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=3033455
Chapter III
Cristóbal de Mondragón: the good Spaniard

Eternal fame

An eighteenth-century chronicler from the town of Zierikzee in Zeeland described the Spanish commander Cristóbal de Mondragón as an exceptional person: “Mondragón possessed a noble heart, that was able to value even the merits of an enemy”. In his chronicle from 1795 he elaborated further on this idea in a footnote:

We admire this virtue in a Spaniard of those days. Thumb freely through the patriotic (Vaderlandsche) histories of those centuries; I doubt if you will be able to find a second Mondragón; whose decent (braaf) behaviour, compared to the wickedness, perjury and inhuman cruelties of other Spanish commanders, stands out even more.¹

Mondragón is the exception to the rule, the only virtuous Spaniard. His presence allows the author to denounce all other Spaniards as extremely cruel. For this reason, praising Mondragón still belongs to the Black Legend of Spain, the narrative tradition among mostly Protestant authors that describes the Spanish as a people cruel by nature. The comparison between Mondragón and the Duke of Alba in particular has often been made, as we can read in a Beggar’s song on the surrender of Zierikzee in 1576: “they keep their body and leave; Mondragón has received them with mercy, he did better than the Duke of Alba, when Haarlem had surrendered”.² The merciless third Duke of Alba, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, can be considered the dark shadow of the noble Mondragón.

¹ De Kanter, Chronijk, 152-153. This chapter was partly translated and reworked for a Dutch book: Fagel, Cristóbal.
² ‘Behouden lijf en leven; Mondragon heeft s’ in genade onthaen, hy heeft beter als duc d’Alf gedaen, doen Haerlem worde opgegeven’. Nederlandsche geschiedgezangen (1864) 161.
This positive image of Mondragón still exists in Zierikzee today. On a gate in the city’s harbour, the Noordhavenpoort, we find a metal pole described as Mondragón’s sword, left behind after the Spanish commander had taken Zierikzee in 1576 in the name of King Philip II. The newspaper Zeeuwsch Dagblad on 6 May 1960 wrote a little disrespectfully about “an iron bar that is called: Mondragón’s sword”.\(^3\) Not free of sarcasm, the journalist described what, according to him, had happened after Mondragón had hastily left Zierikzee in 1576: “Then, in all consternation, he must have forgotten his sword that then was planted ‘for eternal memory’ on top of this gate”. The French novelist Victor Hugo visited Zierikzee in 1867 and his coachman showed him the sword and explained the story when they drove under the gate, and even then the author understood how exceptional it was that the conquered honoured the sword of the conqueror.\(^4\) When in 2017 the sword suddenly disappeared from its towering position, it was front-page news in the local media. After several weeks it became known that the theft was a publicity stunt for a new hotel in the city called Mondragón that opened its doors in 2020. The hotel is in the same building that had housed a restaurant and cinema with that name between 1947 and 2001.\(^5\) Near the harbour, the house where the commander had stayed, called ‘De Mossele’, was also a place of rememberance. Mondragón’s fame in Zierikzee even led in 2002 to the creation of a tourist route called the path of Mondragón, ‘het Mondragónpad’, with a leaflet and a map available for visitors to the island.\(^6\)

Mondragón is a local hero not only in Zierikzee. In Groenlo, a town he successfully defended against Maurice of Nassau in 1595, there is a street that bears his name, and we find the same in Maastricht, where he was one of the commanders who in 1579 successfully besieged the city under the command of the Prince of Parma, Alexander Farnese. His sword seems to possess a special commemorative power, as in the past a church tower in the city of Luxembourg perhaps also had his sword on top of it. In 1926, the colleagues of the young Francisco Franco Bahamonde had two copies of the sword made as a gift for the celebration of his appointment to General. One of the swords was destined for the Spanish

\(^3\) Zeeuwsch Dagblad, 6 May 1960, 3.
\(^4\) Hugo, Oeuvres complètes, II, 532; Uil, ‘Degen’.
\(^5\) ‘Zwaard van Mondragon op havenpoort’; ‘Zwaard van Mondragon moet zo snel mogelijk terug’; ‘Verdwijning’.
\(^6\) Visser and Hoogenraad, Mondragónpad; Blokker, Waar is de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, 62-63; Steegmans, ‘Erfenis’.
Cristóbal de Mondragón: the good Spaniard

national military museum; the other was handed to the man who would later become Spain’s dictator. These copies could be made because the commander’s descendants were then, and still are, in possession of a sword belonging to their illustrious ancestor. The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna possesses a cuirass and a helmet that belonged to him; the cuirass was included in the 1948 exhibition in Delft commemorating the peace of Münster and in the 2020 exhibition on Mondragón in Zierikzee.

His fame in Spain may have been enhanced by the very fine biography on Mondragón published in 1905 by Ángel Salcedo Ruiz (1859-1921), though he modestly called it ‘notes for his biography’. It has remained the reference work on his life to this day. The author, an auditor for the Spanish army, was also a well-versed conservative journalist and an editor of La ilustración Católica. He published widely, including in 1903 a book on Prior Don Fernando de Toledo, the natural son of the Duke of Alba, active in the Low Countries during the Revolt and, as we have seen, closely connected to Sancho Dávila. A few years later, in 1912, the famous Spanish history painter, Ricardo de Medrazo y Garreta, made a portrait of the old general, now held in the national war museum in Toledo. So, at the beginning of the twentieth century it seemed he was well on his way to becoming a national Spanish hero.

However, nowadays, to many people Spanish commander Cristóbal de Mondragón is not much more than a local hero from the remote times of Philip II. In his home town of Medina del Campo, situated on the Castilian meseta, a historical re-enactment group called ‘Tercio compañía de Cristóbal de Mondragón y de Mercado’ has been present at many local and regional festivities since 2013. This interest in the history of the early modern Spanish infantry can be explained both by a growing general interest in the history of the Spanish tercios and by a renewed awareness of the region’s history related to the sixteenth century. At the time this region, and even more so the commercial city of Medina del Campo, was at the very heart of the Habsburg empire of Charles V and Philip II. Of course, there can also be found a more ancient local tradition conmemorating this historical commander, as he was already included in a manuscript on ‘Medinenses ilustres’ dating from the early seventeenth century.

7 Martínez Laínez, El ocaso, I, 86.
8 Velasco Sánchez, ‘Ángel Salcedo’.
9 https://terciocristobaldemondragon.wordpress.com/.
10 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 8-9.
The main question in this chapter is how Mondragón became such a hero in Spain, while at the same time earning a positive reputation as an honourable old officer in the Low Countries, though in general Spanish commanders are seen there as the enemy. Somebody capable of gaining the hearts of both the Spaniards and the Netherlanders must have been a remarkable person. It is this idea that stands out in this chapter on the narratives and the memories of Cristóbal de Mondragón.

**From soldier to captain**

We know very little of Mondragón’s early life, more or less the first fifty years of his life, until the beginning of the Revolt in the Low Countries. The same applies to the other Spanish commanders in this book. The first parts of their careers has been mostly reconstructed afterwards, when they had already become important military men. Though historians have been looking for more information, there are often relatively few documents for the earlier years. We may presume that Cristóbal was born around 1514, though there are also authors who have placed his birth in 1504. We do know for certain that he died in Antwerp on 4 January 1596. By that time he must have been around eighty-one years of age and still in office as a military commander. His extremely long career has made such an impression that a Spanish chronicler from the seventeenth century stated that he had been more than a hundred years old at the time of his death. We shall frequently encounter this image of the ancient Mondragón. Johan Brouwer, the most exiting Hispanist ever working in the Netherlands, defined him for this reason as a figure of almost Homeric proportions.\(^\text{11}\)

Biographer Salcedo Ruiz collected a great deal of information on Mondragón’s early life. His father, Martín, was born in Medina del Campo, of Basque origin like Romero’s father, while his mother, Mencía de Mercado, came from an important family in that city. An official document from 1574 claims he was sixty then, which provides us with a year of birth around 1514. In his mother’s last will and testament from 1545 we read that besides Cristóbal there were only two sisters still alive at the time: Magdalena, married to Diego González del Castillo, and Catalina, the wife of Francisco de Herrera Daza, both burghers of Medina. In 1545 we can also find a Martín de Beamonte, the son of his

deceased brother, Juan, three children (Antonio, Martín and Bernardina) of his deceased sister, Maria, who had been married to Juan de Alamos, and two children (Isabel and Fernando) of his deceased brother, Alonso, and his wife, Teresa de Cárdenas.  

The young Cristóbal is said to have entered the army in 1532 and, as he claimed himself, he participated in Charles V’s famous attack on Tunis in 1535, organised to break the maritime power of Barbarossa, whose fleet was making the Mediterranean unsafe for Spanish and Italian ships. Most probably he then spent time in the garrisons of Italy before travelling to the northern territories of the Habsburgs. The earliest documentary proof is a payment in 1543 and his appearance on a list of wounded soldiers after the attack on Saint-Dizier on 15 July 1544, during the Habsburg-Valois wars. He was serving as a soldier in the tercio of Lombardy under Maestre de campo Luis Pérez de Vargas, who was also wounded at Saint-Dizier. The Spanish soldier had become involved in the wars between Emperor Charles V and the French King Francis I, participating in a military campaign of the Emperor, who at the same time was also King of Spain and Lord of the Low Countries. He was part of an international army and as a Spaniard he had to serve the dynastic aspirations of his sovereign. At that time, there were some ten thousand Spanish soldiers present in the north of Europe, about as many as would come to the Low Countries with the Duke of Alba in 1567.

Some years later he was supporting his King during the struggle against the German Lutheran princes. The most important battle occurred near Mühlberg, on 24 April 1547, also famous for a painting by Titian of Charles V on horseback. According to Mondragón’s biographer, he would be promoted after the battle to alférez, comparable in rank to a lieutenant. He was said to have been one of the heroes who swam across the river Elbe and had made it possible for the Duke of Alba’s army to reach the other bank of the river. The story of Mondragón’s act of heroism has

12 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 11, 27. Last will of Mencía de Mercado, Medina del Campo, 23 March 1545, AHN, Ordenes, Reprobados Santiago, 8bis; ARCV, Pleitos civiles, Pérez Alonso, caja 1033, 3 (1552-1555) and Idem, Registro de ejecutorias, caja 830, 64 (31 May 1555); Atienza and Barredo de Valenzuela, ‘Los Mondragón’.

13 Bermúdez de Castro, ‘El tercio’, 61; Rozet, L’invasion’, 343. I thank Juan Luis Sánchez Martín and Carlos Valenzuela for these references. Parker, Emperor, 301-303; AGS, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, 1ª época, 1049. F. 150. In 1543, Mondragón served under Captain Jerónimo de Guíosa.

14 Fagel, Hispano-Vlaamse wereld, 389-392.

15 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 37.
recently been retold by the modern Spanish author, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, famous for his series of novels on infantry captain Alatriste:

He is completely exhausted, damns the Germans and all their bloody mess; and while he curses as a heretic and takes his sword in between his teeth, he starts swimming at a ford in the river, under a rain of arquebus shots. He shows he has balls and reaches the other bank, fighting and foaming with anger, and killing five of them.\(^{16}\)

We see how Pérez-Reverte turns him into a typical masculine hero, including by using a quite vulgar colloquial idiom in order to recreate what he sees as the world of the tercios. According to this story, Mondragón was the first of a group of Spanish soldiers who swam across the river Elbe, and that made it possible for Charles V’s army to cross the river after them. He calls Mondragón in the same text “the best soldier of the best regiment of the Spanish infantry”. This last phrase strongly recalls the title of an article of 1936 by a Spanish general in which the same story is told in a more restrained style:

Suddenly, a soldier takes off his clothes, holds his sword with his teeth, throws himself into the water and swims under a hail of projectiles. On the other riverbank he starts to fight with the enemies and kills five. After him, his captain and nine other soldiers have jumped in, and they arrived in time to help out the one who was fighting desperately; it was Mondragón.\(^{17}\)

We frequently find this story repeated, for example in the leaflet on the Mondragón path, but is it true?\(^{18}\) In his famous history of the wars in the Low Countries, Italian historian and Jesuit Famiano Strada asserted about Mondragón, “they say he was one of those ten Spanish men who with admirable bravery, crossed the Elbe swimming with the swords in their mouths”.\(^{19}\) And Strada was right to be careful in his wording. Chronicler Bernabé del Busto had been present at the battle and in his

\(^{16}\) ‘Se le va la pinza y empieza a ciscarse en los Alemanes y en todos sus muertos; y jurando en arameo se pone la espada entre los dientes, echa a nadar por el vado bajo una lluvia de arcabuzazo, llega a la orilla con dos cojones, arremete contra los alemanes echando espumarajos, y mata a cinco’. Pérez-Reverte, ‘Una historia’.


\(^{19}\) Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 37.
Cristóbal de Mondragón: the good Spaniard

work he mentions the names of all Spanish swimmers, and Mondragón’s is not among them. The same holds for Sancho Dávila, indicating that famous acts of heroism were often attributed a posteriori to important commanders. Somewhere along the line the rumour had turned into fact, maybe through the work of General Bermúdez, who on 19 July 1936 published his article on Mondragón, two days before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He was most probably looking for real Spanish heroes who could serve as examples during this new clash with the heretics.

We also know now that Mondragón obtained his promotion to alférez even before the Battle of Mühlberg. In the files of a civil trial between Cristóbal and his sister Catalina that went on for years, concerning the possession of several houses in Medina del Campo, we find an authorisation written by Cristóbal, at the time “alférez of the company of lancers of captain Juan Navarro and citizen of the city of Medina del Campo”. The document had been issued on 5 June 1546 in the Emperor’s army camp in the vicinity of ‘Tanbergue’ (Tännisberg?).

From 1552 on there are finally more reliable sources available on Mondragón’s life. He was around thirty-eight years of age at the time and would participate in the bloody wars between Charles V and Henry II, the new King of France. We may presume that he had remained in the north after 1544, although it cannot be ruled out that he returned to Spain for some time. On 22 July 1552 he received an order from the Duke of Alba to organise his own hundred horsemen, “good soldiers and well provided with weapons”. In November of that same year his dissatisfied troops tried to overwhelm the city of Douai in the south of the Low Countries. Mondragón succeeded, however, in calming his men down and taking them peacefully back to Marchiennes, thus avoiding a violent confrontation between the local population and the foreign troops in the service of the sovereign. It is the first time we really witness his conciliatory abilities.

---

20 Busto, ‘Quadernos’. The names can also be found in the German translation, Geschichtete), 179. I thank Juan Luis Sánchez (Madrid) for the reference, and Carlos Valenzuela for providing me with a copy of the manuscript. Mondragón is missing from Lope de Vega, ‘El valiente Céspedes’, 55. Part of the description of the swimming is, however, taken from his work. Bermúdez de Castro, ‘El tercio’, 58-61.

21 Lawsuit of Cristóbal de Mondragón against Catalina de Mondragón and Francisco de Herrera Daza, ARCV, Pleitos civiles, Pérez Alonso (F), caja 1033,3.

22 Alba to alférez Mondragón, Brixinon, 22 July 1552, EA I; Chroniques de Douai, II, 146-147; Ocampo, ‘Sucesos’.
In a declaration used in the above-mentioned trial with his sister Catalina, Cristóbal declared on 11 August 1553 that he was captain of a company of light horse, residing at the court of Emperor Charles V in Brussels. Catalina argued that her brother had given her some houses out of their father’s inheritance, but Cristóbal contradicted her by saying that “he could never have given her these houses, because they are the largest part of his possessions and he had no other income to live on”. He wanted to rent out some of these houses. In 1554 he wrote two letters to important figures in the Habsburg army. After more than twenty years under arms and some ten years active in the border area between France, Germany and the Low Countries, he was well on his way to becoming an important officer in the Emperor’s army.

After Philip II had in 1555 taken over the government from his father, the war between the Lord of the Low Countries and the King of France was resumed. On 24 May 1557 a French army attacked the city of Lens where Mondragón was serving as governor. The French admiral’s troops sacked and burned most of the city. Mondragón was taken prisoner, just as Julián Romero had been a few years earlier after Dinant had fallen into the hands of the French. His imprisonment may explain why we never hear anything about Mondragón being present at the famous Battle of Saint-Quentin on 10 August of that same year. The army of Philip II – Netherlanders, Germans, Englishmen, Italians, Spaniards – at Saint-Quentin inflicted a devastating defeat on the French. Because of his imprisonment, Mondragón missed out on one of the greatest moments in the military history of the sixteenth century.

However, we do find him again in October of that year as captain of a company of Walloon soldiers. This suggests that he may have received his freedom somewhere in between. The fact that he was able, and allowed, to command French-speaking soldiers from the Low Countries shows that he was considered a very well-integrated Spaniard.

In a letter to Philip II he stated, “having been taken prisoner at Lens and escaping from the Bastille in Paris to inform Your Majesty in Brussels what was happening in France”. The document verifies the story by Juan López Osorio from the early seventeenth century in which Mondragón escaped by jumping from a tower.

We may thus imagine Mondragón

23 See above. The houses were situated on the square behind the church of Saint Antolín, next to the church of Our Lady of Saint Julián.
24 Mondragón to Luis de Ávila y Zúñiga, Soble [?], 7 July 1554; Mondragón to the Duke of Savoy, Floresse, 8 July 1554. ARAB, Audience 1667, 1804/1; Ocampo, ‘Sucesos’.
25 CSP and manuscripts, relating to English affairs, VI, 2, 1126; Chroniques de Douai, II,
jumping from a tower of such an emblematic building as the Bastille in Paris and running to freedom. At that time the Bastille was already in use as a prison, as it would still be more than 230 years later, on 14 July 1789. This fact-based anecdote of a hitherto unknown story can, we hope, fill the void left by the most probably untrue story about Mondragón’s famous swim over the river Elbe.

After the signing of the peace treaty with France at Câteau-Cambrésis in 1559, Mondragón received a financial reward “for his good services to the Emperor and Philip II”. Most of the Spanish troops left the Low Countries, but some three thousand soldiers remained to safeguard the country against the French threat, half of them under the command of Julián Romero. Mondragón also travelled to Spain in 1560, but only to return again by the end of the year.

He used his stay in Spain to collect letters of recommendation, among them one from the Count of Feria, Gómez Suárez de Figueroa. The Count even called him ‘my friend (mi amigo)’ and described in the short letter to Granvelle (and indirectly to the Governess-general, Margaret of Parma) how Cristóbal was left without a royal income after 1559 and he hoped Margaret would take him into her service. He was indeed appointed the new military governor of Damvillers in Luxembourg, replacing his colleague, Julián Romero. Damvillers was a modern fortress that had to safeguard the Low Countries from attacks by the French. But the letter also refers to his impending wedding, “as he is returning to that country to get married”. The Duke of Alba also gave him a short letter of recommendation intended for Granvelle, showing that Mondragón had visited the Duke in October. The fact that he had letters from these two high noblemen is remarkable, as they belonged to rival factions at the Spanish court, playing a power game to obtain the best positions and the greatest influence. Feria had been considered to be Alba’s ‘enemy for life’ ever

153. The chronicle stated that Mondragón would later die in Douai and would be buried at the Franciscan monastery in the city; Fagel, Kapitein Julián, 23-24. According to Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 39-40, Cristóbal was taken prisoner in 1558. The capture of Mondragón is in Hooft, Histoerien, I, 11. Fagel, ‘Esplendor’, 150; ‘Haviendo sido preso en Lence y escapandose de la Bastilla de Paris a dar abiso a Bruselas a Vuestra Magestad de lo que en Franzia se hacia’. Mondragón to Philip II, Santander, 21 October 1570. AGS, E. 545, 92.

26 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 40; Marichalar, Julián, 124.
27 ‘Que se buelve a casar a esse pais’. Feria to Granvelle, Toledo, 10 November 1560, RBM, Granvelle collection II/2249, 27r.
28 Alba to Granvelle, 2 October 1560, RBM, Granvelle collection II/2291, 271r-271v.
since 1541, and he was clearly associated with the Eboli faction.²⁹ On 28 October 1560 Mondragón wrote a letter from his home town, Medina del Campo, directly to Granvelle, evidence of the existence of a personal relationship between the captain and Granvelle, but probably simply used to accompany the recommendation letter by the Duke of Alba.³⁰ Mondragón also brought with him letters from Martín Alonso de los Ríos to give to Granvelle for the same purpose. Los Ríos counted Mondragón amongst his friends, “such honourable knights, so brave and so wise”. He had also given Mondragón a bottle of balm for Granvelle, and he promised to send him more products from the Indies and the Canary Islands.³¹

Three letters from 1564, written to the Duke of Alba, offer some insight into his life during these years, still written from his residence in Damvillers. Alba was clearly his patron, as he himself stated in February, using the classical terms that went with such a patronage relationship: “I have always held myself, and still do, as a servant of Your Excellency and I am your creation”.³² He reminded the Duke how he had come to Alba de Tormes to ask him for permission to marry in the Low Countries. This must have been in October 1560. However, in the same letter he now had to inform the Duke that “Our Lord has been served by taking last Thursday my wife during childbirth”. He was now free for new duties and stated that “it is my desire to die serving”: the words of a client putting his destiny in the hands of his protector.

