



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

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Councilor Paranhos spent the second half of 1869 trying to mold the various cliques of Paraguayan exiles into a provisional government beholden to Brazil. What he got in the triumvirate was hardly reassuring; the tense relation between the factions set the stage for political trouble in Paraguay well into the twentieth century. Paranhos had wanted stable lackeys and got squabbling, inconsistent courtiers instead.

Meanwhile, things in the interior were moving toward their expected end. López's stay at San Estanislao, though predictably brief, was long enough to uncover another "plot." Somewhere above Caraguatay a patrol chanced upon two Paraguayan men and a woman and placed them under arrest. They were very likely Allied spies. One of the men was shot down in an escape attempt, and the other two, when finally dragged before López at Santaní, openly cringed with fear. The Marshal had experienced increasingly fierce headaches during his retreat and had no patience for any dawdling.¹ The woman's face blanched and her voice grew atonal as she tried to speak. When she could not answer his questions, he lost his temper entirely, ordering Luis Caminos to beat every scrap of information from her. The flogging elicited a confession that the three individuals indeed worked for the Allies, and that they had made an agreement with an ensign of López's escort to rouse other members of that unit to murder the Marshal without further delay.

The ensign, who had been in very good odor with the Marshal, denied knowledge of any plot, but after suffering the cepo for a time, he started to denounce everyone in the escort. Eighty-six enlisted men were swiftly executed as traitors, along with sixteen officers. This included the commander of the escort, and his second, who died not because they had participated in the "plot," but because they had failed to uncover it. Each man was flogged to within inches of his life, and only then were they shot."²

If the count's army had not already sown sufficient dread among the Paraguayans, López's actions at San Estanislao certainly did. Soldiers in the Acá Verá and Acá Carayá escort regiments had always constituted a class apart—focused, inured to hardships, and utterly obedient to the Marshal. They had once looked so fine in their polished helmets, scarlet tunics, and high leather boots that they served López as gala reminders of Paris and his first days with Madame Lynch. These simple soldiers, whose devotion and loyalty had remained rock-solid during the worst of times, may not have been members of the perfidious elite that López hated so dramatically, but they had no way to insulate themselves as Paraguay unraveled. The Marshal personally attended all the executions that he had ordered—something that he had never done before. He watched as the bullets tore into the beardless peasant boys, and counted their corpses one by one. Now only thirty or forty remained alive.

Perhaps López's attendance at these events provided him with some sense of justice or relief, but it failed to check his anger. Any hint of dissension now sent the Marshal into a fury, causing him to rail against imaginary villains. He shouted that he had defended the *patria* through every campaign, and that in spite of all his sacrifices, there were Paraguayans that had turned on him. Those men who heard these outbursts prayed that he would somehow forget his anger. But it was not to be. On one occasion, his own bitterness left him humiliated and ashamed. Accused of defeatism, a certain lieutenant was lashed to death in the Marshal's presence, and before he fell unconscious, the man raised his voice plaintively. "Never forget, sir," he cried, "that there is a God whom we must all face on the Day of Judgment, and even Your Excellency may soon have to account for this act of injustice!" López must have felt shaken at the lieutenant's reference to the Almighty, and he slunk away to the little chapel to pray.

At the end of August, Paraguayan scouts brought word that the count had dispatched a large force up the Paraguay to a spot near Concepción, where the troops composed themselves into two new columns, mainly cavalry. Even as the count had postponed his pursuit from the south, these forces could assault San Estanislao from the west.⁴ López had no idea of how many troops were involved (there were at least six thousand in Concepción and another five in Rosario).⁵ But the rumor that General Câmara headed one column and General Victorino the other could not have reassured him, since both were known to be hard-fighting commanders.

Once again, López ordered his troops to break camp and retreat, this time towards Curuguaty. He left a small force in the rear to make a final round up of cattle. Surprisingly, the Paraguayan soldiers located fifteen hundred animals, but the troops driving them were intercepted by the Allies before the

herds reached Curuguaty and every head instead went south to supply Prince Gaston's army.6

The Marshal slipped across the Río Manduvirá in the second week of September. His was a demoralized and feeble force, no longer even plausibly military in appearance. At every step the soldiers retreated they had to look over their shoulders—not at their distant Brazilian pursuers, but rather at each other. Men who had known each other since Corumbá and Estero Bellaco bit their tongues and complained about nothing, even though their ulcerated feet made them ache with terrible pain.⁷ They hurried through the shallower sections of the Aguaracaty, a semi-inundated plain some four hundred square leagues in extent, the best route through which to move surreptitiously to the northeast. At one point the column halted in the mud for six days, during which time the men who had fled from Caaguy-yurú and the site of the fleet's immolation caught up with them.

López slept little and drank much, which caused his suspicion to grow to extremes. He accused everyone, forgave no one. He reassembled the old tribunals under Maíz and the other fiscales, who evidently felt so afraid for their own lives that they behaved with even more elaborate zeal than they had shown at San Fernando. Just as an addict needs more and more opium, the Marshal needed ever more traitors executed.

The fiscales might have believed the terror of 1868 was justified as a means to restore discipline. But it is unclear how they could justify such methods now. Hundreds of men were questioned, and nearly as many endured the whip, their backs lacerated into something unrecognizable as human flesh. In the end, sixty more individuals fell to the executioner's lance.

Meanwhile, several minor encounters took place between Allied scouts and Paraguayan troops guarding the western approaches to Curuguaty.8 On 20 September, Brazilian units from Concepción struck the Paraguayan rear guard, forcing the Marshal's men to abandon the field and all the civilian refugees they supposedly protected. This left open the way to San Joaquín, another tiny village that fell shortly afterwards.9

Via Crucis

López's remaining men—just over two thousand exhausted soldiers—had escorted a host of displaced civilians to a supposed refuge at Curuguaty. These people were the real victims of 1869: women, children, and old men staggering forward, uncared for, with little food and no hope, and yet essential to the Marshal's jejune claim that his cause was still synonymous with the Paraguayan nation. Malnutrition made it impossible for mothers to nurse their babies; despair and an intense experience of physical pain looked out from every face, and whenever a worn-out individual fell to the wayside, her companions lacked the

energy to help. Religion had failed these people. Nationalism had failed them. The dreams of glory, counterfeit though they may have been in 1864, had once sustained them. Now, the same mindset brought emptiness. Old men did not hesitate to steal a sliver of manioc from a child's mouth. Soldiers violated the women in their charge with little fear of punishment, sometimes promising them a handful of parched corn as compensation, sometimes offering nothing.

The women in the train of refugees were divided into two groups: residentas and destinadas. The former included members of families who remained faithful to the Marshal after the Allies took Asunción, and whom Luis Caminos had evacuated into the hill country to serve as laborers. Though little recompensed for their farm work at Azcurra, they had, in fact, provided a considerable portion of the rations eaten by soldiers at Piribebuy. Now that the provisional capital had fallen, however, they once again took to the road.

The destinadas, by contrast, included the wives and relatives of men who had putatively turned against López. Some were foreigners, though the majority were members of the old elite, the crème de la crème of old Paraguayan society. In earlier days, the appearance of such well-bred women would have attracted the notice of the throng, but now not a single one of them betrayed even a trace of affluence. Unlike Juliana Ynsfrán, they survived their tortures only to be sent into internal exile at one of several isolated villages. That some of the women were the Marshal's former lovers was a telling irony.

