from Antwerp from Sancho to the Duke and to Albornoz, the Duke’s secretary. In a letter to the Duke he thanked him again for his new position, “whether it is a good or a bad life to be governor of the citadel, I put myself completely in the hands of Your Excellency”. One Spanish soldier poet even dedicated to the new castellano a sonnet which was published in Antwerp in 1569 together with sonnets praising other military commanders: “fame moves in a swift and fast flight, lifting your name up to heaven”.

The Duke of Alba had visited Antwerp for the first time by the end of October 1567, with, according to local chronicler Godevaert van Haecht, three hundred Spanish horsemen. Sancho must have been among them. The burghers complained about the new taxes that were needed for the construction of the citadel, although Alba tried to defend his decision by

72 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 23 May 1568, CG III, 233. See also Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 31 January 1569, EA II, 174; CD XXX, 436.
73 Wegg, Decline, 137; Ochoa de Arizpe, Camp outside Maastricht, 20 September 1568, RBM, Gondomar, II/2212, doc. 12; Boone, ‘From cuckoo’s egg’.
74 ‘Ni si es buena vida o mala ser alcaide, sino en todo remitirme a la voluntad y orden de Vuestra Excelencia’. Dávila to Albornoz, 1 February 1569, AA, C33/28; Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 6 February 1569, AA, C33/32, quoted in Martín García, Sancho, 136. Gabriele Serbelloni to Philip II, Brussels, 19 February 1569 (CP II, 64) explained he had been replaced as governor of the Antwerp citadel by Dávila.
75 ‘La fama con veloz y presto vuelo, levanta el nombre vuestra hasta el cielo’. Ximénez Ayllón, Sonetos, sonnet 16,
stating that once it was finished the soldiers could live in the citadel and would no longer be quartered in the inhabitants’ houses.\textsuperscript{76} In September 1568 six hundred Spanish soldiers came to stay in the citadel. Van Haecht describes how in October four out of nine banners left again, but soon afterwards another six hundred new Spaniards arrived; “these were lodged in the city, though there was enough room in the castle. And all arrived naked, and were dressed here as noblemen (\textit{jonkers}).” By the end of October most of these Spaniards did move to the citadel, as their beds and mattresses had arrived. Some of the officers took with them much household equipment from the houses they had stayed in and when the burghers complained, they just said “it is all ours” (“‘t hoort al ons”). By early December another 250 Spaniards had arrived in the city, “skinny and naked wretches” (“hamels”). The cold winter meant that some Spaniards froze to death “as they are not accustomed to such cold.”\textsuperscript{77} On 29 January 1569, most of the Spanish soldiers again left the citadel with only two Spanish banners remaining in Antwerp.

Van Haecht never mentions Sancho’s appointment or any other news about the new governor in his chronicle. Painter Godevaert van Haecht was born in Antwerp in 1546, and except for a long stay in Paris between April 1570 and September 1571 he seems to have remained in the city. It makes him an excellent eyewitness to most of the events up to 1574, especially since his work resembles loose notes penned directly after the events themselves.\textsuperscript{78} For a young man of some twenty-three years the appointment of the new \textit{castellano}, however, was not worth mentioning. The Duke of Alba absorbed all his attention, as in May 1569 the citadel prepared for a visit by the Duke, “and the castle walls all around were filled with cannons, as he would come to inspect it, and there existed differences between the masters of the castle as how to finish it”. The Duke arrived on 27 May “and in the castle cannons were fired and also the Spaniards fired besides their weapons some rockets; on the 28\textsuperscript{th} day he drove around the castle, and during this triumphal ride he was almost hit with a wooden cannonball”.\textsuperscript{79}

Meanwhile, Sancho used his experience with the citadel of Milan, where he had resided for some time, to evaluate what was needed in Antwerp. So it was not only the Italian architects who brought with them

\textsuperscript{76} On the costs of the citadel: Brulez, ‘Gewicht’, 394.
\textsuperscript{78} Van Haecht, \textit{Kroniek}, introduction, xvii-xviii. During his absence his brother continued the manuscript.
\textsuperscript{79} Van Haecht, \textit{Kroniek}, II, 76, 90-91.
their experience of the Italian citadels, as Sancho also understood what was necessary for a citadel to function properly. A detailed comparison found among his letters to Albornoz explains that he needed a doctor and a surgeon, but also an auditor, “very necessary, and there is no castle that does not have one”.  

He was an experienced Spanish commander well versed in the art of war as it was practised in Renaissance Italy.

One can even study the contruction works on the citadel using these letters, as when in April 1569 it is stated that “the bullwarks are already high, and we have to put the arms of Your Majesty and the Duke, my lord, on them”. However, the final touch would come much later. In a letter of 18 March 1571 to Prior Fernando de Toledo, Alba’s natural son, whom Sancho clearly considered as a close patron and protector, he described “the statue that has to be put here in this citadel of the Duke my lord; it is said that it is the best thing in the world and with God’s help, by Easter we can install it here”. The infamous statue, made out of the cannons won at Jemmingen, would be placed in the citadel’s main square in May of that year.

Until this moment in his story, the local chronicler had not yet mentioned Sancho, who had been in Antwerp at least from February 1569. It will finally be in August that he writes:

Also in this time, the governor of the Antwerp castle named **Sanxo Daver** was a bridegroom, as he married the daughter of a Spaniard in Bruges, and as one heard, the father was a banker. There was a very pompous celebration, even though he had been just a drummer. It was heard that the Duke of Alba had given him a present of 2,000 crowns; and around the 15th day he called for a tournament in Antwerp, as he wanted to return home to the castle by that time, and for this reason, by the first of the month the preparations started to prepare the lodgings for the Spanish lords that would come to the tournament.

---

80 ‘Es muy necesario y no ay castillo que no le tenga’. Dávila to Albornoz, Milan, 23 May 1567 to 29 May 1567, AA, C33/25-27; Idem, Antwerp, 10 February 1569, AA, C33/38.
82 ‘La statua que se a de poner aqui en esta ciudadel del Duque mi señor dizen que a salido la mejor cosa del mundo y para Pasqua con la ayuda de Dios la pondremos aqui’. Dávila to Hernando de Toledo, Antwerp citadel, 18 March 1571, AA, C33/42.
Again we find in this description the idea that the Spanish commanders were of low birth, it calling Sancho somebody who had started off as a ‘drummer’, a description that was also used for Sancho in a Beggar’s song and for Julián in a play by Lope de Vega. This second mention of Sancho as a drummer may indicate that this image of Sancho had spread through the Low Countries. The preparations for the wedding can be found in several of Sancho’s letters, for example on the question whether to celebrate the wedding in Bruges or in Antwerp. Sancho was marrying Catalina Gallo, the daughter of Juan López Gallo, one of the great Spanish financiers from Bruges, who served as a financial factor for Philip II from 1557, and baron of Male from 1560. Juan López Gallo was the son of Spanish merchant Luis López Gallo Vega who had by the end of the fifteenth century already possessed a house in Bruges. Juan had married Catalina Pardo Garrido, the daughter of Silvester Pardo and Josine López, also very important members of the Spanish merchant colony in Bruges. A grandson of Silvester’s, Juan Pardo, Lord of Frémicourt, would become Mayor of Bruges in 1574.

Barbara, a sister of Sancho’s future bride, would marry Alonso López Gallo, born in Burgos in 1533 and Governor of Culemborg and Colonel of Walloon troops during the Revolt. Barbara was Alonso’s niece and Alonso was definitely not Juan’s son, as has often been suggested in the historical literature. In 1567 Alonso had still been a servant of Governess Margaret of Parma, and in that capacity he had gone to Spain in February to inform the King on matters she did not want to put down on paper. Barbara and Catalina had a brother also named Juan López Gallo (who died in 1616) who married Anne of Aspremont, a daughter of Cristóbal de Mondragón’s wife from her earlier marriage. It shows the close relations between Sancho Dávila from Ávila, Cristóbal de Mondragón from Medina del Campo and Alonso López Gallo from Burgos, but also their strong connection to the Spanish merchant colonies of Bruges and Antwerp.

Also involved in the marriage plans was Spanish merchant Hernando de Frías from Antwerp, who seemed to act as an intermediary and whose house in Antwerp might have been used for the celebrations. After

87 Dávila Jalón, *Nobiliario*, 77, 307. They returned to Spain in 1580. Alonso died in 1596 and Barbara in 1629. Their son, Gregorio Gallo y López, was born in Culemborg, but taken to Burgos ‘al pecho de su madre’.
88 Margaret of Parma to Philip II, Brussels, 16 February 1567, CP I, 510.
89 Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 22, 23 June and 21 July 1569, AA, C33/48-50. Sancho is mentioned in a letter from Hernando de Frías Cevallos to Simón Ruiz, Antwerp, 7
Alba’s embargo on English goods in December 1568, the Duke had sold everything for a reasonable price to the same Frías. In 1573 Frías helped Sancho to send objects to Spain: small square cloths with heraldic symbols (reposteros) and handkerchiefs (pañuelos). In 1574 Frías was praised by Requesens in a letter to Philip II for his financial capability: “whose services were so praised by the Duke of Alba, that many times he had said to me that this man had been the single cause why these states had not been lost”. In 1573 Frías bought a large hôtel in Antwerp which he gave to the Jesuits for their first college in the city. Interestingly, the Duke of Alba was a declared enemy of the Jesuits, while Requesens was much more supportive of the order.

On 14 January 1569 Prior Fernando de Toledo visited Antwerp where he was very well received by the Spanish and Italian merchants, the city government, the captains of the German troops in the city and the captains of the ten Spanish banners in the fortress. He went to visit the citadel on the 16th “and then they fired all the cannons with blanks, but the community (gemeynete) did not celebrate his arrival very much”. Again, on 11 August 1569, Fernando returned to Antwerp for Sancho’s tournament, described by Van Haecht in great detail, in an exception to most of his very concise entries, thus showing the importance he gave to these events. The young man must have been impressed by the glamour of the celebrations, albeit at the same time very critical of the participants and reflecting the dissatisfaction of the people:

And they demanded that around the 15th day the golden rooms around the market square and the rooms of the largest guilds had to be opened, to dress and serve all those who came to the tournament. When those of the city had turned this down, they demanded the building of the silversmiths.

And on the 13th day the bride of the castellan came sailing from Bruges to Antwerp with the cities’ barge, and a banquet was held.

July 1568, Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres marchandes*, II, 49.

*Other references to Frías: Dávila to Juan Moreno, Saeftinghe, 14 March, AA, C/33, 74 and Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 30 March 1573, AA, C/33, 75; Dávila y San-Vitore, *Rayo*, 97; Letters to Frías also in EA III. Albornoz to Lixalde on Frías, Utrecht, June 1573, EA III, 483. Vázquez de Prada, *Lettres marchandes*, I, 216-217.*

*Dávila to Juan Moreno, Breda, 6 October 1573, AA, C/33, 104.*

*Requesens to Philip II, 16 March 1574, NCD I, 376-377.*


*Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, II, 75.*
on the quay. There were shots fired from the castle as if a queen had arrived and when a cannon burst, it left a Spaniard dead. The bride entered through the back gate of the monastery of Saint Michael, forced open by the Spaniards because Colonel Count Albrecht Ladron, who had to safeguard the city with his German soldiers, had refused to give them the keys....

On the 15th day in the morning, it started to rain again, and the same happened in the afternoon, ruining their celebrations and making them very angry. On the market square there were buried more than 330 small barrels with gunpowder, tied with iron strips and covered with wood and sand. ... At four o’clock it was fair weather again and the gentlemen came out to play, covered in silk and velvet, with feathers and other ornaments, but all on foot. Their small lances were as strong as glass as not to hurt each other, and the people did nothing else but mock them for not jousting on horseback.

On the 17th they arrived on horseback on the Meir, tilting at the ring, and in the end a man sat down on a wooden horse, gaining money by breaking up to two hundred lances on his armour. By then they had changed their dress, again very richly. There were also some brawls between their followers and the common people (‘den gemeyn volke’).

On the 18th after noon they tilted again at the ring inside the castle, but before noon it had rained again as heavy as the day before, with thunder and lightning. That night the corner of one of the walls of the castle collapsed.95

There seems to have been a very good relationship between Sancho and Prior Fernando de Toledo, both belonging to the circle of the Duke of Alba, but perhaps also because of their functions within the cavalry. Fernando often visited Antwerp, and his presence at the wedding festivities must have been very important for Sancho. And Fernando would return more often to enjoy himself in the city, as in February 1570 the Antwerp chronicler noted, “And it is known that the son of the Duke of Alba, now present in Antwerp, called the Grand Prior, lost ten thousand guilders in one night”.96 In a letter from March 1571 to Fernando, Sancho reminds him of their good times together:

95 All earlier quotations are also from Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 99-100.
96 Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 122.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

Of this city, I only have to tell Your Excellency that every day the absence and solitude that Your Excellency is making to the ladies is felt more strongly, be it widows, married ones or those still to be married. They are very pretty and have celebrated Carnival lacking in parties and people. The game has been stopped completely, as the players have neither credit nor money. That is a great loss for me as well, as there is no money for the construction of the citadel and it is a great pity that such an important work cannot be finished.97

Also in 1569, Alba tried to convince Philip II to reward Sancho with a place in one of the knightly orders in Spain:

I have written to Your Majesty several times about how much Sancho Dávila, castellan of Antwerp, has served here, and how much he deserves to be rewarded. For this I beg Your Majesty to reward me by sending him a habit, for I would appreciate it as much as if Your Majesty would hand it to myself.98

Only a few months later Alba received a positive answer from the King:

For what Your Majesty has done regarding the habit of Sancho Dávila, I kiss his feet many times, and I can affirm to Your Majesty that he is one of the men of most service of all those he has in his estates.99

In a next letter he thanked the King on Sancho’s behalf: “Sancho Dávila is grateful for the habit he has been given”.100 It is uncertain whether Alba knew it had not been a simple decision for the King. In his letter to Alba informing him of Sancho’s habit the King had simply stated that “based on the services rendered by Sancho Dávila and your mediation,

97 ‘Desta billa no tengo que avisar a Vuestra Excelencia sino que cada día se siente mas la falta y soledad que Vuestra Excelencia haze las damas asy biudas como casadas y por casar, estan muy hermosas y an pasado el carnabal echando menos mas fiestas y compania. El juego a faltado de todo punto y los jugadores el credito y el dinero, que es arta soledad para my porque tambien falta el dinero para la fabrica desta ciudadela que es la mayor lastima cosa tan principal que no se acabe’. Dávila to Hernando de Toledo, Antwerp citadel, 18 March 1571, AA, C33/42.
98 Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 11 December 1569, CD XXXVIII, 254-255; see also Zayas to Alba, Madrid, 6 April 1569, Idem, 63.
99 Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 24 February 1570, EA II.
100 Alba to Philip II, 29 February 1570, CD XXX, 437.
I have approved giving him the habit of Santiago, as you asked me to”. However, the minutes [draft] of the King’s letter had another sentence in between the lines, which had been struck out: “Although it was the idea to close the door to the habits for some time, but for things you want and request so wholehartedly, I could do nothing else than keep the door open”. Also in 1570, he finally received payment for his years as an infantry captain, covering the period from its beginning on 15 July 1561 up to 1568, totalling perhaps 350,000 maravedíes.

By 1570 Sancho Dávila had become a very important Spanish officer in the Low Countries, highly esteemed by the Duke of Alba, in part because of his decisive role in several battles against the rebels in 1568; he stood in close relation to the Duke’s son, Fernando; he was the official commander of Alba’s personal guard and castellano of the important citadel of Antwerp; the King had agreed to nominate him to become a knight of the order of Santiago; he had recently received a large payment for his office as infantry captain; and on top of all that he had married the daughter of a very rich Spanish merchant from Bruges, and the celebrations of his marriage had been the talk of the town. In 1570 he even had a son, an heir, called Fernando, surely in honour of the Duke and/or his natural son. Could life get any better?

However, below the surface matters were not all that perfect. The knighthood still had to be approved by the order itself; relations between the Spanish troops and the burghers of Antwerp continued to worsen; there were people who wanted to take Antwerp citadel away from him; and, on top of everything, he was soon to lose his wife.

The local chronicler often reports on problems between the Spanish troops and the inhabitants of the city, now clearly criticising the behaviour of the Spaniards. For example:

On 4 April [1570] a Spaniard who was standing watch on the walls of the castle shot dead a burgher who, according to him, was walking too close to him. And recently, a Spaniard was kicked in the city for what he had said, and his companion escaped and ran to the castle shouting “Spani, Spani”; and a group of soldiers came out of the castle ready to enter the city, but then they wisely decided to remain.

101 Philip II to Alba, Talavera, 22 January 1570, CD XXX, 436-437. See also CD XXXI, 24.
102 CD XXXI, 17-18; Martín García, Sancho, 143; AGS, Contaduría del sueldo, 2ª época, legajo 38.
103 Martín García, Sancho, 143.
104 Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 125-126.
At another time they entered the city’s gardens:

At the end of this month, on the day of Saint John the Baptist, very early, some two hundred Spaniards had left the castle, breaking with their feet and swords, all the trees, fruits and herbs, standing around the castle in the Markgravelei ruining all the gardens and shelters, and dragging the trees behind the roads.\textsuperscript{105}

Was this last action perhaps related to the bonfires the Spanish build even today to celebrate the feast of Saint John the Baptist? In any case, it seems the chronicler did not understand their behaviour. The only other possible explanation could be that they wanted to have a better view from the citadel. But the idea of a celebration is plausible, as also on the day of Saint James we find the Spanish celebrating their national saint.

Remarkably, we also have reports by Sancho of the difficult relations with the inhabitants of Antwerp: “Yesterday those of the city came to talk to me about the order to bring the keys for the night to the castle and the discomfort that this would entail for them”. They also complained about the new taxes and they wanted to give the keys to only two gates close to the citadel as two other water gates had to be opened every night “for cleaning the city”. Sancho hoped Albornoz would send an order to obey him “because they come up with more than a hundred thousand things, like those in Aragon”.\textsuperscript{106} In this quotation we see that complaints of the Antwerp mayors were being compared to the complaints of the officials of Aragon about their privileges. Sancho clearly did not welcome too much influence on his government from below.

