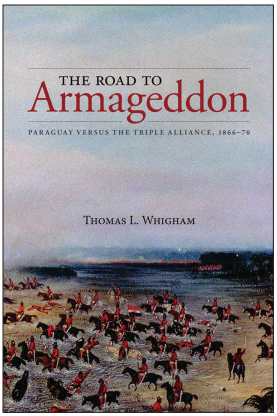
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press



ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON
Paraguay Versus the Triple Alliance, 1866–70
by Thomas L. Whigham

ISBN 978-1-55238-810-5

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press
press.ucalgary.ca

Acknowledgement: *We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher,* **re.press**, *and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy* http://www.re-press.org

13

ANOTHER PAUSE

During the last days of December 1868, Allied commanders had three short-term goals in Paraguay, all of which lay within their grasp. Angostura had just fallen and the troops that had encircled it needed to be redeployed. Asunción beckoned only a few miles upriver, unprotected and ready, it seemed, to welcome the Allies as liberators. And the Marshal's army, now no better than a skeletal force in and around Cerro León, could not withstand even a minor blow from Caxias, who stood ready to strike at any time. The end of the war was in sight.

For the Paraguayans, meanwhile, home took the form of a devastated landscape, stripped of its human resources. Some towns in the interior, especially in the country's far north, had escaped the ravages, and could still boast a few head of cattle and quantities of manioc and cotton, though by now such things were luxuries. But these villages could not sustain a nation that every day grew more insubstantial. And yet the Paraguayan leadership had survived all manner of bitterness before. The fall of Angostura changed nothing, and nor did the idea of an occupied Asunción. Even now, Paraguay might fight again.

The Republic Moves Inland

The Allied successes of December 1868 badly shook López. Arms, munitions, his carriage, even his scarlet poncho with the embroidered Bragança device, fell into enemy hands. So, too, did a great many incriminating documents, including General Resquín's "diary," which listed individuals executed for treason over the previous months.[1] The loss of these materials was humiliating, but the

real problem lay in putting the Paraguayan military back together. Command had disintegrated throughout the Lomas Valentinas, and soldiers had either abandoned their posts or wandered about waiting for orders that never came.

In the confusion, people held captive since before the fall of Humaitá unexpectedly recovered their freedom as their guards fled. Four Brazilian officers, three Argentines, and the redoubtable Major von Versen ultimately made it through the lines as the last defenses crumbled at Itá Ybaté. The former prisoners, ecstatic at their last-minute deliverance, were soon joined by Dr. William Stewart, Colonel Wisner, the British architect Alonzo Taylor, the German telegraphist Robert von Fischer-Treuenfeldt, and a substantial number of women and children left behind in the scramble.

Allied victory had been a foregone conclusion for some time, and the December engagements confirmed the wisdom of the marquis's military strategy. He had taken Angostura, thereby eliminating the Marshal's last positions on the Paraguay River. He had dispersed the enemy soldiers into the marshes and presumably thought that their army would never regain cohesion. Asunción was thus his for the taking.

Caxias needed to find some additional reserve of vitality and he could not find it in himself. Having spent December fighting stubbornly like Ulysses S. Grant, in the wake of victory he became more like George M. McClellan—cautious, slow, and overly dependent on precedent. He also failed to capture the Marshal, a fundamental error that, to his regret, Caxias only appreciated later. The war correspondent for *The Standard* summarized the consequences, observing that:

> Not if Paraguay was teeming with the diamonds of Golconda, or the mines of California, would it be worth the blood spilt at the Lomas Valentinas. Error, deep-lasting error, to have taxed humanity with such a sacrifice. Waterloo had an object; on it hung the fate of France, nay, of Europe. [Königgrätz] can be justified by the eternal feuds of the too bulky German family. But the Lomas Valentinas was a sterile victory since López was permitted to escape, and that terrible blunder will yet cost the Allies fresh torrents of blood and millions, aye millions, of treasure.[2]

These words were penned in early August 1869, long after López's army had regained sufficient strength to harass the Allies in a limited way. Eight months earlier, at the time of the Marshal's escape, the situation appeared less ominous, his getaway less relevant. The Allies had completely routed the Paraguayans—that was the paramount fact, and there was no obvious need to deal with stragglers.[3]

The reality of the battlefield losses seemed persuasive enough but the marquis's decision to press on to Asunción without bothering to chase the Marshal

revealed his poor grasp of the country. Caxias had always considered his opponent a backwoods charlatan lacking in both integrity and courage, a man whose honor could be purchased and whose troops obeyed him out of fear. From this simplistic appraisal, it followed that once the Paraguayans were freed of their fetters, they would forsake the Marshal and welcome the Allied troops.

The opposite happened. The Allies assumed that Paraguayans thirsted for the kind of freedom that Brazil and Argentina offered them. In Paraguay, however, European-style freedom had a negligible value compared to community, and ultimately, to hope.[4] The marquis failed to grasp this fact. His clumsiness, or lack of foresight, ultimately tarnished his standing and provided fuel for political opponents who found it hard to believe that an intelligent general could have allowed López to escape. Some commentators—not all of them revisionists—looked for a more nefarious rationale to explain Caxias's failure to do the right thing.[5]

Their speculations—if that is the right word—assumed some odd and distorted shapes over the years. Thompson set off the cascade of accusations by suggesting that the marquis had acted either out of "imbecility," a desire to squeeze still more money out of the military budget, as an excuse for maintaining a Brazilian army in Paraguay, or perhaps merely "with the view of allowing López to reassemble the remainder of the Paraguayans, in order to exterminate them in 'civilized warfare.'"[6] Another equally implausible explanation (also hinted at by Thompson) held that Caxias had reached an agreement with López to facilitate the "escape" of Brazilian officers in Paraguayan custody in exchange for smoothing the flight of López and his entourage.[7] Perhaps the strangest rumor of all, however, depicted the Allied commander as a staunch Mason who was at pains not to humiliate a supposed fellow Mason and who therefore let the Marshal slip away as a sign of fraternal consideration.[8]

Such theses are overdetermined and a bit silly; Caxias and his officers were physically and mentally exhausted in late December 1868, and fatigued men rarely act with complete composure. Either through a misreading of their orders or through sloppy execution, the men of his command failed to seize the Marshal and terminate the war. Their mistake was necessarily the marquis's responsibility. He had repeatedly underestimated López and had never shaken off his contempt for the Paraguayan people, no matter how dedicated and resilient they had shown themselves to be.

This does not mean, however, that he or any other Allied officer facilitated the Marshal's escape. It was a crass mistake not to dispatch cavalry units to hunt him down, but though it was a blunder that other commanders may have made, Caxias has to take the blame. On the eve of his greatest achievement, he stumbled and could not get to his feet. As the Allied army moved northward to occupy Asunción, the ragged bands of old men and children drifted toward

López's refuge at the foot of the Cordilleras. They were, to belabor a now familiar point, not yet defeated.

Visitors to Cerro León are decidedly rare today, but all who come are struck by its funereal atmosphere, even in the brightness of day. The lowing of cattle provides the place with its principal soundtrack in the early twenty-first century, but at the end of 1868 it was bustling with noise and nervous activity. Its wounded and displaced men were in pain and had many questions.