Such patronage ties were always of an unequal nature, and poor Mondragón did not get a swift reply to his letter. The Duke took his time in answering, and two months later Mondragón had to write him a reminder. He needed Alba’s support, as he now had a daughter and during his many years outside his ‘patria’ in the service of the King he had spent most of his patrimony. He hoped the Duke could help to

²⁹ Maltby, Alba, 46, 72.
³⁰ Mondragón to Granvelle, Medina del Campo, 28 October 1560, RBM, Granvelle collection II/2291, 276r-277r.
³¹ ‘Tan honrrados cavalleros y tan balientes y tan cuerdos’. Martín Alonso de los Ríos to Granvelle, Toledo, 9 November 1560, RBM, Granvelle collection II/2249, 26r-26v; idem, 30 September 1560, II/2291, 278r-278v. Martín Alonso de Córdoba y de los Ríos (died 1569) was an ambassador and an admiral, commander of the Order of Calatrava, Rivarola y Pineda, Monarquía, II, 368.
³² ‘Como siempre me aya tenido y tengo por uno de los criados de vuestra excelencia y sea su hechura’; ‘Nuestro señor [fue] servido de que el jueves pasado de un parto me llevo a mi mujer’; ‘Mi deseo es morir sirviendo’. Mondragón to Alba, Damvillers, 5 February 1564, AA, C44, 171.
convert his lifelong payment from 1559 into one that would continue also during his daughter’s lifetime, securing her future in this way, a not unreasonable precaution for somebody in such a dangerous profession. A third letter, from October, shows his desperation. He now wanted to go to Spain to meet the Duke and inform the King personally of his situation and of the situation in the Low Countries. He needed a licence to leave his government for only six to eight months, just as fellow commander Gaspar de Robles had received earlier. He also claimed some ‘greedy men’ were after his governorship of Damvillers. He further repeated his hopes of converting the payment for his daughter “of such tender age”.  

He was a widower, aged around fifty, with a newborn baby, the fruit of his marriage to Catherine du Hem from Douai, the city where we find Mondragón already active in 1552. Catherine was the daughter of Robert du Hem, Lord of Auby, and Jeanne (Jenne) de Haussy. His daughter, Margarita, would later marry his nephew, Alonso. Mondragón was now ready for new military duties, but he clearly needed the support of his patron. Without direct assistance at court, he could not expect to be heard. The only alternative would be to go to Spain himself, but, for that, one first needed permission, and this again required mediation.

However, in 1565 Philip’s ambassador to England, Guzmán de Silva, spoke to him in Brussels during his visit to the Low Countries. He is introduced in the ambassador’s letter to King Philip as the Governor of Antwerp, “a very diligent man, who has much experience in the affairs of these lands”. It is not very plausible that Mondragón functioned as Governor of Antwerp at the time – as this would be against the

---

33 ‘golosos’; ‘de tan tierna edad’. Mondragón to Alba, Damvillers, 11 April 1564 and 19 October 1564, AA, C44, 172-173.

34 Testament of Jenne de Haussy, Registre aux testaments de l’hostel de la ville de Douai, 216v-220v, 19 January 1581. She wanted to be buried in the church of the Franciscans in Douai next to her deceased husband and her daughter, Catherine. Roquefort, Glossaire, III, 156; Souvenirs de la Flandre wallone, 38. Catherine had at least one sister, Françoise (married to Artus Le Baron, Lord of Brunémont), and a brother, Nicolas, who lived in 1615 in Gravelines, serving the Habsburgs. Perhaps he was the Captain Dohein [?], brother-in-law to Mondragón, who asked to receive the bailiage of La Motte, in the Nieppe forest. Gerónimo de Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 1 July 1576, CP IV, 220. During Queen Anne’s voyage to Spain in 1570 one of the eight Walloon banners under Mondragón was headed by a Captain Du Hem. Cotereau, ‘Voyage’, 574. Jeanne (Jenne) de Haussy was the daughter of Maurand de Haussy, Lord of Remerchicourt, and Jeanne de Lalaing, daughter of Médéador de Lalaing, écuyer d’écurie of Maximilian I and Philip the Handsome. The Spanish Wikipedia page on Cristóbal de Mondragón mentions a certain Catalina de Hens as his first wife, and wrongly puts the second marriage to Guillemette in 1572. Wikipedia.org.
privileges – and he was most surely still the governor of Damvillers. The further description seems, however, to fit the character. When asked, Mondragón understood that the high nobles could indeed be a threat to the government of Philip II, but he did not think this very plausible.35

Mondragón would remarry: Guillemette de Châtelet (Chastelet) from the Duchy of Lorraine would become his second wife. An old genealogist of the Châtelet family stated that the marriage between Mondragón and Guillemette took place in 1560, but this does not correlate with the story about the death of his wife in 1564. In 1558 Guillemette had become the widow of Gerard d’Aspremont, Lord of Marchéville, Vatronville and Ambly. She was the daughter of Claude de Châtelet and Hélène de Roucy, and the sister of Claude de Châtelet, Lord of Bulgnéville. Guillemette was heir to the lordships of Aulnou, Lagrange, Parfonru, Allaumont, Tigeville, Saint-Aignan and Rabuecourt. Most territories from the Châtelet-Aspremont family were part of the Duchy of Lorraine. From her marriage to d’Aspremont, Guillemette had several daughters, one of whom would marry the important Spanish entrepreneur Juan López Gallo from Bruges. Two of Gallo’s sisters would marry the Spanish military commanders Sancho Dávila and Alonso López Gallo, himself a nephew of the entrepreneur. Mondragón is described in the sources as ‘chevalier seigneur’ of Remerchicourt (Remicourt), Lus (Luz) and Gussainville. We know Remerchicourt came through his first wife, Catherine, and Gussainville probably through his second wife, Guillemette, as it can be found belonging to the Aspremont family.36

Mondragón had by then become a member of a noble family living in the frontier region between France, Lorraine and the Low Countries, and the government of Damvillers in the Duchy of Luxembourg fitted perfectly with the families’ domains. It was a mere thirty-three kilometres between his government and his seigneurie of Gussainville.37 Mondragón

35 Geever, Gevallen vazallen, 142; Guzmán de Silva to Philip II, Brussels, 28 November 1565, CD LXXXIX, 241.
37 An unexpected insight into the life of his Walloon soldiers in 1564 can be found in Dehaisnes, Inventaire sommaire, III, 129: ‘George, batard de Malberg, de la compagnie de Christophe de Mondragon, gouverneur de Damvillers, qui “le jour de Caresme” estant allé en masque porter quelque momkehrance, a se prit de querelle avec Aymot Belpois, soldat de la même compagnie, et le blessa mortellement d’un coup d’épée, frappé à l’aventure’.
combined service to his Habsburg sovereign with his own family interests. By the time revolt broke out in the Low Countries he had probably been living for more than twenty years in French-speaking territory. He must have been perfectly integrated and well versed in the language and the culture of his new home. This is surely part of the explanation for the positive opinion people in the Low Countries would have of him. However, at the same time he remained a true Albista, somebody who had to thank the Duke of Alba for every step in his career.\textsuperscript{38}

The early years of the Revolt

The arrival of the Duke of Alba and his army in the Low Countries in 1567 would be of utmost importance to the life of the well-integrated Mondragón. In 1568 Mondragón corresponded with the Duke from his home in Damvillers. He informed his patron about developments in France, but above all he insisted in partaking in the military expeditions of the new Governor-general of the Low Countries; “though Your Excellency has a complete army at his disposal, he does not have anybody with the same affection and service to His Majesty and Your Excellency as me”. He described his position in Damvillers as a kind of banishment: “to find myself in this corner, governing four villagers and a hundred soldiers”.\textsuperscript{39} His soldier’s blood craved military action, but the Revolt also offered possibilities for the advancement of his own career, especially now that his own protector was handing out the jobs.

It is unclear whether he participated in the military campaigns in Frisia and Brabant in 1568 as has been suggested.\textsuperscript{40} With his Walloon troops he was mostly used to control castles, fortresses and cities, and during this period he was also promoted to Colonel of these same Walloon troops. It must have been very welcome for Alba to have at his disposal a loyal servant well versed in French and the culture of the

\textsuperscript{38} Within the Brussels political scene, he seems to have been regarded – together with Gaspar de Robles – as a client of Tomás de Armenteros, Margaret of Parma’s influential Spanish secretary. Derks, ‘Madama’s minister’, 64; Weiss, \textit{Papiers}, VIII, 518-519.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Aunque su excelencia tenga un exercito entero, en todo el no tiene persona con mas afizion al serbizio de su Magestad y de su excelencia que yo’; ‘Verme aquí en este rincon gobernando quaro billanos y zien soldados’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Damvillers, 25 January 1568; Mondragón to Alba, Damvillers, 25 January 1568 and 27 June 1568, AA, C44, 174-176. Already in 1565 Mondragón sent information about the border region to the ambassador in France. Philip II to Francés de Álava, Madrid, 22 December 1565, Rodríguez and Rodríguez, eds., \textit{Don Francés}, 30-31.

\textsuperscript{40} Cabañas Agrela, ‘Cristóbal’, 551.
Low Countries. For example, in November 1568 Alba sent him with six hundred arquebusiers to the city of Huy in the Prince-bishopric of Liège.\textsuperscript{41} This neutral power needed to be treated with care, and who could do this better than Mondragón?

However, soon he also became active in Dutch-speaking territories. At least from 31 January 1569 he acted as governor of the city of Deventer, as he wrote a letter that same day describing his difficult arrival in the city: “It had not been without hard work, as for fifty years never such a quantity of water was seen flooding the river banks”.\textsuperscript{42} He also had to fight to get control of the keys to the city. But his largest problem concerned the fact that the Duke still had to send him the official papers proving both his governorship of Deventer and his appointment as Colonel of the Walloons.\textsuperscript{43}

Local sources from Deventer on his government are very critical. For them, he was just one of the cruel Spanish oppressors from a long list. It is interesting that the sources wrote his name as ‘Mons. Dragon’, dividing his last name in two, resulting in the usual French abbreviation for a lord and the French word for dragon, ‘Monseigneur Dragon’. Monseigneur Dragon prohibited the burial of a Protestant councilor in the city’s church, and he put a schoolmaster in jail under suspicion of reading prohibited books to his pupils. When the schoolmaster escaped the city prison, Mondragón sent the two burgomasters responsible to prison in Brussels. Furthermore, Fadrique de Toledo visited the city during his government with plans to build a fortress within the city, another issue that must have aroused ample criticism. His government of Deventer may have continued until August 1570, when he and his men were replaced by Captain Pacheco and four regiments of Spanish soldiers. It is this Pacheco who would later be killed by the rebels at Flushing. All this means that within the local historiography of Deventer the positive image of Mondragón is not to be found.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Mendoza, \textit{Comentarios}, 434, 438-440; Alba to Mondragón, 4 November 1568, EA II. Alba to Philip II, Camp outside Liège, 6 November 1568, CD 37, 502-504.
\textsuperscript{42} ‘No a sido sin arto trabajo porque a zinquenta años que no san visto tantas aguas debor-dadas desta ribera’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Deventer, 31 January 1569, AA, C44, 177. Already on 17 December 1568 Alba is busy sending Mondragón’s six ensigns to Deventer. EA II.
\textsuperscript{43} Mondragón to Albornoz, Deventer, 31 January 1569 and 9 February 1569, AA, C44, 177-179.
\textsuperscript{44} Mondragón to Alba, Deventer, 5 July 1569. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Archief van de Spaans-Nederlandse regering te Brussel, 1567-1576, inv. 1.01.01.13, document 11, 413; Holthuis, \textit{Frontierstad}, 27; Reitsma, \textit{Centrifugal}, 100; Moonen, \textit{Korte chronyke}, 109-113.
While in Deventer, he also had to defend his rights to Damvillers where he had put his nephew as his lieutenant, “twenty-five years of age and a responsible and nice man”. In the same letter he explained to Alba’s secretary, Albornoz, that they should not take the government of Damvillers away from him, because if he were to be left without any income “I can retire to the house closest to Damvillers of those my wife has in the vicinity of the town”. He was even trying to get his hands on the government of Tournai. Mondragón wanted to be involved in the military action, but at the same time he was busy trying to augment his income and influence in the southern border region. In October 1569 he had to go with his troops from Deventer to help fellow commander Gaspar de Robles defend the coast of Groningen against a possible rebel fleet.

The journey of the future queen, Anne of Austria, to Spain presented a golden opportunity to improve his position. This daughter of Emperor Maximilian II and Philip’s own sister, Mary, had to travel in 1570 from the Low Countries to Spain in order to marry her uncle the King. Mondragón was designated to secure the transport over the sea with 1,600 Walloon soldiers. He hoped he could finally go home, and maybe even present his situation to the King in person. However, a letter from Philip II prohibited him from visiting the royal court and he had to remain with his troops. The King did promise to look at Mondragón’s memorial, which Captain Arrieta had given him. This is typical behaviour for King Philip, preferring paperwork to personally meeting the people who were defending his interests. The Colonel was very sad that he was not allowed to visit the King in person: “For me it is a great pity to have arrived here and not kiss the hands of Your Majesty”.

Beside asking for rewards for his loyal captains, he wanted for himself the confiscated goods in Artois of two noblemen, monsieur de Noyelles and monsieur

45 ‘De beynte y zinco años onbre responsable y querido’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Deventer, 6 May 1569, AA, C44, 181.
46 ‘Yo me podria retirar a la casa mas zerca de los que mi mujer tienen en torno de Dan- bileres’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Deventer, 4 June 1569, AA, C44, 183.
47 Mondragón to Alba, Deventer, 16 October 1569, 23 October 1569, and 3 November 1569, AA, C44, 187-189; De Meij, Watergeuzen, 235.
48 Cotereau, ‘Voyage’, 574. The eight banners of the Walloons were commanded by Mondragón, Haro, Verdugo, Gile le Vilain, Ariette, Henry de Tseraerts, Gustin and Du Hem; Wyts, ‘Voyages’; Wyts, ‘Itinera’, f. 2r-3r.
49 ‘Es para mi gran lastima aver llegado aqui y no besar las manos de Vuestra Magestad’. Mondragón to Felipe II, Santander, 21 October 1570, AGS, E. 545, 91-92 (memorial); Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 51-61; Felipe II a Mondragón, Madrid, 15 October 1570, AGS, E. 554, 190; Idem, El Escorial, 2 November 1570; Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 23 March 1571, Alba, EA II, 545, on his good services during the queen’s journey.
de Longastre. Longastre had his goods close to Dourlens and Noyelles in the vicinity of Amiens, close to his wife's properties. Again we see him building his own little empire in the south of the Low Countries. The memorial Mondragón sent to Philip II describes his merits and the ideas he had on compensation, including his participation at Tunis and his escape from the Bastille:

Cristóbal de Mondragón, Colonel of the Walloon infantry and Governor of Damvillers, says he came from the Low Countries in 1564 to inform Your Majesty about the disturbances that had started at that time and Your Majesty ordered him to return directly. He has served the Emperor, of glorious memory, since the expedition to Tunis, without ever failing in any of the armies and expeditions that have presented themselves, as is well known, and after having been taken prisoner at Lens and escaping from the Bastille of Paris, he came to inform Your Majesty in Brussels about what was happening in France, and since then he has not stopped serving, also in the fortunate journey of the Queen our lady, arriving in these kingdoms, as Your Majesty will read in a letter the Duke of Alba has given at the departure, requesting Your Majesty that as reward for his services you should order to give him the confiscated goods of monseigneur de Noyelles and monseigneur de Longastre, leaving Your Majesty the three hundred escudos rent on the new tax on wool that he had been given, and requesting the reward will be for him, his children, and heirs.

50 George de Montigny, Lord of Noyelles-sur-Selles. Governor of the garrison in Leiden during the first siege in 1574 but sent away because of his bad conduct. Charles de Houchin, Lord of Longastre. Lottin, ‘Nobles’. For Longastre and Noyelles, see also Mondragón to Philip II, Antwerp, 24 January 1571, AGS, E. 547, 117.

51 ‘Christoval de Mondragon, coronel de infanteria valona y governador de Dampvillers, dize que el anno de 64 vino de Flandes a dar aviso a Vuestra Magestad de las alteraciones que entonzes se empezavan y Vuestra Magestad le mando tornar espresamente y atento que ha que sirve desde la jornada de Tunes a su Magestad Cesarea de gloriosa memoria sin jamas faltar en ninguno de los exercitos y jornadas que se an ofrecido como es notorio y despues haviendo sido preso en Lence y escapandose de la bastilla de Paris, vino a dar abiso a Bruselas a Vuestra Magestad de lo que en Francia se hazia y de alli, asta agora no a dexado de servir y en el felicissimo viaje de la reyna nuestra señora biniendo en estos reynos como Vuestra Magestad vera por una carta que el duque de Alva le dio a la partida, supplica a Vuestra Magestad en remuneracion de sus servicios sea servido mandar hazelle merzed de la hazienda confiscada de Mos. de Noyela y de la de Mos. de Longater y dexara a Vuestra Magestad los trezientos scudos de renta que Vuestra Magestad le hize merzed sobre el nuevo impuesto de las lanas, y supplica a Vuestra Magestad sea la merzed que se le iziere para el, sus hijos y herederos’. Mondragón to Philip II, Santander, 21 October 1571, AGS, E. 545, 91-92.
Mondragón was back in Antwerp in January 1571, when he wrote to the King to inform him about the successful but “very difficult and dangerous” journey, but again it was all about getting a reward for his many years of service. The juro bonds of three hundred ducats that belonged to his patent as captain of cavalry were all he had been given.\(^{52}\) If he could get the confiscated goods of the two noblemen, then he could give the juro to his daughter whose fortune he had spent serving the King: “I have children and for many years I am eating their possessions”.\(^{53}\) Were there more children, or was he talking about the children from Guillemette’s first marriage?\(^2\)

In 1571 his position was regularly debated. The King proposed to give him the frontier fortress of Mariembourg instead of Damvillers, but this fell through. Alba also thought of “the most elegant fortress” of Thionville, but he was not able to remove the present governor. The government of Utrecht was another possibility as this would give him a deserved higher income, “because this is one of the old soldiers who know this country”.\(^{54}\) As Philip did not want to decide before receiving a memorial with all information on the commander, Alba sent one to Spain in October, repeating his wish to give Utrecht to Mondragón:

> As his services deserve it…Your Majesty had few men like him in all his estates, nor anybody who has done better in everything that was assigned to him until now.\(^{55}\)

The memorial convinced the King who would react much later saying that he agreed, though he would have preferred him at the frontier and not so much in the interior of the country.\(^{56}\) However, in the end, it all came to nothing.

\(^{52}\) Rojo Vega, ‘1572’. Hernando’s will was dated 23 December 1572, and in it we find information on the payment of the juro of 300 ducats. The last time it was paid was 1569. Hernando was a nephew of Cristóbal and the son of Magdalena de Mondragón.

\(^{53}\) ‘Tan trabajoso y peligroso’; ‘tengo hijos y que a muchos annos que les como sus aziendas’. Mondragón to Philip II, Antwerp, 24 January 1571, AGS, E. 547, 117; CD XXXV, 402-403. Other letters in this period: Mondragón to Albornoz, Nieuwerkeke, 29 January 1571 and Mondragón to Hernando de Toledo, Antwerp, 21 February 1571, AA, C44, 190-191; Mondragón to Philip II, Brussels, 18 March 1571, AGS, E. 547, 118; CD XXXV, 403-404.

\(^{54}\) Philip II to Alba, El Escorial, 4 July 1570, CP II, 138; Alba to Philip II, Antwerp, 13 July 1571, EA II, 669.

\(^{55}\) Alba to Philip II, Brussels, 19 October 1571, EA II, 755.

