The Castillo de San Fernando de Omoa: The History of a Fiasco

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The concept behind the fort of San Fernando de Omoa grew from the unrest caused by pirates along the coasts of Central America in the 17th and 18th centuries. The poor condition of the Caribbean defenses resulted partly because Spain did not know how to deal with the pirates. The latter did not have very much strength, and changed tactics as often as the Spaniards did. Several military strategists, including the Count of Aranda, Juan Bautista Antonelli, and apparently, Luis Díez Navarro, recommended forts—in the case of this study, San Fernando de Omoa—to serve as bases and safe ports from which fleets might seek out and fight aggressively against the pirates, and later the British Navy. But the Spanish Crown, with its paternalistic and parsimonious theories, did not follow a consistent plan during the construction of the system, and ended by arming and manning Omoa defensively: no fleet
ever complemented the defense of the fort. For that reason Omoa fell at the first attempt by an enemy to take it.

This study explains the background to this specific case of Omoa, then provides a chronological overview of the construction period. Besides an analysis of strategic value, it mentions the commercial activity during the construction period, and analyses any influence this activity could have had on the planning and construction and eventual use of the fort. A chapter is devoted to the use of Indian and black slave labor during the construction period.

Materials found especially useful during the research include the Annual Register, in the Loma Linda University, La Sierra Campus library; the unpublished "Historia" of Rubio Sánchez at the Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala which the author so graciously made available from his personal library; Manuel Zapatero's Organization of American States-funded technical assessment of the fort, found in the Instituto de Geografía e Historia in Honduras (IHAH); the long and enjoyable chats with Víctor Cruz Reyes, research director at IHAH; Mario Argueta's article on the Indian labor at the fort, in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras library; and finally, a visit to photograph the fort itself.
LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
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THE CASTILLO DE SAN FERNANDO DE OMOA:
THE HISTORY OF A FIASCO
by
James L. Zackrison

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Chapter One: The Colonial Background

The reign of Carlos I witnessed an awkward situation in Spain: increasing expansion into an unprecedented type of colonialism left Spain weak yet eager. With its economy bolstered by the increasing influx of gold and silver from the colonies, Spain had overextended both in manpower and expenditures far beyond its capacity to keep up. Though increased in power and prestige in Europe, her enemies—England, France, and Holland—struck at the American colonies in an attempt to weaken Spain's position in Europe. And strike they did with a vengeance: by the mid-1500's pirates had attacked and looted Puerto Rico, Cartagena de Indias, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and the Spanish Main at least once each. The biggest difficulty came from incursions in the Caribbean: privateers and buccaneers dominated the Gulf of Mexico for approximately twenty years, from 1665 to 1685, during which time no seaport had any safety from their pillaging.¹

Defending the Panamanian isthmus posed a particularly grave problem. The existing defensive system included forts at Portobelo, Santiago, San Felipe, and San Gerónimo in the north; Chagres had a small garrison. On the south coast, only Panama City had any fortification, unless a small rampart at Chepó could be counted. Only 790 men
defended the strip of land over which the wealth of the Incas passed on its way to Spain.²

English privateers and buccaneers, whether under royal license or not, began raiding the Spanish Caribbean during Mary Tudor's reign, but their trips increased when Elizabeth took over, as she did not restrict them. During the early years, most pirate bands worked alone, using one vessel to fight from, though they usually took along an oared pinnace, in case they were becalmed.³ But after 1552, pirates began joining together in small squadrons. At first they had worked as legitimate traders, but after hearing how Spain treated John Hawkins, many decided that piracy would be the only profitable trade in the Caribbean. Spain, following its policy of total dominion, defined as a pirate anyone sailing in the Caribbean without a license, and treated them as such. Carlos II, on November 14, 1690, issued a Royal Decree ordering all captured pirate officers (corporal through captain) summarily hung. Enlisted pirates of no rank would be sentenced to life in the galleys.⁴

Roland Hussey points out that Spain could not stop these pirates, but because the pillage of small American towns did not at any time hurt the economy of the Iberian Peninsula, not much had been done about the problem.⁵ In later years the situation became so bad that Governor Francisco de Parga of Honduras could not safely approach
the north shores of his province—even with the company of 150 soldiers.6

To all appearances, Elizabeth I could not stop the English pirates either, though she actually may have encouraged—and sponsored—some of them. But Felipe II allowed himself to be fooled by appearances, and decided that diplomatic pressure—not aggressive warfare—provided the best policy. That may be why he insisted private investors finance any military buildup in the Caribbean. He did send the Conde de Feria to the English government to protest—unsuccessfully—Henry Stranke’s and William Willfort’s atrocities. Fernández Alvarez states that shortly after this protest, Elizabeth armed over 300 ships to combat future crime of this sort—though the Spanish believed they sailed for more piracy.7 Then in 1561 a British squadron did equip to counter buccaneering, and Elizabeth ordered all merchant ships to disarm. Felipe II’s policy of diplomacy seemed to be working.

The pirates did not alone profit from Spain’s chaotic defense policies. The British government entered the scene also: as early as 1665 Oliver Cromwell sent an expedition to the Caribbean which, though badly defeated at Santo Domingo, successfully captured Jamaica. Spain, too weak to retaliate, allowed Jamaica to remain in British hands, after several half-hearted forays to retake it failed.
This expedition of Cromwell's formed part of his "Western Design" to take over Panama and the rest of Central America in an effort to strangle Spain's hold on America. The plan never materialized further than the one expedition to Jamaica, but this toe-hold provided an unforeseen result: in 1667 Spain signed a treaty in Madrid, pledging friendship and agreeing to accept British trade in certain ports of America. Three years later, in an even more significant agreement--the Second Treaty of Madrid--Spain recognized the right of countries other than itself and Portugal to colonize America. Britain could legally keep its positions in the Caribbean and on the North American continent—which it had all intentions of doing anyway. Recognizing its holdings as something worth maintaining, Britain began building up these settlements, especially Jamaica and the Belize logwood cutting camps.

The conquest of Jamaica gave the British forces an excellent base for buccaneering in the Caribbean. Belize became the next base, though it had been occupied for many years previously: woodcutters had already taken over what they called "Campeachy" in 1659, and eleven years later Spain finally acknowledged their right to work in the area, after trying many times to dislodge the intruders. In the 1680s, the British lost all but a small area in Belize to armed Spanish colonists, though they had entrenched well. Spain never really accepted the woodcutters' right to
remain, though these, and the British Crown, adamantly insisted on it:

in 1784, a commission from the Crown of Spain was authorized "to make a formal delivery to the British nation of the lands allotted for the cutting of logwood, &c." It is necessary to state this explicitly, because many persons are not only ignorant whether Honduras is an island or part of the continent, but very many, who are aware of the position of the settlements, think the British have merely a right to the logwood and mahogany cutting in the Bay of Honduras, and that it is not a territorial occupancy of the British Crown, which, in fact, it is, as much as Jamaica or any other settlement.9

Because of the nature of the Spanish conquest, the north coast of Central America—having no great apparent mineral wealth—received sparse settlement, and consequently remained unprotected. Several British groups attempted to take advantage of this. One of the most formal, if least successful, came to be known as William Patterson's New Caledonia colony of Darién, in 1698. Two years after its demise, Governor Díaz Pimienta of Cartagena dislodged a second attempt by the British to colonize the Darién area.10

Some fortification seemed necessary to the Spaniards, but on the whole this remained inadequate, and Dutch, British, and French corsairs made the area unsafe to inhabit. In 1643 Trujillo fell to Dutch pirates, though it had a small fort with 17 heavy guns and several smaller pieces.11 Spanish settlers began asking Spain to send
military governors to the Audiencias, to help with the defense of the colonies. They did not like the almost daily occurrences involving foreign pirates. Spanish authorities objected to British encroachments and sent both armies and ships when colonists and woodcutters alike appealed to their respective governments for aid. Don José Vázquez de Prego, Captain-general of Guatemala in 1752, issued several successful orders to force the British to evacuate their settlements in Belize. During the next few years the woodcutters lost all but a couple of positions, like the fort at Poya, on Río Tinto.\textsuperscript{12}

The Peace of Paris, signed on February 10, 1763, gave Britain the right to maintain logwood camps in return for an agreement to demolish any fortifications built in the disputed areas. Spain agreed to not disturb these settlements, allowing the baymen to build houses and magazines (warehouses).\textsuperscript{13} Britain subscribed to a foreign policy dictating that any attack on a Spanish colony really did not mean enmity with Spain,\textsuperscript{14} though they realized the point could not be pushed: the baymen were ordered to destroy their forts and lay no permanent claim on the land. But Spanish colonists could not be so easily satisfied—they realized the English had never given up their intentions and claims on Valis (Belize), and so continued to harass the woodcutters.\textsuperscript{15}
Spain needed a system of defense to solve the problem, if only to calm its citizens in the colonies. The question of how to establish one divided military and civilian theorists into two schools of thought: those for aggressive, open warfare, and those for passive, defensive warfare. The former advocated a line of forts to arm and supply a navy to sail and search out the pirates, destroying their base ports. They recognized in their enemies not an organized force with one headquarters and leader, but rather a disjointed bunch of individuals with one purpose. A defensive posture would only treat the symptoms, preventing attacks at specific locations. But an aggressive posture could eliminate the danger of any attack by destroying the pirates before they could do any damage. The second school of thought saw such a theory as dangerous, for it left the coasts basically undefended: who would protect the cities while the navy put to sea? After all, were one pirate under attack, no other would go to his rescue, but rather would seize the chance to pillage some other undefended Spanish towns. A superior system would be to fortify all major ports and allow trade only through them. This theory became more popular among the colonists, who preferred to see physical evidence of their defense. It is also possible that in this way the colonists could "keep tabs" on the Spanish navy, while dealing on the side with the same pirates and smugglers.
they were supposed to be fighting. Out of these two theories arose a series of fortifications to improve both Spain’s claim to the area, and to defend the coasts from British incursions.
Chapter Two: The Guatemalan Background

Peru's Viceroy, the Duke of the Palata, saw control of the pirates as essentially a naval problem. His theory of aggressive defense played a significant part later in the conception of the fort at Omoa, though nothing but discord resulted when he first expressed it. In 1667, Viceroy Conde de Lemos also foresaw aggressive action in the Caribbean as the solution to the increasingly frequent acts of piracy in the Pacific. Unfortunately the king, although listening to Lemos' report, did nothing, ostensibly because he lacked funds.¹

The President of the Guatemalan Audiencia, in compliance with Royal policy, asked all merchants to defend the Golfo Dulce, Santo Tomás, and Puerto Caballos at their own expense. The merchants refused, claiming they already paid taxes for that: the King must provide adequate defenses for their wares. Taxes went to support the Armada de Barlovento, the Windward Navy, which defended the flota (fleet) in the Caribbean. In 1633 the King ordered that fleet to drop its Honduras squadron: all Central American trade had to go through Veracruz, in Mexico.

The merchants of Guatemala, upon seeing the King's orders, must have calculated, as observes García Peláez, that if the King's money was not safe on his own ships or in his ports, neither would their merchandise be; and it would be better, to avoid risks, to follow
the road used by the royal couriers. Thus, they resolved to use the long overland road between Veracruz and Guatemala for their commerce.²

Spanish convoys, by law, had to be accompanied by two armed warships. But even when obeying this law, the merchants loaded the warships with so many goods that their fighting ability decreased drastically. In the seventeenth century Spain did not have a large enough navy to defend Central America—or any of the rest of the colonies, for that matter. Every merchant ship could be pressed into military service, however, by merely placing one or two cannon on board with the officers to use them. Thus, the king saw no real need for a permanent royal navy.³ The fact that few ships carried armament or that the king provided none seems to have been ignored or overlooked. Prestige did not provide protection from pirates, though some Spanish courtiers apparently thought so. The truth, as Fernandez Alvarez states, was quite the opposite:

The Spanish crown did not possess an Armada—an organized group of ships—to defend its oceanic routes from assaults by its adversaries, or to attack its enemies when needed, that was as representative of its power on the high seas as its permanent armies were on land.⁴

European nations saw in America the possibility of enriching their positions vis-a-vis other nations. But because Spain and Portugal held a virtual ownership monopoly, it became difficult for them to get a foothold in
America. Spain could fight off imperialist competitors on land, but remained woefully inadequate at sea. As a result, the Council of the Indies developed the *flota* system—the convoy—to send all trade in one yearly or bi-yearly fleet. To deal with this new system, pirates also changed tactics, attacking land positions to get at the merchandise in the warehouses. They also struck at single ships in a harbor after the fleet had split up, if only to ease their loading operations.

Frequent wars in Europe left the coasts of Central America open to the corsairs' attacks by draining the manpower supply. As no regular troops guarded the colonies, *hacendados* (landowners) had to foot the bill for raising an army. On October 7, 1570, King Charles ordered all people living near seaports in the Americas to have weapons and horses ready, according to their abilities, to defend the area if enemies appeared. No one could be exempted from this duty, and the Viceroy's or Presidents had to review these conditions every four months. All weapons had to be registered and licensed with the Council before being transported to the colonies: if found otherwise, they would be confiscated and returned to Spain.

The king responded to a 1644 petition for a fort on the north coast of Central America by requesting the name of a bay and a budget proposal stating the source of the funding. No royal monies could be used for the project:
The defense of the country was given completely over to the care of private parties. Without soldiers, without arms, without supplies, without military leaders, what is strange is that Spain should have preserved this colony, which had at a very short distance from its north coasts, wily, ambitious enemies, used to war and to whom it would have cost very little to take them over.

When the pirates changed tactics from the open seas to land positions, King Felipe II decided to build a system of defensive forts to protect principal ports. Only ports with cities or towns needed fortification at first, though Felipe had in mind defending all ports that might be useful to the pirates. With this in mind, the Crown dispatched Flores de Valdés' squadron to the Straights of Magellan in 1581. Five years later Maestre de Campo Juan de Tejeda went to the Caribbean to fortify Panama and defend the transit trade from Peru.

The problem did not appear to be the inability of the Spaniards to fight off pirates; they had shown bravery many times. In 1578 John Oxenham looted Panama but lost his spoils to a hastily-assembled Panamanian army; in 1585 Francis Drake attempted unsuccessfully to take Cartagena; in 1595 Drake again lost a battle, this time to the defenders of the fort at San Juan de Puerto Rico; Sir Thomas Baskerville met with defeat halfway across the Panamanian isthmus that same year. Administrators created most problems: when the Crown did send funds, they were spent on shady deals, contraband speculation, and various
capricious follies. These abuses proved very difficult to remedy.  

In an attempt to override many problems, Juan Bautista Antonelli, a military engineer, went to inspect the Caribbean defenses, returning to Spain in 1587. Together with Tiburcio Hispanoqui, the king's chief engineer, he drew up a new system based on the passive defense theory—very popular in military circles at the time—calling for forts at Habana, San Juan de Ulúa, Puerto Rico, and Portobello. By 1675 most usable harbors in the Caribbean housed some kind of fort, though these had been built mainly by private capital and their design reflected private interests. They had been built for the most part against attacks by Indians: for instance, the one at Santo Domingo. Several did not even face the sea, and no effort had been made to coordinate the defense system. The forts protected trading centers only.