It is possible that Sancho’s difficult relationship with the inhabitants may have been the reason for the Duke of Medinaceli, who had come to take over the government from Alba, suggesting that Sancho relinquish his post as castellano of Antwerp, “to take the castle of Antwerp away from Sancho Dávila and give it to another knight”.\textsuperscript{107} When he heard of this plan, Alba was furious and called it “una monstruosidad”. The

\textsuperscript{105} June 1570, Van Haecht, \textit{Kroniek}, II, 128-129.

\textsuperscript{106} ‘Ayer benieron los de la villa a ablarme sobre la orden que tenian de traer aquy las llaves de noche y las descomodidades que les ara; ‘para la limpieza de la ciudad’; ‘porque dan çien mil ocasiones como los de Aragon’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 7 March 1571, AA, C33/41. Discussion on the keys to the city also in Requesens to Dávila, 8 June 1574, NCD II, 348-349.

\textsuperscript{107} Alba to Zayas, Brussels, 7 June 1571, CD XXX, 451-452; EA II, 618. Medinaceli wanted to put Juan de Mendoza Sarmiento in his place as castellan of Antwerp. Zayas to Doctor Velasco, Madrid, 14 August 1571, CD XXXV, 405 and also Idem, 412-413.
Duke’s letter shows how strongly he defended his own men: “it would be such a great insult that I would not know where to hide for the people not to see me”. Alba understood Medinaceli was attempting to remove the men he himself had put in important places. He praised Sancho for all his services, and especially for the victory at Dahlem, one of his claims to fame up to 1571. The Duke’s anger is visible even through his rather dramatic formulation: “He [Sancho] is resting from his works and from the sweat and all the blood that he has shed, as he is such a man that if he were at the very end of the world, one should throw out the Duke [Medinaceli] and beg on our knees to His Majesty that he would make him come over here”. Alba had seen him fight “a million times”. Fortunately for Sancho, Medinaceli never really took over the government from Alba. And although Philip II had decided at some point to follow Medinaceli’s idea, this plan did not actually materialise at the time. Sancho would remain as castellano of Antwerp until 1577.

His most important setback, however, was the death of his wife in this period, leaving him with a new-born child, just as would happen to his friend and colleague Cristóbal de Mondragón. Young Fernando – “he was a beautiful child” – would be raised in Bruges in his deceased wife’s rich family. However, death struck again, as we find Sancho in October 1571 writing about the death of his father-in-law, Juan López Gallo. He had been to Male where he had also found Alonso López Gallo, one of the heirs. Most of Juan’s belongings, however, went to his eldest son. In the same letter Sancho expressed his wish to go home: “I desire to go to Spain as I have written to Your Honour, and now more than ever”. These last three tiny words (“y ahora mas”) are the only evidence of his personal feelings about his pitiful situation. His sentiments had changed, though the professional soldier was not spilling too many words on the subject.

After the death of his wife and his father-in-law, relations with the Spanish merchants continued, as with the already mentioned Juan Pardo, a cousin of his wife Catalina and at the time an important member of the Bruges government as its first alderman. In December 1571 Sancho wanted to put this in-law forward as the new commissioner of Bruges.

---

108 Las cosas que Su Magestad ha mandado que se digan al presidente Hopperus, AGS, E. 567, quoted in Martín García, Sancho, 216-217.

109 ‘El niño queda vonito’; ‘Deseo de yr a España como tengo escrito a vuestra merced y ahora mas’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 11 October 1571, AA, C33/52; Martín García, Sancho, 143. Juan López Gallo died on 4 October 1571. ‘Los que estamos en este castillo y yo comemos y para tanto no puede bastar la hazienda de mi hijo’. Dávila to unknown [Albornoz?], Antwerp, 27 June 1573, AA, C/33, 93.
within the four Estates of Flanders, and for this he needed a letter from Alba.\textsuperscript{110} As has been said, in 1574 Juan Pardo would become Mayor of Bruges. Based in Antwerp, Sancho was perfectly situated to connect to the rich Spanish merchant families of Antwerp and Bruges.\textsuperscript{111}

**The relief of Middelburg (1572-1573)**

After the taking of Brielle by the rebels on 1 April 1572, the Revolt entered its second phase. When Spanish troops tried to enter Flushing to defend the town against the rebels, the inhabitants started firing at their ships and took one Spanish captain, Hernando Pacheco, prisoner. The city had changed sides. In early May, the town of Veere also joined the Revolt.\textsuperscript{112}

Around midnight on 6 May a fleet left Bergen-op-Zoom’s harbour with some 540 Spanish troops and seven hundred Walloons. The leader of the expedition was Sancho Dávila. It seems that Fadrique de Toledo, who himself was present in the harbour, did not agree with his father regarding Sancho’s appointment: “I harbour doubts about his old age and experience in warfare”.\textsuperscript{113} This seems a strange remark. The commander was 48 years old at the time and very experienced. It may reflect a troublesome relationship between the Duke’s son, Fadrique, and Sancho, while we have already seen that Sancho seems to have been very close to the Duke’s natural son, Fernando. Sancho, however, speaks highly of Fadrique’s military capabilities in a letter to Albornoz: “señor Fadrique is such a good warrior”.\textsuperscript{114}

The expedition has been recently described in detail by Clasien Rooze-Stouthamer. After disembarking the troops headed for the besieged Middelburg. The Walloons went first, with the Spaniards behind them, as they feared the burghers might not want to let Spanish troops in. Even Sancho himself was dressed as a Walloon. They succeeded in defeating the small rebel army around Middelburg and afterwards they also managed

\textsuperscript{110} Fagel, *Hispano-Vlaamse wereld*, 107; Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 4 December 1571, AA, C33/54.

\textsuperscript{111} A Jerónimo Pardo was one of the major contractors of the Antwerp citadel. Quatrefages, *Tercios* (1979) 58.

\textsuperscript{112} Rooze-Stouthamer, *Opmaat*, 101-129.

\textsuperscript{113} ‘Je me doubte pour son ancien eage et experience au fait de guerre…’. Fadrique de Toledo to Philip of Lannoy, ARAB, Audientie, 486, f. 34, quoted in Rooze-Stouthamer, *Opmaat*, 139.

\textsuperscript{114} ‘Señor don Fadrique pues es tan bien guerrero’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 16 July 1573, AA, C/33, 100.
to conquer the port town of Arnemuiden (Ramua in Spanish sources) after a fierce confrontation resulting in many deaths. Cornejo even mentions the fact that Sancho had wished to continue towards Flushing, but his plans were thwarted by the governor of Zeeland.

In a very long letter Alba informed the King of the “cosas de Holanda y Gelanda”, giving the main credit for the expedition’s organisation to his son Fadrique. The Duke also wrote about the Walloons and the Spanish troops and how they went “so alike as if they were from the same nation”, probably referring to their clothing. According to the Duke, when they had all landed successfully at ten o’clock in the evening, Sancho told the troops that “nobody was to be disobedient in sacking or doing anything else”, threatening them with death. Alba informed the King about the plan to put the Walloons in the van “so that those of Middelburg will not be disturbed by seeing Spaniards”. However, in this version, the Spanish were essential to the fighting: “slaughtering a large number of them”. The Duke also used this letter to praise his beloved Sancho:

I do not want to leave unsaid to Your Majesty that in all his estates he does not have a better soldier than Sancho Dávila, and as good, only very few… Besides actual fighting, like nobody has ever done, he has good fortune (“fortuna”) and therefore I took him out of Antwerp castle for this.

Of course, it all revolved around remuneration: “to reward him and to thank him, for winning a battle over here and serving as he did in the expedition to Frisia [Jemmingen] in which he played a major role, as until now he has not been given any reward”. Does this mean that the earlier promises had not materialised yet, or is the Duke exaggerating Sancho’s needs?

In a Spanish account from the same day it was clearly Sancho’s decision to put the Walloons in the van, and this story can also be found in other reports of the event. One of these even mentioned Sancho as the principal actor in its heading. In this version Sancho also hides the Spaniards including himself “in Walloon dress”. On the fighting near Ramua we read about “slaughtering an enormous number of enemies”.

115 Rooze-Stouthamer, Opmaat, 138-141.
116 Cornejo, Sumario, 150.
117 Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 23 May 1572, EA III, 112-120.
118 CD XXXI, 24-29. See also CD LXXV, 44-46 and 50-53 (relación de lo sucedido en Valchrem, por Sancho de Avila, en 6 de mayo de 1572). For another account see AGS, E. 552-599.
The 1713 biographer uses the histories and chronicles of Bentivoglio, Trillo and Mendoza to create a completely different story, including a long speech by Sancho just after landing on the island of Walcheren: “We are going to attack sailors and fishermen, who hardly know the names of the weapons”. This narrative, mostly based on Trillo, is almost the complete opposite of the Spanish accounts. In this version Sancho wants to fight and he puts his Spanish troops in the van, and does not warn them to refrain from plunder. Trillo even adds that around Arнемuiden four hundred of the enemy were killed against only twenty wounded on the royal side. The fact that Trillo speaks of German troops fighting together with the Spaniards demonstrates his poor knowledge of the events. We therefore see that the relief of Middelburg has two very different narrative traditions within the Spanish sources: we have the aggressive commander from Trillo and the 1713 biography, and the smart and tactical commander from the reports and Alba’s letter. Maybe we should put more faith in the texts written directly after the events which were not meant for publication.

To this can be added that, according to the author of the 1713 biography entitled El rayo de la guerra, it is precisely the very quick relief of Middelburg that gave Sancho the reputation of the Lighting Bolt of the war. Poet Pedro de Padilla, describing Sancho’s actions in Arнемuiden, specifies that “he massacred three companies of the enemy”. Interestingly enough, the victory over Arнемuiden had a very different impact on English public opinion:

They go about the streets greatly lamenting that in Arнемuiden not only were the men killed after surrendering, but also all the women and children, and this is what the English believe, saying that we are tyrants.

A Spanish manuscript chronicle however explicitly contradicts this version: “in less than one hour more than five hundred rebels died and nobody

---

119 Dávila y San-Vitore, Rayo, 66-69; Quatrefages, Tercios españoles (1979), 107, gives part of Sancho’s speech from Bentivoglio: ‘En el valor militar consistirá el vencer, o el perder…quien ay aquí de nosotros que no aya visto, o hecho alguna acción señalada en tan antigua milicia como la nuestra’. More examples of speeches by Mondragón and Dávila are in Quatrefages, Idem, 108-109.

120 Trillo, Historia, 105-106. 800 dead rebels in Arquellada, Sumario, 274.

121 Dávila y San-Vitore, Rayo, 68; Martínez Ruiz, ‘Sancho’, 647.


was left alive, except the women, children and the clerics who remained in the church”. Is this manuscript trying to counter the circulating negative views on the events at Arnemuiden?

A few of Sancho’s letters from Arnemuiden are preserved, and they can contribute to reconstructing the situation. The writer says he is not very satisfied with his new place of residence, calling it “a very unhealthy place”. Hitherto he had had little experience in the wetter parts of the Low Countries. Sancho shows himself in these letters as a man drawing a clear distinction between good and evil. The Lord of Beauvoir (Babues in his letters), Philip of Lannoy, was highly praised: “he is such a good nobleman, has rendered important services and has upheld this island, and I am very pleased to be his soldier”. On the other hand, his opinion of the rebels was quite the opposite: “it is rabble, they use the same type of boats as the indians”. On Fadrique he writes positively though quite reservedly to Albornoz: “I think his presence here would be of much relevance”, but the comments on Fernando de Toledo seem more personal and might again relate to their shared banquets. Regarding himself he informs Albornoz that “my feet are feeling a little better, as I have not been able to walk for I do not know how many days”. The Lighting Bolt of the war had hardly been able to stand on his feet during the events that gave him his heroic nickname. He was by then almost turning fifty.

After this first expedition to Zeeland Sancho returned to his citadel in Antwerp, at least as from early July 1572. He was busy organising the citadel, asking for more men and more artillery. It is striking that from this moment onwards the enemy is almost systematically called “the heretics”, unlike by other commanders like Mondragón and Valdés, who generally speak in a more neutral tone of ‘the enemy’.

124 ‘En menos de una hora murieron de los reveldes mas de 500 y a nadie se perdono la vida. Salvo a las mugeres, niños y a ciertos clerigos que estavan en la iglesia’. ‘Libro de las cosas’, 22r.
125 ‘Tierra mal sana’; ‘Es tan buen caballero y a servido tan principalmente y sustentado esta isla que yo me huelgo mucho de ser su soldado’. Dávila to Alba, Arnemuiden, 16 May 1572, AA, C33/57; Dávila to Albornoz, Arnemuiden, 13 May 1572, AA, C33/55; Dávila to Albornoz, Arnemuiden, 16 May 1572, AA, C33/56.
126 ‘Es una canalla, como indios sirvense destos bersos de nabios’; ‘Creo su persona seria de mucha importancia aqui’; ‘Al señor don Hernando tiene aqui tantos papagayos, monos, y perçelanas si bienen de las Indias o hombres que les sirvan con ellas que podra hacer un banquete con las lenguas’; ‘Voi sintiendo un poco de mejoría en los pies que no he podido andar no se quantos dias’. Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 4, 6 and 7 July 1572 and Dávila to Albornoz, 5 July, AA, C/33, 58-61; Granvelle’s confidant, Morillon, reported in August that some time before Dávila had had a conflict with those in the city government. Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 17 August 1572, CG IV, 375-376.
Antonio Trillo describes that around that time Alba ordered Sancho to help out the besieged city of Goes in Zeeland. In his name Sancho sent his Antwerp Sargento Mayor, Francisco de Salvatierra, with gunpowder and rope for fuses. It was a very difficult undertaking as enemy ships had the island closed off, and “not even a bird could pass”. Salvatierra, however, told Sancho he would enter or die, to which Sancho answered, as was quoted literally in the chronicle, “it is not about entering or dying, but about entering or not going”. One morning before the end of July, Salvatierra left Bergen-op-Zoom disguised as a fisherman with two sailors and a servant, with the ammunition hidden under straw and fishing nets. Their expedition in disguise proved successful.\(^{127}\)

Sancho then left with the army for Mons in Hainaut, where the army besieged the city which had taken sides with the rebels led by Count Louis of Nassau. Here again Sancho played a key role as a good practical commander. In the vicinity of Jemappes, Sancho ordered that nobody fire until the enemy was at close range, so no shots would be lost.\(^{128}\) However, in Trillo’s description of the siege of Mons Sancho’s role was limited to this brief appearance.

In October 1572 it was Sancho himself who successfully liberated Goes from the siege by the rebels, together with the Colonels Cristóbal de Mondragón and Arrieta. This is the famous crossing through the water that will be discussed in the chapter on Cristóbal de Mondragón. In Sancho’s letter to the Duke he described the situation just before the action:

> The Sergeant Major of Colonel Mondragón and a soldier from the castle over here went on a reconnaissance mission, reporting that it was possible to execute the crossing, and for this reason Colonel Mondragón was now leaving in order to arrive at seven in the morning at the crossing where according to the information during low tide it was possible to walk in three hours up to the dykes, taking with him all his men and those of Colonel Arrieta and a company of Germans and a hundred Spaniards coming from elsewhere and from the castle over here, with more than twenty measures [quintales] of gunpowder in three hundred leather bags. Information about the outcome will be sent to Your Excellency.

\(^{127}\) Trillo, *Historia*, 119.

and if it turns out as hoped, Your Excellency may decide whether they have to go ahead or if they have to return after liberating the island.\textsuperscript{129}

Though Mondragón was really the main protagonist of the expedition to relieve Goes, Sancho also received some of the praise. Alba and Albornoz sent him letters of congratulation. Alba even seems to put him before Mondragón; “so much satisfaction as was to be expected with you as the one guiding the relief of Goes”.\textsuperscript{130} Albornoz showed in his letter that he completely understood Sancho’s feelings: “the affairs are going so well that with the help of God, we will soon be able to see each other in Madrid”\textsuperscript{131}. Within the realm of literature, Sancho is also the central figure in the verses by Pedro de Padilla, and in one other story Sancho plays a specific role at the critical moment when two hundred Walloon soldiers refused to enter the water: “if he had had a gallows at his disposal, he would singlehandedly have hanged these cowards himself”.\textsuperscript{132} The precise origin of this very cruel quotation, however, remains unclear, but it is certain that the crossing episode had become a fruitful narrative that entered the people’s imagination through literature.

That Sancho may have had a strong personality and harsh character can be discerned through other sources. We know that Jean de Hangest, Lord of Genlis, had been taken prisoner at the Battle of Quiévrain on 17 July 1572, and by January 1573 he was in Antwerp in Sancho’s custody. In a letter Dávila described how this French Huguenot leader, who had already served Orange in 1568, had bribed a musician in an attempt to escape, and now Sancho wanted to execute this musician for treason, “leaving his head as an example on the scaffold of the castle square”. Sancho also wanted Genlis dead, and if he could not be executed for trying to escape, “it is possible to burn him as a heretic, and this

\textsuperscript{129}arakonoz el sargento mayor del coronel Mondragon y un soldado de aqui del castillo, los quales dizen se puede muy bien pasar para lo qual parte a la ora el coronel Mondragon para estar manana a las 7 horas en el paso que segun la informazion con la baja marea sera camino de 3 horas asta los diques, lleva consigo toda su gente y la del coronel Arrieta y una compania de alemanes y 100 espanoles de los que vinieron de fuera y de los de aqui del castillo, llevan mas de 20 quintales de polvora en 300 bolsas de cuero, del subceso se dara aviso a vuestra excelencia y si es bueno como se desea vuestra excelencia mandara aviso si an de pasar adelante o si dejado el socorro en la ysla se volveran’. Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 19 October 1572, AA, C/33, 62.

\textsuperscript{130} Alba to Dávila, Nijmegen, 27 October 1572, EA, III, 236-237.

\textsuperscript{131} Albornoz to Dávila, Nijmegen, 27 October 1572, EA, III, 238.