\(^{56}\) Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 66; CP I. Letter from Alba to Philip II, 13 July 1572.
On 1 December 1571 he was back in Damvillers where he stayed for the rest of the year. He wrote to Albornoz to complain about the many things required in Damvillers and the need for improving its defences with new artillery and soldiers. If this was not possible, it would be even better “to tear down the walls and turn it into a village”. Again he was looking for a more important office: “I am hanging by my hair, and in order to leave here I would gladly do this even without waiting for compensation”. In the meantime he informed Albornoz about what was happening across the border in France: for example, reporting on the growing influence of the Calvinists in Metz. He also included several documents with his letters, including some ‘nouvelles de France’.

Alba did start to make use of Mondragón again, as we can find him in Zevenbergen, near Breda, reporting in January 1572 that “those of the sea are menacing us with visiting and killing us”. It shows that the Spanish commanders were well aware of what was coming. On 1 April 1572 those of the sea, the Sea Beggars, took the small town of Brielle, and with it started the second phase of the Revolt in the Low Countries. Everything became much more violent.

Around early October 1572, three regiments of Walloons under Mondragón sacked the small town of Dendermonde, “looking for booty like the others”. Fortunately for the commander, this dark episode has not blackened his name in the history books. At the same time, the English had also turned their sights on Mondragón, but they did not know how to place him: “the leader of the soldyers was the coronell of this towne named monsr. Mondragon, a Spanyerde’s sonne, but borne in Artoys”. For this English letter-writer Mondragón must have appeared to be a native of the Low Countries. By that time, he had probably been active for already some thirty years in the French-speaking world.

Also another negative description did not have much lasting influence on the commander’s image. Around the same time, the Antwerp Protestant chronicler, Godevaert van Haecht, recorded several episodes between

57 Derocarle las murallas y hazer della un villaje; ‘Yo estoy aqui colgado de los cabelos y para salir de aqui muy de buena gana le haría sin aguardar otra recompensa’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Damvillers, 1 December 1571, 2 December 1571 and 27 December 1571, AA, C44, 192-194.

58 ‘Estos de la mar nos amenazan a visitar y pasarnos por delante’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Zevenbergen, 23 January 1572, AA, C44, 195.

59 Mondoucet to the French King, Brussels, 8 October 1572, Didier, Lettres, I, 59. See also CG IV, 457. The plundering took place on 4 October.

60 Thomas Brune to Lord Burghley, Antwerp, 19 October 1572, Kervyn de Lettenhove, Relations politiques, VI (Brussels 1888) 553-555.
1572 and 1574 in which Mondragón was involved. It seems he had his soldiers shoot at burghers who were walking too close to the city gates, he had evacuated his own wife for reasons of safety, and he had wanted to execute a high city official because he had wounded one of his soldiers. But the most striking element of Van Haecht’s stories is that he calls him ‘Lap ooge’ (the man with an eye patch). The only other mention of this specific hallmark can be found in one of the Beggar’s songs: “in the square of Middelburg, we find with one eye, monseigneur Dragon alone”. Furthermore, on his portrait, painted much later, we do find the remnants of a wound close to his eye. The fact that both textual mentions are related to 1574 makes it probable he had worn an eye patch at least for some time. He had more luck than Julián who had lost his eye at the siege of Haarlem.

The search for a knighthood

Mondragón was certainly not born in Artois as the son of a Spanish father, as he was a native of the Castilian trading town of Medina del Campo. But there was indeed something the matter with his family tree. When Mondragón went to Spain with Anne of Austria in 1570, he used the opportunity to travel to his home town. Besides a family visit, it was his intention to collect the necessary family papers needed for an application to the Christian knightly order of Santiago. For such orders it was compulsory to deliver proof of a perfect, old Christian genealogy, without any Jewish or Islamic ancestors. Mondragón’s timing, however, was terrible. In one of the most dramatic chapters of the biography, Salcedo Ruiz relates how just before his arrival the Inquisition had come to town to put a sambenito in the church of Medina, a plaque commemorating the execution of a certain Zalamea. People in Medina said that Mondragón’s mother was a descendant of this convicted and burned converso. In 1591 a witness during the investigation related to the entry of Mondragón’s son-in-law, Alonso, into the order, remembered that in the city rumours went around that “the Mondragóns had lost their honour”. The family succeeded in moving the plaque to a

---

61 Haecht, Kroniek, II, 211, 213 (2 September 1572).
62 Haecht, Kroniek II, 286 (19 February 1574).
63 ‘Int Middelburghsche pleyn, met één ooghe bevonden, Monsieur Dragon alleyn’.
Nederlandsche geschiedzangen, II (Amsterdam 1864) 115.
64 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 51.
65 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 57.
higher position on the wall above the entrance, but the damage had already been done. 66 One of the witnesses of 1591, Sebastián de Caraballo, declared:

That colonel Cristóbal came to Medina in the year 70 to collect the proof (hacer probanza) needed for receiving a habit for his services. But important people had to disappoint him, telling him that on the side of his father everything was good, but that on the side of his mother he had the case of Zalamea. And he thanked them for telling him the truth, and returned to the Low Countries. 67

In the archives we can find a collection of documents on the case, including testimonies of witnesses, but it remains unclear whether Mondragón’s mother really was a descendant of the said Zalamea. 68 These kinds of inquiries into the origins of families in order to enter the nobility or in this case to enter into a religious knightly order are notoriously difficult to understand, as witnesses did not necessarily tell the truth. In any case, the situation in Medina made it impossible for Mondragón to enter the order of Santiago.

Becoming a caballero of one of the knightly orders was the ideal reward for Spanish military commanders, as there was no need to reside in any particular place and there was always a handsome income attached. We have seen that a commander like Julián Romero did obtain his knighthood of the order of Santiago, while Mondragón’s close associate, Sancho Dávila, never succeeded in entering. In 1649 Juan de la Barrera y Mondragón, his great-grandson, finally succeeded in getting the Zalamea story off the table, and it was taken for granted that Zalamea was a Portuguese Jew who had come to Medina and that there was no relationship with the Mondragón family. 69 Again, much the same happened with the descendants of Sancho Dávila.

For Cristóbal the visit to Medina in 1570 must have delivered a severe blow. One of the most important routes to receiving a substantial royal reward for his services had been cut off. And the King had not even wanted to receive him at court. He had to continue fighting and continue

67 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 59.
68 AHN, Ordenes, reprobados Santiago, Exp. 8bis (1625); Expendientillos N. 819 (1623-1629).
69 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 57-58. Juan de la Barrera y Mondragón was the son of Alonso de la Barrera y Montalvo and Catalina de Mondragón y Castillo, granddaughter of Cristóbal. Atienza and Barredo de Valenzuela, ‘Mondragón’, 325.
moaning about rewards. Until this time he was an important commander of Walloon soldiers, a loyal servant of the King with a good knowledge of the language (French) and the culture of the Low Countries, through marriage related to the local nobility and protected by the Duke of Alba. But he was not yet a real celebrity.

**Goes: Like Moses crossing the seas**

In 1572 Mondragón became more and more involved in the war on the islands of Zeeland. His troops were active in a successful attack on the island of Walcheren, followed by a failed attempt to free the city of Goes on the island of Zuid-Beveland. Sancho Dávila functionned as admiral of the fleet, while Mondragón had the command of some two thousand Walloons from the garrisons of Lier and Antwerp. The fleet was stopped by the rebels, and Mondragón barely saved himself when his galley sank. With the help of some Netherlandish seamen from the region, a new plan was developed: crossing the water around the island of Goes on foot at low tide from the coast of Brabant near Calfven (between Woensdrecht and Ossendrecht). After long deliberations, the troops started off on their hazardous crossing on 20 October 1572.  

The crossing to Goes is Mondragón’s most famous undertaking and a story present in many chronicles of the time. Spanish chroniclers describe the daring undertaking, with in addition to the Walloons another five hundred Germans and only some one hundred Spaniards. In the morning, the water “was very cold”, we learn, but nevertheless the soldiers, entered full of joy:

> Seeing the so very honourable grey hairs of Colonel Cristóbal de Mondragón, with the water coming up to his waist, and up to his knees in the mud, even more tiresome than the water… The infinite number of shells caused a great nuisance, as the soldiers had gone into the water with bare feet and legs, the shells had ripped open the soles of their feet.

The reference to Mondragón’s age is clear. According to Mendoza, Mondragón was even the first to enter the water: “not withstanding his age and showing as always his heart and bravery”. The soldiers had to swim during the crossing, carrying their packs high up their very long

70 Rooze-Stouthamer, *Opmaat*, 137-141, 204-206.
probes. Once on the island, the attack was brutal: “this day there was but little compassion, and no man was forgiven”, and Trillo informs us of more than 2,500 dead rebels. Instead, the more balanced Mendoza accentuates the great wisdom of Monragón’s decision to leave the island again as soon as possible after the relief of Goes in order not to be surrounded by the enemy.

The Dutch Protestant chronicler Van Meteren also pays attention to the story, calling Monragón an “old and experienced Spanish man of war”. The seventeenth-century Protestant writer and historian, P.C. Hooft, does not mention the commander’s age, though the title of his story, ‘Monragón’s stoutness relieves Goes’, does show his high esteem for the Spaniard. However, in his book he never aludes to Monragón’s old age, an element he could easily have made use of for dramatic purposes. By this time, Monragón was about fifty-eight years old, the same age at which Emperor Charles V had died in Yuste. In 1572, the old and grey Duke of Alba was about sixty-five years of age. Hooft described the crossing as follows:

And walking further, with sometimes the water up to their knees, and sometimes up to their navels, they reached the other side after more than four hours; not losing more than nine soldiers, who had not kept to the path, and drowned in the currents.

Spanish novelist and writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte dedicated a short article to the liberation of Goes, comparing the event to a sports match and Monragón to a Spanish sporting hero. He hispanises the event, turning our Colonel of Walloon troops into a Maestre de campo with 2,500 Spanish ‘viejos tercios’, experienced infantry soldiers, and calling the Germans and Walloons no more than support troops: “seventeen kilometres at night, splashing in the dark, wet up to their beards, their bare feet hurt by the stones and the gravel, worn out by the slimy mud”. Monragón speaks to his ‘compañeros’, telling them that he will set a good example and go in first, then they must cross rapidly and silently, and once on the other side they “were not going to leave one damned heretic alive”: Monragón’s words as imagined by the modern Spanish writer, Pérez-Reverte, clearly play with the story using vulgar and.

---

72 Van Meteren, Historie, 61v; Hooft (1972), Histoorien, VII, 281-282.

73 ‘Diecisiete kilómetros de noche, chapoteando a oscuras, mojados hasta la barba, heridos los pies descalzos en las piedras y cascajos, fatigados por lo pegadizo del fango’; ‘No iban a dejar un puto hereje vivo’. Aruro Pérez Reverte, ‘Cuartos’.
colloquial language, and the supposed hatred of Protestants amongst the Spanish troops.  

In his letter, the Duke of Alba much more subtly compared Mondragón’s action to Moses crossing the Red Sea. Philip II would reward him with the confiscated goods of rebel leader Arend van Dorp, in Philip’s letter expressively described as meant “for the shoes he wasted on the passage to Goes”. It seems that the King had not understood that they had gone bare foot. In 1574, Mondragón still had to ask for payment of the promised reward. The same Arend van Dorp would defend Zierikzee against Mondragón in 1576. Alba’s secretary, Albornoz, wrote to Philip’s secretary, Zayas, about “the good old Mondragón” and about “one of the strangest solutions ever thought of by a man: using the low tide to cross the arm of a sea and go from the mainland to an island”.

Mondragón was also perfectly aware himself that this was a very important military achievement. On 21 October he wrote a letter from Goes, the only one preserved in the archives of the Duke of Alba on his crossing:

In the letters I wrote to Your Excellency on Monday and Tuesday, Your Honour will see what has happened to me, a miracle to pass where we passed. God has been served in rendering us his spirit and by giving what Your Excellency had wished for so hard…

Unfortunately we have only this short message in which he calls it a wonder, but we lack the earlier two letters in which he must have explained the events in much more detail. Were these letters taken to be used to write a memorial of the events, or were they even considered directly as such? He also wanted Albornoz to forward the letter he had written to his wife. Mondragón also sent a painting of the ‘relief of Goes’ (‘socorro de Dargus’) to the Duke of Alba, who was very pleased with it and wrote

74 Pérez-Reverte made use of the works of Fernández Duro and Bentivoglio for his description.
75 Alba to Philip II, 19 November 1572, EA III, 244-245.
76 Mondragón to Albornoz, Antwerp, 17 September 1574, AA, C44, 255.
77 Albornoz to Zayas, Nijmegen, 5 November 1572, CP II, 290. Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 71-72. Related to a later crossing, chronicler Juan de Arquellada speaks of ‘rios que pasaban por debaxo del agua de la mar’. Arquellada, Sumario, 283.
78 ‘Por la del lunes y la del martes que escrito a su Excelencia bera vuestra merced lo que me a suzedido que a sido un milagro poder pasar donde pasamos. Dios a sido serbido de darnos su anoimo que se aya serbido con lo que su Excelencia tanto deseaba….’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Goes, 21 October 1572, AA, C44, 208.
back to him, “I think about ordering to have a larger painting made, because I can assure you that it is such a special and memorable enterprise as has been done in the last thousand years”.  

Requesens referred to the crossing in a letter to the commander in August 1574 when he had to ask Mondragón to send troops to Goes: “Nobody could have done better than you, because with so much personal valour you opened up the way”.  

The crossing also inspired military poet Pedro de Padilla, but in his verses Sancho Dávila seems to be more prominent than Mondragón. Emphasis is again put on his age:

And Colonel Mondragón, though his age was not a problem, to put himself in such a great endeavour as the one that presented itself over there, was the first to enter the water, stepping in with his old feet.

A commander in action (1572-1573)

Mondragón’s more than forty letters preserved from the period between June 1572 and July 1573 can be used to put the heroic and less heroic deeds described in the chronicles in historical perspective. During this period he would mostly be writing from the cities of Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom, with the exception of an occasional letter from Goes, Woudrichem or Breda. He was occupied with organising his garrison troops in places like Geertruidenberg, Bergen-op-Zoom, Breda, Reimerswaal, Arnemuiden, Goes and Weert. There were all kind of problems to solve: in Geertruidenberg the burgomasters wanted to get rid of the garrison; in Weert there was a soldier who had stolen weapons; and he also had to expell all unreliable Frenchmen from his Walloon troops. And then he had to listen to the Governor of Antwerp, Champagney, as if he were the Duke of Alba.
Mondragón was also involved in military actions that have not received much attention from the chroniclers, defending both the borders of the Maas and the islands of Zeeland, “always full of privateers”. On New Year’s Day he had to stop the rebels from Gorinchem (Gorcum) from burning down the nearby town of Woudrichem, and in March he participated in a failed naval mission to the island of Walcheren in Zeeland, together with Sancho Dávila. He wrote to Dávila about his men’s fears: “because of the fear they have in their bodies, every small boat seems to them a huge vessel”. In his letters we can almost hear the cannons roar: “they fired more than two hundred cannon shots at us, because for four hours they were doing nothing else”.

In April there was a new attempt to free Walcheren, Dávila and Mondragón again working closely together. In the letters we find him using the word ‘herejes’ (heretics) but also ‘protestantes’, terminology rarely used by the other Spanish commanders. Although he had high hopes for a victory by Dávila, matters got worse, and from a spy he heared that “the heretics that have disembarked at Middelburg had received orders from the Prince not to move until they would take the city or make it surrender; this is crazy!”. 

On 8 May Mondragón did gain a major victory in the vicinity of Tholen from where he sent to Alba his ‘relation of the events and the victory that God has given to us against the traitors’. This time, the commander was positively surprised by his men: “it was more remarkable than all war deeds I have seen afterwards, as they went in the water, halfway up to their thighs in order to attack the fortress from the back”. When an enemy ship wanted to surrender, Mondragón’s troops attacked it during the negotiations, killing more than a hundred men. But most of the enemies drowned: “they threw themselves in the water in a way 

83 ‘Siempre lleno de cosarios’; ‘Segun el myedo questos tienen en el cuerpo cada charrúa les parecerá una hulca’; ‘Nos tiraron mas de ducyentos pelotasos porque duro quatro horas que no hizyeron otra cosa’. Mondragón to Alba, Woudrichem [Worcum], 2 January 1573, AA, C44, 209; Idem, Bergen-op-Zoom, 12 March 1573 and 13 March 1573, and to Dávila and Albornoz, 13 March 1573 and 16 March 1573, AA, C44, 210-213; Mondragón to Alba, Antwerp, 21 July 1573, AA, C44, 233.
84 ‘Los herejes que an desanbarcado a Medyalburque tyenen horden del principe que no se mueban hasta tomar o hacer rendyr la villa, ello es disparate’. Mondragón to Juan Moreno, Bergen-op-Zoom, 21 April 1573; Idem, 18 April 1573, and to Alba, 19 April 1573, AA, C44, 221-222, 225.
85 ‘Relacyon del suceso y vitoria que dyos nos a dado contra estos traydores’; ‘hasta la mytad del muslo para tomar las espaldas a su fuerte’. Mondragón to Alba, Tholen, 8 May 1573, AGS, E. 556, 184.
that never there was a lagoon or a coastal area so full with cormorants, as one could consider the heads of those who were drowning”. The Duke of Alba responded very enthusiastically: “even from the grave I expect you to give so many victories to Your Majesty for many years to come”.86 We can find news about this event in both English and French sources. In an English newsletter we read how “mounser Dragon, who was the chefe captayne ther’ killed 1,100 and drove the rest into the sea where they all drowned, so that of 1500 ther escaped none alyve”. The French ambassador also informed his King that “Colonel Mondragón had his horse killed from underneath him”, and talked about seven to eight hundred dead, “the others barely saved their lives in their ships”. A few days later he downplayed the news, explaining that, “the defeat executed by Mondragón was not as big as first had been made public”.87 Again it is clear that besides the victory itself, it was very important how the victory entered the public realm, even in countries like France and England.

The letters from Mondragón during this period offer some insight into his personal thoughts. When he had to recommend a replacement for the deceased captain Haro, we encounter him in a reflective mood: “it hurts me much not being able to bury him and honour him in death as I have done during his lifetime”.88 We also find another personal note as he refers to his age: “old men should take a small break when possible”, and he even realised, describing Haro’s death, that “little by little we are all coming to our end”.89 After falling ill he had to take to his bed for several weeks, and from his bed in Bergen-op-Zoom he still heard the

86 ‘Fue una cosa mas notable de ver que yo e visto despues cosas de guerra’; ‘Se echavan en lagua de manera que no se a visto jamas laguna ny marina cargada de cuervos marinos como se veya las cavesas de los que se ivan ahogando’; Y aun desde la sepultura espero habéis, señor, de dar muchas victorias a Su Magestad de aquí a muchos años’. Albornoz to Juan Moreno, Nijmegen, 11 May 1573, EA III, 393; Alba to Philip II, Nijmegen, 13 May 1573, EA III, 397. Alba to Mondragón, Nijmegen, no date, Idem, 409. Another victory against the rebels on 8 May 1573. Vloten, Middelburgs beleg, 58-59.

87 News from Antwerp, 15 March 1573, Kervyn de Lettenhove, Relations politiques, VI, 680-681. Also as Monsieur Dragon in: Mémoires anonymes, 114-116. Mondoucet to the French King, Nijmegen, 7 May 1573; Idem, 12 May 1573; 15 May 1573, Didier, Lettres I, 259, 264, 266. See also: Alba to Philip II, Nijmegen, 13 May 1573, CP II, 357, mentioning not only 700 dead rebels but also the capture of three or four important commanders from the rebels who had previously served the royal army. Also in 1582 his horse was shot dead underneath him. Vázquez, ‘Sucesos’, 72, 371.

88 ‘Pesome mucho de no poder enterrarle y honrrarle en la muerte como lo e hecho en la vida’. Mondragón to Alba and to Dávila, Breda, 10 April 1573, AA, C44, 216-217.

89 ‘Tomar los viejos un poco de reposo quando puedan’; ‘Poco a poco nos vamos acavando todos’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Breda, 20 April 1573, AA, C44, 218.
noise of the artillery: “I eat my own fingers out of curiosity to know what it is”. After his recovery he took the liberty of asking Albornoz to give him a holiday of some four to five months “to free myself of my many tasks, more than ever in my life, and as the cure [of the Revolt] has been long and the costs very high, there is no estate that can endure this. If Your Honour wants me to eat, than he has to send me what I need for it”. He not only needed free time, he also needed financial compensation for his work, and he dared to make these complaints so openly only to Alba’s secretary, Albornoz.