López was inclined to see divine intervention in his escape. Cerro León might lie within range of Allied marauders, but Caxias was unlikely to divert his army away from the occupation of Asunción just to destroy this one small garrison. The Paraguayans would thus have time to assemble a resistance on their home ground, and with God's help, they would yet prevail. This was the tone that the Marshal struck in a proclamation of 28 December. Before he rested from the long ride from Lomas Valentinas, he addressed his long-suffering compatriots, reviewing the latest events and spurring them to still greater sacrifices in the name of the nation—and of the Almighty: "Our Lord intends to test our faith and constancy in order to give us a greater and more glorious fatherland," he intoned, "and all of you should feel hardened, as do I, with the blood spilt yesterday, drunk up by the soil of our birthplace; to avenge the loss and to save the nation, here I stand … to purge the country of its enemies."[9]

Given the chaos of December, it was surprising that the country people could coordinate their efforts. In fact, when the news of the reverses at Lomas Valentinas first reached the interior villages, the result was panic. The Marshal's officials had had to face many challenges. The few crops hastily sown over the previous months had failed in the summer heat, which brought famine. Transit through the Paraguayan countryside had been exceptionally difficult due to the lack of mounts, and, save for shipments coming from communities located near the railhead, it had been impractical to get provisions to the front. And cholera had also returned to at least half a dozen towns in the interior.[10]

And yet, with all this, the Paraguayans kept faith with the Marshal. His ability to sway underlings had never been a matter of simple power or brutality. His Guaraní was impeccable, his use of supportive and endearing terms flawless. It was easy for men, even the elderly, to think of him as a father. Most important of all, for the average Paraguayan there existed no point of political or social reference that was not Lopista. To question the Marshal's genius was thus not merely unwise, it was unnatural, and when López arrived at Cerro León, those few army officers who had not participated in the latest engagements stepped forward. Long inured to the hardships of war, they had by now developed hearts of lead, and they intended to keep fighting. Over the next days and weeks, they were joined by other hardened men and boys who had somehow survived the worst challenges of December and had hid from the Allies ever since.[11]

Martin T. McMahon observed the change that came over the Paraguayan camp once the Marshal arrived. The US minister initially noted the gloom associated with the fall of Angostura, but this was now pushed aside by a new determination. In this respect, the fortitude of a single adolescent particularly impressed the North American, convincing him that, even now, the country could still count on men who, psychologically speaking, would never demobilize:

> There came a boy-sergeant of fourteen years, dripping from the swamps, through which, for nearly thirty hours, he had swum or waded; and he told the humiliating story of the surrender [at Angostura]—how gun-boats had been sent with flags of truce and plausible messages from the Allied chiefs; how Paraguayan deserters had misinformed the principal officers of the batteries, telling the old story, since periodically repeated, that López was trying to escape to Bolivia; how at last the whole garrison, more than two thousand, were marched out of their works and suddenly ordered to stack arms in the hated presence of the enemy; and how he, with many others, scorned the surrender, betook himself to the swamps, and rested not until he stood before his chief. All this he told with streaming tears and voice almost choked with sobs.[12]

After only a day, López established a new camp at Azcurra, two miles distant at the crest of the hills. He left behind six hundred men at Cerro León, and moved his remaining troops to the new site, which served as his military headquarters over the next months.[13] The view was panoramic, affording excellent scrutiny of the cultivated areas at the edge of Lake Ypacaraí, the adjacent villages of Areguá and Pirayú, the terminus of the train line that linked the countryside with Asunción and the many tents and lean-tos surrounding the hospital below. If Caxias were to approach, he would have to come this way. Meanwhile, from these sylvan heights, the Marshal could see everything.

As government functions shifted to Piribebuy, López reviewed his strategic options. He likely felt betrayed by incompetent underlings and turncoats like Thompson. On the other hand, Sánchez and the other functionaries might still rebuild the Paraguayan state according to changing needs. Though he was hardly optimistic, the Marshal had no intention of modifying his outlook on the war. The Paraguayans might still "win" simply by not losing, while the Allies could only win by destroying López's army.

The Sack of Asunción

The first Allied troops—some seventeen hundred Brazilian infantrymen—landed at Asunción on the afternoon of 1 January 1869. The damaged López palace,

the customs house, legislature, railroad station, and cathedral soon came into sight but the Brazilians spied almost no people—and certainly no enemy batteries blazing at them. Instead, an eerie quiet predominated. It was the hottest time of year, and the riverfront shimmered with a haze, an effect that magnified the oddness of the place. Here was Asunción—the Mecca, the Timbuktu—towards which all Allied hopes had been directed for four years, the city that Bartolomé Mitre had once promised would fall in three months.

It was not impressive. The landing spot the Allies chose teemed with water rats, the air with insects. The nearby commercial establishments were of a sort familiar from Corrientes and the lower provinces—traditional affairs with adobe walls and high ceilings. But for all the rusticity, the former Paraguayan capital boasted some modern buildings constructed for the López regime. These edifices were large and ornate, designed to impress the poorest Paraguayans with the grandeur of the state. They gleamed with an ostentation that to many Allied soldiers seemed redolent of Europe. They hinted at a broader prosperity and a sure promise of spoils.[14]

The main Allied units arrived from Villeta on 5 January. Following Caxias's instructions, the parade of troops took the form of a triumphal procession, with bands striking up martial airs and every man donning dress uniforms with boots, buttons, and bayonets polished to a shiny luster. The marquis wished to present his conquest of the city as an occasion for spectacular rejoicing. The mission that the emperor had assigned him had finally been accomplished and Caxias evidently thought it appropriate to mark that victory as the culmination of his long military career.

The marquis issued a proclamation declaring an end to the war, which the fleet officers endorsed with a statement that boasted that "it was not impossible to achieve the impossible, we did it."[15] Caxias then prepared to relinquish command to his subordinates. He lacked permission to do this, but evidently was fed up with Paraguay, and longed to return to Rio for a much-deserved rest. The only concession he made to doubt lay in his decision to dispatch a mobile force north to Luque and up the rail line towards Areguá to defend against any unexpected trouble.

The marquis's men had more immediate objects in mind, and few of these redounded to their good name. Indeed, foreign observers unanimously condemned the behavior of the Allied troops who arrived at Asunción over the next weeks. Having fought for so long in the swamps and forests, these soldiers now had many demands to satisfy. The women and girls who wandered into the city at this time were therefore outraged in ways great and small. The Brazilians had already gained a bad reputation for their treatment of three hundred Paraguayan women who fell into their hands after Avay and were repeatedly raped.[16] The Asuncenas escaped most, though not all, of this bad treatment only because so few of them were present in the city.[17]

McMahon, who could not call himself a neutral observer, condemned the Brazilians as a "licentious and lawless horde who disgrace alike humanity and the name of soldier."[18] In coming to this estimation, however, he might well have addressed the vengeance motive that he had witnessed firsthand in Virginia. At least some of the soldiers who raped and abused women in Asunción reasoned that similar treatment had befallen their countrywomen in Corumbá during the Paraguayan occupation. This fact, of course, excused nothing.

A few Brazilian soldiers managed to turn a profit at this time by kidnapping children and holding them for ransom. This seems to have been an isolated phenomenon initially, but kidnapping for ransom grew into a wider problem after the Brazilians penetrated the hill country in July.[19] Though the Marshal's troops had also practiced kidnapping when they compelled a group of Correntino women to accompany them back to Paraguay in late 1865, their motivation was political and involved no demands for ransom.[20] The same cannot be said, however, for the "Italian Nicoles," whom the Paraguayans captured in Mato Grosso, and freed only after his friends paid a ransom of twenty-five million *milréis*.[21]

Rape and kidnapping were less prevalent than looting in the Asunción of 1869. Under the accepted rules of war senior officers could authorize the seizure of articles that might help sustain the enemy's army. The rules did not, however, permit trespass on private dwellings, nor did they envision looting as an object in itself. Yet, as the Paraguayans had shown in Corumbá and Uruguaiana, this is what happens in the absence of proper discipline.[22] The matter of scale may also be pertinent. Whereas the above-mentioned towns received merciless treatment from the Paraguayans, they were all tiny places. Asunción was a national capital, a city in which pillaging was symbolically more painful.