Antonelli's line of forts eventually grew to stretch all along the Spanish Main and along the Caribbean coast to Florida. In Central America and the Yucatán, it included Petén Itzá, San Felipe de Bacalar, San Felipe del Golfo Dulce, San Fernando de Omoa, Trujillo, Inmaculada Concepción on the Río Tinto, Inmaculada Concepción on the Río San Juan, and San Fernando de Matina. Other forts included San Marcos de Apalache, San Agustín de la Florida,
Antonelli's fortification system

1. Petén Itzá
2. San Felipe de Bacalar
3. San Felipe del Golfo Dulce
4. Bustamante de Santo Tomás
5. San Fernando de Omoa
6. Inmaculada Concepción del Río Tinto
7. Inmaculada Concepción del Río San Juan
8. San Fernando de Matina
9. Trujillo
Panzacola, Nueva Orleans, Luisiana Española, San Juan de Ulúa on the island of Sacrificios (or Gallegos), Del Carmen, and Campeche. Castilla del Oro and Nueva Granada had their own series of fortifications.13

The history of fortification in the northern Spanish colonies can be divided into three main time periods. The first began during the reign of Felipe II (1556 to 1598), with the decision to organize the defense of the colonies under one master plan. Defense no longer depended on local initiative. The decision concerning which port to fortify (a decision usually made quite correctly) proved so easy to make, that even after thirty years the system survived, though poor construction or management caused some defeats at the hands of pirates. The second period comprised the reign of Felipe IV (1621 to 1665): Spain had lost much of its energy by then, and the system’s inherent security no longer remained. Only minor improvements occurred on existing forts, and then not as efficiently as they should have been. The last time division came in the eighteenth century. Pirates no longer seriously or constantly threatened: European nations did, and Spain feared an imminent invasion of the colonies by its imperial rivals. Britain in particular posed a strong threat, but the excellence of the initial defensive structure did manage to keep the colonies intact.14
Martin Carlos de Mencos became the first military President of the Guatemalan Kingdom in 1659 and his task included improving the defenses along the north coasts of Central America. The British Navy had taken over the corsairs' harassment of the Spanish colonists, so Mencos began construction of the fort on the San Juan river in Nicaragua, to prevent an attack on Granada like the one that came in 1665. He instituted the practice of taxing local agricultural products to finance the projects of defense.15

But the whole system remained very confusing; no Department of Defense existed in Spain, and hence, no budget. The king dictated all orders, causing at times serious problems, especially in timing. During a war, for instance, the captain-general became commanding officer, but he remained answerable to the king.16 The pirates themselves caused most of the confusion over authority, in a way, because they simply did not have very much collective strength. Piracy had not become an obvious problem to the Spanish court, or at least one easily visible. Complaints abounded, but these did not affect Spain's prosperity directly. The royal engineer Antonelli wrote to the King that:

the enemy has not yet attacked armed ports, but only open, poorly defended bays. To do so they would need larger siege equipment than is allowed by the lay of the land.17
The colonists needed education, not forts. Teaching them how to use artillery and other war equipment would have been of immense value. After Drake's attacks in Central America between 1585 and 1590, the colonists had begun to lose their faith in forts, or at least in Spain's ability to defend them. Talking of the people, Juan de Tejeda wrote to the king:

We have been advised not to depend on them even for the construction of a fort, or to defend it when completed; they only think about fleeing to the bush when an attack comes. Because of this, then, it is not surprising to recommend to the Council of the Indies that the leading authority of the island [Santo Domingo] be a man of arms, and not of letters.18

Jorge Juan wrote to the king in 1786 that all towns not under the protection of a fort had to defend themselves with volunteer militias. In this manner the crown could defend large areas of land without any expense to itself.19 But militias proved scarce and ill-armed. At one point Guatemala had only one regiment of infantry, later reduced to a battalion of five fixed companies spread along its borders, and one brigade of artillery. A total of 150 men made up the entire permanent army charged with defending Central America. Provincial cavalry and infantry could recruit about 10,000 untrained men when needed.20 José Rodríguez sums up the condition of the militias quite well:

suffice it to know that the defense of the interests of the colonies, and those of Spain, were not placed into able hands. This is evident in seeing what the colonial militias
did. They could not and should not be called a regular army. They are, instead, unthinking groups who obey the principles of terror, rather than those of the military moral code, based on discipline. To form a judgement on or to call an army what is basically a conglomerate of Indians, creoles, and slaves is absurd.21

Major problems with existing forts included disrepair, inadequate weapons, difficulty in maintaining provisions and personnel, and funding—an item approved only on an emergency basis.22 This seemingly inadequate line of forts had to stop the usurpation of Spanish territories by the English along the entire Caribbean coast. The Castillo de San Fernando de Omoa resulted directly from this explosive situation.
Chapter Three: The Honduran Background

Mention of the bays along the north coast of Honduras first reached Spain in 1524 when Gil González Dávila threw overboard some dead horses from one of his ships. He named the bay he was anchored in after them—Puerto de Caballos. In 1539 Pedro de Alvarado used Puerto de Caballos, arriving "with three thick ships and three hundred harquebusiers and other many people." He ordered 200 men to open a road through to San Pedro Sula, a task that took them ten days to complete. Alvarado requested the Cabildo (town council)—presumably of Guatemala—to send a mayor and two councilmen to demonstrate the settlements' importance. Alvarado may have requested the officials because he encountered legal troubles with his credentials as the representative of Hernán Cortez.

By the mid-16th century, Honduras boasted seven settlements—at that time often confusingly termed "colonies"—the largest being Trujillo, with some fifty settlers. In 1584, the governor of Honduras, D. Rodrigo Ponce de León, wrote a letter from Trujillo suggesting the port be fortified, replacing the cantería and thatch warehouse with a strong fort built by an engineer. This fort should house four pieces of brass artillery, because Trujillo is very much worth defending from the pirates.

Ponce also wrote the same for the bay of Puerto de Caballos.
In 1592 Puerto Caballos fell to a band of pirates, who reported having looted some 200 wealthy houses, their haul amounting to:

5 or 6 tuns of quicksilver, 16 tuns of old sacke, sheepe, young kids, great store of poultrie, some store of money, & good linnen, silks, cotton-cloth, and such like; we also took three belles out of the church. . .

Puerto Caballos had a more or less permanent settlement until March of 1604, when the discovery of Puerto Santo Tomás prompted the colonists to move the entire town to that bay. Santo Tomás had a more easily defensible bay, which made it a much better port of entry. But the problem of the pirates continued to plague the settlement, even at its new location.

In 1677, Maestre de Campo Don Juan Francisco Sáenz, governor of Guatemala, ordered the construction of a fort at another bay in Central America, the port of Matina, in Costa Rica, with a garrison of one hundred men. This order, however, did not go into effect until Governor Miguel Gómez de Lara re-issued it five years later.

By 1665, the British in Jamaica could easily harass the Guatemalan colonists and engage in rampant smuggling, defrauding the Spanish treasury of much-needed income. Fifteen years later, the British also settled the north coasts of Nicaragua and Honduras, known as the Moskitia, and allied themselves with the Indians living there. By
they had named officials to govern the Miskitos, Colonel Robert Hodgson becoming "superintendent" in that year. Spain vigorously protested this action, but found herself not interested enough in the area to retaliate.9

Francisco de Montejo, the Adelantado to Yucatán and later Governor of Honduras-Hibueras, planned in 1537 an alternate trade route between Peru and Spain through Honduras, instead of Panama. Montejo proposed a route between the Gulf of Fonseca and Puerto Caballos, over a road through the valley of Comayagua.10 Twenty-two years later the Audiencia de Guatemala worked on the project, finding many problems. Engineer Juan García de Hermosilla and Captain Pedro Ochoa Leguizamón, mayor of Nicoya, had resurrected the plan to spite the royal engineer Juan Bautista Antonelli, who disapproved it.11 Antonelli had studied the plan and written to the king, sending a resume with recommendations: the road would simply be too long. At least 70 leguas12 separated Puerto Caballos from the bay of Fonseca, and because the road could not accommodate carts, fourteen thousand mules would be required to carry merchandise through sparsely populated areas at least six times a year. In 1590 Antonelli sent a description of Puerto Caballos and the Bay of Fonseca, pointing out their weaknesses and their strengths. Nothing ever came of these plans, though the Audiencia spent much money studying them.13
Montejo originally planned to consolidate Central America. San Pedro Sula and Comayagua would be the trading centers for Nicaragua and Guatemala at first. Later El Salvador and even Panama could be serviced from Honduras. The accountant, Cerezeda, the treasurer, García de Celis, a Mr. Pedraza, and Pedro de Alvarado discussed the plan together, and even presented it to the king, who rejected it merely by asking for much more money and information than they could supply. After Bishop Francisco de Marroquín of Guatemala advocated the move, however, Felipe II named a commission consisting of Juan Mejía, Pedro de Ochoa Leguizamón, Field Marshall Juan de Tejeda, Captain Francisco Valverde and Engineer Bautista Antonelli to study the proposal. He later appeared to have approved the plans in principle, though in action nothing ever happened. Had it been approved and implemented, the bay at Omoa might have been fortified much earlier in an effort to protect the bay at Puerto Caballos, which Antonelli called "almost indefensible."

There is some question over who sent in the first request or recommendation concerning a fort at Omoa. Calderón Quijano gives the honor to Maestre de Campo Don Juan de Barrientos y Guzmán, who sent word in 1743 to the king that a fort at the Bay of Omoa would stop or at least slow down considerably the volume of illicit trade in the
The English, he reported, used the bay as a wintering port. When fortified, it could aid greatly in the protection of the entire Kingdom. Manuel Zapatero, in a much more recent study (1972), states:

definitely, it was the President of the Audiencia, D. Enrique Enríquez, who wrote in a letter to the Monarch Charles II, dated in 1685, of the great possibility of the ports of Trujillo and Caballos of falling into the power of the English, because of the ease with which the pirates could attack from Belize, with their allies the Zambo-Miskitos. Because of this, he said, there was an "extreme need" to fortify Omoa, a place unknown and unused as a port. With Enríquez opens the interest in Omoa, and to him belongs the first defensive concept.

Enríquez asked for harquebuses instead of rifles, and for a military engineer to defend Guatemala. An engineer would cut the cost of defense, as well as increase the defenses, if only by planning a fort at Omoa. Enríquez had raised 8,000 pesos for the project, mainly from donations by the town councils and the church.

In July of 1751 two reports concerning Omoa showed the English occupying Roatán, Guanaja, Masaguera, and Utila so as to protect their compatriots in the Río Tinto area. So fortifying Omoa had two major advantages: to prevent further English incursions into the area, and to avoid the expense of rebuilding the redoubt and fort at Golfo Dulce. The new fort would have a much greater strategic value because of its new location. By adopting this kind of mentality, both Barrientos and Enríquez appealed to the
militarists of the aggressive warfare theory. A centrally located bay could defend a larger area with its navy, especially if it had the best port along the coast.

According to Rubio Sánchez, the forts at San Felipe, Matina and San Juan had been built to psychologically defend the north coasts: they were not strong enough to withstand an enemy attack, but they gave the colonists a sense of security. The Audiencia of Guatemala knew that, and wanted a strong fort, one which could properly defend the port of entry to the Kingdom.18

The first serious initiative for the construction of Omoa came from Don José Rodezno Manzolo y Rebolledo, an oidor (judge) and member of the Real Audiencia of Guatemala. In a letter to the king dated March 4, 1723, Rodezno recommended a fort at Omoa to decrease the volume of illegal trade going on there. Rodezno had been named oidor supernumerario (supernumerary judge) on the 16th of May, 1710, taking office the following March 16. He spent the next twelve years spying on royal officers in Honduras, to see how many were involved in illegal smuggling with the British pirates. Returning from that commission on January 22, 1722, he reported to the king the following year the results of his investigation. The recommendation of a fort, he claimed, he sent only in service of the king, for its implementation would cause serious unrest in the area--
which it did, as will be seen later. But the fort could serve to infuse life into a dead province, to rebuild its economy, to stimulate enough trade to resurrect the then-illegal Honduras-Havana trade route.\textsuperscript{19} Rodezno's plan included financing the construction with the sale of 4,500 arrobas\textsuperscript{20} of Zarsa (sarsaparilla). The garrison at the fort of Golfo Dulce, which even the British considered useless, could be transported to Omoa, as it only defended the seldom-used warehouses.

Rodezno, like the engineer Luis Méz Navarro after him, advised making the commander of Omoa governor and captain-general of the province, for the sake of efficiency. Since as yet no military engineer worked in the Kingdom, he asked the Viceroy of New Spain to send one for the job, recommending Don Diego Gutiérrez de Arguelles.\textsuperscript{21} His description of Omoa, however, was quite inaccurate. He compared it to San Felipe de Golfo Dulce:

\begin{quote}
Everything is diametrically opposed in said port of Omoa: its temperature is healthful, it has a beautiful bay with a port seven arm lengths deep [11.7 meters], clear water, and is large enough to accommodate any warship. The latter can take cover near the site where a fort can be erected.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

This description could not in part be farther from the truth: Alcedo noted that "its weather was the most unhealthful of America."\textsuperscript{23} Later on, throughout the construction of the fort, the battle with the climate claimed many lives.\textsuperscript{24}
But Rodezno's report continued, enumerating about twenty varieties of fruit that grew there—fruit that could be abundant if properly exploited. He sent a map and a plan for the fort, drawn up by Onofre Núñez, a priest, in the absence of a military engineer or an architect. Núñez' maps, while being accurate, had been very sloppily and carelessly drawn, for he apparently did not have much training as a draftsman. The plans showed a quadrangular fort of the bulwarked system, which D. Sebastián Fernández de Medrano, teacher and director of the Academia Real y Militar de los Países Bajos, had declared the best possible style. The style followed that of the Field Marshal Sebastien Le Prestre de Vauban, Royal engineer of Louis XVI of France: renaissance, baroque, and neoclassic at one time—a very popular combination during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.

The plans showed, by impressive and sophisticated-looking line charts, the areas covered by cannonfire. Technically, the bulwarked system was one of the best, for it left no wall undefended: cannon could shoot parallel to all of the outside walls. Núñez' fort measured 800 feet "de brabante", the faces 351 feet long, the flanks 106, and the curtains 480. He expressed the opinion that although most people wanted the fort placed on "point 83" on his map—probably the north point—it should be farther south
at the deepest end of the bay. Some of those who disagreed later included the Conde de Aranda, who designed the fort, engineer Luis Díez de Navarro, who started the construction, and engineer Francisco Alvarado, who completed it. As it turned out, Núñez' site later proved the better one, and became the site for the construction. 26

But Núñez was no engineer. Rather, he was an amateur who apparently had travelled through France and had become acquainted with the new Vauban style. His plans did not convince the Council of the Indies, which sent a memo to the king on the third of September, 1723, informing him that the report merely reflected the opinions of Rodezno and Núñez. More plans to confirm the validity of these opinions should be ordered, preferably by the government of the Captaincy-general. On February 16, 1724, Rodezno's request finally received validation, but no action ever came from it. 27 Proof that Rodezno's report did not receive much credit in the Court can be seen when on July 25, 1740, Don Pedro de Ribera y Villalón, President of Guatemala, reported receiving orders on the first of October to fortify Trujillo and Matina. These would form part of the system of defense covering the entire north coast from Matina through Bluefields, and Cape Gracias a Dios to Trujillo. 28 But as no military engineer had arrived in the Kingdom yet, nothing could be done.
On April 12, 1745, Ribera recommended to the king another plan to fortify Omoa. This time, unfortunately, his recommendation clashed with current plans to reduce fortifying Central America because of a new Madrid Agreement with England. Nevertheless, the Council of the Indies passed a motion to transfer all the plans for any fort on the Caribbean to Zenón de Somodevilla, Marquez de la Ensenada. Appointed to the Council in 1743 for the reorganization of the defenses of the Spanish colonies, his plans to force the British from the Caribbean entailed force of arms. This aggressive policy diverted the Spanish offensive from the Black River in the Moskitia area to Belize. But the reality of Spain's economy clashed with Somodevilla's plans; he could not afford to both fortify and fight. Sensing that successful fighting might keep his name in the king's favor more easily, he sent armies into Belize during Vázquez Prego's term as Captain-general of Guatemala, to expel the woodcutters who reinforced Britain's claim to the area. Funds allotted for the project at Omoa had to be used to pay the army in Belize, further delaying construction of the fort.29

Somodevilla's policies seem very confusing, possibly not very well thought through. He eagerly favored the proposed Omoa project, and probably helped insure its Royal approval by choosing the name San Fernando, after the king whose favorite minister he had become.30 Nonetheless, his
orders to send armies to Belize did hinder financing the construction of the fort.