In the letters we find more evidence of the good relationship between Mondragón and Albornoz, for example by his starting a letter with wishing him a good New Year. Because of the comprehensive character of the information in Mondragón’s letters, Albornoz generally sent copies of his letters to Don Fadrique and sometimes even to the King, even when the letters were badly written:

It is not only now that I am very fortunate with Your Honour for hiding my blunders and those of my secretary, who is as bad at Spanish as I am; Your Honour had always accepted me for being his servant and him for coming from Lorraine. I am very thankful for sending the letter to His Majesty, because though it is badly written, it has been well worked.

After some thirty years in the north, Mondragón’s own command of Spanish had much deteriorated and his secretary was a French speaker.

When a conflict occurred between Mondragón and nobleman Don Gabriel de Mendoza, the secretary ordered the latter to show respect to the former: “for his services and grey hair he deserves every respect, and it is with reason that if Your Honour wants to be obeyed and respected by

91 ‘Para quytarme de trapaxos los quales no e tenido tantas a my vida y como la cura a sido larga y los gastos grandes no ay hacyenda que la sufra, sy vuestra merced sera servydo que coma, mande me enbyar de que’. Mondragón a Albornoz, Antwerp, 15 July 1573 and Idem, Bergen-op-Zoom, 3 July 1573, AA, C44, 229 and 232
93 ‘No es de aora estar yo muy contento de la merced que siempre me a hecho en cubrir mis gasafatones y lo de my secretario que tan mal romançado es como yo, sufre nos vuestra merced a my por ser su servydo y a el por ser de Lorena. No tengo poca merced lo que me a hecho en enbyar la carta a su Magestad que aunque va mal escrito va bien obrada’. Mondragón a Albornoz, Bergen-op-Zoom, 23 May 1573, AA, C44, 227.
his soldiers, you have to respect the people who deserve obedience for so many reasons”. 94 Here, old age and experience were valued above a noble title. It seems the ‘shameless’ Don Gabriel did not want to abandon the castle of Ghent, while Mondragón wanted to leave the castle in the hands of his nephew, Antonio de Alamos. In his letters we find a Mondragón very angry at nobleman Mendoza. 95 The fact that Spanish commanders like Mondragón were not of high birth did play an important role in such a hierarchical society.

But perhaps the best evidence of the good working relationship between Albornoz and Mondragón is the assassination plan directed against Antoine Olivier, “the painter who had executed the treason of Mons”. This double agent had betrayed the Duke of Alba and had seemingly fled to England, and now there was a price on his head: four thousand guilders alive and two thousand dead. Albornoz stated that “it is very important to bring down this villain”. 96 Mondragón had to select from his regiment two Walloons who could go to London and pass for men from Lorraine or France, in order to kill him. 97 However, Olivier had gone to Holland, where he would die during the fighting. In the same letter, Albornoz informed the commander of the enquiry into the goods of ‘that heretic’ that should go Mondragón’s way. 98 Also, Albornoz was satisfied with the horses Mondragón had sent him, and he would also accept the dapple-grey horse if it was any good: “Your Honour is generally bad at selling; you are better in fighting than in merchandising and horse dealing”. This last sentence again shows the high level of trust between the two men. For Mondragón this relationship was of vital importance. The secretary could personally influence the Duke, and Alba was not only the Governor-general of the Low Countries and the Captain-general of the army, he was also Mondragón’s old patron and protector. As in the case of Sancho Dávila, Albornoz played a key role as intermediary between the commanders and the Duke.

94 Albornoz to Gabriel de Mendoza, Utrecht, 27 July 1573, EA III, 470.
95 Mondragón to Alba, Antwerp, 27 July 1573, AA, C44, 237. see also: Mondragón to Albornoz, Antwerp, 22 July and 27 July 1573, AA, C44, 234, 236.
96 Simonneau, ‘Antoine Olivier’. News of his death during a fight on the dykes close to Amsterdam in a letter from Alba to Philip II from 13 May 1573, EA III, 396: ‘Aquel bellaco traidor del Oliver… Con todo esto le mandé poner en cuatro palos’.
97 Albornoz to Mondragón, Nijmegen, 9 April 1573, EA III, 323.
98 Possibly Arend Van Dorp.
The siege of Middelburg: hunger and honour

The surrender of Mondragón after the siege of Middelburg by the rebels may be regarded as one of the most heroic and honourable defeats within the history of the Revolt in the Low Countries. However, these events have lost the fame and glory they once possessed; especially outside Zeeland the siege of Middelburg does not belong to the canonical highlights of the Revolt. In Middelburg, the siege was commemorated in 1924 with a plethora of events, including an open-air play in which Mondragón figured as one of the main protagonists. The play’s author was the well-known Middelburg poet, P.C. Boutens. After the famous crossing to Goes in 1572, the heroic defence and the honourable surrender of Middelburg is Mondragón’s second claim to fame. At the same time, the events in Middelburg can be considered a mirror for the siege of Zierikzee in 1576, when it was Mondragón who would lead the siege. The positive image of the commander in the Low Countries is closely connected to this Zeeland triptich.

There are three interconnected narratives to analyse regarding this period: the starvation during his government of Middelburg, his honourable surrender, and his promises to William of Orange. During this period Mondragón acted as Governor and Captain-general of the County of Zeeland, at first as temporary replacement for the Lord of Beauvoir. Already in July 1573 Alba had proposed that Philip II appoint Mondragón as the new governor of the island of Walcheren, explaining “that for sure he is going to perform his duties very well, as there is no man in these estates like him who is always doing what he has to do”.

In his first letter from Vrouwenpolder, the commander described his arrival on the island of Walcheren as a disaster. Too many provisions got lost during disembarkation, and quite a few ships were lost. There was discussion about who was to lead the expedition, with the choice between Sancho Dávila and Mondragón on one side and the former Governor of Zeeland, Philippe de Lannoy, Lord of Beauvoir, on the other. The command of the royal army was clearly undermined by the factional struggle between Spanish and Netherlandish commanders, not only here but, for example, also during the siege of Leiden in 1574. Mondragón did not trust the collaborators of Beauvoir, who included someone who had been sent to the galleys by Alba and someone he described as a ‘breaker of churches’. Other sources state that Mondragón

99 Alba to Philip II, Nijmegen, 7 July 1573, CD LXXV, 230-236.
100 Fagel, Spaanse belegeraar.
had accused Beauvoir of handing secret information to the enemy. This ended in Beauvoir's entry in Van der Aa's biographical dictionary of 1851 as a short but very dramatic scene: “He took it so badly, that he got ill and died of sadness”.\(^{101}\)

Already within the walls of Middelburg, Mondragón found out there was no money to pay the troops and only bread and water to feed them. The commander also did not receive any messages from court, and on 8 September he still wondered whether Alba had heard of his arrival on Walcheren. And then there were the enemies who had ships everywhere. He tried to build a small fortress near the harbour to protect the few ships they had left. According to Mondragón, the royal government of Walcheren had completely failed. They had not even worked on the dykes that protected the island: “this island is in very bad condition and if it is not remedied this year it will be in great danger of being lost, as the dykes are completely ruined, and if you don’t see it, you don’t believe it”.\(^{102}\) The always precarious situation in Zeeland had deteriorated because of the famous flood on All Saints Day 1570, when large parts of the coastal area of the Low Countries had been flooded.\(^{103}\) This may have been the largest inundation disaster in the Netherlands and Belgium in modern history, and its consequences played a major role during the first years of the Revolt. Zeeland was more dominated by water than ever.

Hunger would become the other great enemy during the siege by the rebels, and both Spanish and Dutch chronicles testify to this. Spanish chronicler Antonio Trillo said:

Colonel Mondragón saw that there was no hope of relief, and that he and his Walloons had eaten the horses, and even the mice, and that the only food they had on most days was toasted linseed, fried with the grease of whales, and even this had finished, and with these forced needs and excessive hunger, some soldiers had

\(^{101}\) Van der Aa, Biographisch woordenboek, XI, 150-151.

\(^{102}\) ‘Rumpedor de yglesyas’; ‘Esta isla la qual queda muy mal y sy no se remedya esta anno ella quedara en gran peligro de perderse porque los diques son enteramente ruynados y no lo pudyera creer sy no lo vyera’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Vrouwenpolder, 25 August 1573; Mondragón to Juan Moreno, Vrouwenpolder, 25 August 1573, Middelburg, 28 August 1573 and 31 August 1573; Mondragón to Albornoz and Francisco de Lixalde, Middelburg, 2 September 1573 and Mondragón to Albornoz, Middelburg, 8 September 1573 and 24 October 1573, AA, C44, 241-248.

\(^{103}\) Buisman, Duizend jaar, 642-654.
fallen dead and others were left without strength, as they could expect nothing else than that all would die in that city.\textsuperscript{104}

Chronicler Bernardino de Mendoza mentions the eating of cats and dogs and the skins of all available animals.\textsuperscript{105} English Protestant soldier Thomas Morgan, fighting in Zeeland, informs us that Mondragón’s troops in Middelburg had mutinied “for theis causes: they have not any other vitaile then bisket, cheese and brackyshe water”.\textsuperscript{106} A letter from Augsburg by an Italian Protestant suggests that this was reason for Mondragón to intervene: “the inhabitants of Middelburg have been in dire straits since their commander Captain Mondragon has deprived them of victuals which he has distributed to the soldiers ravaged by hunger”.\textsuperscript{107} The claim that Mondragón had taken the provisions from the inhabitants to give to his soldiers can also be found in a letter from the French ambassador to his King. He refused to surrender the city, stubbornly “saying that he would prefer to have his soldiers eat each other than to surrender”.\textsuperscript{108} Here we have the image of a harsh commander, harsh on the inhabitants entrusted to him, and harsh on his own soldiers. But do these images fit the commander’s behaviour?

Mondragón already described the terrible situation in an early letter from 8 September: “The soldiers fall ill… they can count our bites… we get tired of the drinking, as there is not a seed of grain, nor any hop, to make beer…”. Beer was much safer to drink than water, which most of the time was heavily polluted. He needed a metaphor to cope with the situation: “I wish we could sustain ourselves like chameleons, so we would not have a lack of food”.\textsuperscript{109} A chameleon feeds, according to modern advice, on insects like crickets, cockroaches and worms.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{104} Trillo, \textit{Historia}, 226.
\item\textsuperscript{105} Mendoza, \textit{Comentarios}, 503-505.
\item\textsuperscript{106} Thomas Morgan to Lord Burghley, Flushing, 12 September 1573, Kervyn de Lettenhove, \textit{Relations politiques}, VI, 809-810.
\item\textsuperscript{107} Pietro Bizari to Jean de Vulcob [French ambassador in Vienna], Augsburg, 15 October 1573, Kuin, ed., \textit{Correspondence}, 31.
\item\textsuperscript{108} Mondoucet to the French King, Antwerp, 4 January 1574, Didier, \textit{Lettres} II, 85.
\item\textsuperscript{109} ‘Los soldados cayen malos… nos puedan contar los bocados… la bevida nos fatigarya porque no ay un grano de cevada ny de houblon con que poder hacer cervesa’. ‘Yo querría que nos pudiesemos sustentar como camaleones que no tendríamos falta de mantenimiento’; ‘Mire vuestra merced la pena que esto podra dar à un coraçon de piedra’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Middelburg, 8 September 1573, AA, C44, 247.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
On 15 December 1573 Spanish officer Diego Carreño Maldonado cried out for help to one of Alba’s secretaries. They had eaten all the dogs, cats and horses. Nothing was left. The soldiers deserted and went over to the other side:

I cannot stop singing with a certain falsetto when a man walks around the walls, the same song Carvajal sang in Peru.110 My Walloons, o mother, the wind takes them two by two, and I beg God, that I become a captain of Alaraves,111 and not of them, because their insolences are so enormous and the fact that they do not know how to suffer is more torture than engaging with the enemies.112

The inhabitants were starving, even the rich ones, and every day four to six men and women died of pure hunger: “Look Your Honour, the pity this could give to a heart of stone”. Time was running out, and if a relief armada did not arrive in time all would be lost. They had just enough provisions for ten to twelve days.

Carreño Maldonado also described how they had sent inhabitants away to have fewer mouths to feed. However, William of Orange sent them back to Middelburg after having taken everything from them, warning Mondragón to stop sending people to him: “and if by this you [Mondragón and his men] would be the cause of their death… In our hands, you will not only be treated as soldiers, but as cruel and inhuman murderers of subjects of His Majesty”.113

That very same day Mondragón also sent a letter to Requesens, adding that he was willing to die in the service of God and his Majesty, but


111 Refering to a Moorish, Arabian origin.

112 ‘Y no puedo dexar de cantar con un cierto falsete quando el hombre anda rondando las murallas, lo que cantava Caravajel en el Peru. Estos mis Walones madre, dos à dos me los lleva el ayre, y plega à Dios que antes me vea yo capitan de Alaraves que no dellos, porque son tan grandes sus insolencias y su no saber sufrir que es mayor tormento que el acabar con los enemigos’. Diego Carreño Maldonado to Esteban de Ibarra, Middelburg, 15 December 1573, Vul. 104, UBL.

also that he should send a replacement as commander of the Walloons, because “my bad health means I can no longer stand my work nor the air of this island”. In one and the same letter we find both the heroic Mondragón and a complaining and old Mondragón. He was both at the same time.

In January the rebels intercepted a letter from Mondragón to Requesens in which he mentioned that they had only five to six days’ provision left, giving the attackers a very clear insight into the desperate situation in the city. The rebels also took some passports that had text on the back that could be read only when held close to a fire as it had probably been written with onion juice. Communication was now almost impossible. When writing to Philip II on 13 February, Requesens said that the last letter he had received from Mondragón was dated 19 January.

By that time, one of two relief fleets had been destroyed on 29 January 1574, under Julián Romero as its admiral. He had been given the command of a fleet with smaller transport ships while Sancho Dávila had commanded the armada with larger ships. At that point it became totally clear to everyone that Middelburg had to surrender, and Mondragón was preparing to hand the city over to the rebels. Fortunately we have a collection of documents on the matter, starting with a remonstration by Mondragón from 4 February 1574. It is a beautifully written collection of documents that must have served to be presented to the crown, and with it Mondragón no doubt defended himself against any possible accusations relating to his handling of the siege and surrender of Middelburg. Both the description of his deeds and the description of the suffering may have been influenced by these intentions.

He had asked all his officers to discuss the difficult situation and the shortage of food. Their rations of bread had gradually become smaller, later on mixed with oats. They had also received some money to buy apples and mussels. Mondragón proposed holding on for two more weeks,

114 ‘De mas de mi salud no darme lugar a poder sufrir el trabajo y los ayres desta isla’. Mondragón to Requesens, Middelburg, 15 December 1573, Vul. 104, UBL.
115 Vloten, Middelburgs beleg, 96-97; Le Petit, Grande chronique, 271; Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 13 February 1574, CP III, 17; Requesens to Mondragón, 16 January 1574, NCD II, 48-49.
117 ‘Remonstración hecha por el coronel Mondragón a los 4 de febrero de 1574 a su regimiento en Meddelburgck’, Middelburg, 4 February 1574, AGS, E. 557, 77. Another copy is in Zabálburu, Colección Altamira, 96, D1, D61/1-8. See also NCD V (1894) 191-213.
but the officers first wanted to talk to their soldiers: “it was not in the service of His Majesty to have them die of hunger, so they preferred to be employed in some occasion where they could die and end their lives as soldiers with weapons in their hands”.\(^\text{118}\) Eight days later there was food left for only six more days. The inhabitants of the city asked to be protected, but they had already counted 568 people who had died of hunger between Christmas and 12 February alone. This number was incorrectly copied by Mendoza as 1568, and in a Dutch theatre play it would be rounded off as 1600.\(^\text{119}\)

A day later Mondragón announced that he was starting negotiations with William of Orange. Alba had written to him that if they had to surrender it had to be “in a way the enemies would benefit very little from the city”.\(^\text{120}\) Mondragón then asked the officers if they were willing to die and ruin the city, but they said they were not willing to do so. The situation was such that when the soldiers heard Orange would let them go free, they were planning to walk out even without an official capitulation. For anyone who read this document it must have been clear that Mondragón had tried everything that was within his power, but that he had no other option than to surrender. The document ends with a special paragraph that shows the horror of this siege:

> They have consumed 1800 sacks of linseed that have fed the soldiers and the burghers, because the small quantity of bread they were given was not enough, and they employed it in waffles, that have caused them so much feebleness and weakness that the burghers and the soldiers died of eating these waffles, for this seed goes completely against nature, as has been seen in many occasions in Middelburg in which they have opened the human bodies, proving that their stomachs were not capable of digesting this food, finding the entrails burned by it.\(^\text{121}\)

\(^{118}\) ‘No hera servicio de su Magestad hazerlos morir de hambre que querrian antes que les empleassen en alguna ocassion donde pudiessen morir y acabar como soldados con las armas en las manos’.

\(^{119}\) Mendoza, *Comentarios*, 504-505; Claerbout, ‘t beleg, 10.

\(^{120}\) ‘De manera que los enemigos sacarian bien poco frutto de esa villa’.

\(^{121}\) ‘Hanse consumido en linaça 1800 sacos de que los soldados y burgeses se han mantenido porque con el poco pan que se les dava, no bastava para su entretenimiento y en vafres empleavan parte de su socorro, que les han causado tanta debilidad y flaqueza que burgeses y soldados han venido a morir de los dichos wafres, por ser aquella simiente enteramente contraria a la natura, como se ha visto por muchas experiencias que se han hecho en la dicha Mediamburg abriendo cuerpos humanos, y hallar que el estomago no avia podido en ninguna manera digistir aquella vianda y hallar las entranas quemadas dello’.
The eating of linseed is often mentioned in connection with the siege of Middelburg, but nowhere so expressively as in this document. The eating of waffles of linseed would earn the inhabitants of the city the name of ‘waffle-eaters’ for centuries to come. The terrible description of Mondragón seems to coincide with modern knowledge about the eating of linseed. It is considered very healthy in small quantities, and it depends on the way the food is prepared. The modern advice is to eat no more than 45 grammes a day. The inhabitants must have eaten much more and maybe also not properly prepared, and in that case the human body may even start producing cyanide, a deadly poison. It is a terrifying story that should be told along with the well-known history of the suffering of the inhabitants of Leiden during that same year. Within Dutch history the stories from the County of Holland are clearly dominant in comparison to those from other regions, such as the County of Zeeland. However, in the case of Middelburg the besieged were the royalist Catholics and the attackers the Protestant rebels under their leader William of Orange.

There is an even more gruesome story, that hopefully does not correspond to reality. Maximilien Morillon, Granvelle’s confidant in the Low Countries and by this time no friend of the Spanish military, lists in a letter to the Cardinal the prices of grain in besieged Middelburg, and then continues with one simple phrase: “The Spanish soldiers have eaten children and for this Mondragón had them executed”. The story can be connected to a similar anecdote in Van Haecht’s chronicle on Antwerp. One of the burgomasters of Middelburg had in December 1573 gone to Antwerp to inform the new Governor-general (Requesens) about the situation. The food they had received was not enough by far for the two thousand soldiers and the inhabitants. And all other seeds, cats, horses and dogs had already been eaten. There were many women still in the city and “the rumour was that often children were lost, and it was feared the soldiers had eaten them”. Mondragón did not want to surrender the city and wanted to hold on until the last man standing. A few days later the chronicler came with more news: “there was so little space in the city, and it was said that monseigneur Mondragón as commander had locked up moaning women in cellars to let them die there”. He is supposed to have said, “as long as there are people to be...

---

122 For example in the play by Joos Claerbout, ‘t beleg, 11, 28-29.
123 http://www.verhalenbank.nl/items/show/39216.
124 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 26 January 1574, CG V, 12.
Protagonists of War

eaten, there is no famine”. Again we hear the story of the children: “and often children got lost, and it was feared that they were eaten by the soldiers”, but the chronicler ends his text with a reasonable “but I think they were secretly brought out of the city”. But still, there are clearly narratives to be found in which Mondragón plays a very negative role, including in the letter mentioned earlier from the French ambassador. However, strangely enough, the honourable surrender of Middelburg would in fact be very positive for the image of the Spanish commander. Though the Middelburg poet, P.C. Boutens, did not participate in the glorification of the Spanish enemy when he wrote the text of the staged open-air play commemorating the siege in 1924:

Never the Spanish devil Mondragón
surrenders himself on pardon!
His desperation makes him risk everything
and the city goes through hell!  