When Caxias celebrated a Te Deum in the Cathedral on 8 January, the nastiness was well underway. The soldiers started with the larger public buildings. The executive palace, not quite completed at the onset of hostilities, had suffered through Commodore Delphim's barrages. Now, as the Brazilian imperial standard was raised from its loftiest tower, the structure was systematically gutted. As a later observer noted, the palace's "shattered turrets, slivered cornices, and broken parapets announce only too faithfully the absolute devastation of the lone and dismantled interior, [from which] the Brazilian plunderers carried off whatever they could lay their hands on, even to the timbers of the floors and the steps of the staircases, besides hacking and defacing whatever, from its nature, could not be carried away."[23] And this was only the beginning. One German eyewitness reported that the empire's soldiers pillaged "the city thoroughly, leaving not a pane of glass, or mirror, or lock untouched, although the war was ostensibly waged against the tyrant López and not against the people of Paraguay."[24]

Allied officers had sanctioned liberal foraging, and the men proceeded to take whatever victuals and strong drink they could find. They fanned out into

the urban neighborhoods, broke into foreign legations and ransacked churches, private homes, and warehouses in search of things to eat or sell.[25] They lit fires in buildings to illuminate their plundering during the evening hours, reducing more than a few to ashes. Even tombs they desecrated.[26]

At the outset, no one tried to curb these excesses. For one thing, the Brazilian soldiers were apt to feel themselves defrauded of an absolute right to pillage if their behavior were put under restraint, and the officers had had enough problems controlling them as it was. The worst offenders, moreover, could rationalize that they were only doing what the more rustic Paraguayans had done whether or not the Marshal had endorsed such behavior.[27] Even civilians rarely show mercy to other civilians in such circumstances.

The Argentine units, now commanded by General Emilio Mitre, were stationed a league outside the city at Trinidad, where they could conveniently deny having taken part in the abuses. The Argentines claim to have acted with greater circumspection than the Brazilians. Yet, their disdain was tinged with envy. Whenever they witnessed Brazilian troops loading chairs, tables, pianos, carpets, and pieces of art onto imperial warships, they mumbled "*ahijuna*" in wistful complaint that the furniture would never grace their own *ranchos*.[28] Yet the Argentine officers ultimately managed to secure a portion of the loot. And in April, when the new Allied commander passed through Buenos Aires, he caught sight of the Marshal's purloined chairs in the Argentine government house during a reception by Sarmiento.[29]

Furniture and assorted baubles were one thing, but the most valuable portion of the loot consisted of hides, tobacco, and yerba "requisitioned" from private and state warehouses. A surprising quantity of these export items had remained in Asunción and cargo holds of Allied merchant vessels soon bulged with the stuff, which made its way downstream on government account or on that of individual officers.[30] General Castro, the Uruguayan commander, was said to have commandeered a vessel filled with tannin-scented hides and stolen tobacco that he planned to sell on the Montevideo market.[31]

To be sure, some officers behaved badly, but pillaging also found its severest critics within the Allied command. Emilio Mitre, for instance, delivered strong reprimands to well-corned soldiers who had tolerated or engaged in thievery. The same revulsion was likewise expressed by members of the Paraguayan Legion, whose homes were among the buildings gutted. They had looked on helplessly, feeling an understandable contempt—and just a bit of fear—at the wanton behavior of their allies.[32]

There was a certain tragic irony in the plundering. When the Marshal's government ordered the city's evacuation eleven months earlier, a few Asuncenos concealed valuables in the masonry of their houses or buried them in family gardens.[33] They thus avoided the cupidity of López's soldiers only to have their property dug up and appropriated by the Allies. Worse still, the rumors

of hidden treasure (*plata ybyguí*) inflamed the avarice of Paraguayans and foreigners alike. Everyone thought to wrest valuables from hiding places in the ground. Vandalism thus continued long after the fighting ended.[34]

The sacking of Asunción gave the lie to the professed desire among the Allied leaders to bring civilization to the downtrodden people of Paraguay. Yet some commentators defended theft as a natural consequence of war. *The Standard*, claiming that tales of wide-scale pilfering in Asunción had been exaggerated, noted that there was not much left to seize, and when the soldiers found the doors of the shops sealed by orders of López, "it was natural enough that … the butt end of a musket should be guided by curiosity in effecting an entrance." The principal pillage was directed "according to the articles of war towards Government property, such as piles of hides and yerba."[35] The Brazilian foreign minister made a similar observation. Meeting Paraguayan outrage with a bland expression of moral superiority, he asserted that the imperial soldiers had committed no great misconduct, and that the worst looting followed from the actions of foreign hucksters who had arrived in the wake of the army.[36]

There was a grain of truth in this claim. The flotsam of a dozen European countries came on the scene within days of the Allied landing, and it took sutlers no time to set up shops in the ruined buildings of the port district—one source noted one hundred twenty of these establishments by the third week of January.[37] These tight-fisted, sharp-elbowed men, mostly Italians (and a few Germans), were anxious to make a quick peso—the quicker the better. They lacked the romance and guileless fascination that had animated earlier visitors to Paraguay, and took pleasure in watching the parade of Allied soldiers—not because they fancied pageantry, but because more troops meant more profit. The looting that they envisioned was no different from that of the soldiers, just better organized.[38]

If these early commercial exchanges with Brazilian troopers amounted to bartering glassware, table linen, and silver drinking straws (*bombillas*) for liquor and foodstuffs, they nonetheless signaled a rebirth of Paraguayan commerce, which, for the first time since the 1810s, went unencumbered by state interference. The popularity of Paraguayan yerba in downriver ports had never abated and might now have served to stimulate the country's reintegration into the broader economy. That said, in 1869 the advantages of a more open trade were dubious and the Paraguayans had every right to denounce the Allies as robbers. The Bay of Asunción soon crowded with merchant vessels of every size and flag—over one hundred arriving in the first week alone (twice that figure by the end of the month). The sutlers and bagmen quickly filled the holds of their ships with captured booty and sent them on their way, leaving Paraguayans to seethe with a resentment that persists today as an element in nationalist discourse.

Exit Caxias

Sympathetic biographers have claimed that the Marquis of Caxias did everything in his power to curb the excesses of his soldiers. But Caxias was not merely fatigued in January 1869—he was sick. He had gone without sleep for nearly three days before his troops entered Asunción, and he literally fell into the bed that his servants had prepared for him in the elegant residence of the late General Barrios.[39] The temperature was now above one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and the sixty-five-year-old marquis could hardly move for the heat.

He was not alone. In truth, many senior Allied officers had come down with fevers, which often aggravated previous illnesses. General Andrade Neves died on 6 January and the marquis's adjutant, Colonel Fernando Sebastião Dias de Motta, a short time later.[40] Both General Guilherme Xavier de Souza and Admiral Ignácio were so ill that they could not leave their respective sickbeds, and the latter had already asked to be relieved as commander of the fleet. Generals Osório and Argolo Ferrão had not yet recovered from their wounds and General Machado Bittencourt soon died of his.[41]

All this sickness among senior officers created a power vacuum in Asunción that placed even greater strain on Caxias. The victories in December involved a heavy loss of life and this fact weighed heavily on him. Even though he feigned indifference to public hectoring, the battering that the marquis had received in the Argentine and Brazilian press had likewise aggravated his sense of well-being. What had started as minor quibbles had surged into a campaign of whispered invective, and it evidently wounded his pride to think that he had lost the respect to which he was entitled.