After careful planning, Somodevilla issued new orders: Colonel Juan de Vera received the Commandancia General de Armas (military commandancy) in Comayagua, and Alonso Fernández de Heredia the Lieutenant-colonelcy in charge of León. This, in effect, lowered the captaincy-general's military job in Guatemala to that of a quartermaster. The responsibility for the construction of Omoa fell to Vera. But Vera also delayed the project because he lacked an engineer, the only one available being tied up in repairing the fort at Inmaculada Concepción in Nicaragua. The engineer, during an inspection tour, had found himself named Castellano (commander) by Fernández when the previous commander at the fort had died. Then Vera died in 1747, and Fernández took on the leadership of Comayagua, while at the same time holding down his job in Nicaragua.
A shortage of military engineers created the biggest initial problem surrounding the construction at Omoa. More work existed than engineers to plan and do it, so low priority areas had to wait until they became important before having an engineer assigned to them. The title Military Engineer only meant that the holder had joined the military for his training: he could plan towns and civilian buildings as well as military installations.

Finally, on the twenty-fourth of March, 1741, a transfer order was issued for a fifty-year-old Lieutenant, engineer extra-ordinary, to move to the Captaincy-general of Guatemala:

Having heard what D. Pedro Ribera has reported on December 15, 1739, and on May 15, 1740, and what has been reported in the Council of Indies on December 17, 1740, His Majesty has resolved to move the engineer extraordinary D. Luis Díez Navarro to Guatemala City from Mexico City, to put into effect the orders of the mentioned D. Pedro Ribera on the construction of the forts planned, one at the mouth of the Matina river, and one at Trujillo, to defend the provinces; from His Majesty's orders I instruct you to execute these with all due haste.¹

A year later Luis Díez Navarro left his work on the new mint of Mexico City and probably accompanied Tomás Rivera y Santa Cruz, the new Captain-general replacing Pedro Ribera, to Guatemala. There is, however, some confusion as to exactly when he went to Guatemala. The
Royal Order on March 24 sent him to sound bays, landings, and to study the possibilities for a permanent fort. Later, reportedly after having been in Guatemala City for some time, his name was submitted to a vote for a commission as visitador (inspector), on December 23, 1742. Rivera y Santa Cruz approved the trip, though Díez may not have received notice to leave until January 9, 1743. The confusion arises over where he worked in Mexico City when his marching orders arrived, and whether Díez arrived in Guatemala in 1742 or in 1743. The solution depends on which source is consulted. Díez himself wrote:

through a Royal Order of March 24, 1741, received while in Mexico City, I was instructed to go to this capital Guatemala to put into effect the construction of the two forts at Río Matina and the port of Trujillo; I obeyed the order by leaving Mexico in July of last year, 1742, and presented myself to Your Excellency with my credentials . . . .

Later, he wrote in 1773, "it will be thirty-one years ago next October (after seeing I was in Mexico, and Veracruz) that I arrived in this capital of Guatemala . . . ."

Díez became one of the most outstanding engineers in the Indies. A native of Málaga, his military career began before the age of 17, when he went to the Spanish forts of Africa in 1718 with the Segundo Cuerpo de la Real Artillería—the Royal artillery. After working some time in Barcelona in 1720, he spent three years as one of the first students in the Real y Militar Academia founded by
Vauban, apparently distinguishing himself very well in civil engineering. He worked for a short time in Gibraltar, and then went, recommended by Vauban, to work under Ignacio Sala in Cádiz, where he learned the famous "polígono cuadrado" fortification system.  

In 1732, after moving to the Americas--first of all to Veracruz--he worked at the fort of San Juan de Ulúa. Moving on to Mexico City, he built a new mint, blueprinted and modified a mill, and helped design the drainage of Mexico City (Lake Texcoco). Just when he began to build the Royal Hospital of the Indies, he received the appointment to the Kingdom of Guatemala to oversee the fortification of the north coast of Central America.

His first job in Guatemala involved rebuilding the forts at Matina and Trujillo. Instead of starting on these immediately, he began his inspection tour, during which he devised the plans and recommendations for the fort of San Fernando de Omoa. After starting to build this fort, he received a transfer in 1756 back to Guatemala City to oversee all constructions in the Kingdom. His rapid rise through the ranks of the military may not have been totally based on merit; the promotion to ingeniero ordinario (ordinary engineer) and to Lieutenant of the Infantry, along with the ensuing salary increase to 1000 pesos a year may have been to sweeten the transfer from the
capital of New Spain to the relatively unimportant post in Guatemala.9

Soon after his arrival in Guatemala, Díez had been appointed as a **Visitador General de los Presidios** (general inspector of the forts) to carry out a general survey of the defenses of the Kingdom. He received the power to take declarations and oaths from officials and leading citizens concerning any matter he deemed important. He requested the appointment of Jerónimo de Rosal, a friend from Spain, as his Lieutenant, and had him appointed as such on January 2, 1743.10 Zapatero adds that Díez' orders included giving an opinion concerning the situation at Omoa.11 Later that month he began his inspection tour with a report of San Felipe del Golfo Dulce, which he had not seen yet. As the British had begun creeping into Petén and the Río Walis (Belize) area again, a fort at that location would be a good idea, but the bay was simply too shallow to warrant the expense, and besides, the British could probably take anything re-erected there very easily.12 This fort had long been ignored by the enemy, who considered it basically useless.

On February 23, Díez arrived in Comayagua and met with the military leaders to determine their opinions concerning a permanent installation on the north coastline. Juan de Barrientos y Guzmán, the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, quickly declared in favor of the Omoa site.
Francisco Antonio Irache preferred the established port of Trujillo, but expressed concern over the extreme cost of rebuilding the defenses. The rest of the leaders, José Lopes Podó, Felipe Grajeda, Félix de Montés, Carlos Ortega, and Juan Pacheco, followed Barrientos in supporting the Omoa location.\textsuperscript{13} Díez then visited the bay itself, on the eleventh of March, in company with the Governor and other locals acquainted with the area: Captain Francisco Antonio Irache, Lieutenant Joseph López, ship Captain Domingo Podó, Captain Felipe Grajeda of the Infantry of Blacks and his assistant Félix de Montés, Juan Pacheco and Juan de Buena Ventura, probably the scouts assigned to patrol the bay, Felipe Santiago, Juan Mallorca, Lázaro de Castro, and Cavalry Lieutenant Carlos de Ortega.\textsuperscript{14}

The following month, on March 23, Díez reached Yoro, the nearest safe Spanish settlement to Trujillo. After being advised by all the town leaders not to risk personal danger by visiting Trujillo, he sent his lieutenant Gerónimo de Rosal to scout the area. With the latter's report in hand, Díez called a meeting in the town hall and received support for recommending Omoa as a preferable site for a new fort, rather than rebuilding Trujillo.

Trujillo could not be considered a very good place to fortify for at least one major reason: low strategic value because of a wide open, shallow bay. Being close to
Roatán, any fortification could be easily taken by English baymen living there. The pirates, according to local reports, had even been taking bricks from the demolished Spanish garrisons to build their houses on Roatán. In a letter report to the king, Diez listed many reasons for his decision to abandon Trujillo in favor of Omoa. The latter had a more easily defensible bay: Miskitos and Zambos did not control the roads to Omoa from the interior, whereas all the paths to Trujillo were in their hands; thus the Register ship could dock at Omoa and transport goods overland to Guatemala in relative safety. Omoa, close to many other ports, could prevent illegal smuggling in such areas as Chamelecón, Sula, Los Leones, Sal, el Playón de Triunfo de Cruz, and several others. Thus Diez showed his purpose for the fort to be an aggressive one, to search out and destroy the pirates before they came to wreak havoc on Spanish towns:

His Majesty can easily place his corsair ships in the shelter of this port and easily destroy the English towns again, and stop their commerce with Trujillo.¹⁵

Only docile Xicaque Indians, afraid of the English and enemies of the Zambos and Miskitos, lived in the surrounding areas. Trujillo provided too large a bay, one that would take several forts to defend, with a port just too inconvenient to justify such an expense. The areas Trujillo catered to (Sonaguera, San Jorge Olancho, and
Olancho Viejo) had also been known to aid English smuggling, so moving the port of entry for the Register ships would also serve to punish these delinquent towns, by taking that commerce away from them.  

Before continuing his trip onward to Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Díez sent back to Guatemala a plan for a square shaped fort at Omoa:

It is a project of a quadrangular fort, situated in the interior part of the oriental point of the inlet elevated over a platform and with an esplanade that presents shade to achieve a greater overhang. It has four bulwarks corresponding to the angles of the fort, each one flanking two gun emplacements. The buildings are all in the interior of the fortified enclosure, leaving in the center a large extension for the weapons plaza.

This design, like several subsequent editions, did not receive approval. Salvatierra mentions plans for an octogonal star-shaped fort, and an amended plan submitted later with a length of 106 feet, a width of 126 feet, and an outside diameter of 639 feet.

Upon arriving in Nicaragua, Díez served as the mayor and commander of the fort of Inmaculada Concepción on the Río San Juan, where the previous mayor had just died. Later, in Costa Rica, he found a similar situation: Don Juan Germín y Leonart had just died, so Díez, as ranking officer, took over as interim governor of Costa Rica. Brigadier Don Alonzo Hernández de Heredia of the Audiencia de los Confines later regularized his appointment on
January 20, 1748, and Díez remained there for three years: his rank rose to Ingeniero en Segundo (engineer, second grade) and Captain of the Infantry.\footnote{19}

Between 1751 and 1755, Díez had time to work on his original plan—the actual fort at Omoa. A year after his arrival at the site, he rose in rank to Chief Engineer and Lieutenant Colonel of the Infantry. After 1755 he personally built only civilian buildings, despite his military appointment the following year as Director of Engineers, Reviewer of Land Measurements (surveyors), and full Colonel in the Infantry.\footnote{20} On November 30, 1758, Díez applied to Secretary of the Indies Julián de Arriaga for permission to return to Spain permanently. His letter, written officially, and signed as the Director Engineer and Colonel, resulted from a bitter enmity with the Captain-general, Arcos y Moreno. Díez, ill from a recent trip to Omoa, had apparently reached the end of his patience with Arcos.\footnote{21} This letter provides most of the biographical material available on Díez, for he gave Arriaga a resume of his life and work. The request being turned down, he remained in Guatemala, where he died on the eleventh of April of 1780, after having seen the official completion, loss and recuperation of his pet project at Omoa.

After returning to Guatemala City in 1751, Díez drew up plans for a comprehensive military defense system in Central America. He outlined key locations where
fortifications could be built as a starting point for offensives against British settlements in Belize and the Moskitia. Of these, Omoa would be the largest; it would signal commitment to a permanent return of Spanish authority to the north coast. Diez sent his plans along with the report of his survey to Spain on the seventh of April, 1745, and repeated them in his letter of 1751. The chapters on Omoa gave an accurate description of the coastal topography, placing the bay itself at seventeen leagues from Golfo Dulce, 141 from Guatemala, sixteen from San Pedro Sula, twelve from Candelaria Vieja, and sixty-two from Comayagua. Diez described Omoa as the best bay in Central America: clean, safe, with a capacity for approximately twenty-five ships at anchor at one time.

This port is the most secure, clean and sheltered of all the Coast of Honduras, for which motive it has appeared to me appropriate that it be fortified, at less cost and risk, than any other of said coast; it offers many accommodations, and very favorable consequences for this kingdom, which I shall state. 22

Diez listed thirteen reasons to fortify Omoa. The fort could assist in restocking corsairs armed by the king of Spain. Register ships could anchor easily; it had a good bay for repairing ships, as well as "much cedar wood." The Register could load with dyes, cacao, indigo, Brazilwood, vanilla, "exquisite balms," honey, wax, and other things cultivated in nearby regions. This commerce
could help populate the town of Omoa and surrounding areas. More importantly, defense would prevent use of the bay by pirates, which would benefit the Crown by bringing safety to the region. A navy could be equipped to wage war on pirates in places like the island of Roatán and the Miskito coast,

coasts so infested by enemies and pirates who, finding such places alone and undefended, inhabit and harass them. Add to that the damage they can cause and the intimidation of the settlers, with the embarrassment they cause by moving within sight of the construction site, it would serve them right to extirpate and exile the pirates from these seas and habitations, a thing which could without a doubt be accomplished, with time.\textsuperscript{23}

An aggressive policy had to be used to expel the illegals from the area, because without opposition they continued to spread and strengthen, by their mere presence, a claim on the land, to Spain's detriment.

His Majesty's corsair ships could easily be armed and would be very close in said port [Omoa] to the coast of Valis [Belize] (which they could reach in three days) and to the cape of Gracias a Dios and the Gulf of Matina. With this kind of protection the Miskito Indians and Zambos and the English settlements on this coast should lessen day by day, and it will not be long before the English settlements in Río Tinto and Roatán will become uninhabited, by taking away their hope of continuing to trade illegally with the Spanish on these coasts, which is why said nation has allowed them to settle here.

And it would be profitable to both of Your Majesties to expel them from these coasts, because its closeness to the homes of Zambos and Miskitos allows them to disturb our operations with ease.\textsuperscript{24}

The lands surrounding Omoa appeared to be very fertile, and only 140 leagues separated the port from
Diez' second plan to fortify Omoa.
Guatemala. In his recommendation, Díez requested the transport of carpenters, brickmasons, blacksmiths, calafetes (ship carpenters), tailors, and cobblers—a shortage of these skills plagued the entire kingdom. Artillery experts also could be used to train the locals in the art of modern warfare.

Other ports could be served from Omoa: Bacalar, at a distance of five days of travel; Balis (Belize), at two days; Havana, at about fifteen; Guanabacoa at eight; Cabo Gracias at three to eight, depending on the wind; and Matina at five to twelve, also depending on wind conditions. These distances showed even more proof of the central, strategic location of Omoa.

Apparently Díez' plans for the fort had not been accepted in Spain, for he reinforced them by sending what is now called the second project to fortify Omoa, on the 14th of April, 1745. The blueprints corresponded to a square fort, with four bulwarks in proportion to the square—a very well planned fort. The moat would be 15 varas wide, though the normal moat usually measured 42; the landfills sloped out only 25 varas, instead of the normal 60: a smaller-than-normal fort called for smaller-than-normal supporting structures. A parapet wall and drawbridge served as exit, and accommodations included a permanent garrison for four hundred men, with emergency
room for two hundred more. As to the garrison,

it should be equipped with 400 men; 200 of
which should be peninsular Spaniards, veterans
of the army, and if they could be married it
would be very convenient to the Royal Service
(even though it is contrary to the Royal Orders
which in these Countries cannot be followed to
the letter) with which two propitious things
can be obtained: firstly, the most assurance
that they live quietly and free from the much
chasing bachelors are subject to in this
kingdom of the sin of carnal delight; and
secondly, that having their women and children
in the castle, they will not escape [desert]
easily; within a few years they will become
honorable inhabitants throughout the
province.29

Keeping in mind the king's decree to reduce the size
of the forts in the Indies, Drez knew he would have trouble
in recommending a fort to hold 400 men. But if built, Omoa
would carry the defense of the entire Kingdom, so no risk
should be taken that enemies of the king would laugh at the
fort.30 Writing about the commandant of the new fort, Drez
recommended "it would also be convenient that he be a
military man, and not just any fellow countryman [Spaniard]
as I have always seen them send . . . ."31

According to Calderón Quijano, Drez sent these plans,
along with a recommendation not to leave the bay to the
Zambos and smugglers, in July of 1744. Zapatero gives
three dates for the sending of plans: the one he labels
the second plan he dates in 1745--"Plans of a fort
projected to fortify the port of Omoa," with a scale of
450 pies de Francia (scale feet). The other two plans he
The report given in García Peláez' book contrasts the differences between Omoa and Trujillo. The latter had no safe inland access, as all the roads leading there had been under the control of the zambos for some time. For this reason the Register ship from Spain could never land there safely. Besides, Omoa would be much cheaper to build. Even the fertility of the land and the reinstatement of trade between Guatemala and Havana, prohibited by the king due to its lack of safety, was used as an excuse to fortify Omoa.