Orange and Mondragón

On 18 February 1574, Mondragón capitulated at last. Chroniclers Trillo and Mendoza considered the surrender honourable as he was a very experienced and trustworthy captain and the troops could leave the city honourably with their weapons and their banners before enemy ships took them to Terneuzen. In the chronicles Requesens received Mondragón with all honours, and we know indeed that Philip II had asked his Governor-general to offer the utmost consolation to the defeated commander, as in the case of Romero. Mondragón had been able to leave as a free man because he had promised Orange to do everything in his power to free Philip Marnix of Sint-Aldegonde and some other rebel prisoners. If he did not succeed, he would put himself again into the hands of William of Orange. According to Morillon, the commander would indeed try to reach Orange without permission, but he was apprehended on Requesens’s

125 Van Haecht, Kroniek, II, 273 (18 December 1573) and 274–275 (20 December 1573).
126 Vloten, Middelburgs beleg, 29.
127 ‘Nooit geeft de Spaansche duivel Mondragon, zich over op pardon! Eer zet zijn wanhoop alles op het spel, verkeert de stad in hell!’ Boutens, Middelburg’s overgang, 14.
128 Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 24 February 1574, CP III, 24–27; copies of the capitulation documents are also in CEF, vol. 60, 77 and NCD II, 191–216; Philip II to Requesens, Madrid, 13 March 1574, CP III.
orders to prevent that from happening. Knowing Morillon, this story was not given as evidence of Mondragón’s sense of honour, but to show he did not obey his Governor-general. The treaty between the Prince and the Spanish commander was printed in Delft in the same year, with a combined Dutch and French text, so everybody could read the promises made by Mondragón.

The negotiations on the capitulation had thus brought Mondragón into close contact with William of Orange. Morillon did not trust Orange at all and wrote to Granvelle, “if he falls into their hands, he will be mistreated like all the good Catholics who have lived in peril for so long in this city”. In another letter his fears were even greater: “If they catch him, it will cost him his life or the major part of his possessions, that he himself has estimated before at a hundred thousand écus, that he wanted to give in marriage to his only daughter”. News from Antwerp seemed at first to confirm his fears, but William of Orange decided to treat him humanely, “and so the Captain Mondragón only says wonderful things about him [Orange]”.

The gentlemen’s agreement between Mondragón and Orange led to a series of at least eleven letters written by Orange to Mondragón, dated between 16 February and 5 September 1574. In April Orange summoned him to Geertruidenberg as his prisoner if he did not succeed in liberating Marnix of Sint-Aldegonde and the others, signing the letter “vostre bien bon amy à vous faire service, Guillen de Nassau”. The friendly tone slowly changed into a more formal one, as Mondragón was continuously begging for more time. Orange ordered him in stricter terms to follow his word as a ‘gentilhomme d’honneur’. And in May he wrote, “for my part I am happy that at least this serves as an example for you right now, and for posterity, that one should not so easily trust the servants of Philip, even those who among the Spaniards have the reputation of being the most sincere and

129 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1 June 1574, CG V, 102.
130 Tractaet van accoordt.
131 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 1, 15, 23/25, and 24/27 February 1574, CG V, 19, 31-32, 41, 47.
132 BO, accessed 21 November 2018: Orange to Mondragón:16 February 1574, Flushing (3113); 17 February 74, Flushing (9049); 19 February 1574 (11159); 23 April 1574, Zaltbommel (10352); 3 May 1574, Dordrecht (10353); 5 May 1574, Dordrecht (3150); 17 May 1574, Dordrecht (3164); ca. 20 May 1574 (3166); c. 23 May 1574 (3168); 24 July 1574, Rotterdam (3185); 5 September 1574, Rotterdam (2369).
133 BO: Orange to Mondragón, Zaltbommel, 23 April 1574.
virtuous". He was clearly playing with the image of Mondragón as the exceptionally good Spaniard. It proves Mondragón was already considered as such in 1574. Orange’s chancellor used the situation even as a reason not to trust any Spaniard: “he openly says that his master will not negotiate with Spaniards, as Mondragón has not kept his word, after he and his followers had been treated so well, though they could have died of hunger”. Requesens’s correspondence makes it possible to look at the discussion from the other side. The Governor-general did not want to lose Mondragón, but at the same time he tried to reach a good deal with William of Orange without offering too many prisoners in return. In the end, Marnix of Sint-Aldegonde would be freed in exchange.

The life of an Albista under Requesens

We have already seen that Requesens and Mondragón did not agree on everything. The commander remained a creature of the Duke of Alba, to whom and to whose secretary, Albornoz, he continued writing. These letters no longer reflect the direct hierarchy within the royal army in the Low Countries, but show the clientèle relationship between a patron from the high nobility in Spain and his client. Mondragón kept asking for favours from his old patron, maybe not completely understanding that Alba’s position at court had severely weakened. In return he could offer information, so he included copies of papers and of the capitulation treaty in his letters to Alba. After the defeat at Middelburg he wanted to go home, and Alba was his best way out as he wanted to return to his service:

134 ‘De ma part je suis joyeulx qu’au moins ceste exemple servira presentement a vous et a la posterite pour nestre desireulx et faciles a se fier aux promesses et serviteurs de Philippe la mesmes qui entre les Espaignolz auront reputation destre les plus sinceres et virtueux’. BO: Orange to Mondragón, ca. 20 May 1574 and Idem, ca. 23 May 1574.
135 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 19 July 1574, CG V, 163.
136 Requesens to Mondragón, 12 April 1574, NCD II, 154; Requesens to Dávila, 12 April 1574, Idem, 154-155; Requesens to Champagney, 7 July 1574, NCD III, 280-283; Requesens to Mondragón, 29 and 31 July; 2 and 15 August 1574, NCD IV, 185-186; 211-212; 228-229; 367-368; Requesens to Francisco Hernández Dávila, 31 July and 13 August 1574, NCD IV, 210-213; 334-335; Requesens to Lannoy, 31 July 1574, NCD IV, 213-214.
137 Schelven, Marnix, 88.
138 14 letters from Requesens to Mondragón between 16 January and 4 October 1574, NCD I-V.
You know how I have served and the age I have, and combined with my lack of health, I need another function for the future and some payment for the thirty-eight years of service that Your Majesty could reward me for with honour, because I deserve this for the age and experience I have in following Your Excellency and being your soldier.¹³⁹

Two weeks later, on 14 April 1574, Mondragón was active at the famous Battle of Mookerheyde, won by Sancho Dávila against an invasion force coming from Germany and organised by William of Orange and his brothers. Chronicler Trillo stated that Mondragón fought “with determination to die or be victorious”, but all we hear of his participation is the order to unite his troops from the garrisons of Brussels, Leuven and Tienen. By the end of April 1574 he was ordered to divide his more than two thousand Walloons among garrisons in places like Bergen-op-Zoom and Breda, and on the only two islands of Zeeland left to Philip II, Zuid-Beveland and Tholen.¹⁴⁰ A list of 14 January 1575 shows that he was by then supposed to have 3,600 men in eighteen Walloon companies, but in reality there were only some 2,520 men available.¹⁴¹

After the victory at Mookerheyde, an enormous mutiny broke out under the royal troops, as we saw in the chapter on Sancho Dávila. Unfortunately we have no letters from Mondragón for this period, but we do know Mondragón was in Antwerp when the city was harrassed by the mutineers during the early days of May. Morillon blamed both him and Sancho Dávila for the situation.¹⁴² He clearly saw both commanders acting as one and criticised their actions: “Sancho Dávila and Mondragón have procured that His Excellency [Requesens] should not listen to the enemies of our faith”.¹⁴³ This seems to contradict the image we have of Mondragón from Middelburg and his contacts with William of

¹³⁹ ‘Save como yo e servydo y la edad que tengo y poca salud que se me va juntando para poder mejor servir de aqui adelante y tener algun pago de treynta y ocho annos de servicio me podria su magestad honrar y hacer merced pues la edad y espiriençia que tengo de aver siguido a vuestra excelencia y sido su soldado lo mereza’. Mondragón to Alba, Antwerp, 1 April 1574, AA, C44, 249. His health was discussed by Requesens in a letter to Sancho Dávila: Requesens to Dávila, 29 March 1574, NCD II, 60-62. On 2 April ‘se hallase en disposición para hallarse en Mastrique’. Requesens to Mondragón, 2 April 1574, NCD II, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Trillo, Historia, 238; Report from 14 April 1574, CP III, 52; Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 30 April 1574, CP III, 64.


¹⁴² Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 13 May 1574, CG V, 85, 89.

¹⁴³ Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 11 July 1575, CG V, 336.
Protagonists of War

Orange. Later, both commanders were held responsible for the failed expedition to Zeeland and accused of being interested only in their own profit.144

After the expedition to Mookerheyde and the mutiny of 1574, Mondragón resumed contact with Alba and his secretary. He was very pleased to hear that Alba and his wife had arrived in Madrid, so the Duke could ask for favours from the King in person. Mondragón was crying out from Brussels, “Your Excellency knows that there is no soldier who more rightly deserves the favours of His Majesty than me”.145 He asked the Duke for a licence to come to Spain in order to ask the King in person to grant him favours to help his daughter, “if it was not for the rewards I pretend Your Majesty shall give me, it would be as if she had had no father, and I would be forced to send her to my Lady the Duchess”.146 He was clearly threatening the Duke of Alba. Mondragón did not get a quick response from his patron, who most probably had enough to deal with regarding his own precarious position at court. The Duke’s enemies had succeeded in convincing the King that the deteriorating situation in the Low Countries was the result of Alba’s harsh policy, and on top of this there was also a conflict with the King about the marriage of Don Fadrique.147

Two months later, Mondragón wrote another letter, now in an even more aggressive and demanding tone: “I cannot stop bothering Your Excellency”.148 He stated that the Duke had probably not received his letters, because otherwise he certainly would have answered them. Again he described himself as the best soldier of the King, but he was left out while others “even received many rewards while sleeping”.149 His plea for a personal visit to the King, his old age and his daughter all returned in this letter: “don’t wait for me getting even older than I am now, and if I did not have children, I would be satisfied to die poor”.150 He suggested another idea to the Duke. What if the King were to grant him permission

144 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 9 October 1575, CG V, 409-410.
145 ‘Vuestra excelencia save despues que me conoce ningun soldado merece mejor que yo que su rey le favoresca’. Mondragón to Alba, Brussels, 1 July 1574, AA, C44, 252.
146 ‘La qual sy no fuere con la merced que pretendo Su Magestad me haga no podra alavarse de aver tenido padre, y sera me fuerza de embiarla a mi señora la duquesa’.
147 Martínez Hernández, ‘Desafío’.
148 ‘No puedo dexar de importunar a vuestra excelencia’. Mondragón to Alba, Antwerp, 1 September 1574, AA, C44, 253.
149 ‘Questandose dormiendo les hace mucha merced’.
150 ‘No espere a que sea mas viejo de lo que soy y sy no tubiese hijos conhorteria me de morir povre’.
Cristóbal de Mondragón: the good Spaniard

to retire to the castle of Ghent, given to him by Alba but still without receiving the income because the confirmation of the governorship had not yet been given. He had taken over on 4 December 1572, replacing the deceased Jerónimo de Salinas. As the official patent was issued on 23 August 1574, it was in fact on its way when Mondragón was writing this letter.\footnote{CP III, 182.}

The letter to Albornoz was even more aggressive: “I have very good reasons to complain about Your Honour”.\footnote{‘Muy gran razon tengo de quearme de vuestra merced’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Antwerp, 1 September 1574, AA, C44, 258.} He had not heard from him since they had left the Low Countries and he had doubts about their ‘amistad’. He also not included any news: “I don’t write about the news because others do so of which Your Honour is satisfied”.\footnote{‘No scrivo nuevas porque otras las escriban de que vuestra merced se holgar’.} Refusing to serve as a source of news and information shows the depths of his anger. If Alba did not do what a patron had to do, then the client would also stop playing his part. One week after writing these letters, Mondragón received a letter from the Duke dated 16 August. He wrote that Requesens had promised to grant him permission to go to Spain if the royal permission did not arrive within two months. However, the very experienced commander knew that nothing was sure, “as here something new could occur, that would stop them from giving me my licence”.\footnote{‘Porque aca se podria ofrecer cosa con que no se me diese la licençia’. Mondragón to Alba, Antwerp, 17 September 1574, AA, C44, 254.} Again we have letters to both Alba and Albornoz on the same day. He started his letter to Albornoz with the image of a dream: “I would be satisfied to sit together on the new chairs Your Honour says he has in his house, to tell Your Honour about my work and how I found the situation after leaving [the island of] Walcheren”.\footnote{‘Yo me contentara de que sentados en las sillas que vuestra merced dice en su casa pudiera yo dar quenta a vuestra merced de mis trabajos y de las cosas que halle quando saly de Valqueren’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Antwerp, 17 September 1574, AA, C44, 255.} He is again more outspoken to the secretary: “It is very urgent to make the journey”.\footnote{‘Tengo arta necesidad de hacer la jornada’.} He also blamed Requesens for not granting permission to go to Spain, but he knew those in command were unaware of his deeds and he had always been a servant (criado) of the Duke of Alba. Letters in November repeated the same issues, adding a description of how Requesens had left him isolated in between dykes and fortresses, “where I think my services are going to be
buried”. 157 With his old patron not listening to him, his old friend Albornoz not responding, and his new Governor-general unaware of his services rendered, Mondragón felt completely lost, abandoned and isolated.

When he had to write a letter of recommendation to Albornoz for an Italian captain going to court, Mondragón completely broke down: “I have little hope left that if I had died, or would die tomorrow, that Your Majesty would remember my services, nor anybody else, because my deeds from before the arrival of the Comendador Mayor [Requesens] are worth nothing”. 158 He felt betrayed, having thought that with Philip II knowing him so well and with Alba and Albornoz as an “alarm on my behalf” at court, things would go his way. 159 He had heard Philip II wanted to reward him, but without granting permission to go to Spain.

He then took things one step further: “If Your Majesty does not decide, then I think I have to take my licence myself, without it being given to me, and I could venture returning to my home”. 160 If he was not allowed to go to Spain, he would leave the war on his own account. This was his last resort, hinting at desertion. Other commanders had the same problems when looking for compensation for their deeds, and Julián Romero, too, had to threaten to leave the Low Countries without permission in order to get things moving.

His anger seems to have worked. Besides the patent for the castle of Ghent from 23 August 1574, he was also suggested – along with Gaspar de Robles – as a good possible replacement for Sancho Dávila as governor of Antwerp citadel. Juan de Zúñiga, Requesens’s brother, argued that both he and Robles “were such good soldiers and so accepted by those of the country”. 161 Again we find proof of the positive image of Mondragón held by people of the Low Countries in his own time. In May 1575 Mondragón would write to the King that he was very happy with the large reward of ten thousand guilders in a single payment to use as dowry for his daughter. Now he was ready to remain in the service of the King “hasta la muerte”, as he phrased it himself. Little did he know

157 ‘Donde creo mis serviçios han de ser enterrados’. Mondragón to Alba and to Albornoz, Heusden, 4 November 1574, AA, C44, 256-257.
158 ‘Poca esperança me queda sy oviera muerto o sy muriesse mañana que su magestad se acordasse de mis serviçios ny nadie, pues que no valen nada los hechos hasta la venida del señor comendador mayor’. Mondragón to Albornoz, Breda, 10 February 1575, AA, C44, 259.
159 ‘Despertador de mi parte’.
160 ‘Sy Su Magestad no se resuelve creo avre de tomar licencia sin que me la den, lo que podre aventurar seraolverme a mi casa’.
161 Juan de Zúñiga to Requesens, 10 July 1574, NCD III, 327-332.
then that this would mean another twenty years of service, as in 1575 he was already writing about his old age and his grey hair.\textsuperscript{162}

\section*{Quarrelling around Breda (1575)}

By this time, peace negotiations were taking place in Breda in February and March 1575 and again in July and August. Mondragón was, like Julián Romero, among the hostages sent to the rebels during the talks.\textsuperscript{163}

For Mondragón it meant meeting William of Orange again, of which meeting we have evidence in the chronicle by Trillo and in a letter from Requesens to the King, itself based on a letter the Governor-general had received directly from Mondragón. Mondragón and Orange met two or three times and had several conversations.

Spanish chronicler Antonio Trillo informs us amply on their meeting in Dordrecht:

\begin{quote}
The Prince of Orange, present in Dordrecht, was very depressed and confused, because Cristóbal de Mondragón had confronted him one day in public, saying to him that he should not miss the opportunity, because by signing the peace he would save his soul, his honour and his possessions. He would also be remembered as the Defender of the Patria. If he would act contrarilywise, he would be remembered by all men of the world as bad and perverse. And though these words of Mondragón were important and worthy of being very well considered, they stung the Prince of Orange in such a way he never again saw the colonel. Using the excuse that Mondragón heard mass in his house and had the bells sounded at his door so everybody could come and hear mass, he asked for somebody else to be sent in his place, because he, as a man born in Spain, and even in the middle of Old Castile, heard mass and invited everybody to join by sounding the bells, not withstanding the heretics and the Prince, their captain.\textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

Another discussion between the two is reflected in the letter from Requesens to Philip II, this time not taking place in a public space but during a meeting:

\textsuperscript{162} Mondragón to Philip II, Breda, 6 May 1575, AGS, E. 562, 85.

\textsuperscript{163} Soen, \textit{Vredehandel}, 104-105; Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 29 June 1575, CP III, 307. He had left for Breda before 1 May 1575. Viron to Granvelle, Brussels, 1 May 1575, CG V, 306.

\textsuperscript{164} Trillo, \textit{Historia}, 263-264.
Colonel Mondragón wrote to me from Dordrecht, where the Prince of Orange had invited him two or three times, and having several conversations with him. Mondragón had said to him, among other things, that he now could render such an important service to Your Majesty that it would not only make him forget all things from the past, but that he would do Your Majesty such service that he could be made Captain-general of one of his armies. He answered that he did not want this, because they committed too many brutalities in the armies, and he wanted nothing for himself, but only that Your Majesty would guard the privileges, throw out the foreigners and unite these estates, and with this everything would be finished. He also wanted to be a subject of the Estates of Holland and Zeeland, because they had received him when he was in need. And if this was a problem, he would be forced – against his will – to put his business in more powerful hands. So, Your Majesty should look quietly what is more convenient; and he complained very strongly that they had taken away his possessions and his son, and it pitied him very much that his son was now badly educated.\textsuperscript{165}

The descriptions coincide in depicting the Mondragón’s conciliatory character as he tried to convince Orange to return to the obedience of the King, promising him that he would be restored in all his possessions. The difference is that the chronicler adds a Catholic and Spanish flavour to it, and does not give any insight into Orange’s reasoning, while Requesens does explain the arguments of Orange in detail and in a neutral style. The differences may be explained by the fact that one text was intended for internal use, while the other was written with the intention of attracting a wider public and, even more, written by an author with a very sharp pen.

In another situation during this period, Mondragón did not show himself as a man looking for compromises. Whilst in Breda he had an open conflict with the experienced secretary, Jacques de la Torre (c. 1513-1581), of the Secret Council in Brussels, son of an important Spanish merchant from Bruges and a woman from the Low Countries, and with important relations within both the merchant community and the Habsburg bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{165} Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 7 April 1575, CP III, 299-300.
\textsuperscript{166} Baelde, \textit{Collaterale raden}, 236, 255, 318-319. His sister Magdalena/Madeleine was married to the Spanish merchant, Francisco del Río from Bruges, and their son, Luís, was a member of the Council of Troubles. Versele, \textit{Louis del Río}, 17-19. The important functionary, Pedro del Castillo, was born of an earlier marriage of Francisco del Río.
The incident is reported by the negotiators at the peace talks.  
Mondragón had been in his room with De la Torre, his wife and others, when he became angry and had shouted at De la Torre, “go away! (que se vayan!)”, repeating this three or four times. The negotiators speak of “the great fury and indecency of the said Mondragón”. The commander became even angrier after a polite reply from De la Torre, again shouting “que se vayan!”. Mondragón stood up “comme ung homme furieux” and said they had tried before to chase him out of the country.

Mondragón might be referring here to the fact that they had tried to take Ghent castle away from him, but the document does not explicitly state this. We do not even know whether Mondragón was aware of the fact that his government of Ghent castle was at stake, as it went against the privileges to have a foreigner occupying this post. We can think his anger shows that he did know, as he was in Breda at the time the negotiations were taking place. Requesens seems to have been open to this idea as part of the negotiations, while the King and his advisors in Spain were completely against it.

