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Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim in the Berbice slave revolt of 1763-1764

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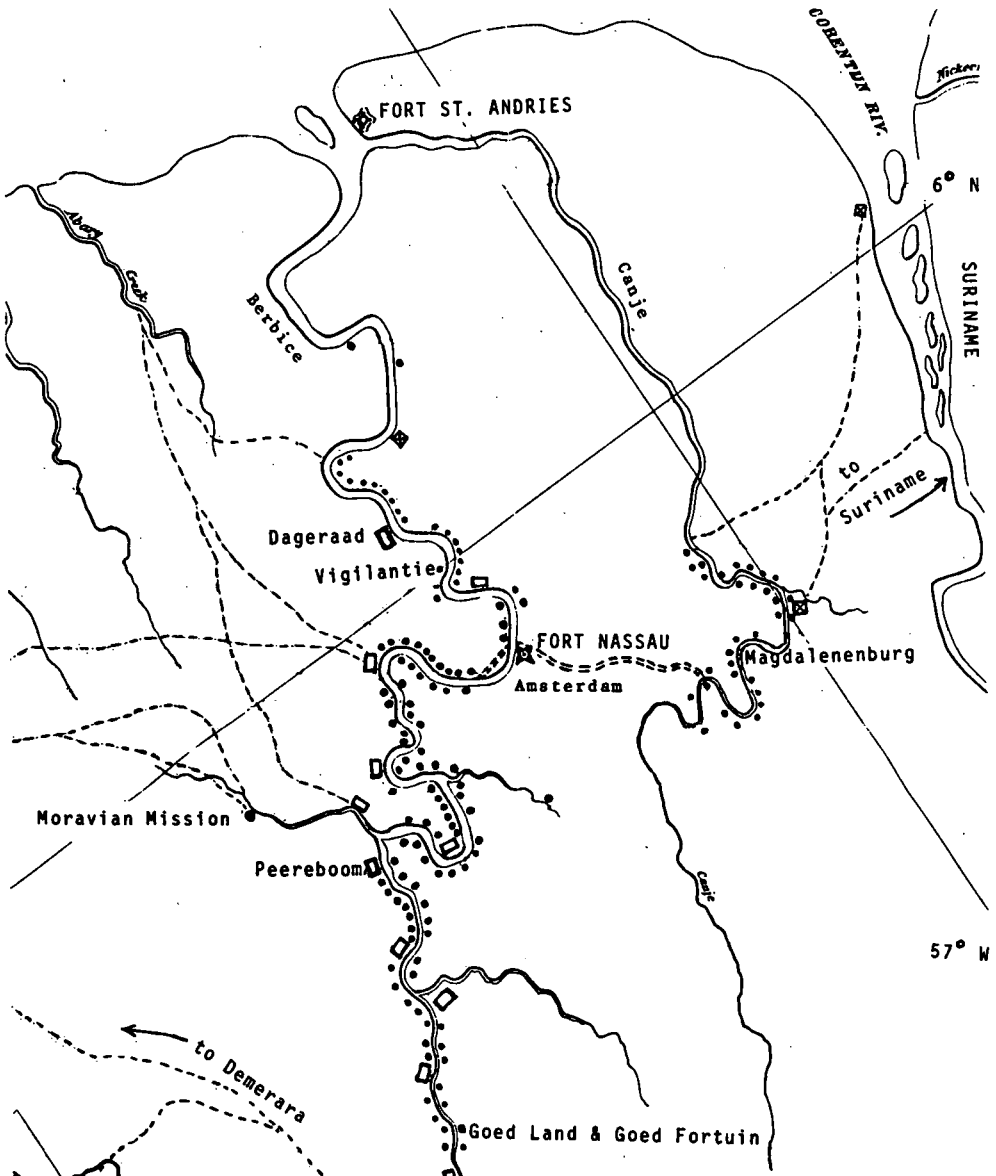
WOLFERT SIMON VAN HOOGENHEIM IN THE BERBICE SLAVE REVOLT OF 1763-1764

When almost the entire slave population rose up in 1763, the Dutch West Indian colony of Berbice was quickly overrun, deserted, and nearly abandoned. The story of its survival is inextricably connected with the character of its governor, Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim, whose courage and ingenuity prevented the colonists' being driven into the sea by the overwhelming multitude of rebel slaves, and through whose determined efforts the Dutch won back mile after mile of territory until their power was reestablished and the rebels were entirely crushed. Although his activities are mentioned in descriptions of the revolt, little is known about the man himself. Moreover, he appears only in accounts published in books now relatively rare (Hartsinck 1770; Dalton 1855; Netscher 1888; Rodway 1891-3).

Despite his crucial role in the Berbice revolt, Van Hoogenheim has received little attention. By way of contrast, his colonial neighbor, Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande, Commandeur of the West India Company's colonies Essequibo and Demerara (Berbice's western neighbors, and later, with Berbice, parts of British – later the Republic of – Guyana), received praise and biographical attention from the Hakluyt Society, in English, with a Dutch version of much of the same material, published at the beginning of this century (Harris and Villiers 1911; Villiers 1920). Storm's Berbice counterpart has remained nearly forgotten. His term of office was short (1760-1765) and he lacked illustrious family connections. Except for his military record, practically nothing was known about him. It is possible, however, to make a reconstruction of possibilities, based on his letters, other writings, and references to him.¹

Wolfert van Hoogenheim was born around 1730 in the eastern part of the present Netherlands. Although inconspicuous, his family was pros-

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SKETCH MAP OF BERBICE COLONY
 after de Veye (1764), Ottens (1740)
 and Netscher (1888).

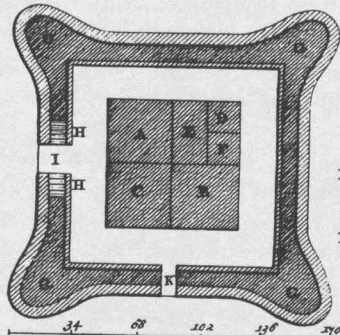
- private plantations
- Company plantations
- - - Indian paths
- ▣ Company outposts
- = = = Company path

perous enough to provide him with a good education. He wrote an educated hand, knew French, German, English, and Latin (DB 226; DB 135; Boxer 1965:155-157, 168), but was not trained for any trade or career other than the military (DB 63, f. 1v, 2r). Thus from about age 15, he took his place on the ladder that leads to officership, beginning as a cadet and rising to the rank of sub-lieutenant by or before 1760.² In that year the Board of Directors of the Berbice Company invited him to accept the appointment as Governor-General of their colony (DB 17, p. 411). Sometime in or before 1760 he married Henrietta Wilhelmina Otters, who was about twenty years old (DB 130, no. 45). Van Hoogenheim's term as colonial administrator was hard and unhealthy. After repeated requests for an honorable discharge from Company service, especially in the later years of his administration, he finally obtained permission to return to The Netherlands, where the Board of Directors required him to appear before several of their meetings to give account of his leadership during the revolt. Van Hoogenheim requested of the Directors reimbursement of money he claimed lost in or because of the revolt, plus the cost of his passage home, and – this was most important – a favorable recommendation to facilitate his subsequent employment. Although he had not suspected it while in Berbice, the Directors were not favorably disposed towards him. They denied him a recommendation and pared down his reimbursement to about half of the amount he wanted.³