Despite a law to the contrary, Díez proposed that the commander of the fort be governor of a new political organization called the Coast of Honduras, which would include Gracias, San Pedro Sula, San Jorge Olanchito, Gracias a Dios, and Trujillo; Comayagua should be reduced from a state capital to a regional capital. Increased military and governmental efficiency would result. If the commanding officer of the fort were also governor of the new province, it would cut bureaucracy by not having to route paperwork through Comayagua. The governor could
receive taxes from the money and minerals from the Honduras mines, and deal more effectively with British smugglers and pirates.

King Fernando VI and the accountant of the Council of Indies agreed in principle to the fortification, if only because Trujillo could prove too costly to defend. Diez' report of April 12, 1745, along with Rivera's letters recommending the fort on April 12, 1745, probably changed the King's mind. Rivera wrote that although the fort clashed with Royal intentions to reduce military spending, it could be built with the surplus 221,000 pesos he had sent to the court earlier that year.36

In the meantime, preparations had been made for the construction. Juan de Vera, the governor of Honduras, asked the Marquez de la Ensenada for artillery to defend the site, suggesting Campeche, Golfo Dulce, and Cartagena as possible sources: all three responded positively by sending cannon.37 Two scouts went to watch the bay and report any ship movement in the area; they shared a salary of 1,277 pesos, presumably annually.38

Changes in the administration in Guatemala hindered the progress of the program more than anything else. José Araujo y Río became Captain-general on September 23, 1748. The following December 21 Colonel Pantaleón Iñáñez received orders to replace the deceased Vera in Honduras, but he
took several months to arrive. By 1750 Ibáñez had been replaced by Fernández de Heredia. Fernández asked Ensenada to appoint a military adjunct in Guatemala to take charge of all military construction, as the current President, Tomás de Ribera, very slow to act, opposed any ideas other than his own, acting offended when anyone showed initiative—such as when Fernández took over the leadership in Honduras.39

On January 17, 1752, Mariscal del Campo D. José Prego Montaño y Soto Mayor, the new Captain-general, sought to implement Díez' fortification system by giving orders on the twenty-eighth of the same month to begin construction at Omoa. He asked the President of the Royal Coffers to ready funds—50,000 pesos to begin with, and a reserve of 61,642 pesos. José Antonio Palma received the military commander's post at the site, and Luis Guasco became Sobrestante, or superintendent, of the works. A rations schedule was drawn up: Sunday and Thursday, six ounces of bacon; Monday and Wednesday, eight ounces of salt meat if at sea, and fresh while on land; Saturday, five ounces of cheese. Every day the troops would receive four cuartillos (quarts) of water—three to drink and one to cook with, plus 24 ounces of firewood. This ration schedule became the biggest single expense to the Royal Coffers. At first all supplies had to come by sea, which caused some problems because some of the sailors, fearing
Omoa's reputation as a place of death, deserted when they found out their ship's destination. To counter this, Prego ordered all deserters arrested, and anyone aiding them punished and charged for any damages caused. The King sent 3,000 muskets with bayonets, plus flints and bullets to the new garrison.  

Prego died the following year after falling ill during a trip to Omoa. He had, however, altered the blueprints for the fort: on the twenty-fifth of April, 1752, he met with a Council of War and declared the fort designed by Diez too big. Prego believed a garrison of 200 men and a circular redoubt along the beach would be sufficient. The length should be only 130 to 150 varas, instead of the 470 Diez called for. Two members of the Audiencia, Don Pedro de Superviela and Jorge Juan, believed an even smaller garrison--80 to 100 men--would meet the needs of the port. A structure of one-tenth the size Diez recommended could house the men, and should be planned according to the topography of the area. The committee also voiced the opinion--a correct one--that the pirates could not be stopped. The only real defense could be nature itself, in the humidity, the sterile land, and the high incidence of disease, because inlets and islands they could hole up in abounded. The only reason to defend an area like Omoa
would be as an offensive measure, to arm and stock a fleet against the British.43

The Council of War in Guatemala wrote up a plan for the defense of its north coasts, emphasizing the need for a coast guard fleet. They felt the British and Miskitos were getting away with too much illegal commerce, and needed to be stopped. The planned coast guard, the Council projected, should consist of squadrons of five vessels each—a ship, a frigate, a jabecue, and two pirogues of differing capacities. The pirogue could travel up rivers farther than the rest, but were too small to cope with ocean-going frigates and ships. Thus each vessel in the squadron would complement the rest, making it an effective weapon against all types of pirate ships. This coast guard could possibly tame the islands and coasts inhabited by the pirates and Miskitos.

But the Council went a step further in its recommendation of this coast guard, pointing out the need for one or more safe ports from which to base its activities. These ports could not be "merely lost beaches, or open roadstead, or the like, but rather ports large enough to shelter the entire fleet."44 There were no rivers large enough to accommodate ships, thus ruling out the forts at Golfo Dulce, Río San Juan, and the Matina river. The port at Omoa would be the best, following the opinion of the engineer Mez, though it was rather far from
Map of the Captaincy-General of Guatemala between 1650 and 1753.
the bases of the English and Miskitos. Trujillo, the lagoon of Nicaragua, and the river mouth at Matina, though poor locations, coincided with the distances between forts the Council wanted. They thought it incredible that of all the ports and bays of the Caribbean coast, only Puerto Caballos had a bay large enough to compare with Omoa, and it was too close to the latter to be of any use.45

So Omoa became the site for this proposed fort. Its intention was aggressive: to serve as a base of operations for a fleet of corsairs who would patrol the coasts and attack the pirates in their home ports. It is interesting to note that at no time did anyone consider a fort on the Bay Islands. After forcing the pirates from that location, such a fort could have done more to assert Spanish authority than any on the mainland. That, of course, would have meant conquering the islands first and then fortifying them, which would have cost the Crown much more money than any mainland fort.
Chapter Five: The First Construction Period

Action during the years 1753 through 1755 proved slow at Omoa. Diez reported having been assigned the soldiers, weapons and ammunition needed, though he lacked the artillery (20 and 25 pounds) to mount on the low redoubt under construction to protect the site. He expressed an interest in being appointed as chief engineer, requesting that I be the engineer assigned to the construction because of my training in that field, and having come to these Kingdoms to practice that craft under the orders of my superiors and of His Majesty, nothing impedes me to accept the responsibility.¹

Several major problems had to be surmounted. A second engineer had to be found in case Diez became ill or died. Negroes, more suited than Indians or Spaniards for labor in the coastal regions, had to be brought from far away, as did food and supplies. One of the most pressing shortages was that of funds. The Viceroy of New Spain promised 100,000 pesos per year for the project, but that apparently did not cover all expenses.²

Arcos y Moreno replaced Prego as Captain-general on January 29, 1752. The following April 15th, he promoted Diez to Lieutenant-colonel, and as such, the commanding officer at Omoa. That year Diez drew a map of the area, showing the roads to Puerto Caballos, the Omoa River, and the soundings of the port, and a drawing of the low redoubt
of El Real, to be built to protect the construction—or as Zapatero put it, "El Real, which was made of stakes and pieces of trees, for a protection, while the Work is being made."³

A very useful member joined the staff in November of 1752: medical doctor Abundio Salomón. Many workers had died because of the bad climate, so the Audiencia saw fit to pay Salomón fifty pesos a month to try to stop the malaria and yellow fever common to the port.⁴ Attempts to do so had not been very successful: Méz himself lost his wife and three eldest daughters in 1748, after having moved with them to the fort to set an example and raise morale among those stationed there.⁵

Later, Méz wrote a detailed expense report, listing all financial activity under his charge from April 7, 1754, through February 20, 1755, and submitted it to Arcos as requested. Other than having detained a sloop temporarily, nothing worth writing about had occurred. The Council of the Indies caused most of the delays the Captain-general complained about, though this could not be seen in Guatemala. Arcos wrote a letter to the Council, accusing Méz of being lazy and of spending money needlessly, not realizing that the court itself caused the delays by not approving any plans for Méz to use. Méz continued to send blueprints to Spain for approval; in 1756 he submitted
one for a fort called Santa Barbara. Another plan for a square fort, this one had a variation—the outside, or seaside polygon measured 105 varas, being curved for greater cannon coverage. The plan showed in great detail the location of the stores, the powder rooms, kitchen, barracks, and other miscellaneous details. The powder rooms were located in the landfills of the bulwarks, which could present a dangerous situation because of fire hazard. This may have been too controversial for Aranda, for he rejected the plans once more.6

Aranda rejected all of Díez’ plans from 1746 through 1756, and made no move to supply any new ones, until he finally drew up a set on December 15, 1756. It is possible that the Seven Years’ War helped speed things up for the project, by showing the need for some defense along the Caribbean. Somodevilla had fallen from the king’s grace by then, but Arriaga and the war secretary Sebastián de Eslava followed his policies very closely, at least immediately following his demise. The Council approved Aranda’s set of plans in 1751, and orders were sent to Arcos y Moreno to build according to them. A set of these plans arrived in Guatemala unsigned, but later designs point to Aranda as the author and designer. That communication or bureaucratic problems existed in the court can be seen in the explanation sent with the plans, stating that
not having a profile of the land, nor knowing the altitude of the land in relation to the level of the sea, the author had not been able to fix a profile to his Plan; this should be taken into account by the Engineer at the time of the Construction, elevating the Fort's floor several feet higher than that of the moat. The stores should be one foot higher than that of the Arms Plaza, to avoid too much humidity in the barracks: this same reason held true for a careful drainage of rainwater. These and other considerations were left to the prudence and intelligence of the engineer in charge of the construction.7

The drawings showed a triangular fort with a curved forward curtain. Apparently this, rather than the traditional square fort, had been proposed because of the lower cost involved, though the triangle could not be considered the best design. Cristóbal de Rojas, a military engineer under Felipe II and professor in the first Academia de Fortificaciones Españolas in Madrid, had written that the triangular design should be used only if no other design were possible. He believed the angles to be too sharp, which became a defect during any defense in a battle. If, however, the engineer insisted on building it, the front walls should be at least 600 feet long.8 But these schools of military architecture did not usually prove to be right in America; conditions were simply not the same as in Spain. The Indians and the pirates did not follow the accepted methods for fighting a war, so the forts planned in Spain usually did not prove very
practical. As a result, they became Americanized, modified to create a criollo style of fort architecture.

The construction seriously interrupted the tranquility of Omoa, because of the large number of men involved. Workers travelled from as far away as Escuintla, San Salvador, Gracias, Tecoac, San Pedro Sula, Yoro, and Tegucigalpa. By mid-1755 a list of the salaried workers included:

- Gabriel Franco, a commander
- Francisco Alvarez, engineer second class
- José Antonio Palma, a ship captain
- Father José Ximénez, a chaplain
- Pablo García, ship lieutenant
- José Quintero, """
- Matías del Sol, """
- José Orozco, """
- Juan Bautista Bayamán, ship lieutenant
- Luis Guasco, mathematician and head foreman
- José Bermejo, war accountant
- Tomás Antonio de Amaya, shop keeper
- Jerónimo de Ibarrueta, surgeon

In 1756 Díez moved the site of the fort away from the poor location planned originally to a much cleaner one, Núñez' "point 83," halfway between the mangroves and the port. The plans for the low redoubt of El Real, built to protect the construction site, changed just as much as the plans for the fort proper. They once called for a shallow moat and simple counter-scape, but no covered road. On the western curtain, one set of plans showed an extension to the dock, to be 150 varas long and 40 wide, with a circular battery at the end. This dock never came into being.
The Recinto "El Real," from a map in Zapatero, p. 412.

1. Mediobaluarte Santo Cristo de Esquivias.
3. Plaza de Armas San Francisco.
4. Road to Puerto Caballos.
5. Road to San Pedro Sula.
6. Mediobaluarte San Gabriel.
7. Mediobaluarte Purísima Concepción.
8. Main Plaza "El Real."
9. Main Gate.
Díez received orders to use the blueprints drawn up by Aranda, instead of the many he and Alvarez had drawn. Expense apparently had changed the minds of the Council, and they approved the controversial triangular fort. Commenting on some of the detail of the new plans, Calderón Quijano mentions that the gun beds would be difficult to build,

being with a reinforcement on the interior and exterior of brick and stone which they bring mixed with lime and is called mícula, which for being scarce, it is necessary to take advantage of the brick, so that it will be a permanent wall with a lot of resistance.\(^{11}\)

On March 13, 1756, Alonzo de Arcos Moreno appointed Don Juan de la Rosa y Barba to the head foremanship of Omoa, the first move in replacing Díez Navarro. In a letter, Arcos stated that Díez had been at the site for over a year, accomplishing nothing except to spend money. Arcos divided Díez' engineering position between Gabriel Franco, Captain of Artillery, and Francisco Alvarez, Ordinary Engineer, and gave the military command to Rosa y Barba. Díez moved to the capital to work on the governor's palace.\(^{12}\) Arcos' letter is believed to have been written in anger or jealousy, for Díez went on to become one of the leading men in the Kingdom of Guatemala.\(^{13}\) Fulgencio García de Solís replaced Pantaleón Ibáñez Cuevas as governor of Honduras, taking office on June 6. José Martínez then completed the move to replace Díez, receiving
the post of Lieutenant of the Royal Exchequer at Omoa. Drez, as mentioned above, returned to Guatemala City.

During the years 1757-1758 no orders were issued to actually begin the construction, so the workers instead began searching for materials and continued to labor on El Real. These were, in effect, non-productive jobs, and Alvarez, like Drez, found himself accused of laziness for the lack of evidence of work being done. Alvarez spent part of his time drawing plans for a fort, producing two: his "Plano del Puerto y Sitio de San Fernando de Omoa" of June 10, 1757, showed all the work done to date. El Real had been built, though not as originally planned. The walls had been closed by October 18, 1756, and all the bulwarks scaled down to half-bulwarks, set in an irregular pattern to follow the contour of the land. Two bulwarks protected the north side—"Santo Cristo de Esquivias" and "Santa Bárbara"—and two the south—"San Gabriel" and "Purísima Concepción." El Real had a capacity for 60 cannon, though only 26 twelve-, eighteen-, and twenty-four-pounders pointed toward the sea and 6 four-pounders to the rear. The circular battery at the end of the dock remained strictly on paper, so its capacity for eight cannon meant nothing. The forward curtain measured three varas thick, and the rest only one vara. The gun mounts had been lined to one half vara of thickness with brick, to ease any recoil damage. 14
"Puerto de S.n Fernando de Omoa."

The port of San Fernando de Omoa, situated on the coast of Honduras, at an altitude of 15º, 45 minutes from the mouth of the gulf of Santo Tomás de Castilla. Seventeen castillian leagues. Luis Díez Navarro. [Ascribed to Francisco Alvarado because of the shape of the fort.] Serv. Hist. Mil. Madrid; sign 5.171; P-b-11-10, hoja 1a, in Zapatero, p. 152.
Alvarez' second map merely showed the location of the redoubt on the coast. It did, however, point out a place for a torreón, a small auxiliary fort to flank any ship entering the harbor, which he thought should be built on the outside point, detailed as "point G," probably Núñez' point 83. That, in effect, started the idea for such an aid, for which several plans later materialized, though it, like the dock, never did. Both of Alvarez' plans still showed a square fort, because apparently Aranda's plans for a triangular one had not arrived yet.