Several destinadas left memoirs of their experiences, including one appropriately subtitled Sufferings of a French Lady in Paraguay. The author, Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre, was the wife of a French distiller who had contrived to sit out the war as an inoffensive neutral but was instead swept up into the maelstrom of accusations at the time of Benigno's supposed conspiracy. The undertow of these charges invariably pulled Monsieur Lasserre down, and off he went in chains to San Fernando. His wife received orders to take her family to Areguá and then Caacupé, after having already abandoned homes in Asunción and Luque. Everywhere she went, she lost money and property to state officials, who abused her unceasingly with petty excises.¹⁰

When officials ordered Doña Dorotéa east to Yhú in January 1869, all her horses save one were confiscated by a thuggish sergeant who "had the authority to take from anybody his things, his poncho, in fact anything he chose, so that [they] ought to be grateful for his forbearance."11 Lasserre's mother rode the remaining animal and the other refugees, all of them ill with fever, made their way on foot.¹² When ordered north to Curuguaty in September, doña Dorotéa managed somehow to obtain a new oxcart, but her tribulations were just beginning:

We left Yhú at midnight and held out as long as we could through mud and across arroyos with only fifteen pounds of starch, one pound of black sugar, three pounds of grease, and a handful of salt ...but, after traveling several days to the Ybycuí pass we encountered a woman who sold us a small piece of meat. ... Towards eleven the next night several soldiers arrived, and ordered us to cross the arroyo, because if their officer found us, we should be lanced. ... López himself [had given] strict orders to kill all the women who lagged behind from fatigue. ... Thus we crossed the arroyo at one in the morning, [walking] along narrow paths through thick wood in total darkness. I kept falling into some very ugly holes ... and over the next several days the arroyos [grew ever more] swollen, and in some the water was up to our waists.13

On 27 September Lasserre reached Curuguaty, where she learned of her husband's execution the previous year.¹⁴ She also learned that the reign of terror had not yet spent itself, for even in Curuguaty charges were being made against senior functionaries. Hilario Marcó, the former police chief of Asunción, was flogged for supposedly seeking to orchestrate the escape of Venancio López and other members of the presidential family. Marcó was shot after six weeks as a warning to the López relatives, for whom the Marshal had another fate in mind.¹⁵

No one was safe. Lieutenant Colonel Centurión had spent nearly a month incapacitated with a high temperature and suppurating skin rashes, and had only heard about the new conspiracies from his orderly. One evening, when in particular pain, he received one of the Marshal's adjutants, who announced that López wished to see him. Filled with dread, Centurión struggled to present himself at the tent of his master, who beckoned him to take a seat beside Madame Lynch. Assuming the worst and shaking as much from fear as fever, he was handed the first of three cups of cognac. López then offered a friendly smile, and toasted the good health of "Colonel" Centurión, thereby announcing his promotion to full colonel. The man still could not stop shaking, but managed to mumble his gratitude for the honor bestowed. In the back of his mind, however, he worried that such favor carried with it a great many dangers.16

The destinadas understood the odd juxtaposition of brutality and festivity in Curuguaty. Madame Lasserre found the Paraguayan army intermingled with an unexpectedly large number of refugees, amounting to over three thousand individuals. As a complete surprise, government officers rode in and gave Lasserre and the others some meat from military stores. This food was welcome, and the residentas (and a few of the destinadas) made professions of thanks and loyalty to Marshal López. For their trouble, they received work assignments in fields just to the north near Ygatymí, which offered the prospect of regular food for the first time in months.17

Vague rumors that circulated throughout Paraguay held that the fighting would soon end. Councilor Paranhos and various Allied military officers had told their respective governments that the war had already concluded.¹⁸ The Count d'Eu, however, saw no wish to endorse such an inaccurate view. He had already dispatched Brazilian units to occupy Villarrica. This meant that López had to contemplate moving the army and all the refugees once again. He had already designated Curuguaty as his new headquarters, sent out search patrols to round up cattle, and ordered the tilling of the local fields in anticipation of a long stay.

Curuguaty, however, was not Luque, nor Piribebuy, nor even Caraguatay it was a tiny hamlet that could never sustain a flood of desperate newcomers. The local population consisted of rude farmers who occasionally supplemented their meager income by smuggling cattle across the border to Brazil. All had heard of Francisco Solano López, but none had ever seen him, and in the angry changeling who arrived among them they recognized something of what they expected of the nation's leader, as well as something they did not. They expressed readiness to obey him, as they would have done with his father, with Dr. Francia, or with some Bourbon representative. Mainly, however, they wanted him to leave.

The denizens of this remote district were mistrustful of all newcomers and habitually sided with the probable victor in whatever outside struggle impinged on their lives.¹⁹ Such a stance at this stage could only inflame the Marshal's temper. Knowing this, some of the country people took to their heels, and those who remained behind assumed the most abject pose imaginable. Yet it was hardly enough. Vice President Sánchez could no more comply with orders to obtain provisions from them than he could promise to make the place an impregnable bastion. Like the refugees, he had no idea of what to do next.

Over the next weeks the Allies made some progress reconnoitering the territories outside San Joaquín. They encountered no troops, just more displaced people and headless corpses strewn along paths like so much crow bait.²⁰ The war, it seems, had turned even more brutal. Taunay, who saw the cadavers, could never harden his heart to such appalling sights.²¹

On 11 October, advanced Allied units occupied San Estanislao, which they found desolated.²² Yhú fell two days later. And in southern Paraguay, the count's units destroyed the remaining Lopista bands one by one, obliterating the vestiges of the old government in those environs. López had by now given up all thought of a protracted guerrilla struggle against the Allies, their elimination of his forces in the south having effectively ended resistance everywhere save for the extreme northeast.

These successes had a positive impact. In Villarrica, the Paraguayans greeted the Brazilian conquerors with open arms. The Allies made a show of distributing foodstuffs, and then joined the local inhabitants in celebrating their liberation from López.²³ It was not obvious, however, whether the local Guaireños were welcoming the Allies as "liberators" (as some liberals argued), or merely as providers of food.

On 17 October the Paraguayans abandoned Curuguaty and made for Ygatymí. After Piribebuy, the Marshal had permitted some of his civilian supporters to withdraw to their homes. No longer. Now his soldiers drove forward all noncombatants like so many head of cattle. Any soldier who lacked a leather whip would tear a sapling from a nearby tree and bring it down with a will upon the back of anyone who tarried behind. Thus did the republic limp forward from one place of destitution to another.

For some of the boy-soldiers the indiscriminate brutality seemed like a game. As long as the cruelty of López focused on members of the Paraguayan elite, the guards viewed these peoples' discomfort with indifference, or perhaps with pleasure. But now the Marshal ordered that no Paraguayan be left behind alive, and to that end, he sent armed parties in all directions to search for stragglers. Some of the men in these parties themselves deserted, but most followed instructions. Whenever they encountered a group of civilians too numerous to drive back to the main column, they lanced them and moved on.