De la Torre then told Mondragón that he had known about the actions against him for quite some time, and then “the said Mondragón attacked him, pulling him by his ears with his two hands, as if he were some page or villain”. He cried out that he wanted to know how the secretary had known this. De la Torre tried to escape from Mondragón, and two or three people got between them to prevent him from hurting De la Torre even more. The secretary now wanted to have his honour restored; after all he was a man of sixty-two with thirty-two years in the service of the King and he had done so much for these negotiations. This makes it a quarrel between two long-serving servants of the crown, as Mondragón was of more or less the same age and experience. The negotiators writing the letter to Requesens knew Mondragón had also written to Requesens, and they now awaited his decision on the matter.

A few days later, Requesens sent his very political answer to the negotiators. If the situation had been as they had written to him Mondragón would be in the wrong, but the commander had written to him with a completely different story and he could not believe Mondragón had treated a minister of His Majesty in such a way. As Mondragón was now very busy, the matter would have to be put on hold. Morillon, Granvelle’s confidant, used the conflict to criticise the Spanish military in a letter.

---

167 Commissionaries of Philip II to Requesens, Breda, 26 June 1575, CP III, 757-760.
168 Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 6 February 1575, CP III, 262; Idem, 286, and Philip II to Requesens, El Escorial, 26 March 1575, Idem, 287.
to Granvelle, and he introduced some extra blows (soufletz) to the story, adding in yet another letter that the commander had also pulled him by the nose. The increase in the violence may have been the result of new incoming information, but also a way of turning the story into an even better one. Morillon also drew a conclusion from the conflict: “If they treat in this way those that are of the nation [the Spanish], what will they do with those whom they like very little?”.\textsuperscript{169} We see Mondragón here as the typical example of a violent and brutal Spanish commander, but we know who is saying it.

**The Red Sea opens again, and again**

After the end of the negotiations at Breda, Mondragón immediately returned to the war. The invasion of Fijnaart, back then an island in the Volkerak, started with the crossing of the sea at low tide. His spies had studied in secret the tides between the coast and the island and then they went in, as in 1572, with the old commander entering first. And again it provided wonderful material for the chroniclers:

> He ordered them to take off their leg coverings, trousers and other clothes, leaving them with only their gambesons, shirts and shoes. He gave every soldier a small sack of powder and some knapsacks for around their neck, and, to the one in front, food for two days.\textsuperscript{170}

Biographer Salcedo Ruiz calls these pages of Mendoza’s one of the best parts of his work, and even of the military literature of the whole world.\textsuperscript{171} They arrived with only nine casualties, the enemies fled immediately, he spared the lives of the rebels in the fortresses, left some men in garrison, and returned to Brabant with his troops. Dutch author Van Meteren also mentions Mondragón’s freeing of the rebel soldiers, but does not attach any positive judgement to this behaviour.\textsuperscript{172} In a letter to

\textsuperscript{169} Requesens to the commissionaries of Philip II, Antwerp, 29 June 1575, CP III, 764; Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 3 July 1575 and 11 July 1575, CG V, 329, 332.

\textsuperscript{170} Mendoza, *Comentarios*, 526-527.


\textsuperscript{172} Van Meteren, *Historie*, 85r; Hooft, *Histoorien X*, 432; Ham, ‘Willemstad’; Mondragón to Requesens, 28 June 1575, AGS, E. 562, 133. See also Requesens to Philip II, Antwerp, 29 June 1575, CP III, 337. He had with him 1,000 Walloons, two companies of Spaniards, two of Germans, and seven pieces of artillery. See also Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 11 July 1575, CG V, 332.
Requesens, Mondragón tells his own story of the crossing through the water:

All the Spanish captains and those of Walloons have served very well and with enthusiasm. I don’t know how I can praise them any more to Your Excellency. With the desire of them and that of all the soldiers, and without knowing more than seeing the enemy defences, they crossed the water... with the mud up to their waist, in such a way as to convert the sea into land, and even the sailors did not serve as usual, but under the captains that had brought them, and they did it all so fast that we arrived to the small island before the end of the low tide, from where we reached the dyke, passing through water, mud and arquebus shots that were fired against us. But with the will to serve God and Your Excellency, this was no problem, and though the enemies were with many more, they greatly feared the good order we had in attacking them.$^{173}$

In September royal troops repeated the same trick, now going from Sint Philipsland to Duiveland, making use of the knowledge derived from Mondragón’s crossing to Goes in 1572. The commander was again involved in the action, but this time he did not go into the water himself.$^{174}$ One chronicle gives Italian commander Chiappino Vitelli the honour of entering the water, but considering his famous corpulence this is not very likely. In the fighting after their arrival rebel commander Charles de Boisot was killed, probably due to fire from his own troops. Mondragón is prominently present at this dramatic scene in an eighteenth-century

$^{173}$ ‘An servido todos los capitanes españoles y los demas de Walones tan prinçipalmente y de buena gana que no lo sabre encaresçer a vuestra excelencia, con la voluntad que ellos y todos los soldados, sin saber mas de ver la defensa que el enemigo les hazia, passando ellos contra el agua, y el lodo hasta mas de la çinta, de manera que an hecho de la mar tierra, hasta los mariners an servido no como suelen, sino haziendo los capitanes que los an traydo a cargo, y ellos tanta diligencia que con ella antes que nos faltasse la baxa mar, nos pusieron en la isleta, de donde para llegar al dique tuvimos el agua y el lodo y muchos arcabuzazos en contra, mas con la voluntad de servir a Dios y a vuestra excelencia, todo se tuvo en nada, y aunque los enemigos fueron muchos mas tuvieron miedo y temor a la buena orden que se tuvo para combatirlas’. Mondragón to Requesens, 28 June 1575, AGS, E. 562, 133.

$^{174}$ Janssens, Brabant, 260-261, includes a copy of an engraving of the crossing from AGS, E. 1516, 171.
Dutch engraving. Charles de Boisot was the brother of Louis de Boisot, the commander of the fleet of the Sea Beggars at the relief of Leiden in 1574 (see chapter IV).

In the last sea crossing on foot, from Duiveland to Schouwen, chronicler Mendoza again sees Mondragón taking off his clothes before entering with his troops, and he is followed by his fellow commanders, Sancho Dávila and Juan Osorio de Ulloa. It turns Mondragón into the Spanish champion in crossing the waters in Zeeland on foot and, combined with his grey hair and mature age, into the only real Spanish Moses of the Low Countries. This expedition to Zeeland was a joint command by Sancho Dávila and Mondragón, with Juan Osorio as their right hand. The idea came from Requesens, but later on he was sorry for his decision as he had to inform the King that several disagreements had occurred between the two commanders that had caused great inconvenience.

A first conflict arose about the strategy on the island of Schouwen. While Mondragón preferred a direct attack on the town of Zierikzee, Dávila and Osorio decided to go first against the small fortress of Bommenede, nowadays completely disappeared under water. It shows Mondragón was not dominating the decision-making process. Sancho Dávila, former captain of the guard of the Duke of Alba, Governor of Antwerp citadel, and the hero of the Battle of Mookerheyde, demonstrated in these years that he was the most powerful Spanish commander in the Low Countries. The siege of Bommenede, also the theme of a Hogenberg engraving, is one of these smaller episodes that could do with a more complete analysis. While the royal army and the French garrison in the fortress were negotiating, some of the Spaniards attacked without permission. Then the French no longer wanted to surrender and they started a brave defence: “those that were called chickens (gallinas) by the Spanish, showed they had the dash of very brave cocks (gallos)”. As in English, gallinas refers to cowards, while gallos is the nickname of the French, related to their origin as Gauls. We can find this word play, here quoted from Mendoza, with the traditional name for the French as gallos, in many chronicles and histories. All defenders were killed, but

175 Mémoires anonymes, I, 175-177; De dood van Charles de Boisot. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-79.097.
176 Van Meteren, Historie, 86v-88r; Requesens to Philip II, Tholen, 15 October 1575, CP III, 375-377; Mendoza, Comentarios, 531-534; Hooft, Historien (1972) X, 436-451 (‘s koninx volk trekt te voete, door ’t waater, naa Duyvelandt en Schouwen’); ‘Relación’, CEF, 60, 222r-226v; Schortinghuis, ‘Mondragon’.

246
the attack also caused many casualties among the royal troops, such as Mondragón who “received an arquebus shot and stayed in Antwerp”. 177

The siege of Zierikzee (1575-1576)

The subsequent siege of Zierikzee would become another of the large heroic sieges in Dutch history, though it has, like the siege of Middelburg, received far less attention than similar sieges in the county of Holland, like Leiden, Haarlem or Alkmaar. During the first months Mondragón did not succeed in closing off the town’s support lines and twice a large relief fleet was able to enter. He also had to close the holes in the dykes that had been dug by the town’s Protestant minister and his adherents. Mondragón’s very generous proposal for surrender caused a conflict in the city that was finally won by the radical Protestant forces. The Catholic regents of the city were imprisoned and taken by ship to Middelburg. 178

Though Mondragón had then wanted to attack Zierikzee directly, it was decided first to attack the small fortress of Bommenede, already discussed above. The Spanish commander did issue an order that refugees from Zierikzee would be directly sent back to the town “in order to more quickly consume the [available] food”. 179 It was the same strategy Orange had used at Middelburg.

The famous Brussels archivist, Louis Prosper Gachard, included in his edition of Philip II’s correspondence some seventy-eight letters from Mondragón, written between 5 March and 26 August 1576 and generally addressed to the Council of State which had taken over the government of the Low Countries after Requesens’ death. 180 Gachard stated that the letters made it possible to be present at all the military encounters, offering all possible details on the negotiations. But then he almost seems to abandon the objective viewpoint of the historian: “reading them you cannot but get sympathy for the Spanish leader, maybe the only one among all those of his nation, who did not receive the public animosity of the inhabitants of the Low Countries”. 181 Salcedo Ruiz confesses in his biography of Mondragón that it was by reading these same letters that he got the idea of writing a book on the commander: “these

177 Hooft (1972), *Histoorien*, X, 440-441; Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 30 October 1575, CG V, 416-417.
179 Pot, *Beleg*, 34.
180 CP IV, 543-738.
181 CP IV, xi-xii.
letters, that portray not his body, but the complete soul of Cristóbal de Mondragón”. 182

The rebels succeeded several times in getting relief fleets with supplies into the town, including on 23 October 1575 and 9 January 1576. As a solution, Mondragón closed the harbour of Zierikzee off with “certain poles connected with anchor ropes and chains”, as he explained himself in a letter to the King. 183 On 11 April a rebel fleet tried in vain to break this blockade, a heroic attempt that was immortalised on one of the famous Zeeland tapestries on the Revolt, now in the Zeeuws Museum at Middelburg. 184

Two days after these events, Mondragón wrote to the Council of State a letter from the dykes, in which he reported floating human legs in the water: “this morning, human legs have been found in the water, together with four dead bodies”. 185 He also wrote a separate letter to Spanish councillor Gerónimo de Roda who in turn informed the King: “Colonel Mondragón writes that one saw a great number of arms and legs floating on the water”. 186

Roda regularly included copies of Mondragón’s letters on the situation around Zierikzee in his correspondence, written in what Salcedo Ruiz calls Mondragón’s ‘international gibberish’, as his “Castellano is as bad as his French”, a fact that Mondragón himself was also aware of. 187 Of course, most space in the letters was filled not with battlefield stories, but with logistics: he needed money as everything was twice as expensive on the dykes as in Brabant; he needed experienced artillerymen as his had been wounded; and he needed more men, as the dykes were so very long and he had not enough men to cover them all.

A next attempt to relieve the town would again turn into a huge defeat for the rebels. Louis Boisot, the hero of the relief of Leiden in 1574, had gathered an impressive fleet of more than 150 ships, with more than twenty infantry banners on board. 188 Jan Pot, who wrote his PhD thesis on the siege of Zierikzee, offers two reasons for this dramatic

182 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 94.
184 Heyning, Tapijten, 129.
185 Mondragón to the Council of State, the dyke close to Zierikzee, 13 April 1576. CP IV, 566-567.
186 Gerónimo de Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 14 April 1576, CP IV, 70.
187 Salcedo Ruiz, El coronel, 96.
188 Lem, ‘Louis’. 248
defeat: a sailor from Sint Maartensdijk had betrayed the plan, and the royal army had intercepted a pigeon carrying a message with the date of the attack. Chronicler Trillo describes a battle of more than six hours with the commander all night on the dykes, resulting in more than a thousand of the enemy dead against eighty dead and wounded in the Colonel’s army. Louis de Boisot died when his ship capsized, and all four hundred men on board perished.  

Mondragón had been very well prepared for the battle: “the infantry is fully prepared, and ready to receive them, with so much courage as I have not seen for a long time in men of war”. Together with Sancho Dávila and Francisco de Valdés he had made a detailed plan describing the movements of all troops. The presence of Valdés turns this confrontation into a revenge for the relief of Leiden, where Boisot had defeated Valdés. On 28 May Mondragón could inform the Council of State of their clear victory over the Beggar’s fleet the evening before. The story of the pigeon messages and the account of the victory reached Philip II’s desk, and Gerónimo de Roda praised both Mondragón and Sancho Dávila for having fought through the night without ever resting and for risking their lives. And again, Morillon saw things otherwise, as he reported in his letter to Granvelle, once more using Mondragón as an example of all Spanish commanders:

But nothing is sure, except that Mondragón has written much more [to Brussels] than what has really happened during the exploit. This is normal for such people, to put all good and bad things on one pile, and to entertain the world with lies they consider in the service of His Majesty, in order to have the whole country subjected in fear.

The victory over the rebels did not solve all of Mondragón’s problems at once. In June 1576 we find many letters from the commander lamenting the needs among his troops. He also needed to protect Bergen-op-

---

189 Pot, Beleg, 49-50; Trillo, Historia, 2800-287; Mendoza, Comentarios, 536-540, 542-543; Van Meteren, Historie, 86v-88r; Hooft, Historien, X, 441; Pot, ’Verhaal’, 130.
190 Mondragón to the Council of State, Ouwerkerk, 7,9,11,17 May 1576; Close to Zierikzee, 19 May 1576; Ouwerkerk, 22 May 1576, CP IV, 593-603.
191 Council of State to Philip II, Brussels, 30 May 1576, CP IV, 177; Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 30 May 1576, CP IV, 182.
192 Morillon to Granvelle, Brussel, 3 and 4 June 1576, CG VI, 99.
193 Mondragón to the Council of State, Ouwerkerk and near Zierikzee, 14 letters between 20 May and 30 June 1576, CP IV, 612-645.
Zoom and the road from Bergen to Antwerp.\textsuperscript{194} The Council of State wanted him to finish the siege as soon as possible as they needed the troops to defend the Low Countries from possible invasions from France. Possibly the high nobility of the Low Countries was more worried about the southern border than about events in the north.

When Mondragón’s negotiations with Zierikzee’s Governor, Arend van Dorp, started, Van Dorp called himself “vostre bien bon ami et serviteur”.\textsuperscript{195} The Council of State decided to use a strategy based on clemency and, of course, they wanted a quick surrender. Therefore they had problems with the large sum of four hundred thousand florins from the town asked for at first by Mondragón. He had to reduce the sum. Mondragón wanted to know if he was allowed to handle the negotiations and which soldiers should enter the city after capitulation. For all this, Captain Alonso de Sotomayor was used as go-between for the commander and the Council.\textsuperscript{196}

In the Council a debate started about Mondragón’s capabilities regarding the capitulation. Councilor Roda wrote to Philip II about the anti-Spanish tension in the Council and pointed to the Duke of Aarschot as its instigator: “he has accustomed himself to speaking badly about the Spaniards in our presence”.\textsuperscript{197} Aarschot wanted to replace Mondragón by somebody from the Council, and when Roda explained to him that Mondragón was just following the orders of the Council, Aarschot replied that “now it is good that those of these lands are governing”. From Rome, Cardinal Granvelle joined in the debate, defending Aarschot’s position, though he admitted this high nobleman was just a mediocre politician:

Those of the town [Zierikzee] did not wish to surrender to Mondragón, because they do not trust the Spanish nation, and the examples from the past have inspired their fear. Leiden would have been taken without Valdés, because he had wanted to plunder the city and Mondragón had the same intention with Zierikzee.

\textsuperscript{194} Mondragón to the Council of State, Ouwerkerk, 1, 6, 7, 10, 13, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25,28, 30 June 1576; Close to Zierikzee, 14 and 20 May 1576, CP IV , 612-645.
\textsuperscript{195} Van Dorp to Mondragón, Zierikzee, 9 June 1576, Gachard, CP IV , 616-617; Idem, Zierikzee, 17/19 June 1576, Gachard, CP IV , 624-625, 627-628; Mondragón to Van Dorp, Ouwerkerk, 19 June 1576, Gachard, CP IV , 627.
\textsuperscript{196} Van Dorp to Mondragón, Zierikzee, 9 June 1576, CP IV , 616-617; Idem, Zierikzee, 17/19 June 1576, CP IV , 624-625, 627-628; Mondragón to Van Dorp, Ouwerkerk, 19 June 1576, CP IV , 627; Council of State to Mondragón, Brussels, 10 and 22 June 1576, CP , 618-619, 632-633.
\textsuperscript{197} Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 1 July 1576, CP IV , 222.
Acting in this manner, is fighting a war against the King himself, ruining his land… The Low Countries will never be pacified by force.\footnote{Granvelle to Philip II, Rome, 13 July 1576, CP IV, 235.}

Morillon, of course, agreed with his master, but as always he had his own particular view of things: Sancho Dávila and Mondragón never obeyed in any case and the Council did not go against them because it did not want to be seen as going against ‘la nation’, a phrase referring at the time solely to the Spanish nation.\footnote{Morillon to Granvelle, Brussels, 21 May 1576, CG VI, 77-78.} Clearly, Mondragón was not liked by all Netherlanders.

On 2 July Mondragón could inform the Council of State that on that morning, at eight o’clock, Zierikzee had returned under the obedience of the King.\footnote{Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 2 July 1576, CP IV, 646-647.} The Council had, however, two problems with the treaty Mondragón had concluded: against its wishes he had not made the rebel troops swear an oath not to take up weapons against the King in the future, and he had freed two Protestant ministers. On both points he openly responded that they were right, but continued stating that if the King was not satisfied with his decisions, “he would have good reasons not to trust in the future other important affairs to someone who knows so little as me, as seems to the messeigneurs”.\footnote{Council of State to Mondragón, Brussels, 4 July 1576, CP IV, 653-654; Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 6 July 1576, Idem, 655-657.} Though the answer was put in seemingly humble terms, he suggested the King would support him against any criticism from the messeigneurs of the Council. He also showed the King his satisfaction that the siege had been relatively cheap: “if somebody else had done it, it would have cost Your Majesty twelve thousand ducats, what now has cost only two”\footnote{‘Si oviera passado por otras manos costara a Vuestra Magestad doçe mill ducados lo que no cuesta dos’. Mondragón to Philip II, Zierikzee, 4 July 1576, AGS, E. 567, 126.} Mondragón was not only a brave soldier; he came from a merchant town.

The defenders were allowed to leave the town with their weapons, their banners furled, and with all their equipment, again much like what had happened in Middelburg. Though Protestant Dutch historian Hooft criticises Mondragón for considering the victory as a personal one, in general he is very positive about the commander, even calling him a noble man.\footnote{Trillo, Historia, 280-287; Mendoza, Comentarios, 536-540, 542-543; Van Meteren, Historie, 86v-88r; Hooft, Histoorien (1972) X, 441.} Directly after the surrender, Mondragón was already occupying...
himself with the continuation of the war. He needed three thousand
men to safeguard Zeeland from the enemy and – following the ideas of
the deceased Requesens – he wanted to attack Brielle and IJsselmonde
“without losing one hour of time”. However, the Council of State was
not prepared to pay for an armada. Mondragón also used his moment of
victory to criticise the government in the Low Countries, and, of course,
to ask for permission to go to Spain:

To reward me with a licence to go and kiss the feet of Your
Majesty before the few days that are left to me for serving you
have ended… of my services of forty-one years. I hope that Your
Majesty is informed of them [my services] so I will not need to
present more memorials.\(^{204}\)

So please Philip, no more paperwork!