In 1756 Arcos ordered the construction of a road, to replace the one closed through a misunderstanding several years earlier, which would connect the capital to the new fort. Don Pedro Truco contracted to survey and mark the route: a road, in essence, consisted of a cleared-out path for mules, so making a road meant marking trees and rocks along the route. The Ayuntamiento of Guatemala agreed to bear the cost, and raised 17,000 pesos for the project--a sizeable sum for those times. After Truco's original survey, local corregimientos had to do a more careful clearing of the track, and maintain the right-of-way. At least two companies formed for this purpose, in Chiquimula, and in Comayagua. The new road, Arcos reported, would open new lands for the Kingdom, as it traversed very fertile areas of Honduras. The new population in these lands, in
turn, could maintain the road, in the long run paying for the initial cost in improved trade.\textsuperscript{17} The total length of the road was 122 leagues.\textsuperscript{18}

In June of 1757, Arcos reported to the Council the discovery of much-needed rock in three different areas. Rock, used in the foundations, had to be hauled in from great distances, being very scarce locally. It could be found, according to Arcos, in the port of Sal Chico, twelve leagues windward and at two other locations seventeen leagues the opposite way, leeward, in the Río del Golfo and Santo Tomás del Castillo. Lime, used in making mortar, could be found just about anywhere.\textsuperscript{19} On the eighth of October, 1758, Franco and Alvarez sent Arriaga a drawing of the completed temporary redoubt, which had been copied from one by Pietro Cataneo Senese, with the exception of one added bulwark. The interior of the redoubt had been christened Plaza de Armas San Francisco.\textsuperscript{20}

As a result of the rapid work of Don Juan de Fuentes Trillo, who rose to the post of Master Bricklayer on October 5, 1758,\textsuperscript{21} Alvarez reported finishing the foundations of the main fort the following month, on November 12, and even sent plans showing what had been done since 1752. These plans were the first to show the triangular fort, but apparently had been drawn on an unofficial advance notice, being entitled "Projected plans"--the official order to build apparently had not yet
"Plano del Fuerte"

Plan of the fort that is being built for the protection of this port of San Fernando de Omoa on the coast of Honduras according to the condition in which today it is found. San Fernando de Omoa, and December 25 of 1774. Jph. Gonzalez Ferminor. This is a copy of the original. New Establishment, February 1, 1775. Navarro. AGI, Sevilla; sign. Mapas y Planos, Guatemala 149, in Zapatero, p. 157.
arrived! But when Arcos visited Omoa the following March, he remarked that progress had been slow in the four years Alvarez had worked there; he could see almost no change. The great supplies of rock either did not exist or had not been exploited, for none at all had been stockpiled. Alvarez had no better relations with Arcos than Díez had had earlier; the Captain-general asked Arriaga to send a new engineer to replace Alvarez, whom he considered just as lazy as Díez. He appointed Captain-commander José Antonio Palma to replace Franco as military leader, in an effort to push Alvarez into accomplishing some work.22

Official plans finally arrived on the 18th of September of 1759, and showed the projected fort in the desired location. Projected plans detailed the entire fortification system for the port, including the torreón on the outside point.23 By December, Alvarez had finished half of the foundations for the bulwarks, the rest of the groundwork ending the following September. Two months later the walls of the forward stories and rooms could be reported as done.24

Death continued to plague the government in Guatemala. Mariscal del Campo D. Alonzo de Arcos y Moreno de la Orden de Santiago, who had taken over from Montaño, died in 1760. His replacement, Fernández de Heredia, had been promoted to Field Marshall status when he moved up from the military
leadership of Nicaragua and Honduras. Fernández eagerly pushed for the fort's completion, and requested a full report of the work done to that date. José Sáenz de Baamonte assumed the governorship of Honduras on June 25, 1761, having been appointed the previous October 12. He replaced Interim Governor Franco, who had run the show after Fulgencio García Solís died.25

When José Antonio Palma took over the military leadership of Omoa, he passed on Fernández' request for a full report to Alvarez. Alvarez had several plans drawn, one on a scale of eighty varas dated September 17, 1759, through December 31, 1760, and another dated September 18, 1759, on a scale of 80 varas and a profile of 40 showing all the work done until then. He had two projected plans, one from July 1, 1760, on a scale of 80 varas and 40 of profile, the other from October 1, 1766, on the same scale. The last set had larger detail, the profile being done in 25 varas, and dated September 18 through December 1, 1760.26

One of the most dynamic personalities on the staff at Omoa proved to be Captain-commander Palma. His biography is quite extensive, as his good points almost equalled his faults. He apparently arrived on the scene as a ship captain, and proceeded to purchase an hacienda at nearby Cuyamel. By the time he had risen to the military command, he ran a store, selling food to the workers at exhorbitant
prices. He began supplying himself with cheap or free labor by appointing recruits in the guards to "hacienda duty," as well as dipping into the civilian work force and slave pool quite liberally. This caused many officials in Comayagua to complain to the Audiencia that Palma spent more time on his ranch than at the work on the fort.

A Royal edict on May 8, 1759 named him as one of many officers involved in smuggling with the British. Two years later, on September 30, 1761, three civilians lodged an official complaint, cosigned by four military captains, accusing Palma of requesting a militia of 50 men, and then using it only to work on his farm. While a normal tour of duty at Omoa lasted only two months, many had spent more than six months at Cuyamel, without extra pay or even license to leave on a visit to their families.

The complaint requested the government to exonerate the militias from such misuse, as the men so used could not even visit their families, let alone feed them. Pay usually consisted of credit in Palma's store, where the merchandise sold at extremely high prices. Apparently the plaintiffs won their case, because Palma received his marching orders, along with a judgment to repay all men who worked at his ranch. Palma's ranch and slaves became Royal property, and he lost his position as commander at Omoa to Francisco Alvarez. At the same time, Juan de Fuentes
Trillo was promoted from master bricklayer to head foreman. 29

Concern over the safety of the construction site arose when the British declared war on Spain on January 2, 1762. Serious trouble with the woodcutters in Belize erupted that year; the British occupied Havana on August 12, after a seventy-day fight with its populace; Manila fell on October 6. 30 Fernández de Heredia wrote in an official report:

I can do no less than bring to your consideration, to pass on to His Majesty, that if there is any breaking with the court of England, boats of competent strength should be sent to Omoa to defend the fort there. It is very undefended, and it is necessary to guard it to prevent any insults the English can do while it is in its present state. Even though, as the Engineers have pointed out, including Don Luis Díez Navarro’s report, a small fort should be built on the point they call "outside", to defend the bay, it will be necessary to send at least one frigate of the squadron, with another from Havana. This will avoid illnesses and the ships can leave and refurnish with victuals and people. Orders should be given to this effect immediately. 31

This request would be difficult to comply with, as Spain had scarcely enough warships to defend existing forts in New Spain and Central America. England, on the other hand, had a large squadron at Jamaica purely for offensive purposes. Consequently the English moved from place to place, never losing in strength. As a solution, Díez recommended halting the construction. Several advantages could be thus gained: the existing foundations could be
tested by weathering, and materials could be replenished and stockpiled, and a new location could be studied for the placement of an anchoring shoe, as one or more of the existing ones had proved insufficient, due to the rockiness of the terrain. Evidently this recommendation went into effect, because the work stopped in 1763. The soldiers remained to protect the site, as can be seen in the account of the salaries paid in 1764. But by the time the orders to stop work arrived, the Peace of Paris, signed on February 10, 1763, had ended the war without mishap at Omoa. The first news of construction after the cessation came in November, 1764, when Diez passed by while working on the evacuation of the Río Tinto area in compliance with article 17 of the Peace Pact:

> It was found necessary to resurface the foundation facing the sea, because the waves had eroded the protecting anchorage and threatened to undermine the construction.

Alvarez had predicted such an event when he began to build according to the plans.

In the same report, which included a set of plans showing all work already done, Diez reported the discovery of a limestone deposit in the hill near the village, which could be used for making lime. The construction workers opened a quarry, thus eliminating the need to travel the seven or eight leagues to the cays for mortar lime. Diez requested several repairs needed for the forts of
Inmaculada Concepción at San Juan, and at Golfo Dulce: "It is indispensable to maintain them, and to the repairs they need, new projects need to be added." At about the same time Heredia asked Arriaga to send a new engineer to replace Alvarez, whom Arcos had fired when the convenient break the war provided came along. Alvarez apparently had died at the fort shortly after that. Diez, too old and weak, could not move back and resume the work there.

According to Zapatero, Infantry Captain D. Tomás Hermenegildo de Arana, the Governor of Honduras, wrote an account of the history of Omoa, dated May 30, 1764. Writing about the size of the fortification needed, Arana stated that the minimum guard should be of four companies of 100 men each—mulattos or mestizos of an area no more than 80 leagues from Omoa, so they would be used to the climate. Such men could be worth ten foreigners, who would succumb rapidly to the diseases of the area. Their families could also serve as spies for the fort, reporting any discrepancies through their kinsmen in the guard. Arana did not believe either the site chosen for the fort or the type of construction to be the best; it should have been built on top of the hill, where it could dominate the landscape. As it sat, the hill could be a detriment to its defense. Only a torreón with a battery of cannon should have been put on the beachfront. But since this had not
"A chart of the Harbour and Port of St. Fernan.o de Omoa."

1779-1780. Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica. In Zapatero, p. 192. A note says that the outside walls were ten feet high, the garrison wall twenty-eight feet high and seventeen thick. The town was between the governor's house and the garrison. The structure to the right of the fort was a kiln, and the battery consisted only of a couple of trenches.
been done, the hill should be levelled and used as fill for the swamps in the immediate surroundings. Aranda expressed disappointment, "because the Fort that was being built, though the Plans say otherwise, is a badly-formed Garitón" (outpost).
Chapter Six: The Labor Aspect

Until recently, there has been no solid evidence contradicting the idea that before the purchase of black slaves in 1755, only white labor had been used to build the fort. But Mario Argueta, in his article "Los Constructores del Castillo de San Fernando de Omoa 1759-1775," states that the work used Indian, Negro, and mestizo labor.¹ Most of the Indians used apparently came from Yoro and Tela, areas populated by Jicaque Indians.² As early as 1681, Francisco de Castro Ayala started the paperwork to move fifty Indians from each town within a forty-five league radius of Omoa to build the fort. Under orders from Sevilla, he also prepared to transfer fifty blacks to Omoa, as the fort had to be completed within five years.³

Evidence of official Indian labor usage still remains scarce, but indirect proof does exist. In 1770 a group of Indians complained about the cost of their trip to and from Omoa. They had not received as much pay as their ladino counterparts for the same distance traveled. The complaint stated that many had died because they had only been used to clean swamps and grow milpas (cornfields) and jiquilite (dyes) for the commander's own profit. The Indians held labor at Omoa in horror, mainly because of the distance
from their families; the climate, and the length of the required stay.  

In 1762 Miguel Midenze and Luis Manuel Rivera, residents of Tegucigalpa, complained to the governor that they could not operate their mines because the repartimiento (governmental division of Indian labor) to San Fernando de Omoa virtually wiped out their labor force. That the repartimiento could seriously alter the operations of the mines can be questioned, though, because the Honduras mines did not use very much Indian labor.

Other complaints also prove Indian labor usage at Omoa: the inhabitants of Macholoa (in Tencoa) wrote that all their tribute payers had been sent to Omoa, and only returned to die, after having been paid half the salary agreed on. Jalapa, Saliaca and Yamala also sent Indians to the fort. In 1760 the Audiencia of Guatemala ordered the governor of Gracias not to send more Indians to Omoa, though the governor by-passed this order, using Indians as porters for bread or guns through Olanchito and Comayagua. The Audiencia's report mentions that in Piraera thirty Indians had died as a result of Omoa labor; seventeen died in Erandique, and twelve in Gualmoaca. That same year Luis Díez Navarro wrote of the Indians working on his project, clearly stating they only opened a road from Omoa to Quimistán, and did not work on the construction. The village of Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, by the junction
of the rivers Chamelecón and Choloma, disappeared completely, because its inhabitants all left or died working on the construction of the fort, according to José María Tojeira.10

Argueta's article is the first to deal with the Indian labor in Omoa, and as such has several problems. Argueta states that after 1752-1753, African slaves or mestizos gradually replaced the Indians, but all the documents used to prove the existence of such labor, except for Governor Castro Ayala's orders in 1680, are from 1760 and later. Castro Ayala's orders were fifty years before any suggestion of, and sixty years before, any concrete plans for the fort at Omoa were made. Then Argueta mentions a petition in 1802 for payment for a group of twenty La Campa Indians who went to unload several ships that never showed up. They were not paid, even though two died en route.11

Because neither the Indians nor the Spaniards could cope very well with the climate of Omoa, the government purchased black slaves to deal with the heavy work of the construction. The exact figures and dates of the purchases are very confusing, if all the data is considered. Argueta dates the first purchase in 1771, with the payment of 55,770 pesos for 217 blacks of both sexes. A 40,000 peso advance had been made to one Joseph Melchor de Ugalde, bonded by Juan Fermin de Ayacienena. When Melchor died,
Joseph Piñol took up the account and received the remaining 55,770 pesos. All three men belonged to the Consulado in Guatemala, and the price paid per slave followed the Real Compañía del Asiento de Negros scale from Puerto Rico: 260 "pesos fuertes" per black, 240 pesos for mulecones (seven to ten year-olds from Africa), and 215 pesos for muleques (female mulecones).  

That same year (1771) the Asiento de Negros de la Havana sent seventy blacks to Omoa, five being rejected as ill, and one dying en route. Robert Hodgson and William Pitt also supplied blacks to the fort, with a contract for 100 slaves. Their prices seem to have been somewhat better than those of the Asiento:

- 140 pesos per slave, in lots of 50 men, 30 women, 10 muleques, and 10 mulequas
- 164 pesos per slave, in lots of 100 men
- 120 to 140 pesos for mulequas only, depending on their size
- 204 pesos for Gold Coast men
- 196 pesos for Gold Coast mulecones
- 170 to 190 pesos for Gold Coast muleconas

But Argueta's tally of the slave population differs:

- first contract slaves---------204 caravalíes (from Nigeria)
- second contract slaves-------232 mondongos (from Congo)
- third contract slaves--------98 caravalíes
- fourth contract slaves-------57 caravalíes
- owned by Palma--------------23 total

Harvey Meyer provides another set of figures. According to him, all the slaves had been purchased from Jasper Hall in Jamaica at 204 or 164 pesos per male
(depending on their condition) and 140 pesos per female. Hall charged 20 pesos for each delivery.\textsuperscript{16} The first purchase of 100 slaves on September 5, 1755, preceded another installment on November 2, 1767 of 100, as certified by Vicente Martínez, interim superintendent at the fort. In a letter signed by Arcos y Moreno on September 5, 1755, the officials involved emphasized their concern for that kind of dealing. If blacks had to be purchased, care must be taken that no smuggling take place in the process: a Spanish ship must be used, if available. Only the slaves could be transported, and no other item of trade allowed on board.\textsuperscript{17}

Arcos y Moreno received a letter from Hall through Colonel Robert Hodgson on June 22, 1756, and the following day he told Phelipe Romano y Herrera, fiscal counselor, Juan Antonio Rodríguez de Ribas, accountant, and Manuel de Llano, treasurer, to issue the payment and passports necessary to deliver the slaves and for the return of the ship. He approved a price of 184 pesos per slave, for blacks of good disposition, delivered in good health. Once again the officials issued a warning about the care to be exercised that nothing other than slaves arrive on the ship, and that the ship land only at Omoa.\textsuperscript{18}

The slavery at Omoa was a curious one, however. Normally slaves received a food and clothing ration and
were allowed to hire out after hours to supplement their income. At Omoa, they received cash to feed themselves, a cloth ration, money to make their clothes, and a tobacco ration. So to some extent they could be considered more as indentured servants than as slaves. According to Rubio Sánchez, slaves were given one peso and a tobacco or food ration. In 1758, the superintendent reported that the 245 slaves belonging to the deposed military leader Palma had been apportioned off between Palma's estate (by then a royal hacienda) and the fort. After the fort's completion, these slaves received their freedom, and formed the basis for the present day village of Omoa.

Diez' prediction that the fort would stimulate an increase in the population of the surrounding areas came true to a degree. Licenciado Domingo López de Urréjola, interim Captain-general, issued an order on January 16, 1772, for the regularization of all new towns and poblados founded in the areas around Omoa.