\textsuperscript{132} Rooze-Stouthamer, \textit{Opmaat}, 205-206. See the chapter on Mondragón.
would be of great service to God and to His Majesty”. Though Sancho wrote that he wanted to send him to the famous prison of Vilvoorde, history has it that he died secretly strangled in his prison cell in Antwerp citadel. The author of the 1713 biography must have known this dark story as he specifically added about Genlis “that he afterwards died of a disease”. Though existing literature generally does not connect Sancho to this deed, there is no doubt that he must have been the one giving the order. And, given his letter, he must have had no remorse in doing so. However, in July 1573 Sancho had still been unsure about Genlis’s future:

After orders came to take away Genlis’s irons, I am left totally confused by the copy of the letter that states not to lengthen his stay in prison … I think of letting him go, Your Honour should tell me what to do. If the Duke wants him to be put in another room with a guard at his cost, I do not refute that if this is what one wants to give him, this would not be a sad prison, being alone without anybody else, and more, he deserves it, although he says he has returned to being a christian and many other nice words.

Because he was based in Antwerp, the conflict in Zeeland, and especially the preparation of an armada, took up a large part of Sancho’s attention. While Albornoz had his doubts “whether it was convenient to risk this armada”, Sancho wrote to him with a firm “if one does not risk, one is not to gain much”. In another letter he elaborated on his views:

If one does not fight, it is impossible to know whose would be the victory, and being the affair of the relief of Walcheren so very important, even though there would be a great risk of losing this

---

133 ‘Dexar la cabeza por exemplo en la horca de la plaza del castillo’; ‘Se puede quemar por ereje y se hara gran servicio a dios y a su Magestad’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 11-17 January 1573, AA, C/33, 64
135 Dávila y San-Vitoreos, Rayo, 73.
136 ‘Despues que vino horden para quitar los grillos a Janli, me mata con la copia de la carta diziendo que no se la alarga la prision … estoy por soltarle, vuestra merced me embie que dezir, si quiere el duque que se le mete en otro aposento con guardia a su costa, yo no niego que si a el le quieren regalar que no es triste prision la que tiene que estar solo sin anima, mas el la mereze aunque dizte que se a buelto cristiano y muchas otras buenas palabras’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 16 July 1573, AA, C/33, 100.
137 For example: Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 31 January 1573, AA, C/33, 68 and Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 13 January 1573, Idem C/33, 69.
armada, I think that, if one does not try to relieve them, it is as if the armada were lost anyway.\textsuperscript{138}

We appreciate the precision in his preparations. He also suggests that it would be good to reward the sailors who wanted to serve in the fleet. In the end he seemed satisfied because though there were not enough sailors available, there were very good Netherlandish and Spanish seamen to serve in the expedition.\textsuperscript{139} In another letter he notes that many sailors did not wish to serve and tried to make others do the same.\textsuperscript{140} On 14 March Sancho was staying in Saeftinghe, from where he wrote a letter about the problems the ships were facing with getting through.\textsuperscript{141}

In April a new fleet had been prepared, “as this relief has to be done because it is so important… I have great faith in God that we will succeed”.\textsuperscript{142} But this did not mean that he put his trust solely in God. To Alba he explained why he thought they were going to be successful: “Our ships are provided with good weapons and cannons, with good sailors and with many of our warriors”.\textsuperscript{143} On 12 April Sancho and Mondragón met to discuss the organisation of the troops for the expedition.\textsuperscript{144} Four days later everybody was ready; “the people have embarked and we shall leave with the afternoon tide”. He really hoped he could do this good service to God and King.\textsuperscript{145} On April 17 he was indeed on board a ship,

\textsuperscript{138} ‘Si conviene aventurar esta armada’; ‘Si no se aventura mucho no se gana mucho’; ‘Si no se conbate, no se puede saber cuya avia de ser la vitoria, y siendo el negocio de socorrer a Balquem (Walcheren) de tan grande ymportancia, aunque sea de tan grande arrisco el aventurar esta armada, me parece que, si no se socorre, la armada es como perdida’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 3 February 1573, AA, C/33, 70; Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 3 February 1573, AA, C/33, 71.

\textsuperscript{139} Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 3 February 1573, AA, C/33, 71.

\textsuperscript{140} Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 6 February 1573, AA, C/33, 72. See also: Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 1 and 3 April 1573, AA, C/33, 76-77. According to Granvelle, the sailors did not want to serve ‘por el mal tractamento que les hazen Sancho Dávila and Juan Moreno’. Granvelle to Abbé Sagante, Naples, 11 and 15 June 1573, CG IV, 570.

\textsuperscript{141} Dávila to Juan Moreno, Saeftinghe (Safetin), 14 March 1573, AA, C/33, 74.

\textsuperscript{142} ‘Pues este socorro se ha de azer por ymportar tanto… tengo grande esperança en dios del buen subçeso’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 9 April 1573, AA, C/33, 83.

\textsuperscript{143} ‘Llevamos muy bien armados y artillados nuestros navios y con buenos marineros y muchos nuestros guerreros’. Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 11 April, 1573, AA, C/33, 84.

\textsuperscript{144} Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 12 April 1573, AA, C/33, 86.

\textsuperscript{145} ‘La gente esta embarcada y con la marea de la tarde partiremos’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 16 April 1573, AA, C/33, 87.
but it was difficult to navigate, mostly because of the wind: “for the
enormous winds… my greatest fear is having the ships colliding, God
may guide us”. 146

These expeditions are also described in Trillo’s chronicle, and here
Sancho clearly appears as the protagonist of the action. One problem
was the shallowness of the water, and on another occasion a thick fog
prevented Sancho from seeing the enemy fleet. Trillo also describes the
intense fighting and the fact that a cannon killed four soldiers, “taking
the head of Colonel Arrieta”. However, besides the elements, the enemy
fleet was also too strong. Trillo presents us with the heroic commander
Sancho, who ordered “that everybody follow him and that they either die
or destroy the enemy and pass”, but also with the experienced commander
who was “well aware of what was needed”. 147 Alba also defended Sancho
in a letter to the King: “he fought for almost three hours with the enemies,
and though they had more men, if the wind and the sea had not been
against him, he would have passed with the ships of his armada”. 148 Alba
also wrote to Dávila after receiving the good news, “I have heard about
the good results Your Honour had during his journey, and I never doubt
that you will always have the same results with everything that Your
Honour will undertake”. 149

In April, Sancho’s expeditions even reminded the Duke of an event
five years earlier: “for having occured in April, and almost on the same
day you broke the heads of the rebels at Dahlem”. 150 One Spanish
unpublished chronicle mentions that by accident Sancho’s ship caught
fire “and Sancho and sixty soldiers returned home with burned hands
and faces”. 151 However, this story cannot be found in other chronicles
of the period. It could be that these kinds of stories were considered less
suitable for publication, since they sometimes presented these heroes in
too vulnerable a position. In May the Duke complained about the lack

146 ‘Por el grandisimo viento… el mayor temor que tengo es esto del tocar, dios nos guie’.
Dávila to Albornoz, on board in Herden, 17 April 1573, AA, C/33, 88; Idem, on board,
18 April 1573, AA, C/33, 89-90.
147 Trillo, Historia, 191-195; Mendoza, Comentarios (1948) 493-495; Van Meteren, Belgische
(1599) 66r. See also the ‘Libro de las cosas’, 39r.
148 Alba to Philip II, Nijmegen, 18 March 1573, EA, III.
149 Alba to Dávila, Nijmegen, 23 April 1573, EA, III, 366.
150 Alba to Dávila, Nijmegen, 23 April 1573, EA, III, 366. See Idem, 367; ‘Libro de las
cosas’, 40v.
151 ‘Y salio quemado Sancho de Avila con 60 soldados en las caras y manos’. ‘Libro de las
cosas’, 41v.
of letters from Dávila, but then good news must have reached him, as he showed his great satisfaction: “el Duque está contentísimo”.

It is in the letters of this period that Sancho consistently started to use the word ‘herejes’ (heretics) as his most common name for the enemy, although ‘rebeldes’ is also used. We do not find this early confessionisation of the conflict in the letters from the other commanders in this book, though Mondragón also used the word ‘heretics’ around the time he was in Antwerp with Sancho. It is remarkable that Sancho also uses the word ‘amigo’ more often than the other commanders, suggesting that Sancho was apparently a man who divided the world into friends and foes. However, it is also possible that Sancho possessed a more religious outlook on the conflict, maybe related to the fact that he may have started his career with a religious vocation. This would fit the image the two biographers from his family wished to present, clearly depicting him as a Catholic hero fighting heresy, together with the Jesuits and the inspiring Teresa de Ávila.

One of the friends who appeared in the letters of this period was Antonio del Río, again a member of the Spanish merchant elite in the Low Countries, writing to him from Bruges on matters related to the war in Zeeland. Sancho tried to help him become the new commissioner of the confiscated goods. He started by pleading with Albornoz that “I do not have the wherewithal to pay those who show me their friendship”, and that only favours from the secretary could help him out. Del Río was a person who merited so much and whose wishes were so deserved… a trustworthy person”. This he further explains by stating that “though he is Spanish, he understands the language of this country”. Hernando de Frías, who would also plead for his appointment, was also a friend of

---

152 Albornoz to Dávila, Nijmegen, 11 May 1573, EA III, 392. See also Alba to the Duke of Savoye, Nijmegen, 6 May 1573, EA III, 388, and Alba to Dávila, Nijmegen, 10 and 18 June, 1573, EA III, 433-434, 444. Mondoucet to the French King, Nijmegen, 3 May 1573, Mondoucet, Lettres, I, 252. About the relative success of the expedition, see CP II, 356.

153 Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 3 February 1573, AA, C/33, 71. For example also in Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 4 April 1573, AA, C/33, 78, and Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 9 April 1573, AA, C/33, 83.

154 For example, Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 1 April 1573, AA, C/33, 76. ‘El buen amigo el coronel Mondragón’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 15 November 1573, AA, C/33, 107.

155 Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 5 April 1573, AA, C/33, 79. Albornoz to Dávila, Nijmegen, 9 April 1573, EA, III, 320.
Del Río’s, “amigo suyo”.\textsuperscript{156} Antonio del Río, Lord of Cleydael, would in 1573 indeed become the new commissioner of the confiscations. In later years, rebels would destroy his castle and he would lose everything, going to Spain where he died in 1586 as councillor to Philip II. His son, Martín Antonio del Río, would occupy important positions in the Habsburg government. He would later become a Jesuit and author a chronicle on the Revolt. Martín Antonio was also a friend of Justus Lipsius and connected to humanists in the Low Countries.\textsuperscript{157}

In June there was a female visitor in the citadel, simply called doña Juana in the letters to secretary Albornoz:\textsuperscript{158}

\begin{quote}
My lady doña Juana has stayed in the house of Fernando de Sevilla, so well attended by his wife and his children as possible. The day before yesterday she came to the castle at lunchtime without informing both me and Mondragón though we were serving the table. I asked her to stay in this house anywhere she wanted, as there are sufficient rooms. However, she decided to go to a house over here in the citadel, situated above the gate by the river. I think she will feel very alone there, though she has with her Hernández [?] who is so elegant and beautiful that it is a pleasure seeing her. Thank God that my lady doña Juana is recovering her health.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{156} ‘Yo no tengo con que pagar a los que me hacen amistad’; ‘Persona que mereze tanto y sus pretensiones tan justas…. Un hombre de confianza’; ‘Aunque es español se le entiende la lengua deste país’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 7 July 1573, AA, C/33, 97.

\textsuperscript{157} Fagel, ‘Es buen católico’, 303; Del Río, \textit{Crónica}.

\textsuperscript{158} Dávila to unknown [Albornoz], Antwerp, 27 June 1573, AA, C/33, 93. Earlier references to her: Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 21 November 1571, AA, C/33, 53: ‘Damas españolas son recatadas… damas y en tierra agena es cosa lleballes la condicion’.

\textsuperscript{159} ‘Mi señora doña Juana ha estado en casa de Fernando de Sevilla tan acariciada y regalada y de su mujer y hijas quanto es posible. Antier se bino aquí al castillo a ora de comer sin hazernos saber nada a Mondragón y a mí que estan al servicio a la tabla. Yo le suplique se quedase en esta casa pues ay artos aposentos de la manera que los quisesie, no a querido sino yrse a una casa que esta aquí en la ciudadela sobre la puerta del rio. Creo estará muy sola aunque tiene consigo a Hernández que esta tan galana y hermosa que es una envidia de verla. Parezeme bendito dios que mi señora doña Juana ba recobrandose de salud’. Dávila to unknown [Albornoz?], Antwerp, 27 June 1573, AA, C/33, 93. Fernando de Sevilla was an important Andalusian merchant in Antwerp, born in the Low Countries. He had contacts with Alba but was also a friend of the Protestant merchants Marcos Pérez and Martín López. According to Jerónimo de Curiel, Sevilla sympathised with the Calvinists. Vázquez de Prada, \textit{Lettres marchandes}, I, 226.
On the feast of Santiago [25 July] doña Juana was still around: “my lady Juana is alternating good and bad days”. Sancho was writing here to Albornoz about Albornoz’s own sister and the wife of Sancho’s cousin, Rodrigo Orejón, his lieutenant in 1566 and during the Revolt the castellano of the important citadel of Valenciennes. Juana Albornoz had lived in Antwerp since 1571 and had fallen ill there. She refused to use the medicine prescribed by the famous humanist Benito Arias Montano and did not keep to her bed. By the end of August she had left for Spain, to die that very same year in Valencia. Not only did Sancho have his network of Spanish military commanders and Spanish merchants, but he even had his contacts in the Duke’s intimate circle through his personal secretary.

The news that Haarlem had been won by the royal army in July 1573 makes Sancho dream about the complete surrender of the County of Holland: “Haarlem is now ours, with God’s help, with more time and money, all of Holland will be ours…. I wish this war to be over now”. It is possible that Alba then asked Dávila to join him in Utrecht, as suggested by a letter from the Duke. From a letter by Albornoz, written in September from Amsterdam, it seems Dávila was indeed with him at that time.

In October 1573 we find Dávila in the city of Breda, where he had arrived with troops and artillery on 5 October. However, he returned to Antwerp before the end of the month. In between, Sancho was involved in the attack on the castle of Oosterhout and the town of Geertruidenberg. The eighty defenders of the castle tried to flee during the night, but at dawn Sancho’s cavalry reached them “and cut them all to pieces, without anybody escaping”. During the fighting at Geertruidenberg “a good horse on which Sancho Dávila was fighting was wounded and died”. It seems obvious that Sancho was not a commander...
who passively looked on at the fighting from a distance. A good friend to have, but a terrible enemy to fear, especially for those he considered to be rebellious heretics.

**An Albista under Luis de Requesens (1574)**

By the end of the year the Duke of Alba was leaving the Low Countries and Luis de Requesens (1528-1576), Grand Commander [Comendador Mayor] of the Order of Santiago, would take over as the new Governor-general. He was the son of Juan de Zúñiga, former tutor to the young Philip II. It was the last opportunity for the military commanders to secure benefices from the old Duke and hopefully a passport to return with him to Spain, while at the same time the Duke himself was busy trying to convince them to remain in the Low Countries. In early December 1573 Alba wrote a long letter to Philip II in which he criticised the King for his treatment of Sancho, “who is very dissatisfied seeing that after so many years of service, Your Majesty has not given him any rewards, not even ordered to write to him”. Alba is clear in his opinion of Sancho: “Your Majesty has in these estates not one soldier like this one”. Again the question is whether the Duke was exaggerating Sancho’s needs in order to support his demands.

Sancho accompanied the Duke all the way to Namur in the south, and on 23 December he wrote a letter to Albornoz, who almost certainly was also present in the same city, beginning directly with an open and frank “the rewards Your Honour has to make me in Spain, with God’s help”. As the governorship of Antwerp was a very difficult position, complicated by the officials of the city government and the presence of many heretics, if the King wanted him to continue “he has to give me a very good reward of a continuous rent and raise my salary”. He seemed to understand that a knightly order would be a difficult reward to achieve, also suggesting the governorship of the castle of Milan, but otherwise leaving it to Albornoz to consider what was best for him. Sancho then reminded him of all the actions in which he had risked his own life:

167 Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 2 December 1573, EA, III, 563.
168 Alba was present in Namur at least between 22 and 26 December, EA, III, 567-569; ‘La merced que vuestra merced me ha de haçer en España con ayuda de dios’; Me ha de haçer mui buena merced de renta perpetua y creçerme el sueldo’. Dávila to Albornoz, Namur, 23 December 1573, AA, C/33, 108.
169 He must have asked Albornoz earlier for this post in Milan. The Duke’s secretary, however, had informed Dávila that he had not received news that the former castellano had died. Albornoz to Dávila, Amsterdam, 22 October 1573, EA III, 534.
en la rota de Dalem (Dahlem)
y la de Frisa del conde Ludovico (Jemningen)
y en la escaramuça de la Yasa (river Gete; in Walloon: Djaće)
y en el socorro de Guelandia (Zelanda)
de Bergas (Bergen-op-Zoom)
y en los de Anberes (Antwerp)
a Balquem (Walcheren)
y en la escaramuça sobre Mos (Mons)
y en la rota de la corneta de herreruelos sobre Santibitinbergue (Geertruidenberg)
y la toma del castillo de Hostraat (Oosterhout; not Hoogstraten).

And, of course, he had also served when his life had not been in danger, as he had been a soldier for thirty years. And he wanted to have permission to go to Spain. 

Did Sancho in Namur still try to join the Duke in his return to Spain? It is more than likely. Alba had to write explicitly to Requesens to inform his successor that he had sent Dávila back from Namur to serve the new governor.

Sancho was indeed right about the influence the change of governor would have on his career. For example, already by the end of January he was complaining that everybody else had received letters from Albornoz except him, though “nobody would be more happy with your letters than I would”. But of course he now received letters from Requesens.