Thus, the helpless refugees were "forced to the severest kind of drudgery, while all of them were driven about through the wilderness, exposed by day to the scorching rays of the sun, with no shelter at night, and with only such food as the forest afforded." At night, vampire bats left telltale signs of their forays, bloodying animals in the train. There were also botflies ($\dot{u}ra$), which during their nocturnal flights secreted their eggs on mosquitos, which in turn would thrust them into the sleeping Paraguayans. Victims later suffered painful, even debilitating, lesions as the fly larvae hatched out and dug their way to the surface of the skin. 25

Dorotéa Lasserre and the other women could not avoid this round of torment. They had spent the previous fortnight in rural labor that had strained muscles but yielded nothing to eat. Hunger sent them foraging for green fruit, manioc, and honeycombs, while those few who still had jewelry to barter did so for miniscule quantities of food. The refugees numbered 2,014 when they started, and half perished before the war ended. Now the destinadas and residentas took to the trail again, their line of march having grown indistinct, with constantly shifting destinations.

It was always the same thing: *monte* and wetland, wetland and *monte*, an unending struggle with tangled thickets. The "guides" who led the refugees tried to orient themselves by moving along streambeds from clearing to clearing, but this was risky, for no one could tell when a storm would turn gullies into raging torrents and carry away any child whose step was unsure.

Food, of course, was irregular. Madame Lasserre convinced her companions to consume the stillborn fetus of a donkey by telling them that people ate horseflesh in France. In the end, the ravenous women at the animal's hide and

hooves as well. More commonly, the refugees subsisted on bitter oranges, or on the gritty heart of the pindó palmetto, which, when ground into flour, made a barely digestible pancake (or *mbeyú*).²⁷

The grim and pallid group rarely encountered signs of human habitation—a thatched hut occasionally, a patch of manioc, or an isolated orange grove at the end of a pasture, then nothing but forest. They saw no people. True enough, the Mbayá and Cainguá sometimes watched the procession pass. Their own knowledge of the conflict with the Triple Alliance was sketchy, not unlike that of most Europeans, who had heard of Paraguay, but could not place it on a map. For the Indigenous peoples, the war proved less tragic than mysterious, and they showed no sympathy for its victims, nor even much interest.²⁸

Rumor held that a few tiny communities lay ahead, somewhere amid the Mbaracayú hills. The destinadas now entered an area of superabundant green, where hundreds of rivulets drained not into the Paraguay but into the Alto Paraná. They could only pray to find some dry place, and, in their imagination, they regarded the rumored villages with a kind of awe, much as those in hell must long for purgatory. The column that included Madame Lasserre reached one such spot, Espadín, about a week's march from Curuguaty. This hamlet lay east of the Mbaracayú hills in Brazilian territory. It offered temporary sanctuary but little food. Lasserre and the others spent more than a month at Espadín where they stayed alive by eating donkey meat and oranges, while their children "walked about like living skeletons, catching lizards."29

Eventually even these meager provisions gave out. This left Lasserre to doubt the chances of survival:

No alternative seemed left to us save to die of starvation or to be lanced; we preferred giving ourselves to the Indians. We held a consultation and sent a deputation to the Indian tents to invite their chiefs to come and treat. It was a mad attempt—at nightfall more than two-hundred people left ... [but the guards eventually hunted all of them down]. ... As the entrance of the wood was so near I did not pay attention where we were going, and we kept going round and round, and lost ourselves among the weeds.³⁰

Doña Dorotéa succeeded in finding her mother the next morning, and together with a few refugees, opted to fall back on Espadín, where word reached them that the Brazilians had penetrated the district. The whole band then set out across the arroyos and woods to meet them, worried every step of the way that López's troops would butcher them before they got far. They walked two leagues in moonlight on the night of 24 December and reached the count's encampment the next afternoon. In this dash to meet their deliverers, the "ground [seemed] like fire, and the pain to the feet intolerable, but the anxiety to save [themselves] was still stronger."³¹

The count's adjutant general gave the women a ration of meat, salt, and *farinha*, and they congregated about the encampment, watching as other refugees straggled in. Many had died along the nameless trails, lost and disoriented in their final days. Some four hundred reached Curuguaty by the end of the month.³² This brought the total number of destinadas and residentas rescued by the Allies to around one thousand—the remnants of the old prewar elite, stripped of their rich apparel, and the poorest of peasant women all thankful to be alive.³³

Last of the Boy-Soldiers

By late October 1869 the cohesion that had once characterized the Marshal's army had largely dissolved, but despite their lack of purpose—or perhaps because of it—the troops continued northward across the Río Jejuí. During this time, the Count d'Eu visited Asunción to coordinate the campaign with Paranhos and the provisional government. He left the pursuit of López to General Câmara, who pressed his units to advance despite the hot weather—over a hundred degrees Fahrenheit.³⁴ Câmara emerged as an exemplary soldier, especially bold when under the eyes of a superior or when a dirty job had to be finished with dispatch. He was not a talkative man or a strategist like Porto Alegre or Caxias, but he was always attentive to his duties, a trait that served him well in this final push against López.

The total number of Brazilian troops in Paraguay at this moment approached some 25,000 *praças*, with 2,300 men at San Joaquín; 1,500 with Victorino; 8,000 under Osório in the vicinity of Rosario and moving toward Santaní; 9,450 with Prince Gaston at Caraguatay; 2,000 at Asunción; and around half that number at Humaitá. This left around 2,300 men marching to the northeast directly under Câmara's command. The Argentines still had 4,000 troops in Paraguay, but these had already been redeployed across the big river into the Chaco territory (which the national government in Buenos Aires coveted). One hundred nominally Uruguayan troops were also left. The Allies thus had far more troops than they needed to destroy López.

So long as Câmara kept on the move, the tattered remnants of the Paraguayan force could never rest. As the Marshal withdrew further into the woods, in Asunción the provisional government was testing the limits of its power. The triumvirs made modest attempts to raise revenues from the sutlers but these efforts were ineffective both in design and execution.

Foreign merchants found the hurly-burly of an uncontrolled market quite congenial, and they claimed every possible scrap of Allied patronage to keep things the way they were.³⁵ Unable to tax the only moneyed foreigners on the

true value of their businesses, the triumvirs remained powerless to improve the country's condition. Aware of their impotence and wanting to make at least a symbolic show of sovereignty, they spent the final months of 1869 setting up a lending library, complaining, and trying to raise a foreign loan. By feigning optimism in the face of so much misery, the triumvirs seemed to think that offering the public a thin reed of hope was healthier than offering nothing at all. Gaining legitimacy with both the councilor and the Paraguayan public could only happen when a constitutional convention oversaw the transition to a new government—and it might not happen even then. More importantly, the Brazilians still had to destroy the Marshal's army.

That the ancien régime still "functioned" in the distant forests had little direct impact on the provisional government, but its survival mattered a great deal to Paraguay. That the Marshal thought to take the offensive at this stage may seem hard to credit, but his creating a workshop at Ygatymi for repairing rifles suggested otherwise. He certainly had no intention of fleeing to Bolivia.³⁹ López had situated his shrinking column at Itanará-mí, a clearing equidistant between the two branches of the Río Jejuí, when word came that the Brazilians (and a few legionnaires) had attacked his rearguard force at Curuguaty. The children who composed the latter unit never stood a chance: several were shot down right away and the remainder wearily put up their hands.⁴⁰ When interrogated, they could only point to the northeast and declare that López was "mombyry-ité"—far, far away.