Dispirited and sickly, Van Hoogenheim retired temporarily to Arnhem to recover (Netscher 1884:408; KHA G2 54 IA “Corte Memorie”). Probably some family members lived in Arnhem; he had already announced his intention to return to his family to mend his health when he returned to The Netherlands (DB 63, f. 2: letter to Directors, dated April 7, 1764). Entirely without job prospects and lacking sufficient remuneration, he was unlikely to have afforded recuperation at a place which was not free of charge. During the period of his recuperation he wrote a short description of the revolt (the “Corte Memorie”, KHA G2 54 I A) addressed to Lodewijk Ernst Duke of Brunswijk-Wolfenbüttel, who was regent for Willem V until 1766 and Field Marshall of the army. Van Brunswijk was favorably impressed: he arranged that Van Hoogenheim be reinstated in the army at the rank of Major. Eventually Van Hoogenheim rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and apparently retired in 1787. His place and date of death are unknown (Netscher 1888:408-409; *Naemregister* 1787).

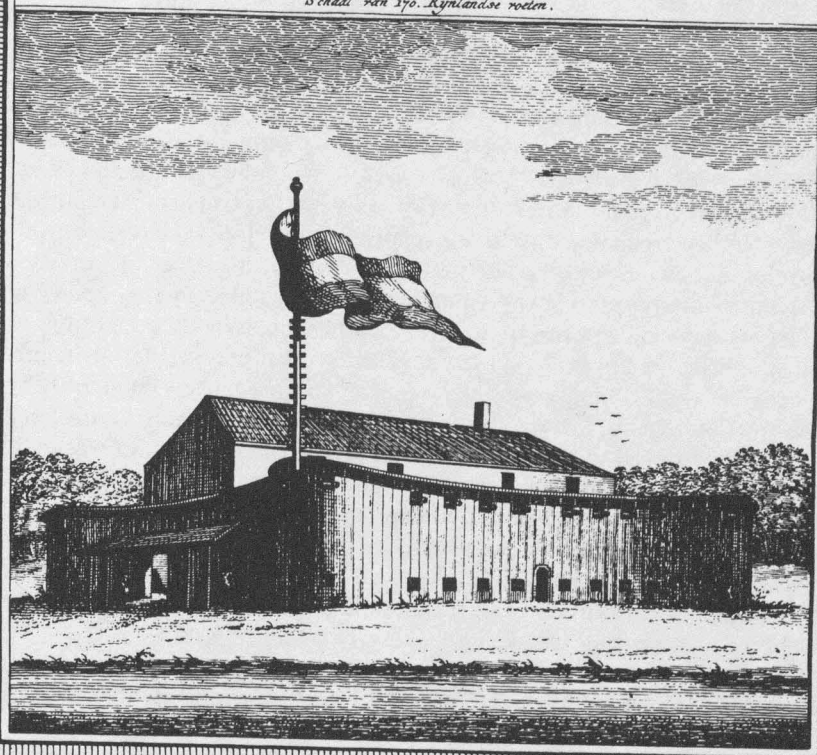
Before describing Van Hoogenheim's activities during the revolt, it is useful to review briefly the colony he entered as leader in 1760.⁴ Berbice was the colony of a small private company, not connected with the West India Company or with the Society of Suriname. Its relations with the WIC were limited after 1734 to the official WIC monopoly on the slave trade, which was not always observed strictly because the WIC never

- A. Carnisoens Kerk.
- B. Gouverneurs Wooning
- C. Raad Kamer.
- D. Secretary.
- E. Kombuis.
- F. Corps de Garde of -
Hoofst Wacht.



- G. Orondekte Gaandery, naar op het
Geschut geplamt was, en daar
onder de Casernen of -
Verdijfplaats der Militie.
- H. Trappen tot de Gaandery.
- I. Doort of ingang des Forts.
- K. Kijne deur of uitzigang.

34 68 102 136 170.
Schaal van 170. Ryplandsse voeten.



J. v. Schell, de vax.

HET FORT NASSAU OF DE COLONIE DE BERBICE

managed to provide enough to meet demand; and the payment of a nominal fee in lieu of allowing the WIC exclusive carrying rights to and from Berbice (Hartsinck 1770 I:358).

The colony was begun in 1626, when a Vlissingen merchant, Abraham van Pere, obtained a patent to colonize the area of the Berbice River. Its boundaries between Demerara and Suriname were the Abarij Creek at the northwest and the Corentijn River in the east (Hartsinck 1770 I: 280, 292-293; Netscher 1888:152) later in the seventeenth century. The colony was the property of the Van Pere family until 1712, when French privateers attacked and conquered the small settlement, exacting a ransom which the colonists referred to the owners. When the family refused to pay for what the French had destroyed or carried off, the debt was settled through sale of the colony to a group of Amsterdam merchants in 1714. In 1720 they sold shares, making it a joint-stock company, in which the mightiest shareholders made up the Board of Directors (Hartsinck 1770 I:300-330).

From the 1730's on, Berbice was promoted as a good place to emigrate; many people took their families there: wives, children, even parents. They established plantations which often required considerable capital, although the private plantations were by no means as capital-intensive as those run directly by the Berbice Company (Netscher 1888: 172). It is interesting to note this departure from the stereotyped image of the West Indian planter: the ne'er-do-well, the convict, the younger son of impoverished gentry, living in an all-male white society, taking his careless pleasures with slave concubines. In contrast, most of Berbice's private planters were farmer-immigrants, respectable in appearance at least, with enough money to make a show of success on their plantations, although never approaching the level of wealth enjoyed in Suriname. The Berbice Company was very particular in granting land only to planters who could show financial substance.⁵ Nor were European women restricted to the unrespectable few. Usually a planter was married and many had numerous legitimate offspring.⁶ It is true, however, that an impoverished element was present in Berbice society, among European men in the positions of clerks, craftsmen and soldiers, many of whom were entirely unqualified for their tasks, having been hired under fraudulent conditions or even kidnapped by press-gangs and sent to Berbice against their will.⁷

Van Hoogenheim's job as Governor-General placed him at the head of Berbice's local administration: the Council of Government (*Raad van Regering*), which also functioned as criminal court (*Raad van Politie en Crimineele Justitie*), had six of the most prominent planters as Councillors and the Governor as president. *Ex officio*, Van Hoogenheim also presided over the Civil Court (*Raad van Civiele Justitie*) with six other Councillors. Van Hoogenheim was assisted by various Company officials, of whom the most important was the General Supervisor of Com-

pany Plantations (*Opzigter-Generaal der Compagnie Plantagies*). Other important officials were the Public Prosecutor (*Raad Fiscaal*) and the Secretary-Treasurer (*Secretaris*), who headed a team of clerks and kept the record office (*Secretarie*). Important requests had to be sent to the Board of Directors in Amsterdam, and court decisions made in Berbice might be appealed in the Amsterdam Directors' meetings, or before the Estates General.