During Requesens’s first months in office another naval attempt was undertaken to lift the siege of Middelburg, with Sancho as the admiral of one of the relief fleets, the other one under Julián Romero. However, hardly any of Sancho’s letters from this period are preserved and more attention to this expedition has already been given in the chapter on Julián Romero. In a letter Requesens explained why he had chosen Sancho:

---

170 See also ‘No quiero sino yrme a España, y si su merced no me hiciere mas merced que pagarme mi sueldo me yre mui contento’. Dávila to Alba, Maastricht, 26 March 1574, AA, C/33, 110.
171 Alba to Requesens, Namur, 22 December 1573, EA, III, 567; Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 22 January 1574, AA, C/33, 113.
172 ‘Nadie ternía mas contento con sus cartas que yo’. Dávila to Albornoz, Maastricht, 31 March 1574, AA, C/33, 111.
173 29 letters from Requesens to Sancho between 27 January and 25 July 1574, NCD I-IV.
“although he is not a sailor, he is a smart soldier with much courage and he has gone several times on these armadas”.  

The day before boarding his ship for this naval expedition, hoping to help out the besieged Cristóbal de Mondragón, Sancho was realistic about his own chances: “I don’t think we can relieve them, but we can divert the enemies by going to fight against them close to Flushing, so the ships that are loaded here can go from Bergen-op-Zoom to take the relief goods”. He even feared for his life and used a well-known expression to hide his emotions, thus revealing his philosophy: “a jug that often goes to the well will break its handle or spill the water”. He also hoped his return to Spain was getting closer: “if this war ends, and I think this will be soon, with God’s help, because if they do not surrender to us, I think soon by force we will surrender to them”. It is interesting to see that one of the most martial of all Spanish commanders in the Low Countries could imagine defeat. Julián’s expedition resulted in disaster, and this also forced Sancho to return to Antwerp, but not without losing his main ship which got stuck in the sand.

The new government literally knocked at his door, as councillor Gerónimo de Roda came to visit him to discuss Albornoz’s position. Sancho directly explained to Roda “la amistad” he had with Albornoz. It seems that the conversation dealt with accusations of theft, but Sancho defended his old friend as a good servant of the King. He accused others of “finding faults in everything from the past”. In Spain Albornoz was imprisoned, but in the end all charges of corruption were dropped. He would inform Requesens about “the truth and the dirty tricks”. At this time Sancho was still very positive about the new governor:


175 ‘No me parece que podremos meter socorro sino devirtir los enemigos yendo a pelear con ellos junto a Fregelingas para que carguen acá con algunos navios para que los que ban por Vergtas puedan hacer el socorro’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 22 January 1574, AA, C/33, 113.

176 Idem, ‘Cantarillo que muchas veces ba a la fuente, se rompe el asa o se vierte’.

177 Idem, ‘Si esta guerra se acava que creo sera presto con ayuda de dios porque si ellos no se rinden a nosotros presto creo sera fuerza nos rindamos a ellos’.

178 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1 February 1574, CG V, 20.

179 Parker, ‘Corruption’, 153-154, 158.
The lord Comendador Mayor [Requesens] rewards me much and I almost think he wants to reward me even more in secret, as he understands that there are many who do not like me. Until now he shows great worship for the affairs of the Duke [Alba].

Sancho also reflected on the future: “if the King would not give more to my children than to me; if God gives me glory this would mean more than anything”. Does the use of the plural form regarding his progeny imply that young Fernando had siblings, as Sancho could never have lied about this to somebody like Albornoz who knew him so well? Furthermore, as we have seen, they were even family, as Sancho’s cousin, Rodrigo Orejón, the *castellano* of Valenciennes, was Albornoz’s brother-in-law. Or is he simply speaking in general terms and maybe thinking of future offspring?

At the beginning of March 1574 Sancho headed for the surroundings of Maastricht. Trillo informs us in his chronicle that Sancho had been appointed Captain-general of the whole army that would be gathered there to stop the new invasion from Germany. According to the French ambassador, a first attack by Sancho on the enemy camp had ended in disaster, with three captains dead and between three and four hundred dead soldiers. Trillo, however, attempts to portray Sancho as victorious during these confrontations. By the end of March Sancho was still stationed in Maastricht, where he happened to be involved in an ‘encamisada’ in the village of Meerssen, “killing more than four hundred men”. He even gave an evaluation of his own position in a letter:

---

180 ‘Poner defeto en todo lo pasado’; ‘La verdad y bellequeria’; ‘El señor comendador mayor me hace mucha merçed y casi conosco que tiene boluntad de haçer mas en lo secreto si no que le debe de pareçer que debe de aver muchos que me quieren mal, muestra asta aora tener en gran beneración las cosas del duque’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 14 January 1574, AA, C/33, 109.


182 Mondoucet to the French King, Antwerp, 15 March 1574, Mondoucet, *Lettres* II, 146; Requesens to Gaspar Gómez, 5 March 1574, NCD I, 294. According to Bernardino de Mendoza, who was present at Maastricht, Sancho had already arrived on 3 March 1574. Mendoza, *Comentarios* (1948) 507.

In affairs of such importance I wanted to govern myself as a captain of Venetians, because it is certain that all of us here seem to be men of republics, because although I am the eldest here, until now there is not a better one.\textsuperscript{184}

Sancho knew with certainty that a battle was approaching: “we could go and attack these heretics and I thought that with God’s help we could break them... our soldiers are good-spirited and the heretics are very fearful”. \textsuperscript{185} The same martial tone can be detected in Trillo’s chronicle: “General Sancho Dávila always had a great desire to battle with the Count of Nassau”. Here, the reality of the letters coincides perfectly with the tone of the chronicler. Even Requesens lost his mostly reserved tone: “it was a good occasion to break the heads of these villains”, further speaking of “breaking these heretics”.\textsuperscript{186} Maybe Requesens knew that Sancho had a preference for the word ‘heretics’, and used it accordingly.

\textbf{The Battle of Mookerheyde (1574)}

Bernardino de Mendoza, captain of light cavalry, belonged to Sancho’s impressive army that had to thwart the invasion from Germany under Count Louis of Nassau, together with Maestres de campo like Gonzalo de Bracamonte and Fernando de Toledo, and other experienced commanders such as Cristóbal de Mondragón.\textsuperscript{187} Maestre de campo Francisco de Valdés was still on his way from Leiden. The royal army crossed the Maas looking for the enemy. Eyewitness and participant Bernardino de Mendoza has left us a detailed description of the events, in which Sancho clearly comes to the fore as the main commander of the army taking all the important decisions, and Bernardino himself, present in the third person, as one of the main protagonists of the battle in his role as commander of the cavalry. On 14 April the rebel army lost 2,500 men, “according to what

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{184} ‘En cosas de tanto peso yo me querria gobernar de mi parte como capitan de beneçianos porque çierto los que aquí estamos pareçemos honbres de rrepublica porque aunque yo estoy aquí como mas viejo asta aora no ai otra majoria declarada’. Dávila to Alba, Maastricht, 26 March 1574, AA, C/33, 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{185} ‘Se podria salir a estos herejes y que me pareçia que con ayuda de dios los romperiamos... Los soldados nuestros entiendo que estan con mui buen animo y los herejes mui medrosos’. Dávila to Albornoz, Maastricht, 31 March 1574, AA, C/33, 111.
  \item \textsuperscript{186} Requesens to Dávila, 29 March and 5 April 1574, NCD II, 60-62, 101-103. Also letters from 12 April, Idem, 154-155.
  \item \textsuperscript{187} Requesens to Vitelli, 5 April 1574, NCD II, 99-101; Requesens to Dávila, 5 April 1574, Idem, 101-103.
\end{itemize}
the villagers said, without counting those who remained at the battlefield and those who drowned”. The royal army took some thirty banners, with only about forty deaths and over a hundred wounded. Interestingly, Bernardino in his chronicle praised Louis of Nassau and the other enemy commanders as “valiant noblemen (caballeros)” and as “good soldiers and captains”. The tone of the learned nobleman Mendoza’s chronicle is again quite different from Trillo’s much more aggressive texts.

Trillo calls him “the very brave Sancho Dávila”, and his excellent tactics were “extremely prudent (prudentíssima), … copying the ancient Romans. In this Sancho Dávila there was so much valour and military prudence that among all the nations he was seen as a very important captain”. In Trillo’s chronicle, Sancho decided that some German prisoners were not to be killed but instead gave them some money after making them swear they would not serve Orange for the next two years. Compared to the mostly strategic comments on the battle from Mendoza, we find more small details in Trillo’s description, like the story of a wounded soldier asking a barber to cut off his arm, offering him his own dagger. They buried the arm and after six hours of bleeding he was cured. In Trillo’s history the ordinary soldiers were also heroes.

The Battle of Mookerheyde was international front-page news, and many pamphlets on the events in German, Spanish, French and Italian flew off the printing presses. In the French version Sancho even made it into the title of the publication, while in the others only the defeated Louis of Nassau was prominently mentioned. While both the Italian and the French texts agree on the number of deaths on the rebel side (five thousand infantry and 1,500 cavalry) and on the fact that Louis had escaped alive, information which was not at all accurate, they differ greatly in style. The pamphlet in French is strongly religious and dedicates most pages to voicing a Catholic vision of the situation in the Low Countries. Sancho is praised as “accort et vaillant”, and the text even precisely records the places where Louis was hit (ribs; thigh). This text was written in Antwerp on 18 April 1574. On the other hand,

188 Mendoza, Comentarios (1948) 509-513.
189 Mendoza, Comentarios, 512.
190 Rodríguez Pérez, Dutch Revolt, 70.
191 Trillo, Historia, 237-244. See also Padilla, Romancero, 91-92; Cornejo, Sumario, 198; Herrera y Tordesillas, Historia, I, 573.
192 Relación; Discours; Vera relatione; French translation of the Spanish account: CP III, 51-53; Neue Zeitung.
the Italian pamphlet is much more military in its content, mentioning the names of all important commanders, including Mondragón and Bernardino de Mendoza. Nothing special is mentioned about Sancho, and Requesens is seen as the great victor. This text was written in Brussels on 17 April. The title of the Spanish pamphlet reveals that it is closely related to the Italian one.\textsuperscript{193} Finally, the short German \textit{Neue Zeitung} was clearly supporting Louis of Nassau, mentioning nine hundred deaths, but adding that this was “without [counting] the women and the small children, that were pierced by the Spaniards who miserably killed them in the relief train of the army”.\textsuperscript{194}

Looking at other sorts of sources we encounter different echoes. The French secretary of Louis of Nassau, for instance, described Sancho as a “bon cappitan” who at the battle “was resolved to prefer dying to failing”.\textsuperscript{195} The tone of a published pamphlet and a letter could therefore strongly diverge in their message, even if they came from the same side of the conflict: a valiant enemy did not fit the pamphlet, but emphasising the cruel deeds of the Spaniards did. Interestingly, a more nuanced military author such as Mendoza found it unproblematic to praise Louis of Nassau in his published chronicle.

The victory of Mookerheyde has in subsequent centuries generated an important memory culture in both Spain and the Netherlands. Many of the banners, among them the banner of Count Louis of Nassau, would end up in the central chapel of the church of John the Baptist in Ávila, where Sancho and his descendants would be buried, and some of these banners remained there until the War of the Spanish Succession (1700-1714). The mast of Louis of Nassau’s banner was still in the possession of the Marquis of Miraflores when he wrote his book in 1857, together with parts of his armour and paintings of Sancho and his family members.\textsuperscript{196} Both the paintings and a piece of the mast of Nassau’s banner still remain in the possession of Sancho’s descendants.\textsuperscript{197} Among the spoils of war, there was also William of Orange’s command baton, which he had given to his brother Louis. This baton entered the estate of Luis de Requesens and has recently been discovered among the Jesuits of San Cugat, who in 2017 handed it over to the King of the Netherlands, to be displayed

\textsuperscript{193} See also: Mondoucet to the French King, Brussels, 17 April 1574, Mondoucet, \textit{Lettres}, II, 171-177.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{L’Agarge}, \textit{Blokkade}, 27.
\textsuperscript{195} Huguerye, \textit{Mémoires}, I, 220, 232.
\textsuperscript{196} Pando Fernández de Pinedo, \textit{Vida}, 172.
\textsuperscript{197} Fagel, \textit{Cristóbal}, 50.
in the Dutch National Military Museum, though the baton remains the property of the regional government of Catalonia.\(^{198}\)

In the nineteenth century a fierce debate on the commemoration of the Battle of Mookerheyde emerged in the Low Countries. It was the period of Catholic emancipation, and several Catholic authors from the eastern regions of the country refused to see the battle according to the Protestant and Hollandocentric vision of the war in which the Nassau brothers were considered national heroes defending the patria. Local historians, such as Catholic priest Meulleners, disagreed in their articles with the views of eminent academic professors such as Robert Fruin and P.J. Blok. In 1891 a commemorative plaque was unveiled, attached to the wall of a Protestant church in Heumen, a village within the province of Gelderland, as those from the adjacent province of Limburg did not want to participate in the celebrations. Maastricht city archivist and historian H.H.E. Wouters attempted to bridge the divide during a speech in Mook at the 1974 commemoration, but there is still even today a large gap between the understanding of the war in the often Catholic regions of the south-eastern parts of the country and the dominant Hollandocentric and Protestant master narrative, a historiographical dichotomy that also resurfaced during the commemorations of the beginning of the Eighty Years’ War in 2018.\(^{199}\)

In the context of historical reevaluation an educational programme for schoolchildren has recently been developed to provide a better understanding of the Battle of Mookerheyde. In this manner Dutch children may learn about Sancho’s ‘trick’, leaving his trumpeters and drummers on a small island in the river. At night they started making lots of noise, depriving the rebel troops of sleep, but also leaving them unaware of the real location of the royal troops. In Mendoza’s words, “soldiers that everywhere and all the time were restlessly sounding the call to arms, both on the river in small boats and on the other side”.\(^{200}\)

Gasparus de L’Agarge, possibly the chaplain of the Lord of Hierges, has left a description of the battle in which he highlights the great deeds of his lord, but also mentions the remarkable noise-making, as the Spaniards were “cunning as ever”.\(^{201}\)

---

198 Punt and Sloot, Willem, 154-156.
201 L’Agarge, Blokkade, 21.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

Close to the scene of the battle (in Bisselt) there are roads called Mendozaweg, Mondragonweg and Avilaweg, named after three of the Spanish commanders involved in the battle. Nonetheless, Sancho remains quite unknown within the Dutch context. A Dutch author who recently wrote a long article on the battle failed even to mention Sancho’s name, as Mookerheyde is mostly seen in Dutch historiography as the battle of the Nassau brothers. However, there is also a recently published Dutch historical novel on Mookerheyde in which Sancho is described as a very experienced commander who was a hero and celebrity in his own country because of his victories. According to this book, Sancho had not dared to start the battle until he knew reinforcements were on their way, and he outsmarted Louis of Nassau on the battlefield. Such positive descriptions of a Spanish commander against the backdrop of the Revolt in the Low Countries are not obvious for most Dutch authors, since the Black Legend narrative still plays a role in perpetuating historical stereotypes.

The victory at Mookerheyde would, however, become a bittersweet one, as the soldiers would start a mutiny directly afterwards. In the long letter Sancho sent to Requesens on 14 April he still told him just about the victory, describing the heroic deeds of his men and of the most important officers. He also reported on the death and wounded: “We have only a few dead and wounded men, though it still weights heavily for concerning such good soldiers”. Three days later, Requesens forwarded this letter to the King together with one of his own: “I hope this [victory] offers the occasion and the start of a different way of managing the affairs of these states, completely different from the way it has been proceding until now”. Requesens expressed his hope for a decisive change, and he had wished to continue attacking the enemy. However, then the tone of Requesens’s letter changed completely, as he had to inform the King that “the Spaniards present at this battle have done what they had said they would do, that is starting a mutiny, only a few hours after the victory”.

Requesens’s letter to Philip II was successful as the King would reward Sancho with an annual income of two thousand florins from the confiscated goods. He would also be sent the official papers of his

---

203 Dávila to Requesens, Hemes [Heumen], 14 April 1574, CD XXX, 453-455; AGS E. 557, 120; González de León, Road (2009) 1-2.
204 Requesens to Philip II, Brussels, 17 April 1574, CD XXX, 455-460.
205 Requesens to Maestre de campo Fernando de Toledo, 22 April 1574, NCD II, 176-177.
Protagonists of War

position as castellano of Antwerp citadel as he would now finally receive this office in full possession. Royal secretary Zayas also congratulated him on the victory a few days later. Sancho had to wait much longer for a letter of congratulation from Alba, as it took the Duke until July of that year to write to him. As an excuse he used his indispositions, which had been manifold and very heavy, but he noted that he always loved reading his letters and that his happiness was great regarding the Battle of Mookerheyde:

I may say that I have raised you all at my breast, and especially Your Honour as we have been walking together for many years in this office, and so they have congratulated me for your exploits, and for a good reason, as nobody deserves this more than me.

The great mutiny (1574)

The story of the mutiny would overshadow Sancho’s heroic victory at Mookerheyde. Mendoza informs us how Sancho spoke to the mutineers directly the morning after the mutiny:

Sancho Dávila addressed them, saying what an ugly thing they were trying to do, and that they should see that with it they obscured the honour that their nation had received the day before and that they cut the thread of the victories and exploits that were expected of them, eradicating the rebels from the states.

The mutiny took the glory of the victory away: “I am shocked that they so voluntarily wish to lose the fruits and the honour of the victory”, wrote

206 Philip II to Dávila, Aranjuez, 12 May 1574, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 173; Dávila, Memorial. Philip II to Requesens, Aranjuez, 12 June 1574, Dávila, Memorial; Domingo de Zavala, Antwerp, 24 January 1575, Dávila, Memorial. Already on 10 April, four days before the battle, it was clear that the soldiers were close to mutiny: Requesens to Dávila, 10 April 1574 and Requesens to Gonzalo de Bracamonte, 10 April 1574, NCD II, 139-143; Requesens to Dávila, 20 April 1574, NCD II, 173.

207 Zayas to Dávila, Madrid, 20 May 1574, Dávila, Memorial.

208 Puedo decir que os he criado á mis pechos, y especialmente vuestra merced que ha tantos años que andamos juntos en este oficio, y así me han dado la enhorabuena de vuestros sucesos, y con mucha razon, pues á nadie se le puede dar mejor que á mí’. Alba to Dávila, Cerrada, 18 August 1574, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 176-177.