The term "dignified" had so often fastened onto Caxias that he had long since ceased making excuses for any personal failings, and on this occasion it showed. He evidently felt unsure that he still enjoyed the confidence of the emperor, and, on 12 January, asked to be relieved or at least granted leave. Two days later, having received no word from Rio de Janeiro, he issued Order of the Day no. 272, which formally declared the war at an end.[42]

The marquis clearly understood that the struggle was not over, but he felt so fatigued and depressed that he desperately wanted to close the book. Then, while attending mass in the Asunción Cathedral on 17 January, Caxias fainted. His men carried him to his quarters, where he momentarily regained consciousness, then collapsed again. As reported in the English-language press, the reaction among doctors was unequivocal:

> His medical attendants did not deem it prudent for him to wait [for the war minister to confirm his successor] … and he embarked on Monday night on board the *Pedro Segundo*, and left early on Tuesday morning. On that day, as was to be expected,

> López formed a subject for conversation, and his probable future movements, with the 8,000 men said to be under his command, were discussed. The Marquis put an end to the discussion amongst his officers by exclaiming: "What does it matter? Eight-thousand men can never finish these dregs [of Brazilian soldiers] that will stay behind [in Asunción]."[43]

Caxias's remark may have been spat out in haste and with aristocratic contempt for his own troops, but it conceded, at least, that the country was not yet pacified.

This fact could hardly have mollified the marquis's successor, General Guilherme Xavier de Souza, who was also sick (with liver disease) and anxious to go home. A former governor of Rio Grande do Sul, the new commander was a gifted political officer, and certainly no weakling, but he was decidedly out of his depth as head of Allied forces. He had none of Caxias's charisma, precious little of his now-vanished energy, and he was frankly perplexed by the turn of events that had placed him in command. Guilherme envisioned no changes to his predecessor's policies; he presumed that his command was temporary and that he ought to resist the temptation to mount new attacks against López.[44] He did act to impose more control in Asunción, to inventory the spoils then in the hands of sutlers, and, where possible, to return properties to their owners. These efforts could never have succeeded amid so much chaos, however. Indeed, the members of the commission that he named to supervise the return of stolen properties helped themselves to a portion of the loot (or took bribes to look the other way).[45]

When he complained to Guilherme and Emílio Mitre that Allied soldiers had wrecked his consulate at Luque, the Italian consul Chapperon was told to mind his manners and to remember that his right of diplomatic immunity could easily be revoked.[46] People were similarly jumpy in all of the nearby villages that had come under Allied control. A small number of Luque's inhabitants had remained hiding in their homes without daring to peep at the Brazilians. Many more, however, found it expedient to flee further inland, carrying their children and infirm parents upon their backs.

As for Caxias, he steamed homeward. His decision not to disembark at Buenos Aires inspired bitter comment from the Porteños, who could not help but think it an intentional snub or some expression of political chicanery. At Montevideo, the marquis did go ashore, not to consort with Uruguayan officials, but to convalesce in accommodations provided by the local Brazilian command.[47] The cumulative strain of overwork and depression had yet to run its course with him, though his fevers abated long enough to permit a brief meeting with Councilor José María da Silva Paranhos, who arrived in the Uruguayan capital at that time.

The imperial government had just named Paranhos special agent to Asunción. Although his duties were only vaguely defined, he had already amassed extensive power as foreign minister, and Paraguay's fate depended on how he chose to use it. Though a Conservative like Caxias, Paranhos had shown little patience with the manner of the marquis's departure from the seat of war, and like the emperor, he worried about what this action might portend. Final success had seemingly been snatched from Brazil's grasp, that old and broken man having thrown it away. In truth, victory had been delayed, not squandered, though at that particular moment this was not apparent.

The Porteño press ruminated that the marquis was dying, and so it appeared to people in Rio de Janeiro as well.[48] His arrival in the imperial capital proved the most consternating event of his life. As Caxias wearily made his way down the ramp from the warship and set foot in his native city, no official stepped up to greet him. He was treated as a private individual, deserving neither a formal reception nor a public expression of gratitude. This lack of appreciation, tantamount to a slap in the face, stung deeply, all the more so since it clearly emanated from the monarch.

Only on 21 February did Pedro condescend to receive Caxias at the São Cristóvão Palace. By now the emperor had opted to put aside his disappointment. It was true that the marquis had failed to capture López—an objective that Pedro deemed essential to preserving his imperial dignity—but the monarch recognized that Caxias had labored under tremendous pressure. He had won many battles, and had always proven a staunch defender of the dynasty. He had much to contribute even now, and it was best for all concerned that his achievements be duly honored.[49] Within a number of weeks, the emperor went one step further, according Caxias the noble title of duke. He was one of only three Brazilians ever to achieve this distinction.[50]

Pedro wished to send a message to the army, to members of the government, and to the public at large, but he failed to display a similar sympathy to Admiral Ignácio, who also returned "prematurely" to Rio de Janeiro at this time. Barely conscious and still wracked with fever, the ex-commander of the fleet was carried to the court in a litter, but the emperor refused to meet him. Distraught as well as ill, Ignácio retreated at once to his home on the Rua do Senado. His religion provided him with his only measure of solace in the three weeks remaining to him, and he succumbed destitute of any public homage save for the hasty praise of his sailors and a few journalists.[51]

Despite his poor treatment of Ignácio, Pedro's willingness to resolve his differences with Caxias was politically convenient, and it found easy support among Conservatives. It did not sit so well with Liberals, of course. They had not forgotten the emperor's use of his moderating power to help Caxias at their expense in February 1868.[52] Heated exchanges on the matter erupted in the newspapers, in the senate, and on the streets, and these brought neither

resolution nor even much clarity. Members of Parliament spent more time evaluating the patriotism of their colleagues than in examining facts. Certain Liberals professed dismay at seeing Caxias ennobled as a duke when a heroic and equally deserving Liberal, General Osório, remained a mere marquis.

In July 1870, after the war was over, Caxias faced a senate inquiry into his decision-making during the final stages of the 1868 campaign. He was a member in good standing of that body, a fact that his colleagues recognized by assuming a scrupulously polite demeanor for the occasion. Caxias had recovered his health and much of his composure and was not interested in any lingering skepticism. He summarized what had occurred in Paraguay before he took command and what he accomplished in his twenty-seven months in the field, omitting no opportunity to eulogize his subordinate officers. He dismissed the question of his departure by disingenuously observing that since Montevideo was part of the military district "in operations in Paraguay," he had never really left his post. As for declaring the war at an end, he had simply stated an opinion, he said, nothing more.[53] The more significant matter of having let López escape was potentially explosive, but Caxias refused to be pulled into a long-winded debate.

The duke's testimony masked an exasperated contempt for the second-guessing of civilians. He was visibly upset at having to go through what seemed like an inquisition. He kept his comments brief, but nonetheless evoked what was known about the Paraguayan campaign at the beginning of 1869. Several things had been certain then. The Marshal's army had counted for little more than a shirtless rabble. They were militarily irrelevant, and unable to hinder the empire's plan to build a Paraguay without López; Brazilian commanders could liquidate the tiny bands of Lopista vagrants whenever they wished. Meanwhile, it was necessary to bring order to those parts of the country that the army had yet to occupy, and this mission could easily have been accomplished by a man in better health than Caxias.

These priorities recognized the military and political realities of the moment, and were in keeping with the emperor's magnanimity. In this assembly, no one could really afford to discount dom Pedro's will. This was as much a matter of self-interest as political procedure. The Senate was the natural domain for aristocratic grandees, the majority of whom wanted to clear Caxias of wrongdoing. Despite their earlier deprecations, every senator could agree that he merited the nation's esteem. He had won the victory by securing Asunción, and whether his military virtues proceeded from policy, personal pride, or the instinct of service, they still deserved to be lauded.