In the end, Mondragón had reduced the sum to be paid by Zierikzee
to one hundred thousand guilders at once, and another one hundred
thousand within another month, but those of the town succeeded in
reducing the sum to half this amount. The Spanish commander furthermore
acted in a noble manner by letting bailiff Casper van Vosbergen go free,
even though he refused to return to the King’s service.\(^{205}\) In the end,
only five Walloon banners from his own regiment entered the town,
while the Spaniards and Germans had to remain outside the walls.\(^{206}\)
In this way Mondragón could guarantee that order in the town would
be maintained. He showed himself a noble victor, which offers reason
enough for the inhabitants of Zierikzee to respect him as an honourable
and merciful conqueror.

However, there was another reason for his unexpected popularity in the
town’s history. Mondragón’s opponent, Governor Arend van Dorp, was
not at all the prototype of a Dutch patriotic hero. Jan Pot, who in general
shows himself in his thesis of 1925 to be a true fatherlander, is quite clear
about it: Van Dorp was always looking out for his own interest, he did
not shoulder his responsibilities, he lacked the self-confidence and energy

\(^{204}\) ‘Sin perder una hora de tiempo’; ‘Me haga merced de darme licencia de yr a bessar los
pies de Vuestra Magestad antes de acavar los pocos dias que me quedan en servir… de
mis servicios de quarenta y un años. Yo espero teniendo Vuestra Magestad como tiene
noticia dellos no tendre nesçessidad de presentar mas memoriales’. Mondragón to Phi-
lip II, Zierikzee, 4 July 1576, AGS, E. 567, 126; Mondragón to the Council of State,
Zierikzee, 6 July 1576, Idem, 655-657.

\(^{205}\) Hooft, Historien, XI, 451; Pot, Beleg, 65.

\(^{206}\) Pot, Beleg, 57-59.
to act, and he was not highly regarded by the government of the town. He was even not true to his faith, as he married his daughter, Louise, in 1575 to the Calvinist admiral Louis de Boisot, while he decided that the children of another daughter had to be educated by Jesuits in Antwerp. Pot went even further in his brutal characterisation:

He was a good friend of a good table; an incredible abundance reigned during his meals. But he was only generous for himself. For his wife and children he was miserly, even heartless. After the death of the Prince of Orange he was left aside by everyone. 207

On the same pages Pot extensively praised Mondragón:

Compared to him [Van Dorp] his opponent Mondragón makes a very sympathetic impression…. But above all he is honest, righteous, and a religious man of faith. He had such an authority over his soldiers, that they would always, even unpaid, continue their duties. Towards his enemies, he was generous. 208

However, we must be cautious not to be swept away by this very positive image of the commander. When Jacques Manteau put his memories about the siege and the surrender on paper in 1630-1631, he did not even mention his name. 209 Writing after more than fifty years, this old witness of the events told the story without recalling the commander’s role.

The mutiny

After the surrender of Zierikzee, the royal troops constituted the largest problem. Being generous towards the defeated caused problems among the victorious. The collected money went almost entirely to the Walloon troops residing in the town, while the Germans and the Spaniards received hardly anything. When some Spanish soldiers went to Zierikzee to complain, the Walloons violently threw them out of the town, killing several Spaniards. 210 The dissatisfaction was enormous. The Spanish soldiers, in particular, were accustomed to being paid after victory. Otherwise they generally started to mutiny. This had happened after the surrender of Haarlem in 1573 and after the Battle of Mookerheyde in 1574.

207 Pot, Beleg, 8-9.
208 Idem.
209 Manteau, ‘Memorie’, 115-140.
210 Pot, Beleg, 60; Pot, ‘Verhaal’, 132.
And this is what happened in Zeeland in 1576. On 4 July Mondragón wrote for the first time about 130 Spanish arquebusiers who had started a mutiny on the island of Tholen. On 8 July Spanish soldiers from the surroundings of Zierikzee joined the mutiny. Mondragón was furious: “I have told them how much damage they are causing”. And in less polite terms, “they are so mean that, if it were in my hand, I would not mind hanging half of them… they are devils”. Hooft also wrote about Mondragón speaking to the mutineers, but he described a completely different and more positive tone: “he succeeded in making their rage disappear, by proof of his brave courage and unmovable perseverance, with strong words and an honourable face, that served the man of war as his rhetoric”. 211 In this sense, even the mutiny could provide an occasion to praise the commander. In a pamphlet on the mutiny of Zierikzee published that same year in Brussels in both a Dutch and a French edition, Mondragón’s name does not even appear, again showing that the positive image of the commander was not damaged by the mutiny. 212

His main objective was to stop the mutineers from crossing to the mainland. But to make matters worse, in the evening of 9 July his Walloon troops also mutinied and expelled their commanders from the army camp “under shots of arquebuses, saying that their colonel had never fulfilled his promises, reminding him of Mookerheyde, the departure from Middelburg, and other places”. In a third letter to the Council on that very same day he had to report that his troops had found transport to Sint-Annaland. 213 The letters show his fears that the mutiny would leave Zeeland “to the mercy of the Prince of Orange”. You can even feel the panic in his words: “God knows what we are getting ourselves into!”, combined with his anger at “the way these mutinying devils are comporting themselves”. 214 On 11 July 1,500 Spanish mutineers arrived at Wouw and Roosendaal, while Valdés tried to pacify those in Bergen-op-Zoom. The experienced commander was confronted with fifty soldiers shooting their arquebuses and shouting “Buelvanse, buelvanse” (“go away, go away”) and “Acaben ya, acaben ya” (“finish now, finish

211 Hooft, Historien, XI, 452.
212 Waerachtich verhael; Discours véritable. The date of 2 July is not correct.
213 Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 4, 5, 8, 9 July 1576, CP IV, 659-668; Council of State to Mondragón, Brussels, 8 July 1576, Idem, 661.
214 Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 10 and 12 July 1576, CP IV, 668-674 (two long letters on one day). ‘Diablos altérez’, also in Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 18 July 1576, Idem, 694-695.
now”).\textsuperscript{215} The mutineers had reached the Duchy of Brabant and could continue in the direction of the wealthy cities of the south.

Though the Spanish chroniclers describe how Mondragón had left just in time to avoid dishonourable imprisonment by the mutineers, in reality he was effectively locked up by his own Walloons on the afternoon of 13 July: “they locked me up in my quarters… and up to this moment, eight o’clock in the morning, they have not spoken to me nor told me what they pretend or what their intentions are”\textsuperscript{216} Two weeks later he succeeded in getting a brief letter out through a confidant, but it took him until 7 August to get a real letter to the Council of State. Now they could also start debating the reformation of the Walloon troops. The Council ordered Mondragón to convert the mutinied seventeen companies into ten new ones and he had to put in charge “capitains of their own nation who have led them before”\textsuperscript{217} The Council sent Mondragón’s letters to the King, while Roda also informed the King of the Colonel’s imprisonment by his own troops and about the Council’s ideas to reform Valdés’ Spanish infantry tercio and to dissolve Mondragón’s Walloon companies, “the best Walloon soldiers there are to be found”. According to Roda, this was done intentionally so William of Orange and the Council of State could take them into their own service.\textsuperscript{218} A few weeks later Roda heard from Mondragón that indeed his mutinied troops had threatened to go into the service of the Estates-General. They had even offered to serve for four months for free if they were just paid the wages due to them.

The Spanish troops who had mutinied would finally be allowed to enter the Antwerp citadel by its Governor, Sancho Dávila, to help him in his struggle against the troops of the Estates-General who had been gathering in the city. The attack from the citadel on 4 November would lead to the cruel sack of Antwerp, an event very soon to be known as the Spanish Fury. Mondragón’s decision not to have his troops plunder Zierikzee is indirectly connected to the pillaging of Antwerp several

\textsuperscript{215} Captain Claude de Vers to Champagney, Gastel [Oud Gastel?], 12 July 1576, CP IV, 674-675; secretary Baltasar López to the Council of State, Bergen-op-Zoom, 12 July 1576, Idem. 675-677.


\textsuperscript{217} Council of State to Mondragón, Brussels, 3 September 1576, Gachard, CP IV, 735. See also: Mondragón to the Council of State, Zierikzee, 30 July 1576, 2 and 7 August 1576, CP IV, 703-704, 710, 712-713.

\textsuperscript{218} Council of State to Philip II, Brussels, 15 July 1576, CP IV, 248-249; Roda to Philip II, Brussels, 7 August 1576, CP IV, 290; Roda to Philip II, Antwerp, 4 September 1576, CP IV, 352.
months later. Tomorrow never comes, but in this case it did come. In a letter from 19 November, after the Spanish Fury of Antwerp, William of Orange was informed that Mondragón’s own Walloon troops had indeed changed sides to the Estates-General.\textsuperscript{219} Mondragón had lost his soldiers, and he would lose even more.

**The siege of Ghent castle**

By that time Mondragón had other worries. His wife and his men in the castle of Ghent were under attack by troops from the Estates-General. It is the last important episode in Mondragón’s life until 1577, and again one that has resulted in one of Hogenberg’s engravings: the surrender of the castle by his wife, Madame Mondragón. According to chronicler Trillo, who was never afraid of high numbers, the defenders killed 2,500 attackers before capitulating, with only forty dead Spaniards. He also mentions that the Colonel’s wife and daughter were imprisoned. However, he does not say anything about an active part played by Madame Mondragón during the siege. Mendoza paid more attention to her, and according to him she showed “the valour that her husband would have had in encouraging them”.\textsuperscript{220} Hooft and Van Meteren do not mention much resistance from the defenders of the castle, but Hooft does mention Madame Mondragón supporting them. He may have taken this from Mendoza, but also the Italian historians, Famiano Strada and Girolamo Bentivoglio, speak about Madame who “defended herself with heroic bravery, taking the place of her husband, in an extraordinary way for somebody of her sex”.\textsuperscript{221} A nineteenth-century Belgian historian describing how she took the place of her absent husband even said of her that “she had the courage enter into the soul of the besieged”. His version of the story is that the women threw boiling water over the attackers and that even the children had helped out. In this sense, the role of this French-speaking noblewoman resembled the image of Dutch heroine Kenau fighting the royal army at Haarlem. When the 150 defenders had to surrender on 11 November 1576, the wounded and the sick included, they had lost six men and nine women.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{219} Roda to Philip II, Antwerp castle, 28 September 1576, CP IV, 398, 402; Morillon to Granvelle, Saint-Amand, 3 November 1576, CG VI, 159; Jean de Croý (Roeulx) to Orange, Ghent, 19 November 1576, BO, 6146.

\textsuperscript{220} Mendoza, *Comentarios*, 543, 550-551; Trillo, *Historia*, 305-308.


\textsuperscript{222} Duyse, ‘Notice’.
Mondragón had not been able to cross the river Scheldt to come to his wife’s aid.223 So he had asked the Estates-General to send him his wife and his chests. Morillon thought they would let the lady go, but not the chests, as they contained Mondragón’s treasure. He later stated about Mondragón that he was “as poor as Job, having lost everything he had in the world at the castle of Ghent where his wife and his daughter were taken prisoner with their possessions”.224 After the surrender, the army of the Estates took Madame Mondragón’s two dinner services, in gold and silver, and they were sold at auction. When Juan of Austria became the new Governor-general of the Low Countries he made certain the services were returned to her.225 Madame Mondragón was taken to Flushing, but Charles-Philip of Croy, Lord of Havré, asked William of Orange’s permission to take her to a safer place. However, there is another story about her whereabouts after the surrender. According to the Netherlandish-Spanish chronicler, Martín Antonio del Río, she was taken on a tour: “a nobleman from Flanders, before liberating the wife of the castellan, took her through some cities, as in triumph, as symbol of their victory”. Salcedo Ruiz stated it had been John of Croy, the Count of Roeulx: “the plebs celebrating her imprisonment and insulting her for her bad fortune, with the rudeness and the cruelty properly belonging to the political passions that ran so high in those terrible days of enthusiasm and hatred”.226 The year 1576 ended for Mondragón with his troops having mutinied, his wife shown off as a trophy, his treasures lost, and William of Orange triumphing over the Low Countries.

**Life and death (1577-1596)**

Mondragón would still have almost twenty years ahead of him. When the Spanish troops left for Italy in 1577 because it had been agreed with the Estates-General that all foreign troops would leave the country, the Colonel most probably returned to one of his wife’s possessions in Lorraine. After Governor-general Don Juan of Austria renewed the war,

---

223 Roda to Philip II, Antwerp castle, 28 September 1576, CP IV, 402. Mondragón had arrived the afternoon of the day before in Antwerp castle; Idem, 10 October 1576, 422.

224 Morillon to Granvelle, Saint-Amand, 26 October 1576, CG VI, 144; Idem c. 15 November 1576, 168. See also Idem, Saint-Amand, 3 November 1576, 159.


226 Havré to Orange, Ghent, 13 November 1576, BO, 6045; Salcedo Ruiz, *El coronel*, 127-128; Río, *Crónica*, 81.
Mondragón quickly returned and served under the Duke of Parma, and was present at the famous siege of Maastricht in 1579. According to chronicler Alonso Vázquez, Parma valued him for his age, his valour and his experience. By that time both his arms were “damaged” (estropeados), as Spanish sources at the time graphically expressed it.\textsuperscript{227}

He returned once more to Spain in that same year to inform the King on Parma’s behalf of the victory at Maastricht. He had to pass through Paris to visit the ambassador and then continue directly to the royal court.\textsuperscript{228} And, of course, he used the visit to the King to plead for compensation for his own services: after so many years, he finally met the King, spoke to royal secretary Delgado, and was even invited to the table of Cardinal Granvelle, by then in Madrid.\textsuperscript{229} However, we find an angry Mondragón, who complained that he had hurried back to Spain on horseback and that after three months of waiting they tried to give him an insufficient reward for his services. He did not accept the eight hundred escudos from the Kingdom of Naples when he had to give up the ten thousand florins promised to him for his daughter four years previously. He would prefer to send her to a convent. He then stated that Sancho Dávila and Francisco Valdés had received much greater compensation for their services:

As they [Dávila and Valdés] had profited during sacks and in disservice, and when they had won and pillaged Antwerp and other places, he was standing in water up to his neck, fighting and serving; and he has never profited from sacks nor other things.

And then Mondragón again tried to threaten the King and his advisors that he would leave the King’s service:

that he is going to live in the lands of the Duke of Lorraine with his wife, and he will ask permission to Your Majesty to go and serve the said Duke, who has often asked him to do so.

\textsuperscript{227} Vázquez, ‘Sucesos’, CD LXXII, 122, 195.
\textsuperscript{228} Instruction al señor coronel Christoval de Mondragon de lo que a de hazer por servicio de su majestad, Alexander Farnese, close to Maastricht, 25 June 1579; Memorial del coronel Mondragon, BL, Add. 28.702, f. 239r-242r.
\textsuperscript{229} Granvelle to secretary Delgado, Madrid, 26 October 1579, CD 31, 179-180. also Idem, 181-182; Vázquez, ‘Sucesos’, 72, 218.
We find both Granvelle and secretary Delgado trying to calm him down. Granvelle stated that the administrators of the financial department needed documents in order to have proof of his deeds, as there were so many people asking the King for compensation. And if he were to tell the King about his plan to serve the Duke of Lorraine while residing in Madrid, the King would most certainly take this badly, while he could do so honourably once in Lorraine. But Granvelle mostly warned him not to lose the King’s grace. Delgado added that Dávila and Valdés had not received the rewards Mondragón thought they had. The King himself showed no initiative, and asked Mondragón for documentation and then returned the case to his advisors: “advise me what you think would be best for him”. Mondragón had to go through all the red tape again. The Habsburg bureaucracy did not make exceptions for this war hero.

The day after meeting Granvelle the commander wrote a memorial to the King stating that he was going back to the Low Countries, that he wanted payment for his services since 1577, as well as the now-promised payment from Naples and the ten thousand florins for his daughter. He wanted everything, even mentioning the three thousand florins his wife had paid for wheat in Ghent castle. He most certainly was not a happy man when he returned to the north, and in Madrid he had made more enemies than friends.

Because of the treaty between Parma and the reconciled provinces, Mondragón was forced to give up his position as Governor of Limburg and the lands of Overmaas, returning to his wife and children in Lorraine. From the village of Saint-Mihiel in Lorraine he wrote a letter to the King asking him for compensation or to take him back into his service after “36 years he had been doing nothing else”. And indeed he was taken back into the King’s service.

Between 1582 and 1588 he acted as a member of the Duke of Parma’s council and as a Maestre de campo of the tercio viejo, the tercio of the experienced veterans. He had finally become a high officer within the Spanish infantry. After the successful siege of Antwerp, he became its

---

230 He did receive royal payments in 1583. Mondragón to Philip II, Duinkerke, 17 July 1583 and Ieper, 4 October 1583, AGS, E. 586, 11 and 17.

231 A chronicle from Zeeland states that Mondragón married a woman from Zeeland during his years as Governor of Limburg/Overmaas (1578-1579). It concerns Magdalena van Wissekercke, the daughter of Anthonis, Lord of Couwere and bailiff of Middelburg. Smallegange, Cronyk, 755. However, in 1590 Guillemette de Châtelet was still alive. Calmet, Histoire généalogique, ccxc. In this last book his marriage with Guillemette is problematically dated 1560. Idem, clxxvi, 158.

232 Mondragón to Philip II, Saint-Mihiel, 20 February 1581 (or 1582), AGS, E. 582, 25.
effective governor in 1585, though he had to remind the King several
times to send him the official appointment, even still in January 1587
when he bluntly opened his letter to the King with the following words:

A soldier of fifty years of service to the Emperor of glorious
memory and to Your Majesty, who finds himself with the strength
and health to serve Your Royal Majesty, may well take the liberty,
being my services so well known by the whole world. 233

Under the government of the Count of Mansfelt he was nominated
Captain-general of the Duchy of Brabant and Maestre de campo general
of the whole royal army in the Low Countries. The soldier from Medina
del Campo had finally reached the absolute top of the military hierarchy.
Between 1585 and his death in 1596 Antwerp castle became his home,
though it is unclear whether he remained permanently in the service of
the King. 234

During this period he also kept in contact with merchants from
his home town of Medina, as is proven by the preserved letters to the
rich local merchant, Simón Ruiz. 235 The main purpose of these letters
was the financial organisation of his incomes and investments. Most of
the money seems to have come from Naples and had to be invested in
Medina. 236 He also informed the merchant about the situation in the Low
Countries, for example, that Antwerp was soon to surrender. However,
several months later he was still writing from outside the city walls. A
Pedro de Mallea appears as his financial agent, ‘mi hombre’, in Madrid. 237

233 ‘Un soldado de cincuenta años de serviçio al Emperador de gloriosa memoria y de Vuestra
Magestad que se halla con fuerzas y salud para servir a Vuestra Real Magestad bien puede
tomar licencia siendo tan conocidos mis serviçios de todo el mundo’. Mondragón to
Philip II, Antwerp, 17 January 1587, AGS, E. 593, 68. See also Mondragón to Juan de
Idiáquez, Antwerp, 8 October 1586, Idem, 590, 109.

234 Cabañas Agrela, ‘Cristóbal’. Mondragón to Philip II, Antwerp, 30 November 1589,
AGS, E. 596, 122.

235 In the Museo de las Ferias of Medina del Campo some twenty letters from Mondragón
dated between 1585 and 1590, and letters from family members, have been preserved.

236 Mondragón to Simón Ruiz, Army camp before Antwerp, 10 April 1585, Vázquez de
Prada, Lettres marchandes, IV, 16.

237 Mondragón to Simón Ruiz, Fortress De la Cruz, outside Antwerp, 15 August 1585,
Vázquez de Prada, Lettres marchandes, IV, 31-32. Also Idem, Antwerp, 3 October 1585,
22 November 1585, 20 February 1586, 13 May 1586 and 9 June 1586, Idem, 43-44,
55, 69-70, 81, 90. The letters also show a personal relationship with a certain Álvaro
Verdugo and his family.
As from 1584, his nephew and son-in-law, Alonso de Mondragón, can also be found in the merchant’s correspondence, busy with Cristóbal’s financial transactions. Notwithstanding his continuous complaints to the crown, Cristóbal was not a poor man.

There is still much to be said about this last period of almost twenty years, but this cannot be done within the scope of this book. For example, there is a famous anecdote concerning the night in 1578 he stayed in a recently conquered castle in which his men went treasure hunting carrying candles. They caused an enormous explosion when eighteen barrels of ammunition exploded, completely destroying the castle. But Mondragón was not hurt and his bed survived the blast without any damage. He kept functioning as an ideal protagonist for storytellers.