The town of Omoa grew slowly: founded in 1752, it included the Royal Treasury building, a chapel, a hospital, a couple of stores and warehouses, the commandant's house, and barracks for the officers and enlisted men. Only people connected with the construction lived there, though. Bancroft states the town "soon contained a considerable population, and became the outlet for the commerce of eastern Guatemala." An anonymous map drawn
"Plan of the Fort, Port, and town of Omoa. Omoa, the 17th of April of 1779. Agustín Crame." Serv. Geog. del Ejército, Madrid; sign. Im-8a-2a-a 134, in Zapatero, p. 174. Note says the upper portion of the town was for blacks only. The lower portion only was called the town of Omoa. The plan shows Cramé's suggested batteries to increase the cannonfire of the fort.
in 1775 shows a town of 75 white families and about 400 black slaves. Two years later, Joseph Ferminor reported to his superiors in Guatemala that the total number of inhabitants came to 1,343: 1,029 blacks and 314 military personnel. In 1798 the Chaplain Juan de Pineda compiled a list of inhabitants that totaled 1,099. By that time, Omoa had a church, a police station, a hospital, a commandant’s office, several ranch houses, a carpenter’s shop, a blacksmithy, and a small number of houses.

Díez Navarro drew up a set of plans in 1768, showing the position of the houses and other buildings of the village. The plans are especially valuable for showing the location of the buildings inside of El Real. Outside the fort, the town consisted of a shop, the blacksmithy, the black slaves’ quarters of the first and second purchases (they were kept separate), the lime and brick kilns, the cattle yards, the engineers’ homes, the powder stores, and the guardhouses. Mentioning his orders of March 25, 1757, which stated "The King orders the fort be made according to the original plan of the Conde de Aranda," Díez made sure his plans fit the originals perfectly.

Strict laws regulated life and conditions in the construction area and towns near forts. Were a fort separated by more than one league from the nearest city or
town, it had, by law, to have a priest with a salary of 130 pesos per year, or at least equal to that of an ordinary soldier. Were the construction closer to town but lasting longer than a week, the governor should provide for the holy sacraments for his workers. Work could not last longer than eight hours in a single day, though this could be arranged to fit the desires of the head engineer. He could, for instance, leave out the hottest part of the day by working from five a.m. to one p.m. Every Saturday work had to stop one hour early so the paymaster could attend to distributing the salaries of the workers. Food had to be provided, though not necessarily for free. The head engineer did all the hiring and firing, and the Captain-general set the wages, after consulting with the head engineer and his accurate records of each worker’s ability. Zamora provides the following pay scale used in Guatemala, though he does not make it clear how long the pay period was:

in 1717, infantry in the Guardia de Palacio-----8pesos
mounted Guards----------------------15

in 1750, a Commandante de Campo------------------30
an alférez (quartermaster)---------------25
a sergeant-----------------------------15
a corporal-----------------------------12
a footsoldier--------------------------8pesos.33

in 1768, a lieutenant-----------------------48
an alférez-------------------------------38
a standardbearer------------------------34
troops (footsoldiers)------------------8
mounted soldiers----------------------15
These salaries did not have to be earned, however. Anyone with the right connections and the right price could arrange for a career in the armed forces. The sale of military rank was a common practice, and the price paid depended on the position sought and the ability of the purchaser to pay. In general, a lieutenant-colonelship cost 800 pesos; a captaincy, 20; a lieutenantship, 18; a quartermaster's post, 15 pesos.34

Other laws governing the defense system called for all fort blueprints had to be submitted to the Council of the Indies first, with a sheet of specifications, circumstances, forms, and reasons for the building.35 The engineers had to personally lay out plans and lines, and the Captain-generals to assist in the construction, seeing the construction to a completion as quickly as possible. Workers could not hire out for any other job until discharged by the fort administration.36

Every building in the near vicinity of a fort had to be demolished and the owners reimbursed by the Real Hacienda. No one could make drawings of Spanish forts except by special permission.37 All ships in the harbor had to salute the fort with a small mortar upon arriving, and if they failed to do so, would be immediately attacked.38 The king forbade foreigners to enter into any Spanish fortification system.39
Chapter Seven: The Second Construction Period

In his report to Arriaga, Salazar recommended a small torreón on the northwest point of the beach, where Méz had originally planned to build the fort. The torreón should have twelve and eighteen pound cannon, and would flank any ships entering the harbor. Apparently Arriaga forwarded the recommendation, seconded by Méz and the engineer Antonio Murga, to General Cermeño, Director of Engineers in Spain. The latter returned the plans because the copy he received did not include topography or a plan to house troops, necessary if the torreón were more than 1,000 varas from the fort. He considered the torreón far too weak for any defense against assault by land, but as a device against naval aggression, it might be a very good idea. Méz' report to Arriaga in 1768 showed the point where the torreón should be been built. His plans presented a profile and elevation for the project on a scale of 30 varas, plans quite adequate for a good idea of the area, despite Cermeño's opinion to the contrary.1 Cermeño drew up a version of a torreón as one possible for Omoa in 1769: a complete fort, reduced in size, but capable of acting independently, despite its being subject to San Fernando.2 Even though the construction of one of these small forts did receive approval and funding, it was never built, and never again did it attract attention.3
Murga rapidly caught on to the causes of the delays in the construction of the fort; he could see the time lapse between a request and an approval and the delivery of materials. He drew up a plan and map of all that had been built at the time he took over, and sent it to Guatemala on the 22nd of February, 1768. The following year he proposed altering the plans of the fort, placing the main entrance at the rear or southeast side, instead of the sea or northeast side, in an effort to avoid entrapment by a besieging army. The typical bulwarked system called for two gates: a main one, and one called "del Socorro," or of succor. The original plans for Omoa had one main door on the seaside and an auxiliary side door on the southeast side. All traffic to San Pedro Sula had to march around the fort before entering, a circumstance which could prove fatal in case of a siege, as reinforcements most likely would come from that direction. Therefore Murga proposed re-making the auxiliary door as the main one, and opening another auxiliary door on the third side, the one closest to the San Pedro road. That way no door opened on the battle side of the fort, and one faced each exit route from the fort. Méz approved the plan; the new door was opened in the area previously housing the chapel, so the chapel was then moved to the opposite side, where the main door had been. Arriaga, upon hearing of the change, expressed the great appreciation the king had for all the efforts to
make it the best defense in the area. But he included a note of concern for the health of the men at the site:

Nonetheless we notify you of the King's resolution concerning the engineers available for duty at Omoa: a rotation system should be set up, using trained personnel used to the climate, taking turns as foreman to relieve the directing Engineer, thus to prevent any detriment to the health of the Europeans in that port.

Toward the end of 1769 a rash of diseases hit Omoa very hard, and the Audiencia requested the Council of the Indies to send six military engineers to serve on rotation at Omoa, and a surgeon to help the ill.

Though an attempt had been made to stop troop movements and rotation of militia duty to Omoa, some militias still had to serve there. In 1777 Captain Alfonso Mercadillo took two companies from Golfo Dulce to Omoa: they marched half of the trip to Bodegas, then sailed the rest of the way. They had little to serve with, though García Peláez included in his Memorias a list of what he considered the inadequate armaments at Omoa. The fact that the personnel at the fort did not meet adequate standards either can be seen in a report written on December 1, 1769:

as far as the help, it is reduced to asking for five helpers of the artillery; four subaltern officers of the cavalry; two engineers, one a chief and the other a subaltern; two sergeants, four corporals of artillery and twenty artillery men, practical all, of cultivated customs, whose number is considered
necessary for the action seen in Omoa, or other forts in the Kingdom, which are needed to defend adequately Spain's interests.  

The new captain-general, Pedro Salazar, wrote in 1771 that ordinary engineer Captain Lorenzo Alvarado had died, and Extraordinary engineer Lieutenant José González Ferminor had fallen ill, as well as Juan Dastié, of the same rank. The only engineer who remained in a condition to work was José Alejandro. Draftsman José de Médula died, and Murga joined the ranks of the ill, though he recovered and returned to Omoa to work on the circular curtain and storehouses. By the end of 1772 Murga had succeeded in advancing the construction to the point of closing all the walls. The northeast side and the three bulwarks fast neared completion also.

Because of the change of the main entrance, another delay occurred. No notice of approval had arrived by August of 1772 for the change, though the order had been sent on the 28th of March of that year. Several openings had been left in the walls, in case the Council disapproved of the changes, and to facilitate the construction by allowing workers to carry materials in from several different work areas outside the fort. These openings appeared on the plans Murga drew up on August 28, 1772. They provided an interesting sidelight to the current knowledge of the fort: traces of filling-in of these access openings gave rise to rumors of the existence of
torture chambers. In later stages of the fort's history it was used as a prison, during which time these "torture chambers" supposedly came into use. There is nothing to prove or disprove these rumors, of course, but the drawings of the openings on a map as access gates should lead one to disbelieve them.\textsuperscript{12}

Salazar died on May 5, 1771, and the Audiencia named Juan González Bustillo as his interim replacement. The next year work finally recommenced officially after the 1763 war break. Arcos y Moreno took over from González temporarily, and gave the orders to begin building again. That year José González Ferminor became chief engineer, replacing Murga, who left for Spain in 1773.

The July 29, 1773, earthquake that destroyed Guatemala and forced the moving of the capital to its present site did not much affect the work at the fort. Diez reported the request by Joaquín del Castillo, the fort accountant, to expand the size of his office space.\textsuperscript{13} The new Captain-general, Capitán de Reales Guardias Españolas y Mariscal del Campo de los Reales Ejércitos Don Martín de Mayorga, de la Orden de Alcántara, sent 30,000 pesos to finish the construction. He requested a complete report of anything needed, but Ferminor, too sick to answer, did not comply immediately. He did eventually draw up a set of plans
showing just what had been done up until the time of his takeover.\textsuperscript{14}

On January 25, 1774, the Council asked to see plans showing the advancement of the construction at Omoa, in order to start planning for outfitting the garrison, sending the artillery, and other supplies. Because of bad times with the court of England, they feared war again, a fear that came true in 1779. The Council worried about the slowness of the construction, and about the quality of the personnel at the fort. In a letter to Arriaga dated December 20, 1774, D. Silvestre Abaroa lists all of the engineers assigned to work on the Omoa project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engineering Director</th>
<th>Luis Díez Navarro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Engineer</td>
<td>Lieut. Col. Joaquín Casaviella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(who never arrived from Spain, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>was replaced by Lieut. Col. Antonio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sampere)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Engineer</td>
<td>Lieut. Col. Antonio Marín</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Engineer</td>
<td>Captain Simón Desnaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary Engineer</td>
<td>Lieut. Juan Dastie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary Engineer</td>
<td>Lieut. José González Ferminor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary Engineer</td>
<td>José Alejandro.\textsuperscript{15}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A new set of plans drawn on February 1, 1775, showed the advances in the construction: the main door had not been finished, but Ferminor (the senior engineer at the fort) had completed the officers' and troops' quarters, the Castellano's apartments, two stores on the left of the main door, and fifteen shops on the circular curtain. A room left in the south bulwark, marked as \#8 on the map, had been designated as a powder room.\textsuperscript{16} Commenting on the
"Plan and profile of the Fort of San Fernando de Omoa. Omoa, the 17th of April of 1779. Agustín Crame. This is a copy made by Julio Albo y Helguero." Serv. Geog. del Ejercito, Madrid; sign. LM-9a-1a-a 134, in Zapatero, p. 177. The legend reads:

A principal door
B door of El Socorro
C shops
D chapel
N powder room
F circular battery
G low batteries to increase firepower
location of the powder room, Zapatero states:

the 8th store, adjacent to the interior angle of the first wall of the southern bulwark, is disposed toward the powder room, thus showing the dados on the ventilation shafts opening onto the arms plaza—and one with the shaft curiously open at the same angle as the wall, an irregularity which we esteem very adventuresome and dangerous, because in the case of a siege, an incendiary bomb could cause an explosion in the room; indisputably this is a technical deficiency which we can not readily explain. 17

According to Ferminor's 1775 plans, the shop with the auxiliary door (on the San Pedro Sula side) shared space with the chapel. Just outside the southern bulwark, at "point 0," a lime kiln had been opened. Because of this, for some time the southern bulwark was nicknamed "the one of the kiln," even though the kiln had been filled in shortly after its construction. Ferminor also made a five-note explanation on his plans:

1. all shops had been finished "con el cañón a tres roscas"
2. the fort now rose to the level of the majesterial cord, ready to begin the work on the parapets
3. the map showed how much of the counterscape had been finished, and that all of the foundation had been done
4. the eastern bulwark, #20 on the map, had been completed, and already had two guardhouses finished
5. the southern bulwark, #21 on the map, was half completed. 18

Mayorga wrote a letter to Arriaga in 1773, stating that "this work is found now in the state to mount the artillery..." 19 The next year Mayorga wrote to José
Galvèz, who had replaced Arriaga as Secretary of the Indies, that two more engineers should be sent to Omoa, not counting Ferminor—and noted the arrival at the capital of Simón Desnauz, a captain of engineers. Then on the sixth of January, 1775, he communicated to the court that he had sent the engineer to examine and inform me of what is necessary for the defense of the plaza: he requested thirty-three cannon and gun carriages and other various utensils. In the very probable event that the enemy bring mortars, it is necessary to have in the fort at least eight mortars and the corresponding bombs. There should be at least 400 men in the garrison and two artillery companies of fifty men each.20

The last official notice mentioning the construction of the fort came with another letter from Mayorga to Galvèz in 1775:

With the date of April the last I am informed by the commandant of Omoa that he has mounted on the wall facing the sea of the castle six cannon of brass of twenty-four pounds and two culverins of twelve; and that at the end of the same month he will have it with all its artillery and placed on a regular defense schedule; that in all the present month they will conclude the landfills of the two collateral bulwarks.21

Mayorga projected a total completion date of June, 1778. The bulk of the construction had been done, but the bulwark fill-in had not: carts and drivers would have to be hired for that job.

In January, 1775, Antonio Sánchez went to Omoa to replace interim military commander Francisco Aybar. Ferminor, head engineer still, felt the Royal Hacienda
could afford to buy carts for the slaves to use on the landfills. Several others disagreed, feeling that slaves could do the job by hand, with baskets, probably. The argument went on for years. The landfills apparently rose to a workable degree by Christmas, 1777, though an anonymous map from early 1775 shows the work to have been completed much as the fort stands today. The counterscape had no landfills, but the upper esplanades had been completed on all three sides. The stores had been finished de a tres roscas, (see note 18) and covered as bomb shelters. Ferminor, in 1777, wrote of incomplete parapets, and of the work needed on the landfills. Mayorga assured Gálvez that these two details would be completed as soon as possible. In the meantime, six 24-pound cannon adorned the front wall, along with two 12-"caliber" culebrinas.

The following year Díez Navarro sent two engineers, Simón Desnaux and Juan Dastié, to survey the fort and report on its condition. An uneasy Audiencia worried over the problems with the British in Belize, and thus for the safety of the fort. The engineers reported some serious deviations from Aranda's original construction plans: the parapets had been altered slightly, though this did not present any problems. But the builders had substituted mortar for dirt fill-in over the shops, which might prove
troublesome; the foundations were weak to begin with, having been built over sand without any deep foundations or anchorings. Several walls already sported cracks, especially along the front curtain, where the sea had eroded the exposed bases and foundations. But the fort could withstand a continued cannonade: Desnaux had all eleven brass cannon (of twenty-four, eighteen, and sixteen pounds) fired simultaneously without causing any ill effect. The over-reliance on brick instead of rock in the outer walls meant another serious deviation from the blueprints. Brick could not withstand enemy cannonballs as well as rock could, so the engineers did not feel the fort could stand up under a sustained artillery attack. Besides, sea water and constant humidity tended to soften brick and melt the adobe, which had a high salt content to begin with. Three arches over lengths of brick constituted the structure of the stores, built one over another without alternating, a practice which weakened the fort's basic structure. Both Dastié and Desnaux only gave approval to the structure because they knew of no alternative except to tear down the fort and begin again from the foundations.