Caxias was honest enough to be disconcerted by a process that flayed him one moment and sanctified him the next. He had sought neither praise nor rehabilitation. But that did not stop him from reciprocating the senate's embrace and approving the soupy commendations ladled over the army that he had shaped into a modern force. With all these proofs of official acclaim already in

the public consciousness, the senate hearings could not help but endorse what the emperor had already decided.

Foreign observers might reasonably have reacted with sarcasm. They could have wondered whether such flattery camouflaged a less-than-pristine record, as the events in Paraguay suggested. For the Brazilian elite, however, it was crucial that military success in no sense challenge their base of political power. It was bad enough that officers of humble birth, who held no titles and who owned no slaves, had played an effective role in the campaign against López. These men might still be co-opted over time. For now, Caxias stood out as the perfect symbol, not just among his own Conservative collaborators but also among Liberals, Progressives, and any others who defended the empire. He had to be a hero—nothing less was permissible.

Thus did Caxias undergo an apotheosis. Over the years that remained to him, he insensibly rose—or sank—into the role of an icon, the Duke of Iron, the symbol of military integrity for all subsequent generations of Brazilian officers. His place in the master narrative of the nation's history was guaranteed and his faults forgotten. Henceforth, his name was used to adorn barracks, railroad stations, and elementary schools.[54]

And the war in Paraguay continued without him.

Paranhos And The Allied Occupation

Perhaps Caxias showed so little concern about the country he had left behind because José María da Silva Paranhos had more or less taken his place. The councilor could be trusted to keep imperial interests in hand as he asserted civil authority in Paraguay and helped construct a new government out of many disparate factions. As a proponent (and practitioner) of realpolitik, Paranhos had always presumed that the Triple Alliance consisted of one dominant power—Brazil—and two subsidiary states—Argentina and Uruguay—both of which needed to comprehend their place in the changing world. 1869 was not 1865. Flores was dead, and the national government in Buenos Aires, though anxious to secure its promised territories in Misiones and the Chaco, could only have a titular interest in the alliance. The campaign in Paraguay had left the Brazilian army in a commanding position, and Paranhos saw no benefit to abandoning this supremacy through some misguided consideration of policy. It was natural that postwar Paraguay operated according to Brazilian rules, and Paranhos wanted this done economically, without giving offense to Argentina.

Like his spiritual descendants in today's Itamaraty Palace, the councilor preferred to achieve results through honest means. He had no desire to poison the atmosphere in Asunción any more than had already occurred, but he also recognized that the authority he appeared to hold could offer prizes for all concerned. It might be used to reconcile the feuding Paraguayan exiles (whose

claim on power at that moment was illusory). It could also sideline any efforts by Buenos Aires to enhance the interests of Argentina's preferred candidates and frustrate their annexationist impulses. Above all, Paranhos could push every player—save López—into accepting the inevitable transition to a new and inoffensive Paraguay. A nation at peace. A gelding.

After consulting Caxias in Montevideo, Paranhos left in early February to visit Sarmiento in Buenos Aires. The councilor wished to avoid statements that might excite Argentine suspicions, and he kept the president mollified with his carefully crafted words. Sarmiento in turn promised continued support for Paranhos's mission to Paraguay, so long as it was cost-effective, reminding him only of the political and financial debts that linked the two governments.[55]

Paranhos made port in Asunción on 20 February, just as the hot weather started to break. Nothing could have prepared him, however, for the brash indiscipline of the occupying troops and the plethora of interested factions who claimed to speak for Paraguay. He had hoped to make the necessary changes without delay and get on with smashing López. Everyone, however, had been waiting on his arrival. They had done little to prepare any transition, and the challenges he faced were therefore considerable. As Sarmiento had already observed in a letter to General Emilio Mitre, the "indefinite protraction of the war leaves us with tied hands. Is there a country called Paraguay? Does it have inhabitants, does it have males? Can a Paraguayan government be organized? Where? When? With what men? To govern whom?"[56]

As a civilian navigating through a highly militarized environment, the councilor found himself at a disadvantage in trying to answer these questions. Yet he was widely seen as the only person capable of breaking through the logjam of ambition, incompetence, and avarice that passed for administration in occupied Asunción. Paranhos was indefatigable, and many in the city began to think of him as the de facto viceroy of Paraguay. He met with General Guilherme, with other Allied military commanders, with Paraguayan exile leaders recently returned from Buenos Aires and Europe, with foreign consular officials, and with representatives of the many traders in the city. He pinpointed Paraguayan exiles deserving of discreet cultivation. And he tried to deal with displaced people who, with the cooling weather, had lost their fear and who were now drifting back to the capital in increasing numbers.[57] Some refugees were honest victims of the Marshal's caprice. Others were spies. But most were scavengers in search of anything the looters had left behind.

The common Brazilian appraisal of Paraguayan liberals, anti-Lopistas, and supposedly ex-Lopistas mingled sincere appreciation with a pragmatic desire to find among them a faction willing to fall into line. Paranhos was more realistic than those Brazilians who thought it simple to enlist a coterie of collaborators. In dealing with Paraguayans, the other Brazilians had always favored the use of

force even when they could gain their objectives through policy. The councilor wanted to find a better way.

The most efficient method to bring about stability in Paraguay was to create the right kind of government to succeed López. Various exile politicians and members of the Paraguayan Legion had asserted a claim to authority among their countrymen ever since early January. But these men failed even to curtail the looting, and they constantly quarreled among themselves. At one time, there were at least five men who announced an intention to assume the provisional presidency; not one was inclined toward political compromise.[58]

Every important exile family had a son in mind for the post. One group, led by Juan Francisco Decoud and his dashing son José Segundo, insisted that all political problems be put to rest through a prompt and open election.[59] This proposal was entirely impractical, but at least it admitted the right of Paraguayans to choose a future of their own design. Unfortunately, neither Paranhos, nor the Brazilian high command, nor the Argentines, nor the other Paraguayan liberals stood ready to consent to any change whose outcome could not be decided in advance.

The councilor discovered his most problematic candidates for power in Asunción not among the former exiles from Buenos Aires but from a small coterie of opportunists who had once served the Marshal. Chief among them was Cándido Bareiro, López's former agent in Paris, whom one scholar described as "a ruthless and cynical politician charged by his enemies with having no scruples whatever."[60] Bareiro arrived in Asunción in February, and, having set aside his previous commitment to López, now sought to create a government that would preserve much of the old Lopista spirit. He took the key role within the nucleus of a coalition favored by those legionnaires who could not stomach the Decoud family's arrogant claim to power. The Decoudistas—if such a term is permissible, given the constant shifting of alliances—remained stridently pro-Argentine, and thus misread the true disposition of power in Asunción, which always favored Paranhos.

In commenting on the befuddled politics of the day, Richard Burton observed that a president "without subjects enough to form a ministry … would be a palpable absurdity, and Paranhos could not lend himself to the farce of creating a nation out of war-prisoners."[61] But the councilor ended by doing something rather like that. He announced that a provisional government of anti-López Paraguayans could count on imperial patronage so long as political niceties were respected. By this, he meant that any anti-Brazilian sympathies that might arise within a new regime would have to be eradicated. Without addressing this stipulation, some three hundred thirty-five citizens signed a petition at the end of March that demanded a new government, and four emissaries were selected to carry the proposal to Buenos Aires.[62]

One of the emissaries begged off, but the remaining three soon departed downriver to the same city where the Triple Alliance Treaty had been signed four years earlier. They paid Paranhos a courtesy visit before they left. The interview tested the councilor's charm, and he offered the three men every sort of bonhomie that aristocrats reserve for inferiors who do not realize that they are inferiors: He flattered them one moment, berated them the next, all the while driving home a polite reminder that their success depended on his.