Although careful to investigate prospective planters' financial ability, the Berbice Company was dangerously tightfisted when it came to paying for the maintenance of its colony's defenses. Company soldiers, weapons, and forts were neglected through deliberate cheeseparing.⁸ There were never enough soldiers, and their rations were poor. They were a private army, of lesser physical quality than Dutch army regulars, and they quickly succumbed to the epidemic when it hit the colony in 1758. By the time Van Hoogenheim arrived, the weakened Europeans had neglected their own food sources, the provision grounds adjacent to every estate, and a steady process of pauperization was under way (DB 226, p. 180; DB 133, no. 67, f. 3.).

He, his wife, and their servants entered the colony via its only entrance, the mouth of the Berbice River (coastal tide flats and mangrove swamps made a coastal harbor impossible). They passed the coastal fortress, St. Andries, following the twisting course of the Berbice River upstream with the tide. From their boat they would have seen lush green tropical rain forest filled with the cries of monkeys and exotic birds. But the jungle was actually a mere strip along the riverbanks, concealing from sight the vast, sandy waste of savannah beyond it. For this reason, as well as for reasons of easy transport, the Dutch colonists drew their estate boundaries mainly along the banks of the Berbice and Canje rivers (the Canje is a smaller stream to the east). Soil near the rivers, which flooded with each tide, was sodden but fertile, and Dutch land-drainage skills were put to good use draining the land and keeping it under cultivation. Each plantation land grant was measured and marked by the Company surveyor and was required to fulfill strict drainage regulations (Hartsinck 1770 I:288; Netscher 1888:172; Dalton 1855 I:226-228). Most private planters had estates of 500 *akkers* (roughly corresponding to 500 English acres), planting as export crops the less capital-intensive cotton, coffee, and cacao.

By 1762 there were about 125 private plantations and the colony population was perhaps around 5,000. There were at least 346 Europeans, 244 Amerindian slaves, and 3,833 Negro slaves, plus Company officials, directors and European workers on Company plantations, and Company slaves at work on the Company plantations and at its forts and government institutions.⁹ Most of the Company's money was invested in sugar cultivation. Nine of its eleven plantations exported sugar (Hartsinck 1770 I: 330). The small amount of sugar grown by private planters

was consumed in the colony, especially in its distilled form, "kill-devil" (*kilduivel*, *kiltum*, raw rum, Netscher 1888:13), doled out to slaves, soldiers and sailors to "strengthen" them in heavy work or bad weather, or as a treat. In addition to its export crops, each plantation maintained provision grounds where food was grown for its slave and free inhabitants (Netscher 1888:173; DB 66, February 21, 1736).

Reaching Fort Nassau, the economic, social, and administrative center of the colony, the Van Hoogenheims encountered a settlement decimated by disease. From 1758 a "sickness" of vague description and epidemic proportion had raged uninterrupted throughout the area, killing more whites than blacks. In 1759 this "sickness" had killed the previous governor, Hendrik van Rijswijk, and many colony officials (Netscher 1888:189).

Despite the numerous provision grounds, neglect resulting from a shortage of manpower had allowed the food supply to drop dramatically by 1760. Van Hoogenheim immediately requested that emergency rations be sent from Holland by the Directors (DB 133 no. 67, f. 3.). He expanded work on existing provision grounds and started new ones (DB 18 p. 58). The government apparatus was confused and disorganized after the deaths of the former governor and leading officials as well as the clerks who had carried out day-to-day paperwork. As it would also be during the revolt, Van Hoogenheim's task was extensive and diverse. In addition, personal tragedy struck him on Christmas Day, 1760, when his young wife died after giving birth to a stillborn infant (DB 130 no. 45). Despite his apparent grief, he continued to work, doing the jobs of many who had died or were too sick to work.¹⁰

In 1762 the epidemic still showed no sign of abating. Berbice had been known as a lax, permissive colony where slaves were not treated strictly enough (Hartsinck 1770 I:368; KHA G2 54 IB). But conditions for slaves were steadily deteriorating, as they were for free people. Because so many were sick, the slaves who were well were required to work harder. Food was scarce. Slaves whose masters may have been habitually cruel experienced still crueller treatment, and even on the mildest of estates, planters felt the economic pinch and transmitted their distress to their slaves. Cruel punishments increased in frequency and intensity. By July 1762 a group of slaves decided to try to escape to freedom.

In July 1762, about 36 men and women from Laurens Kunckler's plantations "Goed Land" and "Goed Fortuin" saw their opportunity when Kunckler was absent from his estates while attending a meeting of the Council of Government. The slaves escaped into the jungle, taking with them all the arms and ammunition stored on Kunckler's property in his capacity as captain of the burgher militia. Although most of the runaways were captured by a military detachment sent out by Van Hoogenheim, the incident shocked many colonists. Rumors of an imminent slave revolt flourished. Van Hoogenheim, however, did not

believe the 1762 incident to be a prelude to greater activities (DB 133 no. 67 f. 3).

About February 23, 1763, slaves on the plantation "Magdalenenburg" in the Canje River settlement revolted. Other revolts followed quickly. Van Hoogenheim's first news of them arrived on February 28, when he began writing his Journal (DB 226). He sent it as an official report (which nevertheless had a very personal tone) in sporadic dispatches to the Directors in Amsterdam. Throughout the text of the Journal, it is clear that Van Hoogenheim believed that his dispatches were eagerly read immediately upon arrival in The Netherlands. Unfortunately for him and for the Board of Directors, this was not so. The Directors apparently first noticed the Journal in July of 1764 (DB 18, p. 196). Although they were usually prompt in answering letters from Berbice, they missed, through pure negligence, the detail and immediacy of Van Hoogenheim's reporting, which often resembles that of a war correspondent. When the Directors finally got around to reading Van Hoogenheim's Journal, the events he described had lost their relevance.

The following summary of the revolt serves as a background for the examination of Van Hoogenheim's character.¹¹ After the revolts in Canje, many plantations in the upriver Berbice area revolted. The slave rebels united under one leader, a West African-born slave cooper named Coffy. The whites who fled their estates in upper Berbice took refuge at the Company estate "Peereboom", where they fortified the director's house. About sixty men, women, and children were besieged there by rebel slaves. Hearing of their plight, Van Hoogenheim sent the well-manned and -armed slave ship "Adriana Petronella" upriver to relieve them (the slaver was in the Berbice River by chance at the time, having just delivered a consignment of new slaves). The ship never reached the beleaguered Europeans. Before it reached "Peereboom" it was held back by other colonists, who commandeered it to save themselves and their most prized possessions. On March 4th the rebels massacred most of the Europeans at "Peereboom", although a few escaped or were held as hostages by the rebels.¹² About this time, too, the panic-stricken residents of the Canje area fled to the coastal fort St. Andries and set up a shantytown there, hoping for transportation to Europe or to other colonies.