209 Mendoza, Comentarios (1948) 513; Trillo, Historia, 244-245.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

Requesens explained that he had always paid his troops well, but now there was no money left: “I am Spanish, and I love and appraise my nation so much, as all those who were born in Spain, and the more I suffer for giving others a reason for undervaluing us”. He would forgive the mutineers without any punishment, and even offered “his silver and the jewels from his house, leaving me with nothing, and I would even hand them my own person”.

On 22 April Sancho arrived from Mookerheyde at Antwerp’s city gate with a company of cavalry. Those of the city let only Sancho’s servants enter and not the soldiers, until they had received orders from Governor Champagney to let them in. However, before Champagney arrived, Sancho had already entered with all of his men through the citadel, which had its own outside gate, “sounding the trumpets and dragging along the banners they had won at Mookerheyde”. Champagney and Dávila found themselves now clearly on two opposing sides, though both serving the interests of the King: “it was heard that there had been a conflict or hate between the castellan and Champagney, and it is to be feared that the burgthers will have to suffer the consequences”. Morillon also informed Granvelle of another story that was going round Antwerp: “it is said that Sancho Dávila had promised to allow them [the mutineers] to enter [the city of Antwerp] and to pay them after they had beaten the enemy”. Also, according to Antwerp chronicler Van Haecht, Sancho had promised the soldiers before the battle that they would be paid in full. Months later, Morillon would even turn Sancho into the cause of everything: “Sancho Dávila, the real source of the mutiny, having personally brought the soldiers to Antwerp”.

At the end of April Dávila wrote a letter about Mookerheyde to his old master, the Duke of Alba, but it was all about the mutiny. He explained how the mutineers had entered the city of Antwerp and “stuck to the wall until the junction with the castle”. Dávila was critical of the mutineers in his letter to Alba since they had entered while Requesens was in the city, but he remarked that he still thought they were behaving decently: “until now they have not created more disorder”. Because Requesens

211 Champagney to Philip II (copy), 28 April 1574, CD XXX, 465-484.
212 Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 295-296.
213 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1-3 May 1574, CG V, 82. The same idea can be found in a rebel song on the mutiny in which Sancho is called Seignor Daniel. Nederlandsche geschiedzangen, II, 121, 123.
214 Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 294.
Protagonists of War

did not have enough experienced men around him, “it is not possible he [Requesens] is without confusion”. No doubt he was accusing Champagney, but he did not mention him explicitly.

The very same day he wrote a much longer, and much more personal, letter to Albornoz, now directly attacking Champagney and criticising Requesens’s strategy: “He is so inclined to comply with Champagney that even the other day when he came from Brussels, though I [Sancho] had not kissed his hands after the journey [Mookerheyde] I did not succeed in doing so, and at the quay where he disembarked he did not speak a word to me, but only slightly removed his hat”. This moment must have certainly hurt Sancho. The hero of Mookerheyde had just returned from his victory and his Governor-general did not receive him with the necessary honours: “the lord Commander [Requesens] knows how he [Champagney] really is, but for some reason he has to treat him with kid gloves”. In a letter to Champagney Requesens, however, made clear that refusing Dávila entry into the city had been a huge mistake and that the men responsible had to be punished. It shows the difficult position Requesens was in, trying to placate both Champagney and Sancho Dávila.

Champagney wanted to use force against the mutineers, while Sancho tried to avoid any violence: “he [Champagney] wanted to take some cannons from the armada and put them on the wall against the soldiers. To this I replied that it would not be a bad thing to remove the cannons that were facing the Prince [Orange] and put them facing the Spaniards”. This is the most sarcastic remark to be found in Sancho’s correspondence with Albornoz. Sancho also told Alba’s secretary the story about Champagney refusing him entry to the city. And while he still

216 ‘Pegados a la muralla hasta la junta del castillo’; ‘Hasta agora no ayan echo mas deshorden’; ‘no puede dejar de allarse en algunas confusiones’. Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 26 April 1574, AA, C/33, 112; Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1-3 May 1574, CG V, 83.
217 ‘Es tan amigo de complacer a Champani que aun esotro dia quando vino de Bruselas no le aviendo besado las manos despues de la jornada llegando a besarselas. Alli al pasage donde se desembarcava no me hablo palabra sino solo quitarse un poco el sombrero’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 26 April 1574, AA, C/33, 114.
218 Idem, ‘el señor Comendador [Requesens] le conoce y le tiene por el que es, sino que debe de ir con contemplaciones con el por algunos respetos’.
219 Requesens to Champagney, 22 April 1574, NCD II, 178-179.
220 ‘Queria [Champagney] sacar unas pieças de larmada para ponerlas contra los soldados en la muralla a esto yo le respondi que no seria malo quitar las pieças que estavan contra el prinçipe y ponerlas contra los españoles’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 26 April 1574, AA, C/33, 114. Requesens also defended the use of violence from the citadel against the mutineers: ‘Si no quisieren reducirse, los ha de tratar el castillo como á enemigos’. Requesens to Dávila, 23 April 1574, NCD II, 191-192.
hoped the mutineers would remain calm, for himself his objectives were clear: “to go to Spain”.\textsuperscript{221}

Champagney wrote a long letter in French (in cipher) to Requesens in which he tried to convince the Governor-general of his side of the story.\textsuperscript{222} He stated that regarding Sancho “I have no particular feeling”, though he was not a friend of his. But he had learned that Sancho had written letters against an important figure, “subtly to sow dissension”. But he had calmed everything down in order not to fuel the “hate and enmity between the nations”. He even said that if the highly placed Netherlanders knew of Sancho’s letters, they would all try to kill Sancho “even if he possessed a hundred lives”.

After this general characterisation of the situation, Champagney entered into more detail. Sancho had already promised his men before the battle that they could enter Antwerp afterwards, “where they would be paid by the burghers”, a story also to be found with Van Haecht and Morillon. Sancho had also taken no action against the mutineers. Champagney wanted only to return to Antwerp with enough soldiers of his own, “otherwise I would merely serve as the subject of mockery and laughter, for both Sancho Dávila and his fellows, and as object of their growing insults”. He had always been a friend of the Spaniards, but only of those who feared both God and King.

Matters got even worse in Antwerp, and in the words of Requesens, “this mutiny of those from the castle has been the worst evil in the world”. Requesens would later even blame the mutineers for losing the Low Countries, as quoted in a famous letter by Hernando Delgadillo:

\begin{quote}
He [Requesens] insisted that it was not the Prince of Orange who had made them lose the Low Countries, but the soldiers born in Valladolid and Toledo, because the mutineers had driven money out of Antwerp and destroyed all credit and reputation, and he believed that within eight days His Majesty would not have anything left here…He continued for almost three hours.\textsuperscript{223}
\end{quote}

The situation was now out of control. The mutineers even tried to kill Francisco de Valdés and Julián Romero during the course of the mutiny. In a long letter, Requesens, who had preferred to wait to write to the

\textsuperscript{221} ‘Yrme a España’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 26 April 1574, AA, C/33, 114.
\textsuperscript{222} Champagney to Requesens, castle Cantecroy (Mortsel), 30 May 1574, NCD II, 304-316.
\textsuperscript{223} Hernando Delgadillo to Albornoz, 9 July 1574, AA, 33/156, quoted and translated by Parker, \textit{Army} (2004) 157.
King until after the mutiny was over, had no choice but to inform the King while the mutiny was still in full swing.²²⁴

Requesens’s brother, Juan de Zúñiga, discussed Sancho’s position in a letter to his brother:

Regarding Sancho Dávila there has to be taken much consideration, as he is such a good soldier, and Your Excellency has so few who can really help out, that there has to be great care taken not to stain him with being the one behind the mutiny.²²⁵

Juan could not believe that Sancho was the instigator of the mutiny, but he did agree that Sancho had not done enough to stop the mutineers. A good option would be to take him with the army that summer and then send him to Spain on some commission. The King could then use him somewhere else: “he is so hated by those of these lands that it would cause much damage if he were to stay”. Juan also discussed with his brother the possibility of giving Sancho the command of the light cavalry and Alonso de Vargas the Antwerp citadel, but Juan thought the citadel would be better for Gaspar de Robles or Cristóbal Mondragón “as they are such good soldiers and so accepted by those of these lands”. The command of an infantry tercio for Sancho would be unfair compared to his governorship of Antwerp citadel, because “with his reputation he could not accept it”.²²⁶

Requesens explained the situation to the King: “[Champagney] serves with such disgust and controversy that it is impossible to reconcile both him and Sancho Dávila, although I have tried my very best with both of them, and it will create great inconveniences”.²²⁷ Little would Requesens know that after his death the conflict between these two men would escalate severely, leading up to the Spanish Fury. The Governor-general clearly supported Sancho, “the soldier with the most services that Your Majesty has in these estates”, but he still thought it better to use Sancho somewhere else because of the ‘general opinion’ that he had played a role in the entry of the mutineers into Antwerp.

²²⁴ Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 15 May 1574, CD XXX, 484-496.
²²⁵ Juan de Zúñiga to Requesens, 5 June 1574, NCD II, 325-331.
²²⁶ Juan de Zúñiga to Requesens, 10 July 1574, NCD III, 327-332. Comparable arguments in Granvelle to Juan de Zúñiga, Naples, 9 June 1574, NCD II, 352-355. See also Juan de Zúñiga to Requesens, 17 July 1574, NCD IV, 25-26.
²²⁷ Requesens to Philip II, 19 August 1574, NCD V, 62-81.
Morillon offers the most terrible description of the mutiny in his letters to Granvelle. The Spanish mutineers awakened the inhabitants at night screaming as if they were going to kill everybody, and in this way an infinity of pregnant women aborted or gave birth before their time, and many old people died or were sick with fear, “and more than two or three thousand women went to [the County of] Flanders”. All the foreign merchants, Portuguese, German and English, were leaving the city as they wanted security “and they don’t want to trust a barbarian castellan, saying that the castle, that should protect them is the origin of the danger”. Together with barbaric castellan Sancho as the main cause of the disaster, Mondragón is also attacked by Morillon: “And it is certain that Sancho Dávila and Mondragón, through their imprudence (témérité) and insolence (oultrecuidance), have caused the robbing of this city”. It is clear to Morillon that “if the said Sancho Dávila remains in the castle, it is everybody’s opinion that the merchants will abandon the city”. He even feared Sancho would become the new governor of the whole city, as this would cause its complete ruin, “as he is not a politician, but brutal and superb as a lion, he would prefer to tyrannise, something the people in the long run will not support”. The inhabitants would then even welcome the enemy into the city. At a more general level he blamed the Duke of Alba who had permitted the soldiers to do what they wanted, and “all those who have had offices under him are frauds and robbers, getting pleasure out of destroying the country”. They should send them all to Italy and bring back “better disciplined soldiers”. In a letter somewhat later, Morillon defined his views on the situation in a one-liner: “Sancho d’Avila, who on his own is the source and cause of all our trouble”. The fact that the Spanish soldiers from the citadel had not fired on the mutineers when they were getting in also meant that there were people who wished to have Sancho removed as castellan and his place taken by somebody from the Duchy of Brabant. This story also reached the French court. But it may even have been the case that Sancho never actually received the official patent of castellan. In a letter written several months after Sancho’s victory at Mookerheyde in 1574, the King told

---

228 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1-3 May 1574, CG V, 84-88. Champagney also points out the possibility of the merchants leaving Antwerp: Champagney to Requesens, 20 May 1574, NCD II, 304-316.

229 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1 June 1574, CG V, 100. Also Idem, 14 June 1574, CG V, 139

230 Mondoucet to the Queen regent, Antwerp, 18 August 1574, Mondoucet, Lettres, II, 292; France, Histoire, 528.
Governor-general Requesens that “I have decided that he may receive the office of castellan of Antwerp as his property, though for the moment it seems to me more convenient not to send him the official papers, out of respect for the pretentions of those from Brabant against giving offices to foreigners, but you can say it to him from my part, although he has to keep silent about it until the right time comes”. The mutiny made the whole situation too complicated: “the papers will be sent when the time is ripe and the present problems are gone, most of all those with the Estates of Brabant”.231 It would take two months and the money of the Antwerp burghers to end the mutiny.232 However, the enmity between Champagney and Sancho did not come to a halt, and Sancho’s position as castellan remained a disputed one.

The ongoing war (1574-1576)

Sancho remained in Antwerp after the mutiny had ended. However, it was clear that the tide had turned, perfectly demonstrated by the fact that Requesens had removed Alba’s statue from the citadel’s central square and placed it in a room in the citadel. Sancho wanted to know from the Duke how to send it to Spain as it was “a pity to destroy it”. The plinth, which was very heavy, could be buried in a bulwark for the time being. A few days later, Sancho suggested the statue could go to Alba’s palace in Alba de Tormes or to La Abadía, now calling it “such a lovely piece”.233 The idea that it was sent to Spain also circulated in the Low Countries.234

Requesens had informed Sancho that the King had decided to reward him with an income of a thousand escudos, but the commander was not satisfied as he had hoped for more. His deeds at Mookerheyde, his new and most important claim to fame, in his eyes justified his higher expectations. However, he did acknowledge that Requesens had given him many favours and gifts “out of respect for the Duke my lord” and had also invited him to meetings of his war council on the expedition to

231 Philip II to Requesens, Madrid 10 August 1574, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 174-176; Dávila, Memorial.

232 More details on these events are in Martín García, Sancho, 179-187; Martínez Ruiz, ‘Gran motín’.

233 ‘Lastima deshazerla’; ‘Por ser pesada’; ‘Tan linda pieza’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 16 and 20 June 1574, AA, C/33, 115 and 118. Requesens to Dávila, Antwerp, 4 June 1574, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 184-185. Juan de Zúñiga supported taking away the statue: Juan de Zúñiga to Requesens, 10 July 1574, NCD III, 327-332.

234 Pollmann and Stensland, ‘Alba’s reputation’, 319; Smolderen, ‘Statue’.
support Zeeland. His main wish was to receive a licence to go to Spain: “I don't want a castle nor more rewards than that what they have to pay me”, and even more poetically, “I am already [too] old to always eat kisses”. But his patron could not help him: “I cannot become accustomed to the fact that the Duke my lord lacks the power to support me”. 235

Morillon reports on a party in the Antwerp citadel when Requesens came to visit on 19 August:

In general it was taken badly that instead of chasing out Sancho Dávila, as according to everbody’s opinion he rightly deserved, His Excellency [Requesens] went to have dinner with him at the castle... Where there was a great feast, with the most beautiful ladies of Antwerp, leaving their husbands at home. There was nobody from the Low Countries at the party.236

Notwithstanding the ladies from Antwerp, Sancho regretted the fact that he had lost most of his friends in the Low Countries: “it makes me sad to see so many people and friends leave these estates”, using a famous quotation to underline this idea: “it seems that one might use the words of Carvajal, that the wind is removing strands of my hair, two at a time”.237 In the chapter on Mondragón we will see somebody quoting this same saying.

Again we find traces of Sancho’s special relationship with merchant Hernando de Frías: “He has given his friends all the sorrow in the world as we received news that he had been killed in France”. Only later did they learn he was held prisoner. Sancho showed how he valued his friendship with Frías: if he did not have the money for his ransom, his friends would give it to him. “Until now I have not heard that he has been set free and

235 ‘Por respeto del duque mi señor; no quiero castillo ni merçed mas de que me paguen'; ya estoy bien para comer siempre besos'; ‘No me puedo acostumbrar de que el duque mi señor no tenga mas fuerça para valerme’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 16 June and 28 October 1574, AA, C/33, 115 and 121; Dávila to Alba, Antwerp, 20 June 1574, AA, C/33, 116; Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 1 January 1575, AA, C/33, 126. Requesens to Philip II, 8 June 1574, NCD II, 344-348; ‘Aunque no son [Mondragón and Sancho] del todo marineros, han navegado algunas veces estos canales’. 

236 Morillon to Granvelle, 5 September 1574, CG V, 200. See also Idem, 6 September 1574, CG V, 212.

237 ‘Harto me pesa e ver yr tanta gente y amigos destos estados'; ‘Pareçe que se podria decir lo de Carabajal, estos cabellicos dos a dos me los lleba el ayre’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 22 January 1575, AA, C/33, 127. The saying refers to the conquistador Francisco de Carvajal, the ‘demon of the Andes’. Other references to ‘amigos’ are in Dávila to Albornoz, Ouwerkerk, 4 May 1576, AA, C/33, 135.
Protagonists of War

returned home, something I wish with whole my heart (en estremo). 238 In another letter to Albornoz he was even more explicit: “he is the best friend we have... he is so passionate for what is important for us... one of the most honourable men I have ever met”. 239 His frequent use of ‘amigos’ in this period is again matched by a similar use of ‘herejes’ when he speaks of the rebels. 240

In June 1574, Sancho suddenly speaks of a second marriage, although it is difficult to judge whether he really meant what he was writing:

I have decided to get married and it has been accorded to take place within ten to twelve days; they say the lady is not very beautiful, as I have not looked at her very well; she will be virtuous as she also has no possessions; God will approve and separate us from sin. 241

By August 1574 they were already married, but again Sancho was not lucky with the health of his new wife: “the lady Violante is so sick and so thin that the only thing to say is that she has to remain in bed without moving for eight or nine months”. 242 Was she pregnant? The next year he had to give Albornoz the sad news: “God has been served by taking the lady Violante to heaven at the time I stayed at the islands of Zierikzee, and although I already for a long time held her for dead, I have felt it, and am feeling it, as one might imagine”. 243 In June 1576 Alba would

---

238 ‘A nos dado toda la pena del mundo a sus amigos porque tubimos nueva que le avian muerto en Françia’; ‘aunque el no tuviera dineros para rescatarse no le faltaran de sus amigos, asta ahora no entendido que sea libre y este en su casa que lo deseo en estremo’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 28 October 1574, AA, C/33, 121.

239 ‘Que es el mayor amigo que tenemos... es tan apasionado por lo que nos toca... uno de los honrados hombres que jama he tratado’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 20 June 1574, AA, C/33, 118. See also Idem, 10 August 1574, Idem, 119.


241 ‘He resolvido de casarme y esta acordado de que sea dentro de 10 o 12 dias, dicen que la dama no es mui hermosa que yo no la he visto muy bien, sera virtuosa que tampoco tiene hazienda, dios nos de buena dicha y nos aparte de pecado’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 20 June 1574, AA, C/33, 117. The bride would receive an income of 400 escudos for life if he died without her having children.