Indeed he was, still drinking European liqueurs, still eating fresh beef, still musing on victories that could not happen. Not only was the Marshal distant from the "front" in terms of miles, he had also distanced himself from the great political questions of the country. Instead, he fretted over desertions and the "plots" hatched against him. Novelists have tried to personalize the Paraguayan dilemma in 1869 by relating how López persecuted his own family.⁴¹ His cruelty may have amounted to a final burst of vindictiveness or perhaps he still sought to instill discipline and political cohesion by showing that no one was above the cause, not even his relatives.

Either way, the first to fall victim was Venancio, the onetime war minister. The government had previously accused him of sedition, but he earned a reprieve in November 1868 through his brother's surprising show of leniency. Now Venancio was a sick man, sometimes delirious, whom informants had fingered for trying to escape to the Allied lines. Worse still, according to information supplied by spies, Venancio had hatched a plot to kill the Marshal with the help of sisters Rafaela and Inocencia and their mother, Juana Pabla Carrillo.⁴²

It might seem odd that Marshal López had failed to shoot all four earlier, but he still seemed conflicted about how to deal with treacherous family members. He had to be careful; their role in Paraguay had once been nearly supreme and his treatment towards them now might send the wrong message. He wavered between ordering a firing squad and something less bloody though equally demonstrative. Washburn, now safe in the United States, related that López

called together his principal officers and asked them if he ought not to bring his mother to trial. Resquín and all the others, with the exception of Aveiro, answered that it was better not to proceed formally to the trial of the old lady, at which López became furious, and called them sycophants and flunkies, praising Aveiro highly for having said that his mother should be tried like any other criminal. He said that among them all Aveiro was his only friend.⁴³

The meaning of this statement was unmistakable, but the Marshal decided to forego the execution of his mother and siblings. He did make their lives miserable, however. He "processed" them, gave them nothing to eat, and berated them like common destinadas.⁴⁴ The three women, whose hands had never known calluses, survived by chewing cowhides.

Whenever the column halted for the evening, the Marshal had the women dragged from the old supply wagon that served as their conveyance. As he had done with Juliana Ynsfrán, he then had them whipped before his officers and men. López designated his "only friend" Aveiro to flog his unfortunate mother, who had defended Inocencia and Rafaela as she had once defended Benigno. ⁴⁵ Juana Pabla seemed ready-made for caricature: stout and ponderous, habitually complaining, and extravagantly generous, she seemed a tragedy-queen straight out of Dickens. In moments of pressure, however, she demonstrated the same resilience and stamina as other Paraguayan women. ⁴⁶

Colonel Aveiro took pleasure in conducting cruel interrogations, and never explicitly denied his role in Juana Pabla's torture. This left him a marginally more honest figure than Centurión, Falcón, or Maíz.⁴⁷ As for Venancio, he tried to save himself by accusing others, but succumbed either to pneumonia or to the thrust of a lance sometime in December.⁴⁸ His sisters and mother all survived the war, but could never afterwards suppress their flinching whenever they saw a coachman whip a slow-moving horse.

One person who also fell at this time was Pancha Garmendia, whose name Paraguayans have always linked to romance and national tragedy. Her beauty, it was said, had enraptured López before he became president but she persistently rejected his advances, gaining a measure of acclaim for holding out even during the worst stages of the *via crucis*. For her part, Madame Lynch had always shown contempt for any woman "don Pancho" found attractive, even (and especially) anyone who refused his advances. Any denial of the Marshal's demands or passions could provoke bad comment and such gossip could prove lethal in Paraguay. For this reason, as much as any other, the Marshal had Pancha arrested.

Pancha followed the destinadas to Espadín, and later accompanied the Paraguayan army in its many peregrinations. Wrapped in a shawl that once had been red with white fringe but had now faded into a dirty rose, she always seemed "active and serene" in the role that fate reserved for her. 49 Cholera and deprivation slowly turned her into a specter with sunken eyes. But even now the Marshal continued to show curiosity towards her, and on at least one occasion he invited her to sup at his dinner table alongside Madame Lynch. As talk of the poison plot began in mid-1869, however, Pancha found herself unexpectedly complicit. At her execution in December, she was so feeble from hunger that she could barely stand, and the lances pierced her body as if going through parchment.⁵⁰

Brutal and evocative though it was, the tale of Pancha Garmendia and the López women was no different in substance from that experienced by hundreds of anonymous men and women who have never found their poet. Hunger and disease had become their common attributes for many months. And yet the killing went on.

The Paraguayan army had successfully retreated since the fall of Piribebuy, and López had generally kept his units intact, but he could no longer do this with any confidence. It had been the Marshal's practice to deploy patrols at some distance from the main columns to provide rearguard functions and occasionally mount delaying actions.⁵¹ Later, with troop strength reduced, the patrols limited themselves to reconnaissance, and they also tracked down and killed any civilians who failed to keep pace or who had dared flee toward Allied lines. Indeed, Lopista executioners seemed to compete with Brazilian scouts to see who could kill the most civilians.⁵²

The command structure within these small patrols, as within the army as a whole, had always gone unquestioned. Now, however, with the Acá Carayá and Acá Verá shattered and loyal Lopistas dead or in chains, officers found it difficult to maintain control in units operating far from the main force. The soldiers that made up these units were as destitute and hungry as the civilians and, like them, apt to desert. On one occasion in mid-February, a party of Paraguayan medics fled to the Allied lines while on one of these patrols; among their number was Cirilo Solalinde, the medical orderly who had saved the Marshal from cholera.⁵³

López sternly reminded his men that the Allies had given no quarter in earlier engagements, but this warning found less resonance than before. 54 He then reduced the number of patrols and attempted to reinforce discipline within the main column by flogging anyone for any reason at any moment. Such measures simply increased military burdens, causing his men to suspect each other and look for excuses to take revenge. Instead of bringing the army together, the measures did the reverse.

The march north had little coherence. The Paraguayans pushed through brush that was more than simply thick. On all sides, green foliage wrapped itself like bunting around dead logs, and creepers worked their way up every lapacho to provide awnings for scores of dark streams. This wooded environment seemed to grow stranger and stranger and even the birds supposedly refused to light on its tallest trees, which towered above the soldiers like so many obelisks. ⁵⁵ The heat was oppressive, the air was filled with insects and the reek of vegetable fermentation.

Caraguatay and Curuguaty had been squalid sites but they were known villages. Now no one could say where the trail would lead. "The enemy is a mystery," recorded one Allied newspaper, and "his situation, his operations, and his numbers are all mysterious." These things seemed equally puzzling to the Marshal's men, who, to use the words of Chris Leuchars, "staggered on, further and further into the interior, both figuratively and literally away from civilization."

If any Allied leader could hasten military victory, and thereby terminate Paraguayan suffering, it was the Count d'Eu, but Gaston's position was hardly enviable. He received only intermittent aid from imperial officials in Rio. The count resented the government's insistence on running the war cheaply. A perfect military economy meant finding a balance in which the blows against López were devastating without stretching the Allied armies too far. As it was, Gaston faced a pervasive disenchantment with the Paraguayan imbroglio from within the war ministry, and no interest in greater expenditures. He had a surplus of manpower and a deficit of supplies. This frustrated his plans to end the campaign by Christmas.⁵⁸

The Allied troops broke off active pursuit because the lack of horses permitted only sporadic reconnaissance. Enemy deserters gave the Count d'Eu some information but never enough to act with any decisiveness in hunting down López. On the other hand, the Allied commander had no need for a full complement of troops to defeat such a weakened opponent. In late November, he withdrew units from Caraguatay to Rosario, leaving only three thousand men under General Câmara to probe around Ygatymí.