Paranhos had little trust for these men. Indeed, he slipped away from Asunción aboard an express packet that reached Buenos Aires hours before the three Paraguayans made port. He had started the process of rebuilding the nation and now intended to see it through without setting aside the empire's advantages or spoiling his notion of a lasting peace.

The Marshal Sets the Stage—Again

In all this muddled talk of nation-building, precious little was said about the obvious fact that López remained free. Though no one doubted that his forces had been seriously reduced in the interior departments, what he might choose to do with them was anyone's guess. The different factions in Asunción might argue all they wanted about the future—the Marshal intended to make war.

Except in scale, the struggle had not appreciably changed during the early months of 1869. López's army occupied a position in a well-watered and fertile district of the Cordillera, roughly twenty miles wide by forty long, and into which had concentrated around one hundred thousand people. Cerro León lay at the entrance of this district, near Pirayú and Sapucai. Directly to the east rose a chain of green hills, six hundred feet in elevation and home to a great many peasant farmers.

López, having left a rearguard force at Cerro León, moved the remainder of his army up the rocky slope to Azcurra, which he had engaged in fortifying ever since his flight from Itá Ybaté. He had twenty artillery pieces of various calibers at the new site and perhaps two thousand troops fit for service.[63] The few British engineers who remained received orders to begin casting cannon at a makeshift arsenal at nearby Caacupé. The foundry south of Ybycuí was also still operational. The main effort, however, focused on constructing earthworks at Azcurra.

Stories of Allied ill-treatment of the Asuncenos and Luqueños, which had spread all over unoccupied Paraguay, were much embellished in the telling; in truth, civilians had more to fear from the Marshal's press-gangs, which needed workers to assist in constructing the Azcurra defenses.[64] Luis Caminos had already drafted the women, children, and old men from the outlying towns and had driven the multitude forward over the previous weeks like so many cattle.[65]

They had lived in the open ever since, their few possessions piled atop bullock carts near their assigned places of labor.

Caapucú, Itá, Yaguarón, San Lorenzo, Villarrica, and Paraguarí lost substantial portions of their dwindling urban population, an estimated thirty to forty thousand persons having fled from the Allies into the hill country and an uncertain future. *The Standard's* war correspondent exaggerated little when he wrote in disgust of their ongoing tribulations:

> [Caminos had] ordered all the families to the mountains, the young, the old, the aged, and the infirm, were all swept before the ruthless guard; the first and best families in Paraguay are at present living … chiefly on mandioca and roasted corn. Clothes are unknown, even rags are scarce. The people are in the most deplorable state of misery, and without even a ray of hope; beef is allowed once a week to the unfortunates; women are alone; men there are none save those in the hospitals, or the few on duty.[66]

Hundreds of displaced families from all over Paraguay joined the residents of the Cordilleras in trying to survive with inadequate resources while keeping up the show of diehard resistance that Marshal López demanded.[67] Those Asuncenos who had rarely dirtied their hands in the soil found themselves begging the peasants for a measly portion of whatever roots or parched corn they had hoarded over the previous season.[68]

Outwardly, the majority of Paraguayans stood firm and cheered the Marshal's cause, their nationalism unperturbed. But in fact, most civilians, having already lived through some of the war's worst traumas, simply could not think of where else to go. So they stared at their wasted children—their protruding stomachs, their frail limbs knotty as dried wood, their hopeless eyes. And they did what the soldiers told them to do. Only a few took the road to Asunción. By now, every Paraguayan could see that the home front was the only front.

Aside from several limited scouting expeditions, the Allies had to continue gathering information through the usual less-than-satisfactory means. Since the Marshal's troops rarely moved out of Azcurra and Piribebuy, a large portion of eastern Paraguay, which had been well populated and prosperous before the war, effectively became a no-man's land. The Marshal had ordered the evacuation of the Misiones long before the fall of Humaitá, and no resettlement of any kind had occurred in the zone since. Other areas had largely been drained of male inhabitants by the government's ceaseless demands for recruits and workers to tend fields closer to the action.

Villarrica, the most important community in the department of Guairá, had suffered a severe decline when the Marshal ordered a new muster in the

early months of 1868. The town's militia chief at that time listed 563 men on his roll: 283 boys aged 12 to 14; 7 more boys in a church band; 5 slaves; 8 former slaves (*libertos*); 29 wounded soldiers; 260 militiamen aged 50 and above; and a long list of "defectives," including 6 insane individuals, 4 men "completely blind," 3 "deaf and dumb," and one 90-year-old *anciano* who had "problems all over his body." Muster lists from Atyra, Caazapá, Yuty, and Concepción revealed a similar picture—and these statistics date from before the December campaign took its toll.[69]

It would be helpful to have complete and ongoing data to illustrate the demographic decline of Paraguay during the war, but in an environment where scriveners recorded extant manpower reserves on pieces of rawhide, fragmentary information was always the rule.[70] One of the clearest illustrations of the changing population can be garnered from one of the least numerous groups in the country: the freed blacks, whom the state listed in censuses from 1844 to 1868. Though an analysis of a small group reveals nothing about broader questions of mortality, all the same it presents a shocking picture for the final year that such records were kept. Only four districts (*partidos*), home at that time to the majority of Paraguay's blacks, received extensive attention:

		1850	1853	1856	1868
Caapucú:	born	20	11	19	8
	died	9	6	11	37
Tabapy:	born		24	35	4
	died		3	10	13
Quiindy:	born	112	47		4
	died	34	15		36
Quyquyó:	born	11	14	14	2
	died	4	2	5	8

Given the absence of men conscripted into the Nambí-í and other battalions of the army, fewer libertos were born in the communities surveyed in 1868 and a much smaller proportion of those born survived.[71] It is not hard to discern in these numbers a population on the verge of extinction.

Save for the liberto statistics, census data for the rural zones are entirely absent for the period 1868–1869. The unfolding disaster was nonetheless obvious to all observers. We can take at face value the statement of Lucás Carrillo, former Paraguayan commander at Angostura, who, when questioned by Allied officers in December, remarked that Paraguay's population had "been reduced to debris, with all property laid waste, every family left fatherless, and with a total population made up of women, children, invalids, and wounded."[72]

Except in a half-dozen communities on the northern periphery, food had grown very scarce, malnutrition had become chronic, and epidemic disease was raging. In earlier days, Paraguayan functionaries found ways to meet the army's needs while retaining sufficient supplies for local consumption. This was no longer possible. "War must nourish war," Cato once exclaimed in the Roman senate—an adage now ruthlessly adapted by the Marshal. To supply his army and keep the fight going, he now seized all of the much-diminished harvest of maize, manioc, and beans, and in so doing, left the civilians with nothing to eat. When he issued orders to concentrate displaced families closer to Azcurra, it simply compounded the pressure on remaining supplies, and spread cholera to areas hitherto unaffected by sickness.[73]

True to his convictions—or to his vanity—López admitted to no added burden in any of this. His people had made sacrifices before and they could do so again, and what they lacked in military stores they could more than balance with an unbending patriotism. Paraguay's continued independence was at stake, and while the kambáes wriggled to the right and left in search of turncoats to staff a puppet government, the Marshal's legitimate regime in Piribebuy continued to function. He organized those minimal sources of manpower, armaments, and provisions still left him with skill and forbearance.[74] At the same time, while his people struggled to stay alive, he displayed indifference not just to their pain but to the very circumstances that had brought that pain about.