At Fort Nassau there were only eight healthy soldiers in the garrison. The fort was in such disrepair that it was feared that firing the cannon might collapse the walls they were mounted on, provided, of course, that the cannon were in a condition to be made to go off at all. Three merchant ships which happened to be present in the Berbice River were summoned to the fort for aid, but proved of little use. Having investigated the fort's condition and assessed the civilian inhabitants' indisposition to defend the colony (a reluctance which included most of the burgher militia), the Council of Government decided to spike the can-

non, set fire to the fort, and retreat to the coastal fort.

Conditions at Fort St. Andries were even worse: provisions were scarce, fresh water absent (detachments had to be sent out in boats to fetch it at great risk). The colonists who had fled there were surly and rebellious at best, and their outbursts of fighting, gluttony, drunkenness, and licentiousness were a daily annoyance.¹³ Only a minority of those attempting to leave the colony actually succeeded in boarding ships for The Netherlands or other destinations. The encampment around the St. Andries fort remained crowded, filthy, exposed to weather (the rainy season was just ending) and unfortified, defenseless before possible rebel attacks. The situation seemed very bleak until March 28, when reinforcements (100 men) arrived from Suriname. Shortly thereafter, Van Hoogenheim and the new soldiers reascended the Berbice River, establishing military headquarters at the Company plantation "Dageraad".

Upon arrival, they learned that the rebels had a large outpost at the neighboring plantation "Vigilantie", less than three hours' journey upriver, and another at the only partly demolished Fort Nassau. Almost at once (April 2) the rebels launched a large but unsuccessful attack on "Dageraad".

Meanwhile, in Essequibo and Demerara, Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande mustered large forces (1500 to 2000 warriors) of Carib Amerindians to prevent the revolt's spreading to bordering Demerara (KHA G 2 54 IA). Then, on March 3 and 4, reinforcements (154 soldiers plus an unspecified number of sailors) arrived from the island of St. Eustatius. Their arrival prevented a Dutch defeat on May 13, when the rebels mounted another large attack on "Dageraad". During this time, reports had arrived of disunity among the rebels: disagreements were chiefly between the African-born and the Creole slaves (slaves born in the colony). Apparently the African-born leader, Coffy, intended to set up an Akan-style kingdom, including keeping slaves – the Creoles.¹⁴ To this end he began a diplomatic correspondence with Van Hoogenheim, offering peace in exchange for a division of the colony. The upper Berbice River area would belong to the rebels, who would be free (except for their own slaves); lower Berbice would remain in the hands of the Dutch, and any slaveholding in the lower Berbice would be no business of the rebel state upriver. Aware of neighboring Suriname's experience with Maroon raiding, the Berbicians distrusted the proposal, but Van Hoogenheim responded carefully to each letter, inventing excuses to put off Coffy's proposals every time.¹⁵

Although Van Hoogenheim wrote to the Berbice Company Directors as soon as the revolt began, requesting help, his letters did not reach them until June 1763. Their response was characteristically stingy: they sent 50 soldiers along on two ordinary merchant vessels which were bound for the West Indies on ordinary business. Apparently Van

Hoogenheim had become used to such false economies, for he and the Council of Government petitioned the Estates General for help at the same time.¹⁶ In October 1763 they learned that the Estates General was planning a big "state" expedition to save Berbice and in the meantime (while the expedition was being outfitted) was sending three other warships which happened to be available (a total of 410 soldiers). These arrived in Berbice in late October and late November 1763.

On October 19, 1763, news arrived at "Dageraad" that a serious shift of power had occurred among the rebels. Internecine strife had culminated in a split between the two dominant African-born groups. Coffy and his followers had been deposed and Coffy had committed suicide. Supremacy had shifted from the "Delmina" (West African) group to the "Angola" or "Congo" (Central African) Negroes, led by Atta. The winning group was considerably less united than had been the case under Coffy's leadership. On November 11, using reinforcement troops including those from one of the warships sent by the Estates General, Van Hoogenheim undertook a combined reconnaissance/punitive expedition in armed ships up the Canje River. Rebels fled at its approach, burning plantations as they went. With the arrival of the rest of the ships at the end of November, the combined European force was able on December 18 to initiate a similar expedition up the Berbice River in four armed ships. Again the rebels fled, although some surrendered in response to shouted announcements from the ships in the "creole language" that they would be treated fairly if they gave themselves up (DB 226, p. 238).

The short rainy season (mid-December to the end of February) had now set in, inundating forest and savannah. Although under Coffy the rebels had managed to have enough food during the long rainy season (April through part of July), now the rebels were desperately short of food. Apparently Coffy's hierarchical division of labor had made it possible to keep the rebel force supplied: many Creole rebels complained of having been forced to work harder at food cultivation than they had as slaves of the whites (Hartsinck 1770 I:458-459; DB 226, pp. 92, 241, 248, 286, 299). It would seem that after Coffy's downfall there was a decline in organization and subsequent failure of the food supply (gathered through cultivation as well as through coordinated raiding and distribution of loot). Many rebels who surrendered were also ill with the epidemic as well as various tropical diseases. Native Africans apparently were not able to endure the Guyana^o jungle as well as they may have imagined. Many Creoles who gave themselves up were sick, starving, and unable to maintain an outdoor lifestyle they had never been accustomed to. It was no surprise that the arrival on January 1, 1764, of the "state" expedition's 600 soldiers made little difference to the revolt's eventual outcome.

By the end of 1763 the rebel forces had become entirely fragmented.

Some surrendered willingly, and most of the remainder were near defeat. For the most part, it was nature's harshness rather than European military prowess which led to the revolt's eventual failure. The "state" expedition's commander, Colonel Jan de Salve, established his headquarters at the partly-demolished Fort Nassau and administered the collection of a large number of rebels, sending out military detachments – often with ex-rebel guides¹⁷ – to find surrendering fugitives, or, not as often, to fight and capture rebels.

Throughout the course of the revolt the epidemic continued to diminish the European population, killing off new clerks and soldiers almost upon arrival.¹⁸ Van Hoogenheim did a tremendous amount of work – his own and that of others – even though he was intermittently sick with fever, severe headaches, failing eyesight, ulcerated legs, and other complaints (DB 226 *passim*; DB 135 no. 44, f.6v, 7r; DB 135 no. 59 f.3; DB 63 f.1v, 2r). Despairing of his ability to continue at his post, he began to long for dismissal from Company service, but his requests were repeatedly refused by the Board of Directors (DB 18, pp. 145-146, 177, 178, 190). Compared to the other Europeans, however, Van Hoogenheim seemed healthy.¹⁹ Probably, in accordance with the opinions he expressed in his writings, he ate wisely and avoided overindulgence in strong drink. It is also clear from his writings that until a replacement governor arrived he felt personally responsible for, and indispensable to, the survival of Berbice.