Over the next two months the Marshal's troops closed with Allied detachments on several occasions, but the confrontations were ephemeral. López continued to retreat and at the brink of the New Year, he arrived at a large clearing in the forest euphemistically called "Panadero" (the baker). There he set up camp together with la Madama, Vice President Sánchez, Generals Resquín and Caballero, and the remaining members of his government and army. The total number amounted to just over one thousand men—a tiny fraction of the force that once carried the Paraguayan flag to Corrientes, Rio Grande do Sul, and Mato Grosso. Several hundred refugees and residentas had remained with the army, and each day, the soldiers pounced on those who could not keep up, shoving them roughly forward, even children whose faces were rounded with kwashiorkor.

In earlier days, López had accurate military intelligence, but spies no longer had a way to pass from the Allied camps to his headquarters. The barest whisper

of an Allied incursion therefore sent the Marshal to his saddle to order a new retreat. Panadero might have offered his men a break in this respect but the paltry provisions available there gave out almost immediately. Then López learned of Brazilian troops advancing from the south. Unaware of the far more substantial force moving up from the west, he decided that, as the sick and wounded were slowing his progress, he ought to leave them at Panadero together with most of the women and the few big cannon still in his possession. The latter he hid in brambles, thinking to recover them later. Then he set off on 12 January 1870 with between six hundred and a thousand men, a few head of cattle, the smaller artillery pieces, and several bullock carts of money and plate. He moved northward across the Río Aguaray, then eastward towards the Alto Paraná.

The Paraguayans passed in close column over long expanses of spongy, water-logged terrain. In the distance rose the Mbaracayú hills, whose eastern slope the men skirted before veering into Brazilian territory for a week or two, following the Alto Paraná northward, and then recrossing back into Paraguay above the Río Ypané. The heat was like a stove—but this did not hinder the Marshal from imbibing a great deal of liquor.⁶³ His men drank water.

Despite some rumors that López might be heading for the Salto Guairá country of the Alto Paraná, it seemed more likely that his ultimate destination was Dourados, an abandoned Brazilian village more than a hundred miles north of Panadero. ⁶⁴ This site was some two hundred fifty miles from Concepción, which General Câmara had recently taken. Charged by the Count d'Eu with bringing down the enemy, Câmara had perhaps three thousand troops ready, and in the last days of January, they set out along a diagonal course towards Dourados. ⁶⁵ At the same time, another, somewhat smaller, force was deployed to come up the bush trail behind López. Câmara instructed this second force to avoid confrontations but keep close enough to harass the enemy as opportunity permitted. Whenever the Paraguayans gained Dourados, the two corps could come together to overwhelm the Marshal with sheer numbers.

Accordingly, General Câmara's columns advanced northward towards Bella Vista, a tiny outpost on the frontier previously occupied by a Brazilian brigade that guarded the northern bank of the Río Apa. 66 Câmara wanted to unite his army with those smaller units and move on to Dourados to intercept López. Before he reached Bella Vista, however, word came that the Paraguayans had veered away from Dourados and were moving westward along a path cut years earlier by *yerbateros*. Called the Picada de Chiriguelo, the trail led after some distance to an excellent campground set amid the Amambay highlands—Cerro Corã.

This site, whose apposite Guaraní name means "the corral of the hill country," had the shape of a natural bowl, Eden-like in its verdure and noteworthy for a large, stoneless pasture often described as a natural amphitheater.⁶⁷ It was surrounded by steep limestone hillocks more reminiscent of the *mogotes*

in Cuba's Pinar del Río province than the rolling Cordilleras of Piribebuy. In military terms, the ground should have been easy to defend, but the Marshal no longer had the manpower.

Running along the northern edge of the Cerro Corã was the Aquidabánniguí, a shallow, honey-colored tributary of its larger namesake. To the west, near the confluence with the main branch of the Aquidabán, lay another creek, the Tacuara, which was smaller still. Only two trails cut the expanse, one that followed the Picada de Chiriguelo along which the Paraguayans had come from the south, and the other running northeast toward Dourados. Like the picada, it was impenetrable at many points and would have to be cleared for the army to move carts along it.

Cerro Corã was a wild place, looking as if humanity had more or less passed it by, and even today, there are no towns or villages nearby to disturb its tranquility. It was not necessarily quiet, however, for the noises of howler monkeys provided unmistakable proof that nature regarded the Paraguayan soldiers as invaders just like the Brazilians.

The Marshal's unexpected arrival at this new encampment led General Câmara to reconfigure his attack.⁶⁸ He ordered the units at Bella Vista to make for Dourados, from where they would follow the track and shut off the northern outlet from Cerro Corã. The general himself hastened by forced marches to bottle up López from the opposite side, near the confluence with the Aquidabán. While still en route to this latter site, Câmara met with a Paraguayan deserter who told him that the Marshal knew nothing of the looming danger and still believed the Allies had yet to advance from Concepción. The Brazilian general smiled at this intelligence, and gave orders to redouble the pace of his march.

Cerro Corã

The Paraguayans needed a long repose. Nine hundred survivors had reached Cerro Corã, where they were essentially marooned by circumstances. They pitched their shabby tents in the usual uniform way at the main encampment, dug latrines, and kindled their cook fires to make the best of a fare of boiled cowhides and nettles. A few soldiers brought in game, which added protein to the mess but hardly enough to relieve the general want.

These Paraguayan soldiers may have been long on stoicism and short on words in earlier days, but life at Cerro Corã promised nothing more than continued fatigue and grumbling took energy that no one cared to expend. Officers and high-ranking civilian functionaries, better nourished than the rank and file, may have retained a bit of their previous bearing, but some worried that their actions at San Fernando, Concepción, and other places might soon bring a reckoning. Those who lacked López's death wish had to wonder if a future even existed.

The Marshal was powerless to prevent the disintegration of his army, but to keep going, to give the national struggle continued meaning, he clung to his religious faith and whatever historical precedents came to mind. He could never quite decide whether he was a Moses guiding his people through the wilderness, or an Alexander, who remained at the head of an ever-victorious army taking a long but necessary detour through the Syrian desert. In a conversation with Victor Silvero at about this time, López ruminated on the longterm historical impact of the Paraguayan campaign. Citing precedents from antiquity, he asserted that those who had fallen in battle were the real winners in war and that those who remained alive after the fighting deserved only pity. If the Paraguayan people had hitherto sacrificed themselves so selflessly in the struggle against the Triple Alliance, it was because they knew that he, as their commander, would face death alongside them. His people would achieve their apotheosis through him.⁶⁹

By leaving behind the wounded along with most of the women and children at Panadero, López at least reduced his concerns to the military sphere. He found, however, that he could not manipulate the troops with the ease he once had and that he needed to do something different. On the night of 25 February, therefore, he assembled his officers and men for an important ceremony. Around five hundred soldiers and the few women remaining at the main camp came to attention in a large semicircle. It had been a brutally hot day and all were presumably thankful for the relative coolness of the evening. The Marshal spoke to the group softly, eschewing for a change the rhetoric of glory and imminent victory.