242 ‘La doña Biolante esta tan mala y tan flaca que no se puede mas decir estase en una cama sin poderse menear 8 o 9 meses...’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 10 August 1574, 4 and 19 December 1575, AA, C/33, 119 and 131-132.

243 ‘A sido dios servido estando yo en las yslas de Ziricsee de llevarse a doña Violante al çielo, que aunque a muchos dias que yo la tenia por muerta lo he sentido y lo siento como se puede pensar’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 21 April 1576, AA, C/33, 134.
send his condolences to Dávila: “it has hurt me in my soul to hear about the death of lady Violante”. He had married hoping for more children: “if God would give me children, good brothers and sisters (hermanos) for the one I have”.

The inheritance of his son, ‘Hernandico’ (Fernando), was partly in the hands of Hernando de Frías, but he was also thinking of involving the Fugger bankers by getting them to invest part of the money. Around this time Requesens calculated Sancho’s annual income at around seven to eight thousand escudos. Sancho also considered buying property in Spain: “I really wish to buy a small hacienda in Spain, good and cheap”. However, he found the prices of the estates in the neighbourhood of Ávila too high, but also blamed his representative at home: “the haciendas in Spain seem very expensive to me, or he does not know how to buy cheap”. In 1577 Sancho would pay eighteen thousand ducats for the Dehesa de Villagarcía, in the vicinity of Ávila.

In his letters Sancho complained about the behaviour of the rebels, the Spanish mutineers, and the inhabitants of the Low Countries: “the news from La Goleta and other failed exploits related to the affairs of His Majesty, seems to be celebrated in public”. A victory would change all that; “it seems they value us little now, but then [after a victory] they would value us more and they would show us more friendship and they would support us more than they do now”. He was a clear opponent of peace talks as he thought the rebels had to be punished, as “in any other

244 Alba to Dávila, 10 June 1576, EA, III, 613.
245 ‘Si dios me diese hijos dexar buenos hermanos al que tengo’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 21 April 1576, AA, C/33, 134.
246 Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 10 August 1574 and 4 and 19 December 1575, AA, C/33, 119, 131-132.
247 3,000 from his first wife or his son of less than four years old, 150 escudos a month for the Antwerp citadel, and more than that sum in relation to other smaller incomes, and 1,000 escudos a year on the Low Countries given by the King. Requesens to the Count of Monteagudo, 7 July 1574, NCD III, 291-293.
248 ‘Yo deseo bien comprar una hacienda en España buena y barata; me hacen muy caras las haciendas de España o el no sabe comprar barato’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 19 December 1575, AA, C/33, 132; Martín García, Sancho, 237, 241.
249 ‘De las nuevas de la Goleta y cualquiera otro mal suceso que benga cosa que toque a Su Magestad parece que se alegran en publico; Que parece que nos estiman agora en poco, nos tendrían en mucho y nos mostrarian mas amistad y nos harían mas asistencia de la que hazen’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 28 October 1574, AA, C/33, 121; Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 10 August 1574, AA, C/33, 119; Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 22 January 1575, AA, C/33, 128; Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 318-319.
way both these estates and the reputation would be lost”. Morillon knew of Sancho’s opinions, and saw no difference from Mondragón’s: “Sancho Dávila and Mondragón tell His Excellency [Requesens] that he should not listen nor negotiate with the enemies of our faith”. This quotation supports the idea of Sancho having a more outspoken religious opinion, but it does not fit the balanced image of Mondragón (chapter III). However, it is not the first time Morillon considered that the two men held the same opinions.

It is important to remark that Sancho was not just commenting on events but also taking action. In December 1574 the army commanders were again planning an expedition to Zeeland. Sancho would take one fleet from Bergen-op-Zoom, but he was not very confident of success because of the lack of good sailors. He thought the best option would be for the King to send an armada from Spain because then they would have good and loyal sailors at their disposal. Together with good soldiers this would solve their problems. Describing another naval expedition, Morillon reported that Admiral Sancho took a Vice-admiral from the Low Countries with him, so this man could be blamed if things went wrong. Sancho could then excuse himself, saying that “he was not as good on sea as he was on land”, a phrase that reminds us of the debate on Julián’s behaviour at Reimerswaal. In October, Morillon blamed Sancho and Mondragón for initiating such a “hazardous expedition” only for “greasing their own hands”.

In early December 1575 Sancho returned to Antwerp after another expedition to Zeeland. The letter to Albornoz is full of words of defeat, though they had won in the end: “we lost many friends… they did us much damage…. they killed many of our good men… they made us retreat… the affairs of these islands had not been very prosperous”. Finally the royal army –Mondragón was also involved – succeeded in gaining the small fortress of Bommenede: “on Sunday morning… we

---

250 ‘De qualquiera otra manera se pierden estos estados y la reputacion’. Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 22 January 1575, AA, C/33, 128.
251 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 11 July 1575, CG V, 336.
252 Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 30 December 1574, AA, C/33, 125; Dávila to Alba, Antwerp citadel, 22 January 1575, AA, C/33, 128. Pí Corrales, España.
253 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 18 September 1575, CG V, 391.
254 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 9 October 1575, CG V, 409-410.
255 ‘Nos costo artos amigos… nos hiçieron mucho daño… nos mataron mucha gente y buena…. Nos hiçieron retirar… el no aver sucedido mui mas prosperamente estas cosas destas yslas’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 4 December 1575, AA, C/33, 131.
started the assault and took the town, slaughtering all those inside”. Requesens spoke of seven hundred defenders killed, but he also wrote to the King about their own high losses:

There are so many wounded Spaniards, and some banners are left without healthy soldiers, and others with only three or four, and with twenty at the most. But the majority of the wounds are from pikes and stones, and they will heal rapidly, although there are also many men wounded by arquebus shots, of which they will die.  

The many casualties may have led Sancho Dávila to criticise Requesens’ policy, at least if we are to believe Morillon:

They [Sancho and Juan Osorio] have decided to go and complain to the King, and if ever there was a reason to bring down this Catalan Comendador Mayor. The said Sancho Dávila is ready to break with him; and I heard this from none other than [Pedro] Castillo.

By now we know Morillon hated Sancho and that he would be glad to write down any negative rumour he overheard, but it is remarkable to note the use of Requesens’ Catalan origins as an argument that may have been used against him. However, there are no traces of this idea in Sancho’s own correspondence. The source of the rumour Morillon mentions, Pedro del Castillo, was the son of a Spanish merchant from Bruges, working for the central government.

After Bommenede, the next attack was aimed at Zierikzee, a siege most closely related to Cristóbal de Mondragón, so most details of this siege can be found in the chapter on Mondragón. Requesens, who was present in Zeeland, had wanted to attack the city directly, but Sancho and Mondragón convinced him that the troops could not stand another assault. At the beginning of the siege the Governor-general still hoped the city could be won in a month. He was very wrong, and would not live to see its surrender. Dávila describes how the rebels tried to enter Zierikzee with large support fleets. On 3 March 1576 he wrote a letter

---

257 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 6-7 November 1575, CG V, 421. Juan Osorio also participated in the expedition to Zeeland with Sancho Dávila and Cristóbal de Mondragón.
258 Fagel, ‘Cardinal Granvelle’.
259 Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp citadel, 19 December 1575, AA, C/33, 132.
to Requesens asking for provisions, but only six days later he had to write a letter to the King about Requesens’s death: “a day after I returned from the island of Zierikzee I heard about the death of the Comendador Mayor [Requesens]”.

He heard about Violante’s death when he returned from Zierikzee in April 1576, and on that journey he had also been in danger when his ship had to cut anchor during a storm to end up on “a beach where we did not lose men or artillery, but we did lose the limited amount of clothes I had with me”. In England, Lord Burghley would receive the same news also by late April: “Sancho Dávila, who was driven to save himself by wading up to his neck in water, is come sick to Antwerp to make the funeral of his wife”. Morillon, as always, added a pinch of anti-Hispanism to the story: Sancho had almost drowned because he had gone against the winds and the tides, “according to the nature of these people who do not follow any advice”.

In that same letter from Dávila there is a very detailed description of the fighting to stop the rebel fleet from reaching Zierikzee, with both losses and gains. If the town surrendered “they [the rebels] would have to give up all the islands of these canals of Holland”. He even hoped that the important fleet of Zierikzee would then join the royal side. Sancho had meanwhile returned to Antwerp to ask the Council of State which had taken over after Requesens’s death to provide the means to end the siege. By early May it was clear that they would take Zierikzee, “although they remain obstinate even though we know they have little food left, though more than we would have liked”.

Requesens’ sudden death created a power vacuum in the Low Countries. In his letter of 9 March 1576 Sancho directly asked the King for a replacement. It would, however, take more than a month for the news to arrive from the King that everyone had to obey the Council

---

261 ‘Una playa donde no se perdio la gente ny artilleria aunque la poca ropa que yo llevaba’. Dávila to Albornoz, Antwerp, 21 April 1576, AA, C/33, 134; Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 7/8 April 1576, CG VI, 51.
263 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 7/8 April 1576, CG VI, 51.
264 ‘Tienen por perdidas todas las yslas destos canales de Holanda’; ‘Aunque estan todavia obstinados no obstante que se entiende tienen poca comida pero no tan poca como querriamos’. Dávila to Albornoz, Ouderkerk, 4 May 1576, AA, C/33, 135.
265 The following is partly based on Santiago Belmonte, ‘Year’.
266 Dávila to Philip II, Brussels, 9 March 1576, AGS, E. 567, 26.
of State until a new Governor-general had been appointed, confirming what the Council had already done directly after Requesens’s death. It meant that Sancho and the other Spanish commanders now had to obey the Council of State, dominated by the nobility of the Low Countries and controlled by the Duke of Aarschot. Gerónimo de Roda was the only Spanish member of the council, and Aarschot clearly tried to remove the Spaniards from the decision-making process.

The same tension can be detected from a letter by Granvelle’s confidant, Morillon, who stated that “Sancho Dávila and all those of the nation hate the Lord of Lalaing”, referring to Philip of Lalaing (1533-1582), Count of Lalaing and Governor of Hainaut.267 ‘Nation’ here clearly means the Spanish nation, a term used increasingly with this meaning in the context of the conflict in 1576. A crystal clear example of a euphemism.

After Zierikzee’s surrender to Mondragón, Spanish troops started a mutiny, and on 25 July they took the Flemish town of Aalst. The situation came to a head in Brussels, where the inhabitants attacked the Spaniards present in the city, starting a popular rebellion. The Council of State found itself in a difficult position and decided to outlaw the Spanish mutineers and give the States of Brabant permission to raise troops for their protection. During these chaotic months, Sancho maintained a close correspondence with the Council of State. The Council considered the popular rebellion a result of the mutiny, but Sancho did not agree and saw the popular rebellion as the real problem, and in part sympathised with the mutineers. “We know such a great movement is not caused by the mutiny of the Spaniards, because it had started much before, when already things were happening and words were overheard”.268 He also felt that the members of the Council of State were being controlled by the burghers of Brussels, especially after Gerónimo de Roda, Alonso de Vargas and Julián Romero had been locked up within the palace by the rebelling inhabitants. This measure also implied that Sancho no longer trusted the Council of State’s decisions.269 As early as in May 1576, Morillon stated that the Spanish commanders had acted against the wishes of the Council of State: “Sancho Dávila and Mondragón do not obey at all, but the said Council does not wish to complain, so it does not seem like they hold a grudge against the nation”.270

267 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 19 March 1576, CG VI, 31.
268 Dávila, Antwerp, 16 August 1576, CD XXXI, 129.
269 This is in short Santiago Belmonte’s argument, ‘Year’. CD XXXI, 72-111.
270 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 21 May 1576, CG VI, 77-78; Council of State to Philip II, Brussels, 12/14 August 1576, CP IV, 301.
Again, all faults were to be found with the Spaniards, described again as ‘la nation’.

Sancho turned himself into the representative of the Spanish military commanders in the Low Countries, “seeing this country so revolted (alterado) and already some Spaniards have been killed”, and also understanding how little could be done to pacify it all, with the Council arrested and imprisoned in that city.\(^\text{271}\) According to Sancho, the burghers of Brussels controlled the situation and they were responsible for outlawing the mutineers:

> They felt so arrogant and brave that they asked the lords of the Council... that they should declare the said Spaniards that had entered Aalst as disobedient rebels and enemies of His Majesty and of the country... and they pressed so hard that against their wish they made them publish a general placard in this sense.\(^\text{272}\)

When the Council wrote that the mutineers wished to head for the Antwerp citadel, he denied this: “I have not heard such news”, and he confirmed to them that “I do not intend to host any soldiers suspected of mutiny”.\(^\text{273}\) A day earlier a group of high commanders, among them Sancho, had written an ultimatum to the Brussels government, stating that they wanted the arrested members of the Council to be set free, or otherwise they would go into action. Santiago Belmonte is right in describing this ultimatum as an ‘act of treason’, as Philip II’s explicit orders had been to obey the Council of State. The military were now following their own policy. Roda wrote to the King during these days saying that he supported Sancho’s policy, but that nobody was to know, because he feared for his life if they did.\(^\text{274}\)

As the arrival of the newly appointed Governor-general, Don Juan de Austria, was taking too long according to Sancho, he wrote to the King to emphasise the urgency of his arrival.\(^\text{275}\) In his next letter he set out his ideas on the best royal policy:

\[^{271}\] Dávila to the Council of State, Antwerp, 1 August 1576, CD XXXI, 81-82; Notes of the Council of State, 3 and 6 August 1576, CP IV, 513, 523.

\[^{272}\] Dávila to the Duke of Brunswick, the Duke of Cleves, The Bishop of Liège and the Archbishop of Cambrai, Antwerp, 1 August 1576, CD XXXI, 109.

\[^{273}\] Dávila to the Council, Antwerp, 6 August 1576, CD XXXI, 90.

\[^{274}\] Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 7 August 1576, CP IV, 290; Roda to Philip II, Antwerp, 30 August 1576, CP IV, 339; AGS, E. 567, 30.

\[^{275}\] Dávila to Philip II, 15 August 1576, AGS, E. 567, 95.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

There should be sent as many Spanish soldiers as possible, gather German companies and all those coming from the country, for the war of Holland and Zeeland… The magistrates and abbots should be deprived of most of their rents and taxes (gavelas), leaving them very little… It would be convenient to build castles in all the important cities… break down the walls of some of the cities and punish them, as all this and more is what they deserve.²⁷⁶

On 30 August Orange’s men were let into the city of Brussels, and on 4 September all the members of the Council of State were arrested, a ‘coup d’état’ that provided the subject for one of Hogenberg’s engravings. The Estates of Brabant and the united Estates-General would now take over, with the fast-growing influence of the rebels under William of Orange.²⁷⁷ A day later, the Council of State sent a representative to the King, carrying instructions to put the blame for the crisis on Sancho Dávila and asking the King for an exemplary punishment. They spoke of “the braveries (bravades) of Sancho Dávila and his followers”. On 11 September the King wrote to Roda and told him that he was satisfied with Sancho’s actions, but Sancho had to obey the Council of State in everything, “showing his complete submission and obedience”.²⁷⁸ All parties involved, including the King, were playing tricks, hiding their true ideas on the matter. For many Netherlanders Sancho had become one of their main enemies.

On 22 September 1576 the decree against the mutineers was extended to include all Spanish military in the Low Countries. Sancho found himself in a hostile country, completely at war. And still the new Governor-general had not arrived. Morillon blamed Sancho and Roda for the rebellion, caused by their “pride and violence”, a vision he shared with Granvelle.²⁷⁹ In the evening of 14 July 1576 Champagney had already placed guards in the streets leading to the Antwerp citadel, and Roda considered that if Sancho did nothing to stop this “it would be like the citadel was being

²⁷⁶ ‘Embiasse mucha gente Española, toda la que se pudiese y que se hiziesen Alemanes y que todos biniesen del pays tomando por azesorio (?) la guerra de Holanda y Gelanda … los magistrados y abades quitándoles todas sus rentas y gavelas y dejándoles dellas muy pocas… convenía hazer castillos en todas las villas principales … derrocar las murallas a algunas de las villas y castigarlas pues todo esto y mas parece que lo monezen’. Dávila to Philip II, Brussels, 16 August 1576, AGS, E. 567, 100.
²⁷⁷ Janssens, Brabant, 293-296.
²⁷⁸ Instruction of the Council of State to Rassenghien, Brussels, 31 August 1576 and Philip II to Roda, El Escorial, 11 September 1576, CP IV, 342, 344, 367; AGS, E. 569, 118.
²⁷⁹ Morillon to Granvelle, Saint-Amand, 15 September 1576, CG VI, 129; Granvelle to the Prior of Bellefontaine, Rome, 6 December 1576, CG VI, 179-180.
Protagonists of War

besieged".280 This was written several months before the attack on the city from the citadel on 4 November, showing that the situation was already extremely tense during the summer.281

On 26 September troops gathered against Ghent citadel, where Mondragón’s wife and his lieutenant resided, and on 20 October an open rebellion against royal commander Francisco de Montesdoca in Maastricht ended in the sacking of the city by royal troops. On 12 September the King had written a short letter to Sancho urging him to obey Gerónimo de Roda, responding in this way to Sancho’s letters written between 29 July and 17 August.282 However, the letter would not have arrived before the end of September or early October. In the chronicle by Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, published in 1601, Julián Romero had adverted Sancho that the Estates-General wanted to besiege the Antwerp citadel, ‘but he [Sancho] did not believe it, because the Count of Eberstain had given his word that he would keep the city on the side of the King’.283 Unfortunately, we lack further proof of this early warning by his fellow commander.