Even more than usual, López seemed engrossed in his own personal drama. He had always carried an air of exclusivity about him, and now, amidst all this squalor, he more and more lost himself in it. The cult that had grown up around his name had taken ever more exaggerated forms during 1868, and he may have come to believe in his own propaganda. Certainly he ate more beef than ever before, drank more caña, prayed more fervently and in terms of greater familiarity to a deity that most Paraguayans would have thought unapproachable. He became an avid reader of religious texts, including Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity*, which gave him a casuistry to validate his actions.[75]

The Marshal occasionally tried to make out the balance sheet of his life. While chatting with Lieutenant Colonel Centurión at Azcurra, for instance, he spoke of the advantages that Paraguayans enjoyed in having chosen authority over legality:

> I could have been the most popular man, not only in Paraguay, but in all of South America. All I needed to do was to promulgate a constitution. But I did not wish to do so, for however easy it might have been, it would have brought disgrace on my nation. When I read the constitutions of the neighboring countries, they leave me enthusiastic in the contemplation of so much beauty, but

> when I adjust my eyesight to see their practical effect, it fills me with horror.[76]

Thus did López attempt to cement the national destiny to his person and pass off his impulses as reflecting the public will.

The Marshal had always striven for glory, yet now there were also periods when his grip on reality seemed tenuous, and he appeared more and more to be looking for death. Perhaps a feeling of guilt had finally touched his soul. More likely, the darkness of his probable fate had so enveloped him that he sought release in delusion. Such inclinations might be judged pitiful in a harmless country gentleman like the knight of La Mancha, but as López retreated more and more into his dreams, he grew more frightening—and more arbitrary. No one could afford to ignore his whims or to forget that he still held the fortune of thousands of Paraguayans in the small of his hand.

On several occasions starting in late April, the Marshal dispatched cavalrymen on expeditions to Concepción, Horqueta, and other communities of the north. They had orders to root out and execute local traitors, with which the region supposedly abounded. López had long suspected the more prosperous families in the region of having preferred the candidacy of Benigno back in 1862. And now his spies had informed him that certain highly placed members of the old Concepceño elite had opened treasonable contact with the Brazilians.[77] With Marshal López, suspicion quickly became fact, and, since among his soldiers freedom from responsibility was more attractive than freedom from restraint, they now did their worst. Before his cavalrymen finished their grisly assignment, they had lanced nearly fifty "criminals," the great majority women and children.[78] Lopista agents were capable of even worse behavior, with one source noting 257 individuals executed in Pirayú and Azcurra over several months, both military men and civilians accused of defeatism and worse.[79] There were few natural brakes to contain this butchery.

Madame Lynch and the López children sometimes got through the Marshal's gloom, but they could also encourage his breaks with reality. In the National Archives in Asunción there is a torn and dusty letter of March 1869 from Panchito López to José Falcón. In it, the fourteen-year-old colonel asks the fifty-nine-year-old official to kindly arrange for the binding in fine leather of two volumes of music belonging to his mother, la Madama, with instructions to carefully tool her initials onto the cover of each book.[80] The almost surreal quality of this epistle, which presupposes affluent rather than normal circumstances, suggests how far the López family had slipped away from reality. So did the behavior of Madame Lynch, who spent her time at a makeshift treasury in Caacupé picking out jewelry from among the loot collected by state agents. She also continued to purchase private lands "for absurdly low prices; on occasion, she bought them in exchange for food."[81]

The strangeness of this little republic in the hill country was reflected not just in the comportment of the presidential family but also in the pages of *Estrella*. This was the final Lopista newspaper of the war, edited in Piribebuy and composed in Spanish by the Italian cleric Gerónimo Becchi and two Paraguayan assistants who filled it not just with the usual bloated patriotism and praise for the Marshal, but also with references to engagements that had never happened, victories that were never won. In earlier days, the various state newspapers tried to promote a strong nationalist sympathy among the undefeated Paraguayans. Though this same idea evidently guided *Estrella*, it was no longer a matter of casting the pearls of Lopista wisdom before the peasant swine, to somehow inflame their enthusiasm in this late hour. The pearls instead were being cast to the wind.[82]

The Count Takes Command

While the people of Paraguay did everything they could to survive their privations and the members of the López family basked in self-delusion, the Brazilians wondered what to do next. Citing the paucity of horses and fodder, General Guilherme did little to challenge the Paraguayans in the Cordillera during February and March.[83] López had wrecked the one locomotive left behind at Asunción, and while the Allies awaited the arrival of a new machine from Buenos Aires, their scouts followed the rail line on horseback past Areguá.[84] They noted a shattered bridge at the Arroyo Yuquyry that had to be rebuilt before any major advance up the line.

The scouts also confirmed the falseness of a rumor that the Marshal had placed warships on Lake Ypacaraí, a 56-square-mile body of tranquil water that obstructed the approach to the east. They then continued on towards Patiño Cue and Pirayú, noting little of interest, and returned to base along a more direct route. Other scouts, dispatched on a still longer ride, galloped past Paraguarí and edged Carapeguá in central Paraguay before they, too, returned empty-handed to Asunción.

Though the Allied armies avoided major confrontations, the navy did engage in smaller operations. A portion of the Allied fleet had already steamed upriver in mid-January in search of the López navy, whose ships, it emerged, had fled up the Manduvirá, an important tributary of the Paraguay just north of the capital.[85] The retreating Paraguayans left a half-sunken hulk at the mouth of the river before making their way further upstream and onto a swollen creek, the Yhagüy. Most Allied ships were too deep-drafted to follow without clearing the obstacle, and only Delphim's monitors succeeded in getting through. At length, however, they discovered that Paraguayan troops had dropped chains, stakes, and rock-filled oxcarts into the channel at various points, making what had been a difficult passage virtually impossible.

Meanwhile, other naval units proceeded up the Paraguay to inspect the Mato Grosso settlements that the Marshal had previously abandoned. The sailors were startled to learn that a new Brazilian fort had replaced the Paraguayan defenses at Corumbá. This new facility boasted a garrison of five hundred troops sent from the provincial capital. The new garrison met the imperial steamers with an initial volley of hot fire, thinking they were the Marshal's vessels coming to wreak havoc once again.[86]

López was not terribly concerned with remote events. He preferred to focus on building the works at Azcurra in the same way he had once prepared defenses at Humaitá. Yet he was still capable of tricks. On 10 March, a force of Brazilian engineers marched from Luque to the Arroyo Yuquyry to rebuild the railway bridge that had previously been destroyed. The Argentine locomotive had finally arrived in Asunción and the Allied command wanted to get it into operation as soon as possible.[87] The Paraguayans had been so quiet that no reason existed to suspect any opposition to the Brazilian effort. Then, as the troops lined up to receive their midday rations, a locomotive with six cars steamed up near the opposite bank. Two hundred Paraguayans jumped off all at once, and immediately let fire a volley of musketry.

The Marshal's gunners, having also mounted a small cannon on one of the six wagons, now used it to pour grape on the startled Brazilians, forty of whom fell dead over the next minutes. Allied cavalry eventually swept across the creek, but no one had the presence of mind to lay a log across the rails in the rear. This allowed the Paraguayans, with one man killed and three wounded, to get to their wagons and speed off towards Pirayú.[88] Thereafter the Brazilian generals carefully guarded the tracks between Areguá and the Yuquyry with upwards of fifteen hundred troops, but these did not impede periodic sabotage along the line.[89]

In truth, the Allies were busy elsewhere. Five days after the train attack, Allied warships conducted a reconnaissance of the Alto Paraná at the southeastern end of the country, nearly three hundred miles from the capital. They disembarked troops at Encarnación and found the town empty, stripped clean of everything useful. Brazilian cavalry units followed up this operation by mounting a brief foray deeper into the Misiones, destroying what they could of the meager Paraguayan stores found there.[90] These scouting operations brought negligible gains in matériel seized and intelligence gathered.