By mid-February 1764 about 1200 rebels had returned, many voluntarily, and more were to be collected or captured during the months to come. A comparatively small percentage (perhaps 6%) were executed for murder and/or arson.²⁰ By June 1764 the revolt was considered virtually crushed. A few rebels were still at large, but planters gradually returned to their estates when possible. On December 16, 1764, Van Hoogenheim issued a general announcement of amnesty to all remaining slaves, tried or untried, on condition that they henceforth serve obediently. Trials and executions ceased. The total number of ex-rebels recaptured and left alive was reported as 2600 (DB 18, p. 176). The "state" expedition, depleted by disease and finished with its task, departed just after Christmas, 1764, leaving behind an occupation force of about 100 men. The revolt definitely at an end, Van Hoogenheim ended his Journal on December 31, 1764. Although still sick and requesting replacement, he began the reconstruction of the colony. The Board of Directors finally granted him his dismissal pending the arrival of the new governor, Johannes Heijliger. Because his dismissal was subject to the condition that he train his successor in the job, Van Hoogenheim was obliged to remain in Berbice until May 28, 1765 (DB 137).

In his own writings and those of a few contemporaries who mentioned him, Van Hoogenheim's character emerges more vividly than in published accounts of the revolt, where he appears as little more than a cog

in the colonial military machine. He gives detailed accounts of his own activities and opinions in his Journal and letters, emphasizing the qualities he considers praiseworthy: honesty, sincerity, devotion to duty, respect for superiors, just authority over inferiors, fairness, tact, determination in the face of depressing circumstances, and a rather self-righteous piety. He was extremely self-conscious, perhaps obsessive, in his perception of his responsibility toward his patrons (the Berbice Company) and his subjects. As governor he perceived his duty to be the preservation of order in the government of the colony through direct, prompt action, tactful reconciliation, and just arbitration. When, after his governorship had ended, the Directors turned on him, he saw himself as persecuted, misunderstood. He considered himself to have practised the qualities he most admired; for his virtues he felt they not only omitted to reward him, but actually punished him.

At the beginning of Van Hoogenheim's service, the Directors had encouraged him to write to them openly and directly about the situation there. When the revolt broke out he continued to do so, and added comments about others' lack of the virtues he admired. He went so far as to apply this kind of candor to the Directors themselves, which undoubtedly contributed to their disfavor.

Financial difficulties probably increased the Directors' distaste for Van Hoogenheim's outspokenness. He was apparently unaware of the 1763 financial crisis in the Amsterdam bourse, for throughout the period of the revolt he harangued the Directors by letter about what they ought to be spending on their colony to protect and improve it. At the end of 1763 he took it upon himself to propose a complete rehabilitation plan for the colony and its inhabitants. The plan, which included tax exemptions, the building of better and more forts and earthworks, the retention of a 400-man occupation force for several years, and financial grants to ruined planters, would have cost the Berbice Company at least five million guilders. To strengthen his case he informed the Directors that he had sent a copy of the plan to the Estates General (KHA G 2 54 IB, letter December 18, 1763).

Confirmation of the accuracy of much of Van Hoogenheim's self-assessment can be found in other archival sources. Most prominent are the letters of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Douglas, a Scot in the service of the Dutch army, who was second in command to the "state" expedition. A friend and protégé of Count Willem Bentinck, Douglas wrote regularly throughout his tour of duty in Berbice. Douglas became very friendly with Van Hoogenheim, and often mentioned him in his letters to Bentinck. He invariably praised Van Hoogenheim's amiable disposition, devotion to duty, honesty, fairness, modesty, honor, and physical stamina, marvelling at his enormous capacity for work even while sick and in the midst of the terrifying circumstances of epidemic and revolt (KHA G2 54 IB).

The commander of the "state" expedition, Colonel Jan de Salve, also became friendly with Van Hoogenheim after an initial chill, due probably to the difference in age and (Van Hoogenheim's former) rank. From his post at Fort Nassau, De Salve wrote friendly letters to Van Hoogenheim, giving and requesting advice, carrying on a running discussion of policy. Often he begged Van Hoogenheim to visit him so that their discussions might take place in person. Robert Douglas's description of the relationship between Van Hoogenheim and De Salve indicates that the two men remained on good terms only because of Van Hoogenheim's unusual ability to deal tactfully with De Salve, whom Douglas characterized as capricious and arbitrary. Douglas himself was unable to get along as well with his commanding officer, and fear of his moodiness and unpredictability forced Douglas into an almost servile position. This may in turn have increased his admiration for Van Hoogenheim's ability to maintain an equal balance (KHA G2 54 IB, Douglas to Bentinck, January 2, 12 April, 1764). In his "Corte Memorie" Van Hoogenheim recalled that De Salve was not the easiest man to have to work with, and remarked that he was not sorry when De Salve finally left Berbice.

Of other military and naval officers sent to Berbice, it may be remarked that when Van Hoogenheim did not strike up a friendship with them immediately, he was able to manage sufficiently well through the use of diplomacy and tact, often not hesitating to sacrifice his own pride to obtain cooperation. Tact was also necessary in his dealings with the remaining planters and colonial officials. Prominent among these was Lodewijk Abbensets, a rich planter and leading member of the Council of Government. He was a rude, bossy, stubborn, arrogant man who seemed to enjoy terrorizing clerks and minor officials, threatening his fellow-colonists, and baiting the military officers through deliberate insolence. Whenever Van Hoogenheim was absent or ill, Abbensets seized the opportunity to try to undermine his authority locally and his position as official of the Berbice Company. Colonel de Salve had no patience with Abbensets, and upon hearing of his antics, especially his slanderous, seditious talk in Van Hoogenheim's absence, he urged that Van Hoogenheim drop the tactful approach and give Abbensets a taste of military discipline (DB 226, pp. 106-107, 545-546). Van Hoogenheim refrained, aware of the difficulties of dealing with free civilians. He remarked that he had had to put up with far more from the burghers than he would ever think of tolerating from soldiers, but in this case military standards could not be applied.