As in the past, the men listened attentively, though now their faces appeared empty in the dying light of the campfires. López started by praising their steadfastness. He repeated a few old jokes at the expense of the enemy, and damned the empire as an affront to civilization. Then he got to the point, defining the contrast between vulgar militarism and national sacrifice:

You who have followed me from the beginning know that I, your chief, am ready to die together with the last of you on the final field of battle. That moment is nigh. You must know that the victor is the man who dies for a beautiful cause, not the one who remains alive at the scene of combat. We will all be reproached by the generation that emerges from this disaster, the generation that will take defeat into its soul like a poison. ... But generations to come will do us justice, acclaiming the grandeur of our immolation. I shall be mocked more than you. I will be the outcast of God and man, and buried beneath a mountain of ignominy. But ... I will rise from the well of slander, to rise ever higher in the eyes of our

countrymen, and at length become that which our history had always meant me to be.⁷¹

The address, which featured prophecies more ironic than López could have guessed, at least recognized the certainty of defeat. His assertion that the costs had been worthwhile may have sounded hollow, but when he stated that all those present shared a common destiny, that they were comrades whom history would honor in good time, there was an element of truth in his words.

López then awarded a new decoration to all those who had survived the sixmonth retreat from Piribebuy. Distributing colored ribbons in lieu of the medals themselves, López described the award's design in loving detail and noted how deserving every soldier was of Paraguay's acclamation. The presentation of this new medal provoked an instant reaction. The Marshal had loosened invisible chains and the crowd burst into sincere applause. "In all the history of the world," Cunninghame-Graham recorded, "no military order was instituted in stranger circumstances." True enough, and if we are to believe Centurión, the news brought weary smiles to all present. López then waved to his fatigued and famished soldiers, dismissed the assembly, and retired for the night together with Madame Lynch and the children.

The men took in this *coup de theatre* and contemplated the fate that had brought them to this camp. They chatted only a little, then stared at the heavens before laying down to a nervous sleep. The Marshal had already dispatched patrols to search for cattle and other provisions. One such unit, composed of forty-three men and commanded by General Caballero, had gone into Mato Grosso on a foraging expedition and had not been heard from in several days. As for the enemy, though the Brazilians were probably many days distant, the troops had already prepared some minor defenses. To the Paraguayan front lay the Aquidabán-niguí, with the Tacuara some three miles away on the extreme left. At the first waterway, the Marshal's men hid four small cannon to cover the ford leading to the main camp. At the second, two cannon and a sizable guard of infantry—several hundred strong—served as an outpost. The Paraguayans had little ammunition, and given the exhaustion of the men, their efforts at building defenses were necessarily limited. Even so, the soldiers hoped to accomplish something over the next days.

General Câmara did not let them have their way. An hour or so before dawn on 1 March, a small party of his Brazilian cavalrymen succeeded in crossing the Tacuara without being detected. At daybreak, they charged the little outpost and seized the cannon before the Marshal's men could open fire. The shocked Paraguayans immediately dispersed, but Câmara's troops chased them down. The Paraguayans then tried to set up an ambush between the two streams, but the Allied soldiers stormed the position before anyone could raise a general alarm. In the process, the Brazilians captured an officer who proved

very talkative.⁷⁷ Several soldiers who had accompanied the man managed to slip away around six in the morning and rush to López's side. Up to that moment, he had no idea that the enemy had violated his sanctuary. "To arms!" he screamed, his voice breaking, and the men assembled into defensive positions as cavalry charged them.⁷⁸ Rifle rounds were exchanged in the usual frenzied way, but most Paraguayans held only sabers and lances.

On previous occasions, as Allied soldiers seized the momentum from the Paraguayans, their commanders would delay their assault until the Marshal had either withdrawn or assembled sufficient troops to control the field. General Câmara was not much more imaginative in his tactics than his predecessors, but, unlike them, he was determined to prevent López's escape. Câmara hastened to the fight, bringing up a force of around two thousand men. The Brazilian infantry, one battalion of which was commanded by Major Floriano Peixoto (future president of Brazil), deployed along the length of the Aquidabán-niguí, and fired at the few gunners on the other side. Bugles sounded, and cavalry and infantry bounded across the water. The Brazilians seized the light cannon, and routed a force that arrived too late to reinforce the defense. Then, with lancers at the front, the infantry advanced onto the open ground where the Paraguayans had set up their tents. Four hundred of the Marshal's troops, drawn up now in a single column, tried to meet the Allied force. At the last instant, however, Brazilian lancers swept round the column in a prearranged maneuver that blocked the trail leading away from the ground.

This effectively closed the trap. Brazilian riflemen assembled into a skirmishing line after emerging from the ford leading to the encampment. Wasting not a moment, their commander charged in to prevent the Marshal's escape. Although López's soldiers had by now recovered from their shock, they still faced a far superior force. The Brazilian riflemen swept forward relentlessly, firing their weapons in a manner both mechanical and furious, and eventually they enveloped the malnourished defenders. After fifteen minutes, the Paraguayan units broke and ran, leaving some two hundred of their number dead.⁷⁹

Colonel Centurión tried to rouse the men to resistance but his horse took a hit and slipped, trapping the colonel underneath. As he struggled to get up, a Minié ball struck his cheek and splattered blood into his eyes so that he could barely see. He dragged himself to the far end of the camp as the bullets whizzed around. He felt groggy and uncertain of his footing. One of his final memories of the day was hearing López's familiar voice demanding to know who had abandoned the field, and being told by Panchito that it was the gravely wounded Centurión. 80

At this moment of confusion, the Marshal's mother, who could presumably still feel the welts on her back from Aveiro's lashing, harkened to her son. "Save me, Pancho!" she shouted, but he answered only with a hurried retort—"Trust to your sex, madam!"—and was gone. 81 The heartlessness of this response hid many

realities. The Marshal's view of his mother had always been complicated by jealousy and lack of warmth. She showed him more affection than he could find for her, and, just perhaps, at this moment of peril, his mind retreated to his youth and the whispered canards that he had been born a whoreson. Some claimed that López had already reserved a date for her with the firing squad, but instead now left the old woman to the clemency of the enemy as a greater humiliation.⁸²

Certainly all was pandemonium and López could find no way out. He shoved Madame Lynch and the children into a carriage and the little party set off south along the picada, hoping to rejoin the Marshal after the confusion subsided. Meanwhile, bullets continued to fly as the Brazilian soldiers reached the Marshal's tent, which astounded them with its damask lining, provisions, and luxuries.

As his family vanished down the trail, López dug his spurs into the flanks of his horse and, together with his staff and half a dozen officers, galloped furiously toward the Aquidabán-niguí. His eyes were fixed on the opposite bank.⁸³ All the men had their swords unsheathed but before they could gain the arroyo and the wood beyond, Brazilian fire cut them down. Dead also was Caminos, the Marshal's flatterer and aide-de-camp. General Resquín, the only senior Paraguayan riding a mule that day, fell to the ground when his animal slipped. Covered in mud, he tried to get to his feet and reach for his sword but he failed to get his fingers properly wrapped around the hilt. As the Brazilians approached, he raised his hands, and fell prisoner.⁸⁴

The Marshal had no intention of sharing his general's fate. He wheeled about for a moment and fled obliquely towards the arroyo as the sound of cavalry came up fast behind him. The ground suddenly grew soft under his horse's hooves, leading the animal to stumble. Sputtering with rage, López dropped from the saddle and sank knee-deep in the muck. He began to trudge across, but was thwarted in his course by the Brazilians, who called loudly for his surrender. They cursed him as a pig and a tyrant. Aveiro somehow caught up during this interchange and the Marshal screamed for him to "kill the monkeys." But it was too late. 85

The threat of immediate violence can make cowards courageous or brave men waver, and the Marshal's cowardice, which had been so obvious on so many previous occasions, now made way for the one brave act of his career. He kept pushing ahead, trying to follow Aveiro's lead, all to no avail. Six enemy cavalrymen galloped up from the near distance, ordering him to cast down his sword, and in response, he cursed them as darkies, and damned them for profaning the soil of Paraguay. Although the testimony is contradictory, López might have then taken a shot to the chest or was perhaps cut by a saber. ⁸⁶ In either case, however, he stood his ground. ⁸⁷ General Câmara rode up during the melee and, recognizing the enemy commander, added his own strained voice to

the clamor. He directed his men to hold fire and apprehend the Marshal, who continued to hurl insults at his pursuers as Colonel Aveiro got away.