The main Allied units still made no move, however. The Argentines at Trinidad spent many weeks drilling in the mornings and giving formal balls at night, but their morale was poor and their rations even poorer. The beef, cooked in its own hide; the savory stews (*pucheros*); the plates of cornmeal crushed into a polenta that smelled of the home fire—in Paraguay, all these things were replaced by a humble fare of charqui and hardtack. It was no better for the

Brazilians. They drilled just like the Argentines, and spent their free time with amateur dramatics, gambling, and the inevitable singing songs of *saudade*.[91]

Military preparations for the final push went nowhere. Guilherme had been intermittently ill. Richard Burton, who met the Allied commander in mid-April, described him as a tall, thin man, peculiarly Brazilian in countenance, but with pallid, yellow skin that left him looking "almost corpse-like." Knowledge of his fainting spells had become common by now, and his officers dismissed him as little better than a *General da Corte*, joking that any second lieutenant could offer better leadership.[92] As Guilherme had supposed, moreover, the government in Rio showed no interest in assigning him the honor of obliterating López's army and instead was looking for some other candidate, preferably an aristocrat of the highest rank.

Most senior officers in the Brazilian army either lacked the necessary prestige, were politically unreliable, or had already fallen ill from fever in Paraguay. The most obvious remaining candidate was dom Pedro's son-in-law, Louis Philippe Marie Ferdinand Gaston d'Orléans, the Count d'Eu. The count had the requisite status and had already seen military service with Spanish forces in Morocco. But his nomination posed a challenge.[93] A generous impulse in 1864 had prompted Pedro to favor the suit of this minor Orleans prince who sought the hand of his daughter Isabel. Though the emperor had his reservations, the count found a sympathetic spirit in the imperial princess, and the newlyweds grew much attached to each other no matter what her father thought.[94]

Isabel enjoyed considerable esteem in Brazil and it was natural that the Count d'Eu should seek some public role through her. But Pedro always meddled, citing *raisons dynastiques* while in fact acting as a compulsive busybody. Whatever his faults, the count deserved better treatment. He dressed indifferently, spoke Portuguese poorly, and was presumptuously unconcerned with protocol. True, he was devoted to the Bragança monarchy, got along well with members of the court, and found friends in both the Conservative and Liberal camps. But the count's casual habits, which had gained him so many friends, grated on the emperor. So did the fact that Dona Isabel had thus far failed to conceive.

And there was another matter. In 1865 the Count d'Eu had accompanied the emperor to Rio Grande do Sul, where together they witnessed the Paraguayan surrender at Uruguaiana. Ever since, the younger man had thirsted for action. He sent five separate petitions to the Council of State asking for a field command and Pedro saw to it that all five petitions were quashed.[95] We can only guess the motivations behind the monarch's rebuffs. Possibly he wanted the count to focus on family matters. Also, so long as Mitre and Caxias held the overall command, His Royal Highness would have to take orders from social inferiors, and no matter how amenable and respectful the generals might be, such an inversion of rank on the part of Isabel's husband was unthinkable.

While these factors may have carried some weight, jealousy clearly framed the emperor's need to keep the count tethered to his home in Rio de Janeiro. Since the government had previously baulked at his own demand to serve as Brazil's first Voluntário, the monarch was unwilling to enlist the whiny Gaston, who understood the envy underlying the council's denial and hence resented it; he would find some way to demonstrate his patriotism whether the emperor liked it or not. Now, in February 1869, the situation had changed and so had Pedro's opinion. He directed a letter to the count, citing the urgent situation in Paraguay and assured him that as Allied commander he could leave diplomacy to Paranhos, choose his own officers, and concentrate on military affairs. "A steamship awaits your orders," the emperor wrote.[96]

The count had Pedro where he wanted him. In a three-hour interview, he enumerated the problems that stood in the way of his immediate assumption of the Allied command. For one thing, he had harshly criticized the manner of Caxias's departure from Asunción—something that the Conservatives would hold against him. In addition, the ministers responsible for the war had never included the count in their deliberations, and he would therefore be working in the dark about conditions at the front. And finally, he pointed out that Paranhos had strongly opposed his earlier requests for command, and could not now wholeheartedly support a promotion that made the count his virtual partner in Paraguay.[97]

The emperor had already reflected on these things, and he made every concession to settle the question of command. The count, now vindicated, nodded his assent, and then, as a final jab, he insisted that the Council of State confirm the nomination, and that Paranhos agree to the matter in writing. Tired of his son-in-law's chirpy voice—and of the many things that went unsaid between them—Pedro wearily assented. Both men got what they wanted in consequence: the embarrassed emperor had an aggressive commander in Paraguay who would hound López to the death, while the count had all the reassurances he needed so as not to be kept on a tight leash by anyone, least of all Pedro.[98]

If a blister had to be lanced in Paraguay, Gaston was the man to do it. He reached Asunción on 14 April 1869. Brazilian warships in the bay thundered a royal salute as he stepped onto dry land, lifted his kepi to the assembled soldiers, and accompanied the reception committee to the Cathedral for a Te Deum. Staff officers grimaced in noting more than a few errors in etiquette, but His Royal Highness "was never a very great stickler for such like, [and] seemed thoroughly to enjoy the consternation of some of his entourage at the various little 'contre-temps,' and the more serious they looked, the more he laughed."[99]

The count got busy the next morning. He was only twenty-seven years old and seemingly out of place in such a senior role, yet he showed a remarkable diligence that Brazilian historians have yet to properly acknowledge.[100] He visited Luque in the early hours, inspected the battalions guarding the approaches

to Asunción, and re-formed the army into two corps. To Osório, who had yet to fully recover from his jaw wound, Gaston assigned command of the First Corps—perhaps the single most popular decision of the day.[101] With somewhat less enthusiasm, the soldiers greeted Polidoro as the count's chosen commander over the Second Corps. Gaston may have lacked the gravitas of Caxias, the introspection of Mitre, and the physical courage of Flores, but he had no intention of letting anyone doubt his perspicacity or the scope of his authority. He was determined to bring the inaction of recent months to an end.

Accompanying the Count d'Eu in this effort was Alfredo d'Escragnolle Taunay, the military engineer who had survived the torments of the Mato Grosso jungle and who now joined in the new deployment as the count's personal secretary. Among his duties was to write an evocative account of events to rival what he had already penned during the retreat from Laguna.[102] Once in Paraguay, Taunay offered effusive praise to his patron, noting the count's strength of mind, his careful and sympathetic interrogations of Paraguayan deserters, and his desire to put the army in order.[103]

Not all the soldiers in Asunción shared Taunay's enthusiasm for Gaston (and, in truth, the friendly relation between the two cooled after a time).[104] Building morale by assigning command to the count was a problematic business. Caxias's hackneyed argument that the war was fought by the entire Brazilian nation seemed contradicted by the emperor's choice of a foreign-born commander who was hard of hearing, spoke Portuguese like a French bourgeois, and who made the soldiers work too hard.[105]

Though many officers admired the man's zeal, the men never liked him. They took exception to anyone who might force them back into the fight, for they already knew much about the Paraguayans that the count presumably did not. He was a novice and the Allied soldiers stood every chance at suffering from his inexperience and, perhaps, his recklessness.

On one occasion, not long after his arrival at the front, Gaston boarded a hospital ship bearing sick and wounded to Buenos Aires. Calling the patients malingerers, he ordered four-fifths of them to return to their duties and prepare for combat.[106] Up to this point, many Brazilian soldiers had actually thought that they might survive the war and see their families again. Now no one knew for sure. A ditty sung at the time told the whole story:

> He who made it to Asunción
> [has already] finished with his mission.
> If López has stayed in the country,
> then it's because the Marquis wanted it that way.
> Whoever now marches to the Cordillera
> will have acted like a donkey.[107]