"Today I was sought by Secretary Van Fick concerning the new clerk, Kruijder, whom I had assigned lodging aboard the ship "Standvastigheid", there being no room for him ashore. Councillors Gillissen and Abbensets put him on night sentry duty after he had already spent a full day working in the record office. I considered this unreasonable, so that evening sent Sworn Clerk J.

de Vrij to inform the aforementioned councillors that I had not intended that that youngster take a watch aboard the ship, since he did his work during the day, and furthermore, that there were enough men on board to take the watch. But upon returning to shore Jan de Vrij reported that he had delivered the message and that Councillor Abbensets had bellowed, 'Anything whatever – WHATEVER comes on board here must bear arms and do his duty!' Such encounters from my own councillors have taken place here more than once since the outbreak of the revolt. They seem to do nothing but criticize and contradict everything. That man's haughtiness and obstinacy, with which he seeks to thwart everything, is becoming unbearable and deserves to be disciplined severely. Yet when I consider the sorry situation of the country and its inhabitants, I have always held back. Otherwise I would certainly not fail to take a very different tone with him. I have analysed the matter and for the sake of peace and unity have taken the most lenient course. Yet it seems now that things cannot improve or be rectified in such a way.'" (DB 226, p. 106, July 2, 1763.)

Throughout the rest of the revolt Van Hoogenheim continued to trade lenience for unity. Perhaps another leader would have done as De Salve had proposed, declaring martial law. It might have worked, but Van Hoogenheim feared that it would only precipitate the final variation on the decline of Dutch power in Berbice – the complete disintegration of the group of remaining colonists.

Van Hoogenheim's religious faith, which is evident in every letter he wrote and in practically every Journal entry of length, certainly may have provided a supportive background for his perseverance throughout the years of epidemic and revolt. It may provide the reason why he did not turn to drink, why he persisted in getting his job done while sick, and while daily new clerks and soldiers dropped from a sickness nobody understood; how he managed to continue to hope, to look ahead to a future of some kind instead of giving in to despair and living for the moment, like the riotous majority of the burghers he despised.

Besides the apparently sincere piety he expressed in his own writings, a valuable witness to this side of Van Hoogenheim's character was a Moravian Brethren missionary who mentioned him in letters home (Staehelin 1913-19 II:183-185, 188). Johannes M. Bambeys and his fiancée, both missionaries, visited the Berbice governmental center at Fort Nassau on December 10, 1760, to register their intention to marry on December 28. While at the fort, the pair met Van Hoogenheim and his wife Henrietta, who received them cordially. Bambeys was surprised and gratified to discover that Van Hoogenheim was very well-informed about the Moravians and wished them success in their mission work. On their wedding day, the Bambeys met Van Hoogenheim again, but this time he was alone, for Henrietta had died December 25. The Bambeys

offered their condolences, and Bambey described in his letter how, in tears, Van Hoogenheim wished them more happiness in their marriage than his own had brought.

According to what Van Hoogenheim told Bambey, he had become acquainted with the Moravian Brethren sect through numerous visits to their headquarters at Zeist while he was an officer in the army. It is important to point out that during the first few decades of the Moravians' Zeist settlement (from 1738) the group was considered heretical by the established Dutch Reformed clergy, who opposed it strenuously.²¹ It would have been unusual for any Dutch person, especially a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, as Van Hoogenheim was (Netscher 1888: 184, 394) to have visited them repeatedly. His visits testify to an unconventional interest in them. Moreover, his visits to Zeist were made during his furloughs, probably while he was stationed in 's Hertogenbosch, a round-trip of about 80 to 100 kilometers. Garrison life being what it was, he must have been an unusual soldier to have given up the free time he might otherwise have spent drinking, gambling, and whoring. However, despite his pious writings and his often outspoken disapproval of others' excesses, Van Hoogenheim was considered a good companion by the military officers and some of the planters, and in no place did his acquaintances describe him as oppressively virtuous.

Van Hoogenheim's life had, from his fifteenth year, been spent in the army. It is not surprising, then, to discern in his writings a strong military ethos. Protecting the weak, respect for higher authority while expecting respect and obedience from those under him, loyalty to comrades, patriotism, devotion to duty, perseverance in carrying out that duty even in the worst circumstances – all these were ideals which Van Hoogenheim seems to have embraced entirely. A certain harshness, an authoritarian grimness might be expectable from such an officer. But in Van Hoogenheim's case his stern code of conduct was softened in practice by his religious faith, particularly in the God of love and mercy preached by the Moravians. The following incident reflects both aspects of his character. The first group of reinforcements, troops from neighboring Suriname, roughnecks, idlers and exiles like the soldiers in Berbice, were near mutiny ostensibly over the quality of their rations. In a display of fairness, Van Hoogenheim sampled the bread and pronounced it good. Incensed to find that their riotousness had no real basis but was simply an attempt to push insubordination as far as it could go,

"I flew to my room to fetch my gun, intending to shoot at the feet of the man who had spoken as self-appointed leader. Such conduct and language is not to be tolerated from a soldier. I do not know how I was restrained, but God Almighty's Providence certainly had a hand in it." (DB 226, p. 174.)

The remorse Van Hoogenheim felt at the execution of leading rebels and the responsibility which constantly weighed on his mind concerning

all facets of life in the colony before, during, and after the revolt, may also have a partial basis in religious belief. If religious belief may account for the following remark, it is perhaps closer to the personal piety and generalized sympathy preached by the Moravian Brethren than to the sterner Dutch Reformed outlook.

“How painful it is for me to have to deal in such a way with human beings! One is often forced to do that which one would otherwise shrink from in horror. *Fiat Justitia Ne Pereat Mundus.*” (DB 226, pp. 408-409.)²²

The executions included hanging, breaking on the rack, burning at the stake, and slow fire. A more usual view of them was Robert Douglas’:

“... in general they [the rebels] show’d so little Concern, were so little mov’d, & seem’d so stupidly insensible, that contrary to what I thought would have happened, I & every Spectator present, were no more mov’d, than if we had seen Butchers employ’d in killing Cattle, nay, not so much.” (Douglas to Bentinck, KHA G2 54 IB, May 25, 1764.)

Of the spectators who were unmoved by the rebels’ sufferings, Douglas did not include Van Hoogenheim, whose concern was demonstrated in an incident Douglas described in the letter quoted above. Van Hoogenheim also reported the incident in his Journal. One of the rebels lay dying on the rack, all his limbs crushed by beating with an iron bar. He summoned all his strength to speak, cursing his master, who was among the spectators, accusing the master of having been the cause of the slave’s agony through having given cause for the revolt by mistreating his slaves. (The master had been notorious as one of the cruellest in the colony, who were listed by Coffy in his early letters as having caused the revolt.) The master began in turn to curse the Negro and tried to defend himself against the dying man’s accusation. Van Hoogenheim ordered that the white man be made to keep silent. This, however, was the extent of his intervention: meticulous in his adherence to the rule of law, he did not order the *coup de grace*, for it had not been included in the rebel’s sentence.

While he seems to have perceived himself as morally superior to most others in Berbice, Van Hoogenheim’s strong sense of responsibility may have its origins in a mixture of theology and military ethics. That he was personally worthy to lead and bound by duty to do so because of his worthiness, was possibly rooted in his official faith, whose Calvinist, predestinarian teaching included the idea of election and its concomitant success. It may also have derived from a lifetime of having seen duty done well and rewarded by increased responsibility – which in turn demanded that increased duty be carried out outstandingly. That it was mitigated by a strong dose of personal responsibility for sin or virtue, may show the influence of pietism, in particular, of the Moravian Brethren.