On 3 November 1576, on the very eve of the Spanish Fury in Antwerp, Morillon described the difficult situation Sancho Dávila found himself in: William of Orange had promised to deliver the citadel of Antwerp to the Estates-General within six weeks after the first cannon shots. However, Morillon hoped they would act without Orange’s help. He also thought Roda and Sancho would not simply wait for what was to happen: “I do not think that Sancho, however reckless he may be, nor Roda, will remain waiting”. In an intercepted letter to the castellan of Valenciennes, his cousin Rodrigo, Sancho had written that he could not come to his rescue and that “the stubborness of the mutineers from Aalst will be their common ruin”.284 Those in the citadel of Antwerp found themselves in the same hopeless situation; “as the castle is a world of merchants, paymasters and others from the nation that have retreated to the said castle of Antwerp, all fearsome people who will make the soldiers lose heart”.285

280 Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 15 July 1576, CP IV, 254.
281 Champagney to Philip II, Antwerp, 10 August 1576, CP IV, 292.
282 Philip II to Dávila, El Escorial, 12 September 1576 (AGS, E. 569, 23-24) and Idem, El Pardo, 17 October 1576, CD XXXI, 136-137.
283 Herrera y Tordesillas, Historia, II, 94; Kagan, Clio, 144-149.
284 Morillon to Granvelle, Saint-Amand, 3 November 1576, CG VI, 153-154.
285 Idem.
In the same letter Morillon also reported on the arrival of the Marquis of Havré, Charles-Philip of Croy (1549-1613), in Antwerp with five hundred horse and twenty-one infantry banners as a result of an agreement between Champagney and the Estates-General. Havré was Aarschot’s half-brother. The always well-informed Morillon added “that it is said that the Lord of Havré has the government of the castle and of the city and that monseigneur de Champagney has the admiralty”. Thus, according to Granvelle’s confidant, Dávila’s job as castellan had already been given away. Morillon also reported in the same letter that Julián Romero was trying to convince the mutineers of Aalst to join them “to occupy the city with the help of six companies under Count Hannibal”. The mutineers, however, had gone to plunder in Geraardsbergen. Although staying in Saint-Amand in Hainaut, Morillon already understood how both sides in Antwerp were preparing for battle.

**The Spanish Fury of Antwerp (1576)**

The most frequently used sources on the Spanish Fury of Antwerp in 1576 are a series of engravings by Frans Hogenberg and the description given by the Englishman George Gascoigne in his *The Spoyle of Antwerpe* (1576). The engravings were later re-used in a combination engraving showing the city of Antwerp in the middle with six other scenes draped around it. Although Gascoigne’s work has until recently been considered an example of early modern autobiography, it turns out to be mostly a translation and elaboration of a pamphlet in Dutch written by an eyewitness who clearly hated the Spanish presence:

*The true description of the taking of Antwerp and of the inhuman and very gruesome murder, fire, sack, and the unheard violation of women and girls by the Spanish and their adherents, on November 4, 1576, and several days therafter, written by one who had been present himself.*

---

286 De Schepper, ‘Markies’, 34.
287 Morillon to Granvelle, Saint-Amand, 3 November 1576, CG VI, 156-157. Count Hannibal was Jacob Hannibal of Altemps (1530-1587).
289 Rijksmuseum RP-P-OB-76.862.
290 *Warachtige beschrijvinghe*, Leiden University Library, Thyspf. 258.
Though recent historiography tends to describe the Fury as the result of a mutiny, in reality it was a battle in the city, in which the mutineers did play a role, but where the decision to attack on 4 November 1576 was made by Sancho Dávila and royal councilor Gerónimo de Roda. In line with the interpretation of the Fury as a mutiny, both the recent historiography and the Hogenberg engravings play down the presence of troops defending the city, turning it into an act of blind violence against innocent burghers by mutining Spanish soldiers. Sancho was the main commander in the citadel, and he accordingly plays an important part in the narratives on the Fury. Génard, who published an extensive volume on the sources of the events, stated in 1876, “For Sancho Dávila was reserved the shame of being the general commander of this troop of barbarians”.

On 9 November, only days after the Fury, the newly arrived governor of the Low Countries, Don Juan de Austria, wrote a strongly worded letter to Sancho Dávila:

Señor Sancho Dávila, the revolt that has taken place in Antwerp has given me great pain and it would be worse if I knew it has happened because of you or because of the Spanish soldiers there present.

Sancho answered the letter on 14 November, but informed Don Juan at the same time that Gerónimo de Roda had already written to him in order to explain the situation in a more elaborate manner. However, Sancho did not refrain completely from giving explanations to the new Governor-general. He clarified how the citadels in both Ghent and Valenciennes had been under attack and that they had now succeeded in avoiding the same fate in Antwerp. It had been a kind of pre-emptive strike:

When you will be informed, you will understand that our people had been forced to act for their own health and safety and that they had always tried to avoid it.

---

292 Don Juan to Sancho Dávila, 9 November 1576, CD XXXI, 138.
293 Fagel, ‘Origins’.
294 Sancho Dávila to Don Juan, 14 November 1576, CD XXXI, 141
Sancho accused the city government of collaboration with William of Orange, while they themselves had only acted in the best interests of the King.

Unfortunately, the letter from Gerónimo de Roda to Don Juan that Sancho mentioned is not extant, but we do have a letter from the royal councilor to his King written on 6 November, with the plundering still ongoing. Roda informed the King that the city government had let in German troops paid by the Estates-General and that they had built entrenchments against the citadel, even installing artillery pieces. The troops from the citadel had attacked these entrenchments before the mutineers’ arrival, an event described by chronicler Antonio Trillo but also to be found in an anonymous English pamphlet, *An historical discourse or rather a tragicall historie of the citie of Antwerp* (1586). According to Trillo, this easy victory gave the Spanish troops in the citadel the idea that an overall attack on the city might be feasible. These data make clear that the violence started before the mutineers’ arrival, but also that Roda and Sancho did not use the presence of the mutineers to free themselves of any guilt regarding the excessive violence used by the troops.

Another aspect of the letter from Roda is his definition of the event as a victory in a battle, and his statement that the main commanders, including Sancho, Julián Romero and Francisco de Valdés, should be rewarded by the King for their actions. The victory had been ‘sanglante’ and much damage had been done, but it was a very important one, as from now on the Low Countries would take the citadel more into their consideration.

There was another aspect that contributed to the events: the festering personal conflict between Sancho Dávila and Governor Champagney. As mentioned before, Luis de Requesens had been perfectly aware of the situation, but clearly sided with Sancho:

Sancho Dávila, without offending anybody, is the best soldier the King has at his disposal in the Low Countries and you can only blame him for his violent passion towards Champagney, while Champagney possesses a terrible hatred towards the whole Spanish nation and everything that is decided and done in Brussels and Madrid.

---

297 Roda to Philip II, Antwerp citadel, 6 November 1576, CP V, 15; AGS, E. 566, 57.
The personal conflict between Champagney and Dávila dated from at least 1574 when the Spanish soldiers had celebrated their victory at Mookerheyde in the streets of Antwerp, with lots of noise, shouting and trumpets. Champagney also related in his memoirs that Sancho had been waiting for a good opportunity to rob the city of its riches, and this had almost led to a duel between Sancho and Julián. We find the same idea in a letter to the King.299

The 1713 biography connected the attack with honour because of the victory over a strong enemy, but tried to minimise the plundering: “by ordering not to take anything out of the city, part of the damage could be resolved, and the goods returned to their owners at a low price”.300 Sancho’s biographer in 1857 decided to minimise the space given to the Fury, not even half a page, and concluded without quoting any sources that Sancho had tried to avoid the sacking of the city, probably based on the 1713 text.301 The entry in Spain’s new biographical dictionary also does not pay much attention to this event and states that it was the result of problems between the Council in Brussels and Sancho, and that the action was undertaken to punish the city for supporting William of Orange, and as a way of paying for the troops.302 If this last argument had been true Sancho would actively have favoured the sacking. The 2010 biographer is the first to dedicate a whole chapter to the Fury, called ‘el saqueo de Amberes’.303 The author claims that the defenders of the city started using their artillery against the citadel, turning Sancho’s attack into a reaction, but the only moment in this text when Sancho is actually given any protagonism is when he asked the mutineers to join them. There is no reflection whatsoever on Sancho’s role in the events.

The Spanish Fury on stage

The Antwerp Fury has inspired plays in both Spain and England, studied by Ann Mackenzie in 1982 in an elucidating comparative article. There is doubt about the authorship of El saco de Amberes as both Pedro Calderón de la Barca and Francisco Rojas Zorrilla have been mentioned, while A Larum for London has remained anonymous. Both plays have recently

299 Perrenot, Mémoires, 39-40, 83; Champagney to Philip II, Brussels, 30 November 1576, CP V, 73-75.
300 Dávila y San-Vitores, Rayo, 203.
301 Pando Fernández de Pinedo, Vida, 216-217.
302 Martínez Ruiz, Sancho Dávila’, 647.
303 Martín García, Sancho, 207-215.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

attracted scholarly interest and recent editons of both are available.\(^{304}\)

In *A Larum for London* Sancho is one of the main protagonists, albeit under the name of Sancto Danila, clearly the result of bad copying. He is the first to enter the stage after the prologue. And it is directly made clear that Sancho started the violence and why:

> The plot already is determin'd of, and say Cornelius [commander of German infantry] doe but keepe his word; these swilling Epicures shall taste of death, whilst we survive to rifle their rich coffers…. if men ever had a fit occasion to inrich themselves, and fill the vast world with our echoing fame; now is that instant put into our hands. \(^{305}\)

The anonymous author of the play has no interest in possible political or military reasons behind Sancho’s motivation to attack the city. The only other argument mentioned is the fact that the inhabitants had permitted Orange’s fleet to anchor. Interestingly, the element of helping the Prince of Orange can also be found in the surviving correspondence. The element of mutiny is not used and the mutinying troops arriving from Aalst are not described in any special way.

The strength of the play lies in Sancho’s characterisation as a violent and very cruel man. When he found out that an old man had hidden his daughter in a convent, he ordered his troops to fetch her: “welcome faire sweet, mine armes shall be thy throane”. Sometime later, when the fighting needed his full attention, he decided without remorse to kill her with his own pistol, “rather tan another shall inioy, what Danila held esteemed in his eye, heere it began, and heere my love shall dye”. \(^{306}\)

The scene may have been based on a story in Gascoigne’s *Spoyle*, where two soldiers raped a girl after getting her out of her hiding place in a convent.\(^{307}\) Danila also stars in the last scene, just before the epilogue, when entering the city victoriously with drums, banners and soldiers:

> Her streetes lye thwackt with slaughtered carcasses, her houses that before were stuft with pride, are left as naked as the wilderness:
> Oh in remorse of humaine clemency,


\(^{305}\) Greg, Larum (1913) lines 20-23, 63-65.

\(^{306}\) Greg, Larum, lines 1023, 1075-1079.

\(^{307}\) Mackenzie, ‘Study’, 289.
My heart (me thinkes) could sigh, my eyes shed teares,  
To call to minde and see their misery:  
But they were wanton and lascivious,  
Too much addicted to their private lust:  
And that concludes their martirdoome was iust.\textsuperscript{308}

Just for one moment it seems Sancho was capable of pity, but he remains a perfect example of the Spanish soldier as described in texts belonging to the discourse of the Black Legend: cruel, bloodthirsty and merciless. There is nothing authentic about his depiction, and not even his name was rendered correctly.

For its part the Spanish \textit{comedia} offers a completely different version of events. The play is set before the actual Fury takes place, with Sancho again as one of the main protagonists. This loyal servant to the crown appears on stage trying to convince the mutineers to stop their mutiny and come to his rescue: “Return, return, Spaniard, for our nation… to move the hardness of these rebel souls, returning to save us”.\textsuperscript{309}

In the end, Sancho will succeed in convincing the mutineers and they will arrive at the gates of Antwerp citadel, staging a dialogue between Sancho and \textit{electo} Juan de Navarrete, the leader of the mutineers:

\begin{itemize}
\item Sancho: ¿Quién llama?  
Who is calling?
\item Navarrete: Los de Alost.  
Those of Aalst.
\item Sancho: ¿Y con qué intento?  
With what intention?
\item (¿si acaso les ha animado  
Maybe you are encouraged
lo que anoche les previne?)  
what he told them last night.
\item ¿Venís a que se amotine  
Have you come to make mutineers
la gente que me ha quedado?  
out of the people that are left to me?
\item Navarrete: No es de tan infame ley,  
There is no bad intention
la acción que nos ha movido  
behind the reason for our arrival.
\item Sancho: ¿Pues que es lo que os a traído?  
So then, why have you come?
\item Navarrete: Ganalle a Amberes al Rey,  
To win Antwerp for the King
pues con hecho tan valiente,  
because with such a brave endeavour
nuestra misma afrenta cessa.\textsuperscript{310}  
we can make up for our affront.
\end{itemize}

In the play it is clearly stated that it was Sancho who decided to open the gates for the mutineers: first, those from the outside to the citadel and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{308} Greg, \textit{Larum}, lines 1610-1625.
\item \textsuperscript{309} ‘Bolved, volved, Español, por vuestra nación… para mover la dureza, destos animos rebeldes, porque a socorrer me buelvan’. Truan, \textit{Saco}, II, 670-671; III, 220-226.
\item \textsuperscript{310} ‘Truan, \textit{Saco}, III, 578-591.
\end{itemize}
then those from the citadel to the city. “I want to point out, that by my
er order they have opened it [the gate of the citadel towards the city]”. And
we also find him, almost at the end of the play, participating personally
in the attack: “slashing several”, as the author summarised the action.\footnote{Ya advierto, que por mi orden lo han abierto’; acuchillando a algunos’. Truan, Saco, III,
lines 636-637, after line 674.}

Related to this episode, there exists a famous quotation, spoken by
\textit{electo} Navarrete, the leader of the mutineers: “we shall eat in Antwerp or
dine with Jesus Christ”.\footnote{‘Vamos a comer a Amberes o a cenar con Iesu Christo’. Truan, Saco, III, 563-564.} “The quotation assigns some of the protagonism
to the \textit{electo}, but it seems that the valour of the mutineers is what is being
emphasised here. We can find a variation of the quotation in the chronicle
of Bernardino de Mendoza who relates how the Spanish mutineers were
let into Antwerp citadel on 4 November 1576, at eight in the morning:

\begin{quote}
And Sancho Dávila and the other commanders asked them if
they wanted to rest for a while and eat, but they, coming with
green leaves and hope of success for their good spirit, responded
that there were determined to eat in paradise or dine in the city
of Antwerp’.\footnote{Mendoza, Comentarios (1948) 549.}
\end{quote}

Why the order of elements has been changed remains unclear, but it is
undeniable that the playwright clearly knew his chronicles. This remark
can also be found in the previously mentioned anti-Spanish Netherlandish
pamphlet on the Fury and in later Protestant histories of the events:
“they swore an oath not to eat, nor drink or rest before they could do
the same quietly and easily within the city of Antwerp”.\footnote{Warachtige beschrijvinghe; Hooft, Alle de gedrukte werken IV, 469-470; Brantôme, Oeuvres
complètes, I (1839) 150-151.} It looks as if
the rather general quotation of the pamphlet later became embellished
with a religious point in more elaborated texts. \textit{Electo} Navarrete died
during the first attack on the defence line, and even in Hooft’s history
the author no longer differentiated between mutineers and other soldiers.

\textit{El Saco de Amberes} is a very interesting play as it turns mutineers into
heroes fighting for King and country.\footnote{Rodríguez Pérez, ‘Amotinado’.} One could even describe it as a
nationalistic play. Sancho’s role is paramount, since he had succeeded in
converting the mutineers again into active and loyal soldiers. As they had
not yet been paid, they were allowed to fight under their own banners
and under their own \textit{electo}. In that sense, of course, there were Spanish
mutineers during the Spanish Fury, but it was not a mutiny that got out of hand; it was a battle within the city, against a large army of defenders with different parties involved. In the military sense it was a victorious assault by Sancho’s troops. Even the Netherlandish pamphlet considered it a work of God, “because otherwise it would have been impossible that so few soldiers would have been capable of gaining a city with so many inhabitants and with so many soldiers”.

**His failed knighthood**

The Perpetual Edict issued on 17 February 1577 included the surrender of the citadels to people born in the Low Countries and the departure of all Spanish troops. The King had already given his new Governor-General the right to take Antwerp from Sancho, as can be found in a letter to Dávila from 6 November 1576, written when the Spanish Fury was already taking place, but, of course, without the King being aware of it: “if I order you to give up the government of this citadel, you have to do it without any doubts and without any difficulties”. It was an order, though still politely formulated. In January 1577, Philip’s tone was much harsher: “though for duplicated letters I have ordered and commanded you to hand over the said castle”.

Don Juan informed the King that Sancho was very unhappy as the citadel had been given to him as compensation for his services, and Sancho considered the King should take this away only if he were to receive greater compensation. The worst was that he would have to hand the keys to his castle over to the Duke of Aarschot, his enemy from the Council of State. According to chronicler Cabrera de Córdoba, he could not make himself give the keys to Aarschot, so he left and delegated this difficult job to his lieutenant, Martín del Hoyo.