At the time of the report the landfills had not been even started, because no dirt suitable for such use had been found in the immediate area. Looking at the bright side, however, they believed the topography in some way compensated for some of the fort's weaknesses, if only
because of the lack of another decent landing place nearby. The shops remained irremediably damp and humid: all but three collected water at alarming rates, though the engineers felt this could be fixed, at some cost to the crown. The mangroves had reclaimed much of the previously cleared areas, a fact not considered good either for the defense or for the health of the inhabitants. The roads to San Pedro Sula and Guatemala also remained in a very sad condition, probably through simple lack of use. Desnaux estimated the cost of repairing the eighty-one league route to Guatemala through San Pedro Sula to be 418,450 pesos.25

Brigadier de Infantería e Ingeniería Militar D. Agustín Crame, appointed by the Council of the Indies as inspector general of the fortifications of the Americas, produced another evaluation of San Fernando de Omoa.26 At the time of the report (April of 1779), only two companies guarded Omoa, with an effective strength of 100 men: Crame accurately admitted the garrison’s deficiency in case of attack that month: his assessment was to be proven true only five months later.

The construction needed serious reforms: the northeast curtain did not have enough cannon coverage, and Face Two of the northern bulwark and Face One of the southern could not withstand any attacks. One solution might be, Crame suggested, to build two separate batteries,
connected to San Fernando by "caponeras" (literally, cloaks), opening toward the sea. This would complement the defense of these weak spots, and add greatly to the firepower of the fort. Were the redoubt of El Real torn down, the cost of building these two batteries would only amount to about 6,000 pesos. The interior of the fort needed more "aljibe," provisioning of food and water. A deeper well should be dug inside the plaza, to improve the water supply for the number of troops and animals quartered within the fort. 27

The garrison, Crame continued, needed reinforcing desperately. It had barely 100 men, and certainly not enough officers: Lieutenant Diego Durán had gone to Spain, Captain José Cuéllar and under-lieutenants Antonio Antonio and Gabino Martínez to Guatemala. Only two officers other than the castellano held command: under-lieutenants Manuel Cleriac and José Menéndez. Guatemala could not supply reinforcements readily, being too far from the fort, so Crame suggested stationing a contingent of 400 veteran troops in San Pedro Sula, of which 100 could remain in the hills near the fort. Omoa should have 400 veteran troops, including sixty artillerymen, and a reserve of 100 slaves as reinforcements. Current infantry consisted of only seventy-four veterans and six Spanish corporals. The artillery personnel included forty black slaves with no real training, and their weaponry he termed "loose": they
only had twenty-six cannon (brass, of twenty-four and
twelve pounds), of which six needed repairs already. Of
the inventory of forty-three iron cannon (24, 18, 12, 8, 4,
3, 2, and 1 pounders), twenty had not arrived, and ten of
the remaining had broken down. The men needed 14,755
bullets to bring current stock up to adequate standards,
because only 5,945 of all calibers filled their stock.
Instead of 400 "sixteen caliber" muskets with bayonets,
they had only 50. Supplies of lead, flints, and compounds
for making powder simply did not exist.28

Ironically, in 1777, the Captain-general had tried to
stop the conscription of militias for rotation at Omoa, or
at least to stop them from going to the fort. Because news
travelled slowly, this did not go into effect for some
time: Comayagua still sent eighty men per month on a
regular basis.29
Chapter Eight: The Commercial Aspect

Commerce, after defense the most important reason for the fort's construction, grew very slowly. During the first few years, only Royal traffic used the port: troop shipments, supplies, and an occasional Register ship. José de Palma arrived in 1755 in the first merchant ship to call at Omoa, but only because a storm did not permit him to land at Matina. The first merchant ship licensed to the port arrived the following year--the María under Captain Silvestre Martínez de Canobas, from Santo Domingo.

Commerce tended to be a serious problem for the whole of Guatemala. Part of the trouble started when a treasurer in Peru lowered the gold content of coins being minted, for his own profit. Guatemala appears to have borne the brunt of this flood of counterfeit coins, and suffered economically from it. Then Ecuadoran cacao flooded the Mexican market, practically eliminating all Guatemalan competition. A worse blow came in 1620 when the King prohibited trade with Peru; the loss of commerce with Havana in 1676 proved to be the last straw. Batres Jáuregui sums it up well by quoting the "chapín" (Guatemalan) adage "Buen principio de semana tiene el que lo ahorcan en lunes"--you start off a week well when you're hanged on Monday.
The Peru trade had been good: Guatemala sent tar and dyes and cacao in return for wine, vinegar, rum, almonds and olives. With the loss of these imports the price of wine skyrocketed, if only because of demand. The ban opened the way for blatant smuggling between Nicaragua and Peru, because only Nicaragua supplied Peru with pitch for its wine casks, and only through Guatemala could Peru benefit directly from the Manila Galleons.4

Taxation hit Guatemalan merchants very hard. In 1629, Spain demanded 4,000 ducats of gold annually to support the military. The Windward Navy was established during the War of Succession, adding

4 reales gold on each box of indigo
2 reales gold on each load of cacao
2 reales gold on each arroba of grana silvestre
1 real gold on each hide
1 real gold on each petaca (measure) of tar, tobacco, or sarsaparilla

to the current taxes: the gobelas, tequios, diezmos, primicias, alcabalas, the quinto on metals, derechos, oficios vendibles, and other local fees. These all amounted to near bankruptcy for Guatemalan merchants by the end of the seventeenth century.5

The yearly Cádiz fleet sent at least one ship to Honduras, under the protection of the Windward Navy, bringing wine, velvet and jewelry, and returning to Spain with cacao, indigo, balsams, and woods. But on the 12th of April of 1633, the king dropped the naval protection of the
Honduras squadron, forcing the merchants to send their wares through Veracruz. With the development of the Ecuadoran cacao production, Guatemala lost its monopoly on that market and had to diversify its products: planters tried cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, pitch, and alquitrón. The area around Trujillo produced maize, fruits, grapes, oranges, lemons, and the rivers abounded with fish. Cattle also multiplied rapidly, and in later years Thomas Gage reported important crops of hides, Canna Fistula, sarsaparilla and yucca. The production of jiquilite, cochineal and vanilla declined, though precious woods and mineral wealth increased. But the destruction of the seaports by pirates after the loss of protection by the Windward Navy hurt all commercial traffic drastically.

According to Rubio Sánchez, the merchants' future looked so bad that

the commercial movement during the year 1702 in Central America can be said to have been circumscribed in the arrival of the ship named "Magdalena," from Panama, which arrived at the port of Realejo. 7

In 1742 Guatemala imported 400,000 pesos of merchandise from Spain and 200,000 from China. That same year it exported 300,000 in gold and silver, 250,000 in cacao and dyes, and 50,000 in miscellaneous items, thus producing a trade balance of zero. 8

The commercial outlook in the colonies brightened somewhat by 1765, with the opening of several Spanish ports
to the Caribbean trade. The new Bourbon king saw these free trade reforms as the only way to restore agriculture and industry in the colonies to their previous vigor. Before these improvements, Guatemala had shown very low tax profits: in 1757, it sent only 29,000 pesos to Spain, with a mere 22,000 remaining to the merchants as profit. After the trade reforms, in 1768, 150,000 pesos remained to the merchants, and by 1769, 175,000 pesos. In 1778, the corce de caja (the government's share) in Guatemala jumped to 218,000 pesos.

Still, only thirty or thirty-five mercantile houses controlled all the commerce in the Kingdom of Guatemala. The Peru trade reopened, consisting of two or three ships yearly bringing wine, olive oil, and table articles worth 200,000 to 300,000 pesos in exchange for indigo. Cuba averaged eight to ten vessels, exchanging rum and onions worth 5,000 to 6,000 pesos per shipment, for indigo and 3,000 to 4,000 pesos in gold and silver coin and bullion. Mayorga wrote in 1773 of over 2 million gold pesos' worth of indigo being exported yearly: the Ungo, Viteri, Laucel, Calera, Mejera, and Batres families controlled most of it. In 1787 the fleet took to Spain 5,677 arrobas of cochinilla, producing revenues of 283,750 in gold pesos.

Troy Floyd has written an analysis of the merchant class of Guatemala and the monopoly it ran within the
There appears to have been a coalition of *peninsulares* and *criollos*, an elite group interrelated by marriage, *compadrazgo*, and business ties, who took advantage of their position at the right times. The textile revolution in Europe demanded indigo, and the Spanish merchant marine had been growing as the pirates lost their control of the shipping lanes. In the last quarter of the 18th century, Central America produced over 25 million pounds of indigo: adding this to the silver mined in Honduras, the income amounted to about 2 million pesos yearly. But many farmers complained against the Consulado, the elite monopoly, insisting it stifled them by dictating the prices of their crops. As a result, the government passed laws attempting to "free" the "inner provinces" (Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador) from the Guatemalan merchants.

The construction of the fort at Omoa began this movement of reform, by symbolizing a freedom at least for Honduras: farmers theoretically did not have to ship their indigo to Guatemala. The fort's proximity to the Motagua River meant Salvadoran farmers could ship their wares on that river to the new port. Honduras again "benefitted" with the opening of Trujillo to trade with Spain in 1782, and Nicaragua with the Río San Juan in 1796. The Bourbons reduced all taxes in 1781, specifically for Omoa and Trujillo, and in 1782, the *alcabala* (tax) for importation
was lowered from four to two percent. Two years later the council abolished the alcabala altogether. None of these tax reforms produced any significant change in commercial patterns for one simple reason: the monopoly owned all the transportation. The farmers had no one to sell to but to the Consulado in Guatemala. Their only other option was to buy ships and transport their own crops directly to Spain, an option none of them could afford.

Two more laws were passed in an effort to help the farmers. Captain General Gálvez ordered all trade from Guatemala to go through Omoa, and the trade from El Salvador through Zacapa to Omoa. But these also failed for the same reason. To the merchant monopoly, even though taxes dropped, the move to Omoa meant a net increase in expenditures. The port of Santo Tomás proved to be the crux of the problem: because of pirate attacks, the tax collectorship there had been abandoned. Thus, when the merchants shipped through Santo Tomás, they paid no taxes. The lowering of tax percentages at Omoa and Trujillo only placed them on the same level as Santo Tomás, and since the transportation and roads to that port had been well established and used for many years, they remained cheaper to use. The elite had close ties with Cádiz, and saw no reason to change their smooth-running operation to other cities in Spain, either.
Thus between 1789 and 1793, of twenty-four ships that landed at Omoa and Santo Tomás, twenty-one belonged to the Cádiz merchants, and landed at the latter port. That may be why the members of the Consulado opposed building a fort at Omoa:

Let us say lastly, that one of the things that slowed down the fortification of the coast of the North Sea was the resistance put up by the rich and privileged merchants of the capital of the Kingdom, with the interest of exerting a more complete control, let us say monopoly, over commerce, and to defend their contraband with the same English, which so much profited them. Very clearly the king is told by the Royal Officials of Comayagua, when they informed him by letter on December 3 of 1746 that the influential men of the city of Guatemala were opposed to the fortification of Trujillo, so that there should be only one port, a dock, not a fort, to register the ships of commerce on the Golfo Dulce.

The distinction between external and internal trade in Guatemala also proved a purely artificial one. The indigo buyers controlled most other internal products also: they would buy up cacao, cotton, threads, cloth, iron, cattle, and hides, and trade in kind for the indigo crops. By also owning the banks, the Consulado members provided most of the currency for the region: they yearly advanced about one million pesos to the indigo farmers, and purchased about 50,000 head of cattle yearly for barter. In short, the consulado ran a true monopoly on all trade in the Kingdom of Guatemala.
Britain ran a strong, if illegal, competition to the Spanish merchants. Clarence Haring wrote that two circumstances helped this illegal trade: the length of the coastlines Spain had to defend, and tolerance by Spanish officials toward the contraband. Central America simply did not have enough inhabitants to afford adequate surveillance. Because of this and the strict trade regulations, even government officials participated in the illegal trade, often claiming—quite truthfully—that the colonists demanded and needed it.¹⁵ The problem became so extensive that the Audiencia began an intensive study in 1758 to find out the exact extent of this smuggling, particularly in Honduras and the Moskitia.¹⁶ This study produced the report that indicted even the commandant of Omoa, José Antonio Palma.

But the Spanish merchants not only had to face British competition: they labored under Spain's mercantilist theories that dictated which ports could or could not be used, and what went through them. Because at first Central America had no port of entry, all trade to and from Guatemala had to go through Veracruz in New Spain, and overland through Oaxaca. In an attempt to overcome this, the Consulado in Guatemala called a Cabildo abierto, a town council, and asked the President of the Audiencia to open Omoa as a port of entry. Doing so would reinstate the protection of the Windward Navy, under which they wanted to
ship their indigo to Spain or to Havana. The president acquiesced, but Don Domingo de Nicheo, a representative of five trading houses in Spain, voiced opposition. Only the king, he claimed, could take such a course of action. As a result, the president sent an official request to the king on the fifth of December, 1758. His arguments noted the distances the wares had to travel: 260 leagues to Oaxaca, another 80 to Veracruz, and only during February and March did the weather permit the four-month trip to Oaxaca. From there to Veracruz took another 45 to 50 days. Thieves and bandits added to the cost and difficulty of the trip, as did accidents caused by bad road conditions.

In all, the president concluded, reaching Veracruz in time for the Register ship proved difficult, and storage was very expensive if the wares did not arrive on time. By contrast, the trip to Bodegas covered only 80 leagues, and from there to Omoa was another 120 leagues: a new road had been opened at a cost of 16,089 pesos, facilitating communication with the new port. If the king approved the trade with Havana, a 150 ton ship would suffice to carry all the trade at first, and would be very beneficial to trade and commerce for the whole kingdom of Guatemala. It would increase the diversification and volume of trade, and thus the revenues to the king's coffers.17
The request took three years to process: on the 5th of January, 1761, the Council announced an order, originally written on March 5, 1760, approving free commerce between Omoa and Spain, through Havana. But though approved, the new route took some time to develop. Three years later, the cacao export had almost disappeared, though indigo and xiquilite (superior unprocessed indigo) had increased some. Commerce with New Spain increased dramatically: possibly as a result of this the king issued a Royal Edict on January 17, 1764, lifting the ban on trade with Peru and New Granada. A dramatic increase in trade did not mean much, though. The port of Omoa in 1764 saw only two major export shipments: the taranta Jesús, José y María under José Retortillo arrived from Cádiz and returned with gold, silver, and other products; and El Vigilante under Captain Cosme Joaquín Therreros took the same type of load. Royal ships still stopped at Omoa regularly, supplying the fort and workers with materials and foodstuffs.

From then until 1775 ship movement at Omoa gradually increased. After 1775 it almost stopped, possibly because of the war in the Caribbean. Rubio Sánchez believes the use of the port seemed low because of the lack of knowledge concerning it. Commerce increased slowly with time, as knowledge of the port spread.

The king finally decided in 1765 that only free protected trade could revive the sagging agricultural
economies in the colonies. A Royal Edict on October 16 of that year opened several new ports of entry in Spain. The results proved positive, and the trend spread, opening more ports in the colonies. Omoa prospered as well: by 1774 it had need of a group of port pilots, headed by José Antonio Martínez. Commerce diversified also, as the captain-generals in the mid-1700's had encouraged production of new grains with moderate success, and the production of tobacco spread to Istepec, Chinameca, Copán, and León, Nicaragua. The Audiencia commissioned another road to San Pedro Sula in 1780, which Juan Pinto and Francisco Fortani signed a contract to build.21
Chapter Nine: Cost and Value

Construction at Omoa officially ended in 1775. King's minister Zenón de Somodevilla's military policies of aggressive belligerence against the British in Belize had taken their toll on the speed of construction by diverting funds, dividing the military strength, and not really accomplishing much of anything. The sluggish movement finally ground to a halt, exhausted economically by Somodevilla's efforts to do too much at one time.