It may be concluded from the foregoing sketch of W. S. van Hoogenheim as he functioned in Berbice during the years 1760 to 1765, that strong beliefs supported him during his not always willing leadership of the Berbice Colony. His beliefs, whether founded upon a background of military ethics, pietistic religion, obsession with the leader role and its responsibilities, or simply a reasonableness born of experience in leading through tact and compromise, were apparently durable enough to sustain his will when his body failed him. The rarity of such unshakeable perseverance is to be seen in its contrast with the majority of the inhabitants of the colony, as well as the visitors in the form of merchant sea captains, sailors, and soldiers, who consistently broke down under the extended stress of the years of sickness and slave revolt.

NOTES

- 1 The main archival sources for studies of the revolt are present in the General State Archives, The Hague (Algemeen Rijksarchief, hereafter ARA), most prominently the records of the Berbice Company (Directie Berbice, hereafter DB). Other important pieces are present in the archives of the Dutch Royal House, The Hague (Koninklijk Huisarchief, hereafter KHA). Of the DB archive the piece used most here and by other writers on the revolt is W. S. van Hoogenheim's Journal, kept from the beginning of the revolt, February 28, 1763. My translation of this 645-page manuscript for the Republic of Guyana Ministry of Information and Culture in 1970-1972 led to further study of the social history of the Berbice colony during the Dutch period (ca. 1720-1795). The translations of Dutch citations in this article are mine. One contemporary writer quoted, Robert Douglas, wrote in English. Of the KHA documents, the longest single piece relevant to the revolt is Van Hoogenheim's 1765 report on the revolt addressed to the Duke of Brunswijk, "Corte Memorie vervattende een waaragtige en beknopte beschrijvinge van het gepasseerde in de Berbice in den jare 1763 met relatie tot de Revolte van de Negros Slaven, enz." (KHA G2 54 I A). I am grateful to Prof. M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, Prof. I. Schöffner, Prof. C. Fasseur and Dr. P. C. Emmer for advice in this work. The immensely important descriptions of Van Hoogenheim in Staehelin would have remained unknown to me were it not for Prof. R. Price's friendliness in drawing my attention to the book.
- 2 It should be pointed out that The Netherlands, like other European countries, drew upon the well-to-do families for its military and naval officers. C. R. Boxer pointed this out while stating that naval officers in the first half of the eighteenth century were of middle or working-class origin (Boxer 1965:79). In his later study of the eighteenth century Dutch navy, J. R. Bruyn showed Boxer's remark on naval officer social origins to be incorrect (they also came from the wealthy group) (Bruyn 1970:99). Several other factors show Van Hoogenheim's background to have been well-off, demonstrating at the same time that his family, and by implication many others, could be as well-to-do as they were unknown to later generations. Van Hoogenheim possessed two seals of different sizes, displaying a coat of arms. (These are noted in the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague, in the Collectie Musschart, no. 46, under the name Wolfert Simon van Hoogenheim.) No other Van Hoogenheims are listed with coats of arms, and the appearance of W. S. van Hoogenheim in the collection (which cannot pretend to completeness) may be explained by the fact that he held public office. The seals in the Musschart collection are casts of some found in the Directie Berbice archive: some examples appear in DB 134 nos. 23 and 40; DB 133 no. 72; and DB 134 no. 24. Foreign languages show up throughout the letters connected with Van

- Hoogenheim's governorship: examples are DB 135 nos. 36 and 108, and his Journal (DB 226), pp. 122, 172. Netscher gives a short, slightly incorrect account of Van Hoogenheim's military career, p. 189. Information concerning his later career is found in the army lists (*Naemregister*) deposited in the Dutch Royal Army Museum (Koninklijk Legermuseum "Generaal Hoefer"). I am grateful to my husband, Jeremy D. Bangs, for help in reading these lists.
- 3 Withholding the recommendation was tantamount to a direct condemnation of his activities and a clear warning to any future prospective employer. Deprived of this, even the full amount of money he requested would not be of much use. He had abandoned his army career to take up the governorship of Berbice. The Directors' minutes record no discussions of his case; mention is made only of the refusal of recommendation and the payment of H/fls. 2600 instead of the H/fls. 5375 claimed, after which Van Hoogenheim's case was to be considered completely and permanently closed.
 - 4 Van Hoogenheim swore the oath of office before the Estates General on April 4, 1760, and departed from Texel with his wife and servants aboard the "Wilhelmina Johanna" on September 7, 1760. See Netscher 1888:189 and DB 437.
 - 5 The Berbice Company required all prospective planters to show that they possessed sufficient wealth to buy enough slaves and equipment to make the estate a going concern within a year and a half. A house had to be erected and canals and sluices dug. On the waterfront dams had to be made to keep the tidal flow out. See DB 18 pp. 473-6 and Dalton 1855 I:226-228.
 - 6 Family migration can be noted throughout the registers of persons who left The Netherlands for Berbice 1720-1741 (DB 437 and 438). The prevalence of family life over single-male-dominated society is, however, not necessarily a sign of virtue. Contemporary visitors to Berbice remarked that it was an immoral place and that the epidemic and revolt were God's punishment. That the colonists' sins were never described may be interpreted variously, e.g.: (a) the sins were so widely known that description was unnecessary; (b) the sins were so bad that description was improper; (c) no knowledge of specific sins was present but the punishment implied them, etc. See especially DB 128; DB 226 pp. 139, 169; DB 127; KHA G2 54 I A: De Salve to Brunswijk Dec. 31, 1763; Van Rijssel and Texier to Governor Crommelin of Suriname, April 13, 1763; KHA G2 54 I B: Douglas to Bentinck, April 12, 1764.
 - 7 DB 135 no. 104. Corroborated in a letter from De Salve to Brunswijk, January 13, 1764, complaining that the soldiers supplied by the Berbice Company were usually deserters, lame men, and cripples, obtained by press-gangs. De Salve found the Amerindian warriors superior to European soldiers or burghers.
 - 8 Company neglect of forts, soldiers, etc. was no secret: DB 189, Van Hoogenheim to Directors, December 6, 1763; DB 226, pp. 3, 7-10; KHA G2 54 I A; Governor Crommelin of Suriname to the Society of Suriname, April 27, 1763; Jean de Coninck to Bentinck, July 23, 1763; KHA G2 54 I B: Bentinck to Lacoudzle in Amsterdam, unsigned letter extract dated August 3, 1763. Netscher also discusses it, pp. 179, 182.
 - 9 ARA Collectie Fagel 1824 no. 71; Netscher 1888:191. The figures are based on the head-tax levied on private planters in 1762. Netscher argues that the number of slaves was actually several hundreds higher due to the existence of a ten-year tax exemption for planters who began cultivation of new estates, and the fact that between 1762 and 1764 new shipments of slaves continued to arrive in the colony (many of these immediately joined the rebellion). Hence it is plausible that although a minority of the slaves remained "loyal" to their masters, about 4,000 rebelled. Estimates of the rebel fighting force varied according to observer, from 2000 to 4000 fighters, of whom 500 to 600 were reported to have guns (KHA G2 54 I A).
 - 10 Van Hoogenheim's letter to the Directors dated 2 January 1761 reveals his grief and zeal: the letter begins with a report on his activities getting the colony back to a normal state of affairs after the loss of so many members of its previous government. Van Hoogenheim then mentions his wife's death and breaks off with the apology that his