Mondragón produced narratives and letters until almost the final hour of his death. On 30 December 1595 he wrote a last letter to his King, who was already an old and sick man himself. Of course, the Colonel repeated his service of by now sixty continuous years, but the main goal of the letter was to ensure the government of Antwerp castle for his son-in-law and nephew, Alonso de Mondragón, and a company of lancers for his grandson, Cristóbal de Mondragón. After his death on 4 January 1596 his heir Alonso also wrote a letter to royal secretary Martín de Idiáquez, but all their attempts were in vain, as Antwerp was too important a fortress to be given away so lightly.

And, of course, there is an anecdote related to his death, even recently used by Spanish author Arturo Pérez-Reverte, claiming the dying Mondragón wanted to be put next to a window so his beloved soldiers could see him die. Salcedo Ruiz offers another version of the same story in which he wanted to see the war from his window, but he does not think it fits the

---

238 Alonso de Mondragón to Simón Ruiz, Antwerp, 18 February 1586, 1 and 7 October 1587, 10 April 1588 and 31 July 1588, Vázquez de Prada, Lettres marchandes, IV, 69, 190-191, 193, 228, 262-263.

239 Much can be found in Vázquez, ‘Sucesos’. A short evaluation of Mondragón in which Vázquez states regarding the colonel’s deeds that ‘no hay para qué encarecerlos ni escribirlos’, in Idem, III, 361.


241 Alonso was the son of his sister, Magdalena de Mondragón, and Diego González del Castillo. From his marriage to Cristóbal’s daughter, Margarita, he had three children: Catalina, Juana and Cristóbal. Atienza and Barreda de Valenzuela, ‘Los Mondragón’, 322.

242 Mondragón to Philip II, Antwerp castle, 30 December 1595, AGS, E. 609, 231; Alonso de Mondragón to Philip II, Antwerp castle, 21 January 1596, AGS, E. 609, 232. See also Alonso de Mondragón to Martín de Idiáquez, Idem, 233.
Protagonists of War

character, and neither do I. Dutch Calvinist historian Pieter Bor tells a completely different story in which he died “washing his hands to sit at the table”.\(^{243}\) Had Bor a metaphorical or moralistic intention in ascribing this peculiar way of dying to somebody who had been in the war for more than sixty years? Or is it perhaps the simple truth?

Although he was first buried in the chapel of Antwerp castle, he was later taken to be buried in the chapel of his son-in-law’s family in the church of Vera Cruz in Medina del Campo. When a reburial was needed in 1674-1675, a new text was made to accompany his grave with a short – and not always accurate – biography of the commander, listing his commands and his great deeds, and finishing with a “eulogy in which he is praised, not only by the Spanish chroniclers, but also by the foreign ones”.\(^{244}\) This chapter serves as evidence of this rather remarkable statement from a seventeenth-century Castilian: Cristóbal de Mondragón had indeed a very good press among foreign authors.

**Mondragón on the Dutch stage**

And his international fame was not to stop there. In late-eighteenth-century Dutch theatre Mondragón was turned into an important protagonist within the stories of the local, provincial and national past. Dutch historical theatre was booming between 1780 and 1800, and this also had its effect on Mondragón’s image.\(^{245}\) Already in 1774 one of the few female Dutch writers of the period, Lucretia Wilhelmina van Merken (1721-1789) from Amsterdam, produced a play on Jacob Simonszoon de Ryk, a rebel whose life was spared thanks to Mondragón.\(^{246}\) This play had the honour of opening the new Amsterdam theatre on 15 September 1774, after a fire had destroyed the old building. The first public performance of Menken’s play two days later sparked great interest among the public, and soldiers had to help restore order when everybody tried to rush in.\(^{247}\) The play would have some thirty-nine stagings in Amsterdam until 30 November 1840, but it also had success in other cities, even as far away


\(^{244}\) Salcedo Ruiz, *El coronel*, 194.

\(^{245}\) Jensen and Van Deinsen, ‘Theater’, 194.

\(^{246}\) Merken, *Jacob Simonszoon*; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Reinier Vinkeles, engraving 1774; Merken, *Jacob Simonszoon* (2019).

as Batavia.\textsuperscript{248} Van Merken is also famous for her play on the siege of Leiden, the city she moved to after her marriage.\textsuperscript{249}

Four years later, in 1778, prolific writer Johannes Nomsz. published his \textit{Maria van Lalain of de verovering van Doornik} [Mary of Lalaing or the conquest of Tournai], a play in which Mondragón is one of the five main protagonists.\textsuperscript{250} Nomsz. (1738-1803) also wrote short biographies of Charles V and Philip II. He is famous for being an author who changed sides between the Patriots and the Orangists, the two opposite parties dominating Dutch politics during the late eighteenth century. The performance in the Amsterdam theatre on 13 December 1783 caused an enormous commotion as the public applauded when the Duke of Parma declaimed, “the Prince of Nassau, the plague of the Dutch states”.\textsuperscript{251} The applause made continuing the performance impossible, and again soldiers had to come in to control the public. The anti-Nassau speech had sounded to the Amsterdam public as “heavenly music to their ears”.\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Marie van Lalain} had thirty-nine performances in Amsterdam by 14 February 1849, making both it and Merken’s play bestsellers well into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{253}

Another ten years later, in 1788, \textit{‘t beleg en overgaan der stad Middelburg} [the siege and surrender of the city of Middelburg] was re-published. It was originally written by a seventeenth-century author from Middelburg, Joos Claerbout, and first published in 1661. The re-edition was clearly influenced by the popularity of historical theatre at the time, as can be deduced from the introduction.\textsuperscript{254} Another three years later, in 1791, it was followed by an anonymous play under the title \textit{Boisot en Mondragon of de belegering en verovering der stad Middelburg} [Boisot and Mondragón or the siege and conquest of the city of Middelburg].\textsuperscript{255} So within seventeen years, Dutch theatre staged four different plays in which Mondragón was one of the main protagonists of the story. For Dutch theatregoers of the time he must have been a well-known character.

The 1791 anonymous play seems to be connected to the 1774 play by Van Merken. In 1791 the play is situated in a room of Mondragón’s

\textsuperscript{249} Logchem, ‘Lucretia’, 677-679.
\textsuperscript{250} Nomsz., \textit{Maria}.
\textsuperscript{251} ‘Nassaus prins, de pest van Nederlands staten’.
\textsuperscript{253} Onstage.
\textsuperscript{254} Martínez Luna, \textit{Ondraaglijk juk}, 114; Claerbout, \textit{‘t beleg}.
\textsuperscript{255} Claerbout, \textit{‘t beleg}; anonymous, \textit{Boisot en Mondragon}. 
house, while in 1774 the stage had been set in Mondragón’s Ghent castle. In both plays we find Francisco de Bobadilla as a Spanish commander and a friend of Governor-general Luis de Requesens, and Osorio de Angulo as a commander and friend of Mondragón. But the most striking similarity is the presence of Elvire de Moncada as Mondragón’s wife, while he was, of course, married to the noble Madame Guillemette de Châtelet. As the authors clearly used historical descriptions for their story, it was a deliberate decision to give Mondragón a Spanish noblewoman as his wife. The clear opposition in the play between Dutch and Spanish would otherwise have been blurred.

In all these plays Mondragón is in essence the only good Spaniard, the only one that could be trusted. In Jacob Simonszoon de Ryk the play is centred around Mondragón’s promise after the surrender of Middelburg to spare some of the rebel prisoners or himself go into captivity. The author used the histories of P.C. Hooft, a relative of the title hero, and “the only one… as far as I know, who has extensively reported on the deeds that are the subject of this drama”. A problem was that Mondragón was a member of Alba’s faction, and so Elvire explains: “As much as the Low Countries hate the cruel Alba, he did justice to my spouse, and he supported him”. Mondragón is the man of honour, while in general “the unfaithful Castilian does not hold his word nor his promises to be sacred”. Mondragón only appears relatively late on stage in order to criticise Requesens, who does not want to free De Ryk: “is this all the pay you owe me for my loyalty?…You must not regard my services very high, if they do not hold against five Beggars”. In the end Requesens is convinced by the commander: “I did you wrong. Please return your friendship to me”.

256 Maestre de campo Francisco Arias Bobadilla (1537-1610), Count of Puñonrostro, Williams, ‘Francisco’. His troops were saved in December 1585 from rebel forces as a result of the Miracle of Empel, near Bois-le-Duc (’s-Hertogenbosch).
257 Captain Osorio de Angulo was a captain of the Spanish infantry, wounded at the Battle of Saint-Quentin in 1557.
258 The surname was probably taken from Francisco de Moncada (1586-1635), a Spanish commander in the Low Countries, active since 1622. García Hernán, ‘Francisco’.
259 ‘De eenige… zo verre my bekend is, die een omstandig bericht geeft van de daad, die het onderwerp van dit treurspel uitmaakt’. Merken, Jacob Simonszoon 1774, 119.
260 ‘Hoe zeer ook Nederland den wreeden Alva haat, hy deed myn wederhelft-recht, en was zyn toeverlaat’. Idem 126.
261 ‘De ontrouwe Castiljaan houd woord noch eeden heilig’. Idem 173.
262 ‘Is dit het loon dat ge aan myn trouw verschuldigd zyt… U ligt gewis niet veel aan mynen dienst gelegen, zo zy te ligt is om vynf Geuzen op te weegen’. Idem 193-194.
Boisot en Mondragon is centred around the relationship between the royal Spanish commander and the rebel commander. Now Mondragón opens the play as a noble and haughty general: “How d’Alinas, do you dare speak like this to Mondrágon? To Mondragón, who has never avoided the enemy? Who kept Goes by an expedition through the water, as daring a deed as ever a mortal has completed”.264 It is also explained that he was promoted by the Duke of Alba who “did feed on cruelties, though never permitted cowardice”,265 and this meant he was not favoured by Requesens. He is strong and stubborn: “I do not tolerate objections against my orders, as long as I hold Middelburg for Spain”.266 But at the same time he does not treat his own family better than the poor. Boisot speaks of Mondragón as “this war hero” and “I call you a friend, whom I should consider an enemy”.267 He sees him as the exceptional Spaniard: “there are few of them we can trust”.268 Mondragón does not want to speak with Boisot about surrendering the city as he still hopes a relief fleet will succeed in rescuing it, but he sees the people suffering. We then re-live the disaster of the double fleet of Sancho Dávila and Julián Romero. In the end he has to surrender to Boisot, but this takes place with mutual respect. He describes himself in this play: “Am I not Mondragón, born low, who left his estate and through his bravery in war, rose above the estate of nobility by birth and blood?”269 Exactly the same discourse on the importance of nobility versus practical qualities that we can find in the seventeenth-century Spanish plays on the habit of Julián Romero.

Maria van Lalain by Johannes Nomsz. has, like the other two plays, a rebel hero in the person of the heroic Maria de Lalain[g] who defended the city of Tournai during a siege by Parma in 1581.270 She was a cousin of Count Horne, executed by Alba in 1568. The author states that he based his description of the heroine on the histories of Bentivoglio and

264 ‘Hoe d’Alinas durft gy tot Mondragon dus spreken? Tot Mondragon, die nooit den vyand is ontweeken? Die Goes behouden heeft, door eenen watertogt, zoo stout als nimmermeer een sterfling heeft volbrogt’ (pages 3-4).
265 ‘Wel wreedheden heeft gevoed, dog lafheid nooit gedoogd’ (4).
266 ‘Ik duld geen tegenspraak op myn gedaan bevel, zoo lang ik Middelburg voor Spanjen hou’ (12).
267 ‘Dien oorlogsheld’ (19); ‘Ik noem u vriend, wien ik als vyand moet beschouwen’ (28).
268 ‘t zyn weinigen van hen die wy vertrouwen schenen’ (22).
269 ‘Ben ik niet Mondragon, die laag, in stand geboren, zyn’ laagen staat vertrad, en door zyn oorlogsmeed, klom boven d’eedlen rang en van geboorte en bloed!’ (64).
270 Maria Christina de Lalaing (1545-1582).
Protagonists of War

Le Clerq.\(^{271}\) Maria (or Christina) might be seen as the rebel counterpart of Madame de Châtelet. Again the playwright explains his relationship with the Duke of Alba: “Toledo, the country’s tyrant, though completely without virtues, always valued Mondragón’s righteousness”.\(^{272}\) And again, he is the exceptional Spaniard, saying to Maria:

How I would like to free you from Spain’s rod of war! I hate Toledo’s revenge and the anger of his executioners; you have to believe that your well-being is very dear to me… And it makes me sad, that I have to fight against such a brave people as the Dutch.\(^{273}\)

He tries to convince Maria to surrender to Parma: “do trust Farnese’s word, he is not Toledo”.\(^{274}\) Alba is clearly the enemy in this play, much more anti-Spanish than the others. Parma judges Mondragón very positively: “You are not only a hero in the heat of battle, but also an honest man who tells me the truth”.\(^{275}\) However, Mondragón refuses to follow Parma’s orders to kill her son. In the end Parma understands Mondragón was right and praises him: “that Mondragón will remain Farnese’s guide for many years”.\(^{276}\) In this sense the play resembles Jacob Simonszoon de Ryk, with Mondragón convincing Requesens to do the noble thing.\(^{277}\)

The three plays together show that Mondagón was very positively judged in Dutch theatre as the exceptional, good Spaniard, just and honest, and his relations with the rebel heroes are always positive. This was less so in Claerbout’s play which was originally published in 1661. In the 1788 introduction Mondragón is called “the brave” (“de dappere”), but in the play itself he is much less noble and open than in the other plays, and much more Catholic, using words like “Beggar vermin” (“Geuse ongediert”) and “the calvinist sect” (“secte der kalvinisten”), and

\(^{271}\) Probably historian Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), author of the *Histoire des Provinces Unies* (Amsterdam 1728).

\(^{272}\) ‘Toledo, ’s lands tiran, hoe ook van deugd ontaart, achtre altyd Mondragons oprechtheid achting waard’ (6).

\(^{273}\) ‘Hoe gaarne ontrok ik u aan Spanjes oorlogsroede! Ik doem Toledoos wrok, en zyner beulen woede; geloof my dat uw heil my diep ter harte gaat… Intusschen smart het my, dat ik zo braaf een volk als Nederlands volk bestry’ (10).

\(^{274}\) ‘Vertrouw Farneses woord: hy is Toledo niet’ (11).

\(^{275}\) ‘Gy zyt niet slechts een held in ’t hevigst van ’t gevecht, maar ook een eerlyk man, die my de waarheid zegt’ (28).

\(^{276}\) ‘Dat Mondragon noch lang Farneses leidsman zy’ (65).

\(^{277}\) In his *Willem de Eersten* (Amsterdam 1779), 11th zang, Nomsz. praises Mondragón as ‘de dappre Mondragón’ and ‘de fiere Mondragón’.
offering a very negative image of William of Orange.\textsuperscript{278} Claerbout’s praise is mostly directed at his abilities: “because monseigneur Mondragón is very experienced in affairs of war”.\textsuperscript{279} Though less overtly Spanish in character than military commanders Sancho Dávila and Julián Romero, Mondragón was in 1661 not yet the noble hero in the Low Countries he would become in the late eighteenth century.

\textbf{Victory of the good}

We return to the image from the beginning of this chapter. In the 1795 chronicle from Zierikzee he was the great exception, the only good Spaniard! He has maintained this fame until today. This positive image can already be found in his own time, but it has become clear that both his life and the descriptions of it during the course of the centuries offer a much richer and more diverse palette. He was not a good Spaniard in the eyes of all Netherlanders, and he certainly was not without stain or fault. However, that was to be expected from a Spanish commander during the Revolt in the Low Countries. It was the exceptional side of Mondragón, his good side, that would survive the centuries and is still alive today.

The fact that he had resided in the north for many years before the outbreak of the Revolt may explain a large part of his positive image in the Low Countries and, as a result, also the understanding he seems to have had for the land and the people. Mondragón was a completely integrated Spaniard, whose Spanish would even lose ground to his French. His friends, his relatives, his soldiers were all French-speaking. As French was the language most members of the elite in the Low Countries were able to speak, Mondragón could perfectly communicate with all the important people. There is no clue about his possible knowledge of the Dutch language, but evidence also remains unclear about the active knowledge of Dutch of even William of Orange.

His relatively lowly origins in Spain and the fact that a knighthood of one of the Spanish chivalric orders seemed out of the question, combined with the small family empire he was building in the Low Countries, also make it more than logical that a great number of his interests were vested in the Low Countries. Though we can also see that even this integrated Spaniard regularly asked to be permitted to return to Spain and also invested in his home town. In the end he would remain...

\textsuperscript{278} Idem, 12.

\textsuperscript{279} ‘Want Mons Dragon, die is in ’t krygs-stuk wel ervaren’ (24).
in the north for more than fifty years, interrupted by only a few short visits to Spain.

Also the use of his old age in many of the chronicles may have favoured his image. His grey hair may have turned him into a more respectable person, though, of course, the Duke of Alba was even older than Mondragón. Mondragón’s age, combined with his experience and his sense of honour, turned him into a reliable person.

His character must indeed have been calmer than that of his close comrade-in-arms, Sancho Dávila, and his great patron, the Duke of Alba. When reading the letters from both Dávila and Mondragón, we note the differences in character, although somebody like Morillon saw the two men as one and the same. The fact that the good Spaniard of the Revolt in the Low Countries was a companion of Sancho Dávila and even a creature of the Duke of Alba shows that it is difficult to attach a certain set of values to the whole group of people around the Duke. Besides a difference in character, Dávila had hardly known the Low Countries before the outbreak of the Revolt. Dávila looked for friends among the Spaniards present in the army and among the Spanish merchant colonies of Antwerp and Bruges.

It is interesting to see how the Dutch plays make use of the fact that Mondragón was a close collaborator of the Duke of Alba. Maybe it made him even more interesting for the story. But for the Dutch, it was his connection to William of Orange that really made him special. The letters exchanged between Mondragón and Orange after the surrender of Middelburg show that already during his lifetime Mondragón was seen by the rebel leader as different from the others. The same holds for Julián Romero, when we think of their discussion of the ‘bonne guerre’, but this relationship was little known at the time. Besides questions of personal character, the fact that Romero, Mondragón and Orange shared a common past before the outbreak of the war may have been of great importance. They had been fighting in the same army for years.

There are also negative stories to be found about Mondragón: his behaviour in Deventer, the sack of Dendermonde, his harsh stands in Middelburg and Antwerp, and his temper and his behaviour at Breda. And then there is Maximilien Morillon, who sees him along with Sancho Dávila as the worst Spanish commanders during the Revolt. However, all these stories have been forgotten over time. This might prove that the stories that do not fit into the general idea regarding a person are more easily forgotten than the stories that do fit. In the same way, we never tell any good stories about the Duke of Alba in the Low Countries, or
use his grey hair as a way to soften his image. In his case, the grey hair fits the image of the ‘Iron Duke’.

The Zeeland trypitich turns Mondragón into a special hero in the Low Countries: two major sieges and the subsequent crossings through the sea have turned him into a special Spanish hero, the Moses of Zeeland. Though the history of the siege of Zierikzee still plays a prominent part in this town, the history of the siege of Middelburg seems almost completely forgotten, and even more so the role Mondragón played in it. Perhaps again the fact that a Spanish defender of a Dutch city does not fit the general idea of the Revolt may explain this situation, but, on the other hand, the surrender of Zierikzee to a noble Spaniard also makes an awkward fit. In any case, the Zeeland stories have hardly made it into the canon of the Revolt in the Low Countries, though they can easily compete in intensity and heroism with the sieges of Haarlem, Alkmaar and Leiden in the County of Holland. The story of Mondragón can be used to bring the history of the war in Zeeland during the early phase of the Revolt back to our attention.

Mondragón’s image in Spain may not be as spectacular as his image in the Low Countries, but ever since the publication of his biography in 1905, Mondragón has belonged to a canon of important Spanish military heroes. However, a modern writer such as Pérez-Reverte understands that it is not good for the story to explain to a Spanish public that Mondragón was for most of the time a commander of Walloon soldiers, so the author turns him into a commander of Spanish tercios. This may be compared to the authors of the Dutch plays who changed his noble wife from Lorraine into a spouse from the Spanish nobility. In literature one is allowed to play with the historical facts, and to look for images the readers and the public will understand: a Spanish commander has to have Spanish soldiers and a Spanish wife.
Magdalena Moons begs her fiancé Francisco de Valdés to postpone the storming of Leiden another night, 1574. Painting by Simon Opzoomer (1840-1850), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.