---

316 *Warachtige beschrijvinghe.*
317 ‘Si os ordenáre que dejeis el cargo de esa ciudadela, lo hareis sin poner en ello duda, ni dificultad alguna’. Philip II to Dávila, Madrid, 6 November 1576, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 222-223; AGS, E. 569, 22.
318 ‘Aunque por cartas duplicadas os he ordenado y mandado que entregueis el dicho castillo’. Philip II (secretary Antonio Pérez) to Dávila, Madrid, 31 January 1577, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 224-225.
319 Don Juan to Philip II, Marche, 2 January 1577, CP V, 135.
320 Juan de Austria to Dávila, Leuven, 3 March 1577, quoted in Pando Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*, 226-227.
On 28 April 1577 most Spanish troops left the Low Countries by way of Maastricht, “with money in their pocket, plunder, and booty in their bags, and the firm promise of more to come”. The 5,300 soldiers had two thousand servants, but needed provisions for twenty thousand.\(^3\) There had been a discussion about who would function as commander of these troops. Was it to be Alonso de Vargas, Sancho Dávila, Julián Romero or Francisco de Valdés? In the end the Count of Mansfelt led the expedition to Italy. However, the commanders were very unhappy that they had to give up their positions without knowing what they would get in return.\(^4\) According to Italian historian Bentivoglio, Sancho had boldly stated on his departure from the Low Countries that they would be back soon: “Your Highness forces us to leave the Low Countries, but remember, very soon he will find himself forced to recall us”.\(^5\)

In May 1577 Philip II was thinking how to reward the commanders who had returned from the Low Countries, as we have already seen in the chapter on Julián. The citadel of Alessandria was for Sancho, but if he did not want it the citadel would go to Romero, and this would also have repercussions for Mondragón. But the King kept changing his mind, and Sancho was not satisfied with the offer: “it will not be solved until he [Sancho] can kiss the hands of Your Majesty and explain to him his services and some other pretentions he has”. According to the Marquis of Ayamonte, Governor-general of Milan and (like Requesens) a member of the important Zuñiga family, Romero and Sancho did not behave as they should, but “soldiers that comply by fighting can be excused for their lack of courtesy”.\(^6\) Sancho did indeed go to court, as is proven by a letter from September asking the King for compensation for his services.\(^7\) Though he had not fulfilled all requirements, as some payments depended on his being present at court, the royal council decided to give him what he asked for because of all his services. One royal secretary added in the margin of the document, “this has consequences for others and it should not be done with those who have been absent,

\(^4\) Don Juan to Philip II, Leuven, 7 April 1577, CP V, 299.
\(^7\) Dávila to Philip II, Madrid, 4 September 1577, CD XXXI, 160-161.
and especially with those that have good salaries like his”. Sancho was also appointed Captain-general of the coast of Granada.\(^{327}\)

But he did not attain his main objective, a knighthood of the order of Santiago, promised to him by the King in 1570, but still under scrutiny.\(^{328}\) The council of the military orders did not limit itself to meekly following Philip II’s wishes, since when dealing with military commanders it did investigate their noble status and their purity of blood.\(^{329}\) At the time of the first request, the council had found a problem with a great-grandmother of Sancho. In 1578 the case was still being debated between the president of the council, the King and the Duke of Alba. Finally, Alba understood that Sancho was not going to be handed a habit, though he still suggested the possibility of asking the pope for a dispensation. The debate continued, and when the pope seemed willing to provide Sancho with a dispensation, the president of the order did not accept this option: “to give a habit to a converso, and to such a well-known personality… would be the knife and the end of the orders”.\(^{330}\) The Marquis of Aguilar tried to convince the King to intervene in this case:

As it is a matter of honour, it seems to me not unreasonable, because without it he cannot serve His Majesty, and His Majesty would then lose a great captain and soldier, who has been succesful in all affairs he was involved in.

The Marquis also sent a memorial of Sancho’s with his letter in which Sancho pleaded his case with the King, threatening to leave his offices:

Without this contentment and satisfaction, my spirit would not be enough for me to continue serving Your Majesty in this function, nor in any other related to war, because he would understand that my sword and chance (\textit{ventura}) would fail me in everything.

Sancho also tried to frame the situation as an insult to the King’s powers: “I cannot believe that Your Majesty is not powerful enough to honour those who serve him, and lift men up from the dust of the earth, because these are the powers and the greatness of kings”. Seemingly Philip II did

\(^{327}\) CD XXXI, 161-166.
\(^{328}\) AHN, Ordenes militares, Santiago 8581.
not send a reply to the commander on the matter. However, on 20 October 1579 Sancho received his patent as Maestre de campo general of the army that had to enter Portugal.

In 1580 his old friend Fernando de Toledo, the Duke’s natural son and Prior of the Order of San Juan, did his best to help Sancho, asking for approbation of his habit:

And even if Sancho Dávila was not my friend, I would do the same for any other person whom I would see in the same manner, because he is the most desperate man on earth, because his honour cannot walk around the world as it should, and it would be so easy to resolve it.

Even his old ‘amigo’ could not help him out, and Sancho would die in 1583 without having received his habit and without having regained his honour. In 1636 Sancho’s grandson, Sancho Dávila Guevara, would finally receive a habit of the order of Alcántara, just before travelling to America in the service of the King. In a document of the Council of the Indies we see that the grandson earned his new positions in large part through his famous grandfather, whose years in the Low Countries were summarised as follows:

He went to Flanders as captain of cavalry and the Duke’s guards, where he apprehended the Count of Egmont, destroyed the rebels at Dahlem, slaughtering more than five thousand; in Frisia he defeated Count Louis, offering valuable services during this war, destroying the Prince of Orange, killing and capturing in Tienen (Tirlemont) the best men of the army – and where he was shot in his thigh; he saved Middelburg, slaughtered the heretics who had besieged it, won Arnemuiden and four hundred ships worth many millions. During the nocturnal attack (encamisada) on Arnemuiden, under his command and that of others, they used ladders to climb the walls, and in Moncalvo he killed in a duel a knight who was almost a giant arriving with a double-handed sword and Sancho with his sword and shield. He discovered the

331 Marquís del Aguilar to secretary Juan Delgado, Madrid, 24 August 1579 and Memorial de Sancho Dávila, CD XXXI, 166-169; Philip II to Dávila, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 19 September and 4 October 1579, Idem, 169-172.
332 CD XXXI, 173-175.
333 Dávila to Philip II, Lisbon, 8 April 1583, CD XXXI, 555.
treason of Roermond, pacified the mutiny in Antwerp, conquered the islands of Zierikzee, Duiveland and Philipsland.\textsuperscript{334}

In the seventeenth century the rules of the orders regarding purity of blood were clearly less stringent than in the later years of Philip II but, of course, the candidates’ past also became less easy to control, as with the passing of time it became more difficult to find evidence of a converso background. A comparable situation occurred with the possible knighthood for Cristóbal de Mondragón.

Martín García in his 2010 biography does address Sancho’s converso background, asking the question “and why not a habit of the Order of Santiago?”, suggesting that Sancho had already harboured doubts about the origins of his two grandmothers from Salamanca and Segovia. The documentation from the council of the orders points to the family of his mother, Ana Daza, the daughter of Rodrigo Orejón and Andrea del Espinar. Andrea was thought to be a descendant in the third degree of conversos from Segovia.\textsuperscript{335} In 1857, the Marquis of Miraflores completely avoided writing about the possible converso background of his ancestor, not even mentioning the debate about the habit. Gerónimo Manuel Dávila y San-Vitores also did not mention a converso background, neither did he refer to the negated knighthood. While Gerónimo filled many pages of his book with genealogical information on his own family, there is nothing to be found about Sancho’s mother’s side.\textsuperscript{336}

**Last years in Portugal (1581-1583)**

Sancho played an instrumental role not only in the Low Countries, but also in Portugal. As *Maestre de campo general* of the army he helped the

\textsuperscript{334} ‘Pasó a Flandes por capitán de cavallos y de la guardia del duque de Alba, donde prendió al conde de Agmon, desbarató los revoltos en Dalen pasando a cuchillo más de 5,000; en Frissa venció al conde Ludobico haciendo en esta guerra notables servicios, desbarató al príncipe Dorange, degollando y prendiendo en Tylimon la gente más lucida del exército y a él le dieron un balaço en un muslo, socorrió a Middelburg, degolló los herejes que la tenían cercada, ganó a Ramua y 400 navíos y urcas que valían muchos millones. En la encaminada de Ramua, haviéndose encomendado a él y a otros, un escala para arrimarla y en Moncalvo mató de solo a solo un cavallero que era medio xigante viniendo con montante y Sancho Dávila con espada y rodela. Descubrió la traycción de Roremunda, apaciguó el motín de Amberes, conquistó las islas de Zirqueca, Duvelanda y Filispidan’. Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente 111, 202, quoted in Martín García, *Sancho*, 285-287.

\textsuperscript{335} Martín García, *Sancho*, 10, 46, 139, 143.

\textsuperscript{336} Pando Fernández de Pinedo, *Vida*; Dávila y San-Vitores, *Rayo*.
Duke of Alba to pacify Portugal and facilitate Philip II’s access to the Portuguese throne. The Duke, as leader of the whole expedition, had requested Sancho’s presence from the beginning. His final enterprise has also turned him into one of the protagonists of a play attributed to Lope de Vega, *La defensa en la verdad*:

Y assi el Español monarca
Para hazañas tan grandes,
Embió al rayo de Flandes,
Al cuchillo de la parca,
Al mas valiente Español
Que al furioso mar se obliga;
Que con la sangre enemiga
Puso rojo todo el sol.
Sancho de Avila en efeto
Que en la docta escuela la aprende
Del gran Duque de Alva a Ostende,
Y Mastrique en el aprieto.
Mayor de Sancho temblaron,
Al fin a su nombre ygual.

And so the Spanish monarch
For exploits so great,
Sent the lighting bolt of Flanders
The knife of death
The most valiant Spaniard
Who forced the furious sea
With the blood of the enemies
Turned the sun red
Sancho Dávila indeed
Who in the learned school was taught
By the great Duke of Alba, with Oostende
And Maastricht in distress
Fearing Sancho so much
And in the end even his name.

During this last expedition Sancho again worked together with his friend, Prior Fernando de Toledo. The expedition offered new possibilities for asking for royal rewards, reminding the King of the more than thirty-eight years he had served as a soldier: “I hope…. if I don’t die, to receive many rewards and honours from your hand”. He also reminded the King of the fact that the rewards he had been promised after the Battle of Mookerheyde had still not been paid. Now he wanted an office and an estate in Portugal that had become vacant, not for himself, but “to leave to my son”. In March 1581 he was still waiting for his financial reward from Mookerheyde and by then he suggested he be given another estate in Portugal.

---

337 Valladares, ‘Alba’.
338 Vosters, *Nederlanden*, 261-262; Vega y Carpio, *Defensa*.
339 Fernando de Toledo to Zayas, Setubal, 19 July 1580, CD XXXI, 207-213. Many letters to and from Sancho in CD XXXI.
341 Dávila to Zayas, Porto, 18 March 1581, CD XXXI, 559-560; Dávila to Juan Delgado, Puerto de Santa María, 19 December 1581, CD XXXV, 339-342; AGS, GM 120, 86.
Protagonists of War

Sancho also complained in his letter that he had never in his life received a good ransom from a rich prisoner:

Though I had taken one during the victory at Dahlem who would give me five thousand escudos, but the Duke cut off his head and did not give me anything in return; and another very rich German during the battle of Mookerheyde, but the Comendador Mayor [Requesens] asked to exchange him for Luis Ponce, the son of Andrés Ponce, who had been taken prisoner by the Count of Nassau, a brother of the Prince of Orange, and I also handed him over.\textsuperscript{342}

In April 1583 Sancho was still desperately engaged in trying to obtain his promised habit: “I beg that you find it at your service to issue an order to give me an encomiendo with the habit that would honour me… And if possible to enjoy it during my lifetime, and it seems it is high time, as I am already around sixty years of age”.\textsuperscript{343} And he was right, as he died on 8 June of that year:

A horse had kicked Sancho Dávila and he did not make much of it. At first he was cured with the use of incantations; after three days the wound closed with medicines; by then he already had fever; they bled him three times and he was purged, and as the remedies were started late, he died on the ninth day.\textsuperscript{344}

His executors were Alonso López Gallo, Antonio del Río and Luis de Barrrientos (of the royal war council in Portugal), who wrote a letter describing Sancho as indeed “a great soldier with friends and enemies (soldado de gran opinion con amigos y enemigos)”, the image we can also deduce from his own letters, dividing the world into excellent friends and despicable enemies.\textsuperscript{345}

His body was taken to the church of Saint John the Baptist in Ávila. In his will he expressed his wish to have a chapel for himself and that his first wife’s body be brought there from the Low Countries. His young son, Fernando, would receive an inheritance worth some sixty thousand

\textsuperscript{342} Dávila to Zayas, Barcelos, 3 August 1581, CD XXXI, 474-477.
\textsuperscript{343} Dávila to Philip II, Lisbon, 8 April 1583, CD XXXI, 553-555.
\textsuperscript{344} According to Brantôme, Sancho had died at the siege of Maastricht (1579). Brantôme, \textit{Oeuvres completes}, I, 151.
\textsuperscript{345} Barrrientos to secretary Juan Delgado, Lisbon, 10 June 1583, CD XXXI, 556.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

In the end Sancho had accumulated a handsome fortune during the more than forty years he had served as a soldier. His descendants did well, obtaining a habit, and in 2019 Marquis Alonso Álvarez de Toledo is still guarding the family inheritance, including the paintings of Sancho and his wife Catalina.

Protagonist of a historical novel (2007)

Enrique Martínez Ruiz, in 2007 still an active full professor of Early Modern History at the Complutense University of Madrid, published that year a lengthy historical novel on Sancho Dávila. Though this military specialist and authority on the history of Sancho Dávila knew better, it was decided for commercial reasons to call the book *El castellano de Flandes*, instead of the correct but less attractive *El castellano de Amberes*. The subtitle shows the importance the author assigns to his protagonist: ‘the man who kept Philip II’s empire standing’ (*el hombre que mantuvo en pie el imperio de Felipe II*). The novel portrays Sancho’s eventful life from his native Ávila, passing through all the important places of his career in the Low Countries, including Dahlem, Mookerheyde and Bommenede. However, it takes the author more than half of the more than six hundred pages to arrive in the Low Countries.

Elaborating on a well-known and emotionally charged historical moment, Martínez Ruiz offers us a moment of intimacy between Sancho and Egmont after his arrest: “their looks crossed each other; and in that of his one could see a reproach (*las miradas se cruzaron; en la de aquél había un reproche*)”. The scene resembles the emotional moment between Egmont and Julián Romero just before the count’s execution in Brussels that we can find in several chronicles. Furthermore, the author devotes much attention to the description of his wounds and to the peculiarities of military life at the time, using original sources. A fictitious love story with Agnes, a woman from the Low Countries with blue eyes, is also added to the plot. It is noteworthy that his two real-life marriages were omitted from the novel. Almost at the end of the book a chapter entitled “Apocalipsis en Amberes” describes the Spanish Fury. After the attack on the city had started, Sancho rushed to Agnes’s house, only to find her tortured and brutally killed by soldiers looking for money. It makes him finally understand the position of the victims, after all those

---

346 Martín García, *Sancho*, 276-278.
347 Martínez Ruiz, *Castellano*.
348 Martínez Ruiz, *Castellano*, 356, 393, 397.
violent years: “For me, nothing will ever be the same and I fear that I will turn into a man who hates his destiny” (“Para mí ya nada será igual y me temo que me convertiré en un hombre que abomina de su destino”).

Friends and heretics

When considering the texts written by Sancho Dávila and those that have been written about him, two interrelated elements come very much to the fore, in contrast to the other commanders studied in this book. There is the fact that in his correspondence Sancho much more frequently uses the word ‘heretics’, turning the rebellion in the Low Countries into a religious conflict. This ‘confessionalisation’ of the Revolt by the Spanish commander may have been the reflection of a more profound religious sentiment. As the biographers have it, he started his life in search of a religious career, perhaps under the guidance and protection of his uncle, the arch-dean. But at the same time he seems to have always had a martial heart, which may have been the genetic inheritance from his early deceased and combative Comunero father. It may well have been that Sancho, more than the other commanders, was a soldier with a religious heart. This possibility must then be combined with the problems with the laws of purity of blood that prevented him from acquiring the habit of one of the religious knightly orders. For a Spanish soldier with a converso background religion may have been a more important issue since it also intersected with his very own personal life and career, but this question is imposible to answer with the available sources.

Nevertheless, in the same letters in which we encounter the frequent use of ‘heretics’, we also find the recurring use of ‘friends’. Compared to the others, Sancho writes much more about his friends. Particularly strong friendships are those with the rich merchant Hernando de Frías and with Fernando de Toledo, Alba’s natural son. One of his executors, Luis de Barrientos, when reflecting on Sancho’s life, called him “a great soldier with friends and enemies”. This chimes perfectly with the idea one gets from reading his letters. If this were the case, we would then have to be cautious in interpreting his use of ‘heretics’ too narrowly as a purely religious statement. It can certainly be a way of expressing the dichotomy between friends and foes, preferring a clearly negative word for the enemies to a more neutral one. Maybe his feud with the Lord of Champagney is also a case in point.

349 Martínez Ruiz, Castellano, 603-604, 612-613, 620.
Sancho Dávila: the champion of Catholic Spain

However, for the moment it might be best to interpret both these elements at work within this Spanish commander, combining his martial and religious background with his personal character which tended to divide the world in a Manichean dichotomy. Sancho functioned for ten years without any disruption in the Low Countries, a region where there was a religious divide he had not experienced in his earlier life in Ávila and in Italy. And over time, the Low Countries became more and more hostile to Spanish commanders, magnifying even more the influence of both his character and his background.

At the same time we should not overlook the fact that Sancho was also a professional and experienced soldier who craved recognition and the rewards that corresponded to his accomplishments, a need that was connected with the idea of building an inheritance to leave for his only son. Despite the difficult negotiations, he was actually very successful because, notwithstanding all the complaining in his letters, he did amass a small fortune during his military career. Furthermore, he also passed on another legacy: his memory and fame. Already starting with his grandson, his descendants used the memory of the great deeds of their ancestor to promote themselves, continuing at least until the Marquis of Mirafllores in the nineteenth century. Having such a great hero in the family was beneficial without any doubt. His descendants who took up the pen to write his biography also framed him as a ‘Catholic’ hero, combining this image of a war hero with that of a hero defending Catholicism against heresy, which could also be useful in the Spain they were living in. At least judging from his own letters, using ‘heretics’ so frequently, Sancho may have felt himself indeed a champion of Catholicism, in a more pronounced way than the other commanders.

Dutch historiography has not paid much attention to this great Spanish military figure. He was clearly famous, and much hated, in the Low Countries during his lifetime, maybe even as the drummer turned commander, but his fame was lost after his death. Though difficult to prove, it might well be the fact that he was so close to the Duke of Alba, and so close to the negative characterisation of the Iron Duke, that Dutch historiography did not need to create a separate protagonist. It was easier to emphasise the much more famous Duke of Alba as the symbol of Spanish and Catholic cruelty. In that sense Sancho’s image was overshadowed by that of his master.
Cristóbal de Mondragón. Painting by Abraham de Rycke (1591), private collection, Torre de Murga, Spain. Photo: Stadhuismuseum Zierikzee.