The Brazilian government had offered a reward of 110 pounds sterling to whoever could bring the Marshal down. This enticement evidently proved too tempting for a fierce little Riograndense corporal named José Francisco Lacerda, who returned the profanity that López offered, then lunged forward on horseback. With all the skill of a picador—but none of the grace—he drove his lance into the Marshal's abdomen. The corporal, whom comrades had nicknamed "Frank the Devil," saw the pain he inflicted in the Marshal's face, and he took pleasure in the deed though it also caused him to wince just a bit.88

López's final moments, though iconic, remain obscure in their details. Some witnesses aver that he was shot in the chest but kept standing despite lance and bullet wounds. Others claim that he fell face first into the arroyo, rose in a final show of determination, and fell again. All agree that Câmara grew impatient and implored his tottering opponent to yield, but though the Paraguayan could not find the strength to rise, he did manage to summon a final measure of grit from deep inside his torn gut.89 He pursed his lips, spat, and cried the words of his own eulogy: "¡Muero con mi patria!" (I die with my country!).90

López coughed, blood gushing from his side, and slipped into unconsciousness, his final gulp of air as hungry for life as a baby's first breath. His anger, his vanity, and his caprices ebbed away in seconds. He was the Marshal no more—just another corpse whose blood mixed with the mud and water of the Aquidabán.

Afterwards

Were the story of the Triple Alliance War a Homeric epic, it would have ended here, with Francisco Solano López stubbornly choosing honor in death over humiliation in life. In reality, he died amidst great confusion. Not everyone at Cerro Corã had realized that the war's chief antagonist had met his end. A few Paraguayans kept fighting along the nearby perimeter and a few more who were at some distance were not privy to the event. General Caballero, for instance, was off searching for provisions in the Mato Grosso.

For their part, the Brazilians indulged in a rampage against the Paraguayan survivors. The elderly Vice President Sánchez, so often the butt of López's mockery, stumbled from his tent with saber in hand. As the Brazilian lancers cut him down, the old man looked far more courageous than his master. Indeed Sánchez died fighting, as did three colonels, a lieutenant colonel, and five military chaplains.91 A good many lesser officers and functionaries died as well, perhaps because the Allied commanders insisted that no member of the Marshal's government should escape alive.92

In a day full of poignant moments, perhaps the most poignant came when Brazilian cavalry caught up with Madame Lynch and her children. The Marshal and most of his men had died an hour or two earlier, leaving Allied troopers busily searching for stragglers. La Madama's carriage had made little or no progress down the Picada de Chiriguelo when Brazilian horsemen suddenly came galloping from behind. Their officer, a lieutenant colonel named Francisco Antonio Martins, rode at their head, and when he spotted the carriage, raised his voice to demand that the escort of boy-soldiers yield.⁹³

Now a full colonel in his father's service, fifteen-year-old Panchito bristled, and when Martins turned his back momentarily, his young adversary drew his sword and struck him slightly on the forearm. "Give up, little boy!" Martins exclaimed with contempt, raising a saber to ward off further blows. Madame Lynch added her own appeal in the form of a shriek, pleading from the carriage window for her son to give up his charade of resistance. "A Paraguayan colonel never surrenders!" Panchito cried out with bravado, echoing the vacuous sentiment that had guided the Marshal since 1864.

Swinging his weapon in the air and growling at the Brazilians, Panchito's performance elicited more amusement than fear or pity. When his hand went for a revolver, however, they lost patience. A lancer jutted forward from his saddle and ran Panchito through. His mother had just stepped down from her conveyance and was only three paces behind. "I'm an Englishwoman!" she cried, "Respect me!" Then she burst into tears, running forward to cradle the body of her firstborn. At this sight, her second son, the eleven-year-old José Félix, screamed uncontrollably. "Don't kill me! I'm a foreigner, the son of an Englishwoman!" Then he, too, was lanced—an utterly unnecessary and atrocious killing. With a look of absolute dismay, Madame Lynch stood erect but could find no words to convey the depths of her misery. She now took the place of all the Paraguayan women before her and contemplated her dead children.

If the Brazilians had orders to take no prisoners, they certainly failed to comply, for many key figures in the Marshal's entourage made it out of Cerro Corã as captives. Colonel Centurión had received some grudging help from one of the residentas, who hid him in a grass hut from where he witnessed the Allies bayonet two boy-soldiers who had tried to surrender. The colonel later crawled to a stand of trees, where he spent many hours until he was finally noticed and brought in. He had had nothing to drink save his own urine. Amazingly, Colonel Patricio Escobar, whose heroism had facilitated the retreat at Ypecuá in December 1868, also survived the final confrontation. So did Father Maíz, Generals Resquín and José María Delgado, Colonels Aveiro and Angel Moreno, an equal number of lieutenant colonels (including the faithful Correntino Victor Silvero), José Falcón, and other lesser members of government.

General Câmara ordered a litter constructed from saplings and had the Marshal's body ferried back to the main camp, where it lay on the ground for

several hours. During that time, medical personnel completed an autopsy.⁹⁷ Sentries prevented the cadaver from being profaned, either by rowdy Brazilian troopers or by Paraguayan women who "had taken to sacking the carts [and when they saw the Marshal] routed, wanted now to dance on his corpse." It supposedly "cost no small trouble to prevent them."98

By now, the second Brazilian column had arrived from the Chiriguelo, which brought the full Allied contingent on the field to around six thousand men. Each soldier wanted to view the bodies of López and Panchito, who had been brought back to the main camp along with Madame Lynch. Doña Juana Pabla and the López sisters stepped up but refused to exchange words with the grieving woman. Only the Marshal's mother showed any emotion, weeping bitterly for her son and grandsons.

As for Madame Lynch, she now assumed the pose of a self-possessed, gallant widow, anxious to protect her remaining children but otherwise unwilling to betray any loss of dignity. General Câmara and Colonel Ernesto Cunha de Mattos were touched by this show and accorded her every consideration. Having fought so ruthlessly, Câmara wanted to appear magnanimous, while Cunha de Mattos remembered la Madama's personal kindnesses to him when he was a prisoner of the Paraguayans.