- grief makes it impossible for him to write more. He promises more in a later letter. So active was Van Hoogenheim that the Directors awarded him a bonus of H/fls. 600 in mid-1762 and the option to start his own plantation or take financial interest in an existing one (this was a privilege usually not open to Company officers, although the Directors awarded it now and then for good service). Although Van Hoogenheim replied with an application for land, he apparently did not ever start a plantation. See DB 18, pp. 4, 9 and Netscher 1888:180-181, 190, 393.
- 11 Netscher's report of the revolt is the most complete published, but similar reports whose differences or errors are not pertinent here, appear in Rodway, Dalton, and Hartsinck.
 - 12 The Peereboom massacre became well-known in The Netherlands, apparently symbolizing the terror of the Berbice catastrophe to the periodical- and pamphlet-reading public. The most piquant detail (apart from various atrocities and the grisly executions of rebel leaders) was the abduction of Sara George, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a planter, who was forced to be "wife" to the rebel leader Coffy. Amazingly, the girl managed to survive Coffy's downfall, escape the rebels and make her way back to the Dutch, and thence back to Europe. A scandal arose concerning the massacre because three members of the Council of Government were implicated in the detention of the slave ship which had been sent to relieve the siege. Blame was placed chiefly on Adriaan Gillissen, whose presumed relative Pieter Gillissen of Middelburg produced an "anonymous" pamphlet describing the incident and blaming unnamed others (Anon. 1763).
 - 13 Van Hoogenheim described the situation and condition of Fort St. Andries and its environs in his Journal (DB 226, pp. 17-18). Colonel J. de Salve also described it in a letter to Brunswijk, December 31, 1763 (KHA G2 54 I B). A memorandum from De Salve's Major-Engineer, F. J. de Veye, corroborates Van Hoogenheim's description of St. Andries as a fort in little more than name (KHA G2 54 I B, enclosure in letter De Salve to Brunswijk, January 13, 1764). Van Hoogenheim's criticisms of the burghers appear throughout his Journal, especially pp. 18, 19, 226, 528, 539. The view is fully supported by other observers, e.g. Captains Van Rijssel and Texier of the Suriname reinforcements in a letter to their governor (Crommelin), 13 April 1763 (KHA G2 54 I A); De Salve to Brunswijk, 31 December 1763 (KHA G2 54 I B).
 - 14 Nearly every account of West Indian plantation life mentions the enmity between Creole and "Saltwater" Negro slaves. In the Berbice revolt, only the Creoles themselves seem to have been surprised that the African-born Negroes mistreated them.
 - 15 Coffy's letters proposing a peace treaty and their answers were dictated to various scribes, including Sara George. Six early letters were published or mentioned by Netscher. Three more of Coffy's letters remained apparently unknown until the present research, as well as five answers from Van Hoogenheim, in the correspondence during the period April to August 1763. Van Hoogenheim described the letter exchange as a play for time when describing it later in his "Corte Memorie". He also presented it to the Directors as a play for time while the correspondence was going on. It is conceivable that he was less detached when he wrote the later letters - they concerned the possibility of ransoming the European girls Coffy was still keeping prisoner. For Suriname's experience with Maroon raids, see Müller 1973:21-50.
 - 16 KHA G2 54 I A, Governor and Council of Government of Berbice to Estates General, March 23, 1763: full report of the revolt, including the epidemic. Letter from the same to the same, April 7, 1763, reporting the arrival of reinforcements from Suriname and the April 2 battle.
 - 17 Akara and Gousari, two former rebel leaders under Coffy, surrendered after Coffy's downfall and later offered their services to De Salve as scouts and rebel-catchers. They were effective in persuading or forcing rebels to surrender. Akara and Gousari eventually earned themselves a pardon. Although Van Hoogenheim objected to their employment (DB 136 no. 136; DB 226, p. 584), the two ex-rebels were repeatedly employed by De Salve (Netscher 1888:405 gives them credit for the capture or

- persuasion of more than 600 rebels). De Salve's successor in the colony, Major Louis Henri Fourgeoud, also used them. Later, in 1765, Dutch army officers took Akara and Gousari to The Netherlands and made them drummers in De Salve's regiment. Still later the two were taken by Fougoud to Suriname to serve with the army sent there to fight Maroons in 1772 (Stedman 1796 I:123-4, 249, 267, 304; II:132).
- 18 As early as August 18, 1763, Van Hoogenheim estimated that one-third of the European force had died of the epidemic, one-third was too sick to do anything at all, and the rest too few to defend the colony (DB 226, p. 139). Later (December 17, 1763), in a letter to the Directors, Van Hoogenheim and the Council of Government remarked that although it was the healthiest season of the year in Berbice, still there were fewer than ninety healthy soldiers present, including those sent from Suriname, but not counting forty stationed in Canje (KHA G2 54 I B).
 - 19 In a letter to Bentinck dated January 2, 1764, Douglas remarked that "Every Body speaks of his Conduct with great praises, & He is very well, even in the midst of the most pestilential Sickness . . . sweeping away great Numbers . . . a more formidable Enemy than all the Negroes . . ." (KHA G2 54 I B).
 - 20 DB 226, pp. 346, 408, 466, 640. Executions in March, April, June and December, 1764, totalled 124. No minors were executed.
 - 21 J. Hartog gives a description of the prevailing antipathy towards Herrnhuters (Moravian Brethren) (Hartog 1890:235-238). An apocryphal story about Van Hoogenheim's close connection with the Herrnhuters is related by Wolbers: Van Hoogenheim supposedly converted Suriname's Governor Jan Nepveu from an anti-Herrnhuter stance to toleration and support of the Herrnhuters in Suriname in the period after the Berbice revolt while Van Hoogenheim was living in Suriname (this never happened) (Wolbers 1861:358).
 - 22 *Fiat Justitia Ne Pereat Mundus*, or "let justice be done so that the world not perish", is a variant on the Latin tag *Fiat Justitia (et) pereat mundus*, "justice must be done even though the world perish because of it" or "justice at all costs", which was the motto of the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand I (1556-1564). Van Hoogenheim's use of the variant (it was not original) shows his attitude towards the preservation of the fabric of society.

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