The Brazilians permitted Lynch to retain her properties and go about camp unmolested. "Although it was known that she had with her an immense value in brilliants and other jewelry, nothing was taken from her carriage; on the contrary, a Brazilian guard protected her from violence."99 Cunha de Mattos acted as her escort on the return trip to Concepción. In placing himself at her orders, he hoped that fellow officers would endorse his scrupulous behavior, "for Brazilians were above [small-minded] suspicions."100 Madame Lynch charmed these men just as she had charmed McMahon, Cuverville, and many foreigners at Asunción. Her "blend of arrogance and fine courtesy" worked its magic one final time.101

Still dressed in Parisian finery and carrying herself like a tragic heroine, Lynch begged permission to bury López and Panchito at the campsite. The Brazilian commander conceded this, assigning soldiers to help her dig the shallow graves. Former minister Washburn claimed—not very convincingly—that Câmara also provided her with extra guards to protect her from the residentas, who "would undoubtedly have dug her eyes out with bodkins ... and thrust her mutilated body into the Aquidabán to become food for the alligators."102 The soldiers who helped Lynch must have felt vindicated, for the inhuman López was dead, and with him, all the aggression he had projected towards the empire. On the other hand, though they were hard men made harder by the war, they could not help but admire this handsome woman whose family they had just torn to shreds.¹⁰³ The interment was a rushed business: two holes dug into the soft earth, two bodies wrapped in white sheets, two simple wooden crosses, and

no indication of who lay beneath. For more than a generation neither mound nor tablet marked the burial site. 104

There were many other graves to dig at Cerro Corã and little time to waste. Câmara wished to return promptly to Concepción, where the Count d'Eu awaited details of the final engagement. The Riograndense general took with him some 244 Paraguayan prisoners, including those "precious trophies of the triumph," Madame Lynch and the López women. 105 The Allies had suffered a mere 7 men wounded on their side, while the Paraguayans lost over half their contingent of 500 defenders. Some were killed afterwards by the Brazilians, but many dashed into the bush and later joined the lines of refugees on the way to Asunción.

The Brazilians picked up many souvenirs of their victory, including López's sword, which Câmara sent on to Rio de Janeiro as a present for dom Pedro. Other men on the scene took various baubles—silver spurs, bombillas, etc. One man secured the Marshal's pocket watch. And Colonel José Vieira Couto de Magalhães, a bookish officer who later became Brazil's premier ethnographer, discovered in the Marshal's baggage a 1724 edition of Antonio Ruiz de Montoya's Arte de la lengua guaraní, which he kept as an object of study for many years.106

The train of prisoners that set off for the eleven-day journey to Concepción faced an unknown future. Most were glad that the war had ended, even though it meant a lengthy foreign occupation. Others worried about what kind of slavery the Brazilians had in mind for them—if it were to be hard labor alone, or if the emperor would parade them like caged animals before the public and shoot them when he tired of the game. The prisoners' notions of Paraguayan nationalism, which the Marshal had cultivated since the heady days of Curupayty, must have seemed unrecognizable by now. It was unclear that these people would ever see Asunción again.

As it turned out, neither Câmara nor the Count d'Eu had any intention of turning their high-ranking prisoners over to the summary justice of the triumvirs. 107 In fact, the Brazilians fraternized rather ostentatiously with their Lopista captives. Everyone took a fancy to Colonel Centurión, who quoted Shakespeare with ease and joked about his facial wound. The charming José Falcón was likewise admired and forgiven for having gotten involved with some shabby self-promoters.

And there were more tender links between victor and vanquished. Some claim that Inocencia López had a brief but passionate affair with General Câmara, who left her pregnant only days after his brother's death. Rafaela López definitely had a relation with Colonel Azevedo Pedra, for they married shortly thereafter and took up residence in Mato Grosso. For his part, Captain Teodoro Wanderley, a minor officer in the Brazilian command, became so enraptured with a daughter of Venancio that he stayed by her side not just to Concepción, but all the way to the Paraguayan capital.¹⁰⁸

Once they arrived at the Brazilian base, the ranking Paraguayans received orders to sign a statement denouncing the Marshal; most signed, then repudiated the declaration later. 109 Resquin, Aveiro, Maiz, and a few others were then held incommunicado aboard a Brazilian warship. For his part, Aveiro had somehow managed to slip away from Cerro Corã, but having nowhere to go, he eventually turned himself in to Câmara, who asked him sharply why he had not killed López when he had the chance. Aveiro responded with impudence, asking why he, Câmara, had failed to kill the emperor, who was the real author of the war. The Brazilian general let this remark pass, then asked if it were true that Aveiro had flogged the Marshal's mother; when the colonel admitted to the deed, citing orders, Câmara cut him off, telling the Paraguayan that he was lucky to be alive, since doña Juana Pabla had explicitly demanded his execution. Aveiro found enough courage to risk still more effrontery, saying that Juana Pabla's murderous intent towards him was hardly surprising in a woman who had tried to assassinate her own son. At this, Câmara shook his head and terminated the interview.110

The count, who learned of Câmara's victory on 4 March while en route from Rosario, signaled the imperial government that though he held several important prisoners, the Marshal had preferred death. The war was over, Prince Gaston announced with final assurance, and his men deserved praise and rest.

The celebrations that followed in the Allied camp were boisterous, but probably not as loud as those in Rio de Janeiro.¹¹¹ The feeling of jubilation—if that is the correct term—was far more subdued in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and the occupied Paraguayan capital. In the last of these three cities, little in the way of real celebration accompanied the war's end. The street poets of the capital, mostly Italians, were dancing on the great man's misfortune, but most Paraguayans simply felt relieved. Nearly every one of them had lost a son or a father.

La Regeneración, the newspaper of the Decoud faction, reflected the politics of both Paranhos and every Paraguayan liberal when it noted that the "1st of March will ever after mark the anniversary of freedom in Paraguay, sealed with the ignominious death of a monster who ruled bloodily and who exterminated her sons."112 Whether most Paraguayans endorsed the politics behind this sentiment was irrelevant; they still wandered the countryside in small groups looking for food. Gradually, they learned that the Allies had won and that the nation had to come to terms with that fact. The Asuncenos had already learned this lesson. For their part, they were too preoccupied with immediate needs to waste pity on any refugees—or on the nation.

In April, General Caballero and his men finally emerged from the bush. They had located only a few head of cattle on the Mato Grosso frontier and learned of the Marshal's death some three weeks after leaving his side. They

skirted the outlying districts of Dourados, where they heard that other stragglers had died in clashes with Brazilian soldiers who had offered no quarter.¹¹³ Whether this was true or not, Caballero had already decided to turn back to Concepción when his men spotted enemy horsemen in the distance. They later encountered other Allied cavalry as they neared the town. This time, when the enemy fired a few shots their way, Caballero threw up a white flag. His men were now almost completely naked, their tattered clothes having worn out during the final trek through the forests.

The balls that flew over their heads in this one-minute encounter were the last fired in the Triple Alliance War. The Allied cavalrymen disarmed the Paraguayan soldiers and gave them food and drink. As they had no clothing of their own to spare, the Brazilians gave their prisoners cowhides to cover themselves. Dressed like troglodytes, the last Lopista soldiers marched into captivity.

Caballero ultimately joined the other high-ranking prisoners who had been sent on to Rio de Janeiro. The majority of his officers and men obtained their release upon arrival in Concepción, and were permitted to join the droves of refugees wandering toward the capital.¹¹⁴ When they finally reached the city, few were thinking about war-making, self-sacrifice, Paraguayan nationalism, or loyalty to Marshal López. Heroism is not just about fighting and dying. Staying alive, too, requires bravery, and the Paraguayans needed every bit of courage to face the challenges of peace.