British forces had great admiration for the fort, without seeming overly concerned with it. They considered its location an excellent harbor, and "the fortress at Omoa should have been exceedingly strong, if strength were always the consequence of labour and expense."¹ A description written in the Annual Register mentions walls 28 feet high surrounded by a deep dry ditch, with parapets 18 feet thick; the entire structure had been made of solid stone raised, the authors claimed, from the sea 20 leagues away. "Its batteries shewed about 40 pieces of artillery; but it seemed to have been deficient in that respect, as well as in point of garrison."²

So perhaps Salvatierra is correct in assuming that although Omoa did not serve much of an active role in the defense of the Kingdom of Guatemala, it had somewhat of a
THE FORT OF SAN FERNANDO

Instituto de Historia e Antropología de Honduras
deterrent effect, by letting the British know that Spain intended to make good its claim to the north coast of Central America.

This fort and that of La Inmaculada of the river San Juan came to be the formidable obstacles where was wrecked, conquered, the English pretension to take over the now called Central American Isthmus.³

Omoa may not have been as strong a deterrent as Salvatierra opines, but the possibility exists that the Spaniards knew of Oliver Cromwell's great plans for the area. The Spaniards then made their presence known just enough to foil these plans, or to intimidate Cromwell's counsellors into believing that the Western Design would not be the easy pushover Cromwell thought. The same could be said to have happened to later English monarchs.

The cost of the fort had been staggering to the Spanish Crown. At the end of 1761, Fernández gave a detailed account of the expenses incurred to June 22 of that year: 875,147 pesos, 6 reales, not counting the loans from Campeche, Comayagua, Havana, Chiquimula, and Zacapa. Guatemala had also used up the credit of 40,964 pesos, 5 reales, and 7 maravedís loaned to Campeche to support Melchor de Navarrete on an expedition against the British in Valis (Belize).⁴ The town of Sonsonate sent an expense report for:

February 6, 1760---130 pesos for salary and trip
April 15, 1761---192 pesos for rice
60 pesos for its transport to Sacapa
80 pesos from Sacapa to Golfo
November 22, 1763--325 pesos for 32 quintales,
one arroba, 19 pounds of *Jarcia de Xenique*
May 4, 1766-------200 pesos for rice
54 pesos for its transportation
Total 1,043 pesos.

This bill was signed by Andrés Guerra in June, 1768.5

Francisco Xavier de Requena signed a report of accounts
rendered by the Royal Coffers to the fortification project
for salaries, mail, recruitment, and recruits, for the
dates January 28, 1752, through May, 1768:

1752-------------------66,461. 6. 22 2/3
1753-------------------51,235. 6. 17
1754-------------------158,540. 0. 11 (includes 29,871. 2 1/2
spent on a Balist:Belize [expedition])
1755-------------------55,222. 2. 17
1756-------------------95,463. 6. 17
1757-------------------95,162. 6. 17
1758-------------------63,484. 5. 0
1759-------------------148,552. 6. 0
1760-------------------73,004. 7. 0
1761-------------------75,370. 2. 1
1762-------------------51,131. 4. 6 1/2
1763-------------------34,531. 4. 22 1/2
1764-------------------56,541. 5. 0
1765-------------------55,534. 6. 0
1766-------------------38,160. 7. 5 2/3
1767-------------------55,163. 5. 0
1768-------------------34,189. 2. 0 (January to May 21)
Total 1,199,282. 3. 1 1/3

Comayagua submitted a separate cost sheet, for the period
between June 2, 1752 and July 25, 1768, signed by Manuel
Lopes de Rajo y Soto:

1752-------------------50,000. 0 (April 14)
1753-------------------0. 0
1755-------------------1,641. 0
1756-------------------9,082. 0
1756 [sic.]-------------------3,311. 4
1759 [sic.]-------------------5,524. 0
Calderón Quijano provides a different set of figures, signed by Armiz y Macía:

Note on the quantities that have been spent from the Royal Coffers in our charge, for the assistance of the port of San Fernando de Omoa, since the 27th of January of 1752, when the expenses began, until the 20th of July of 1773.

On the salaries of officials, employees, and recruits--------- 39,515. 5. 1/2
on money remitted-----------------995,806. 5. 0
on food and transportation fees---435,718. 3. 1/2
on purchase of negros------------- 55,760. 0. 0
on various equipment,
and transportation fees----------121,360. 5. 0
on various minor expenses------- 4,632. 4. 1/2

    total----------1,652,763. 7. 1/2

Though construction had been stopped in 1764 because of the war, the garrison had remained to protect the site. An expense breakdown for that year shows the cost in pesos of supporting the garrison:

January--------2,102. 1
February-------1,993. 1
March---------2,078. 7
April---------1,868. 4
May----------1,580. 4
June---------1,668. 7
July---------1,762. 2
August-------1,752. 2
September----1,680. 5. 1/2
October-------1,846. 6. 1/2. 1/4
November-----1,718. 7. 1/2. 1/4
December-----1,753. 7
Salazar reported that by 1766, at the beginning of his rule, 1,117,690 pesos and 7 reales had been spent, and only the foundations could be seen. By July, 1766, Murga had spent another 129,331 pesos putting up the walls and several arches. Clearing the swamps raised the cost also. A typical construction monthly expense sheet might look like this one signed by Joseph Pussilla:

August 1767  
Infantry and artillery--------480. 1.2  
Volunteers-----------------306. 6  
Civilian workers----------127. 6  
Monthly salaries officers -------129. 6  
Plaza Mayor materials --------250. 6. 11/13  

total 7,288. 6. 2/3

Salazar, in an effort to cut the cost of feeding the workers, gave orders to restock, at royal expense, the Royal Hacienda at Cuyamel, by then confiscated from Palma. He required the corregimientos of Comayagua and Chiquimula to help supply food. He also sent a request to the king that all supply ships arriving at the fort be exempt from taxes for a period of ten years, in the hope of attracting more merchants. The king agreed, but only for a five-year period. The Cuyamel project the king vetoed, and asked Salazar to enact measures insuring prompt pay for the militias at the fort.

Business did pick up somewhat during the construction period. Merchants not connected with the fort paid 10,438 pesos in taxes in 1766, on 2,609 1/2 zurrones of dye loaded
onto the ships Jesús María y Joseph and Santa Bárbara,
under Captains Pedro Barcelo and Joseph de Urristti. 13

By 1777 the cost of the construction had gone down
dramatically, as had, of course, the amount of work being
done. That year a bill submitted by Doña Casilda Araoa for
the work of land fills requested payment for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Loads</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>1036</td>
<td>777 pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1044</td>
<td>783 pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>703 pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>624 pesos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>887 pesos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An estimate of the cost to finish the project came to
179,240.48 pesos:

To unload and fix the shops---------9,639 pesos
To reload and finish the shops------1,408
To finish the parapets, and stairs-- 82.2
To finish the counterscape---------3,112
To resurface the parapets and
covered road--------4,024
Excavation to fix the stores--------1,344
To finish the bulwarks-------------1,596
To refill the parapets-------------1,870.2.17
landfills------------------------98,035.1.05

In 1806 the price of labor exceeded 19,000 pesos
yearly. As this labor meant black slaves, the government
felt something had to be done to cut the cost. Most slaves
did not work at the fort—they filled in as personal
servants to the military officers, whose political power
had grown too strong to be bucked. The solution to the
problem came in 1811 with the emancipation of the slaves,
though these had to remain on their allotted lands. 16
Batres Jáuregui puts the cost of maintenance for the fort after the construction at 60,000 pesos yearly.\textsuperscript{17}

During the construction period, the secretary of the Indies, Arriaga, recognized that the fort might have been a white elephant after all. It had taken over sixteen years to build, earning a reputation as a graveyard for bodies and money, and yet its purpose as a defensive fort came to be questioned seriously:

This port, elected as the most useful to the commerce of that Kingdom and having begun to establish and fortify 16 years ago, has been a sepulcher of peoples, and much more of monies. It has been the successive special charge given to Presedents Vásquez Prego, Moreno and Heredia, but the work has advanced little. Its fortification cannot count with more than receiving the respect of corsairs and one or two other ships which might attempt to insult it; but when exposed to being beaten by an enemy squadron, it could be of very little use except as far as has been mentioned; but in any case, as a more adaptable and safe port for the commerce of the province, and the only one which should remain, it is best that you do your utmost to see to the conclusion of the project begun.\textsuperscript{18}

General opinion held that the fort could not withstand a serious attack by an enemy because it was too small. Its only value could be for commerce, because of the good bay: the fort provided a sense of security that merchants liked. Arriaga thus held the opinion that as passive defense the fort became useless. Either he did not know or he overlooked the original intention of the project as a base for an aggressive defense of the coast. Spain could no
longer afford to outfit the large numbers of ships required to implement Mézel's system, or even to stock large defensive forts. So Arriaga used the poor planning as an excuse to justify the apparent failure to build an adequate fort at Omoa: perhaps, he surmised, some use could be salvaged by using it to defend a small commercial port. In the short ten years between the beginning of construction and Arriaga's letter, the purpose of the fort had changed completely from the aggressive warfare school of thought to the passive defense theory.

Architecturally and technically speaking, the fort remains hard to categorize. Zapatero notes that its design by Aranda anticipated by twenty years the development of the triangle style of fort by Montalembert, for it was simultaneous with the teachings of the school at Mézières, which influenced all military design in Italy, Spain, Germany and Sweden. But he points out that three of the leading military architects disapproved of a triangle as the basic plan for a fort. Cristóbal Rojas, professor at the Escuela Militar de Fortificación Ofensiva y Defensiva, arte de Fuegos y de Escuadronar, wrote that the triangle plan should only be used as a last resort; J. Cassani of the same institution said the same thing in 1704; and Pedro de Lucuze, director of the Real Academia de Matemáticas in Barcelona, wrote in 1772 that a triangular
fort could withstand a siege just as long as any other, and for a much lower cost, though he preferred other styles. 19

Zapatero does give an attempt to classify Omoa, by its different attributes:

The fort, according to the norms of the art of fortification, is the following: Defensive, by its disposition from few to many; composite, by being composed of natural and artificial; irregular, by the disproportion of the capital radius of bulwarks 1 and 3; comfortable, by its conditions and mediums; advantageous, by dominating the field; useful or of consequence by being the key to the defense and communication to the Valley of Sula and the Royal Road to Guatemala; horizontal, because all the rooms are on the same level; by its domination, large; and remote, by the number of cannon and reach of over 1,400 varas of Castille. 20

Zamora notes that San Fernando did not have the appearance of a feudal castle nor the conditions of a modern fort. The bulwark system predominated in the 1700's, having been introduced during the time of the Duke of Alva, from Italy, where Pacciotti, the father of modern fortification, had adopted it. 21

On the sixth of September, 1771, President of the Audiencia Bernardo Troncoso del Rincón ordered engineer Antonio Porta y Costas to make a survey and report of conditions at Omoa. The latter submitted the required report on April 30, 1792. 22

The fort's position was 15 degrees, 4 minutes 9 seconds North, and 287 degrees, 14 minutes longitude from the Tenerife Meridian, with an elevation of no more than
two feet above sea level. The hot, humid weather became unhealthy when the sea breezes blew over the swamps in the winter. The bay itself seemed good, protected completely on the first and second quadrants, and part of the third; its bottom was loam, with white sandy beaches. An effort should be made to check the slow and continuous silting up effect of the Omoa River by planting trees and shrubs around it and dropping rocks at the river's mouth. Landmarks near the fort included Puerto Caballos, three leagues eastward; the Chamelecon River with a draught of six feet, seven leagues eastward; the Ulda River, with a draught of seven feet, nine leagues eastward. The road to San Pedro Sula remained very dangerous, as travellers could easily be ambushed by the British at the Chamelecon crossing.

The structure of the fort followed that of a "Hornaveque Doble" or crown, with thirty-one rooms for barracks, stores, magazines, chapel and dungeons. The moat had a counterscape, but the walls lacked all the parapets, having only an exterior "revestimiento" (coating of plaster). Some of the curtains had been finished already. The circular part needed stairs, and all the landfills, including that of the covered road, remained incomplete. The arms plaza, parapets, and esplanades had not been finished, either. A hill 800 varas away, 32 1/2 varas high
and 280 in circumference dominated the fort: the town on the lee side of the hill had been built away from the only healthy breezes available. Despite the silting action of the river, the entire bay still remained deep, a characteristic of the entire Caribbean between the Ulúa and Motagua rivers.

In critiquing the structure, Porta noted the undefended appearance of the two wings and all the golas and circulars. They had no flanking points, a defect that facilitated an enemy scaling assault. The redoubt of El Real had fallen into disrepair and did not have sufficient strength to defend itself. Because of this, it also could be used as a cover by an attacking force, thus forming a serious defect in the defensive system. The outer walls of the fort appeared strong, but the interior needed improvement because of the lack of adequate drainage; rain seeped from the ramparts into the stores and barracks, melting the lime mortar. For this reason Porta expressed doubts that the interior walls could last more than a couple of years, and hoped they could be rebuilt. Another major problem with the drainage also concerned the stores, for they were built one foot lower than the plaza floor, and subsequently flooded with frightening regularity.

In its present condition, Porta concluded, the fort could not be defended, and the long-term projects to repair it should be started as soon as possible. The seaside
bulwarks needed to be enlarged or added to, as mentioned earlier. The road to San Pedro Sula seemed to have been the only operating one, and Porta recommended it be abandoned in favor of the unfinished road started in 1778. The new one proved susceptible to attack, as shown by the British in 1781. His estimate to complete the construction and repairs came to 179,240 pesos and 4 reales, plus another 63,791 pesos to build two half bulwarks to complement and enhance the defensive posture of the site.\(^{23}\)

Porta gave one final recommendation: he found the port of Santo Tomás a much more suitable port of entry, if a canal could be built to the Motagua River. This done, freight could be unloaded from the ships and onto riverboats which could then travel upstream to San Pedro Sula, eliminating some of the danger posed by bandits and pirates on the Omoa route. Porta therefore stated that the fort at Omoa should be abandoned and the garrison transferred to Santo Tomás. The cost might be heavy to begin with, but the long-range savings would be very much worth the trouble. Omoa, he pointed out, could not and did not stop banditry along the Chameleón or Ulúa rivers. He also pointed out that a more thorough survey of the area should be taken before following up on his report.\(^{24}\)

This report seems typical of the attitude many Spaniards held concerning the defense of the Caribbean:
forts should be built with land protection in mind. But Omoa's use as a fort against land expeditions only came about because of the indecisive policies of the administrators in the government of Guatemala and Spain. Constant bickering between the two schools of thought concerning colonial defense hurt the strength of the system, as did the conflicts of ambitions, ideologies, and court factions.25

The result of all this bickering was predictable—a poorly constructed San Fernando de Omoa. Its plans, though excellent, had been poorly executed:

The Fort at San Fernando is of terrible construction for the elementary reason that it was condemned, by its basic concept, to be so. With heroic stubborness, the Spanish builders took upon themselves to follow a structure of heavy and elephantine ideology and execution, against all inconveniences and insolvable limitations.26

Telles contends in his technical assessment of the fort that Spain's technology at the time did not have the ability to create a floor elastic enough to not break under the strain of the climatic and temperature changes, and yet strong enough to hold up the amount of fill-in required by the plans. Spain, in essence, built a fort beyond its ability to do so. They could not make the fill-in waterproof enough, so the high humidity and rainfall of the area made the walls crack under both the enormous weight and the erosive action of the water. The engineers used
brick made locally of inferior clay with a high organic matter content. The salt and minerals in the clay dissolved when it rained, causing the brick to decompose faster than the lime mortar used to hold them together. The fill-in areas, because of the absorbing characteristics of the dirt and sand used, became basically a large water tank, which dripped and poured water through cracks almost constantly. The humidity in the stores made their use almost impossible.  

The economic maintenance of Spanish forts was the responsibility of the local authorities. A tax on agricultural and manufactured commerce had to be paid in Comayagua, which would then be sent on to Omoa and Trujillo. A proposal called on the Audiencia to route all ores from the mines in Honduras through the two fortified ports. If enacted, this traffic could then be taxed to maintain both the forts and the roads used by the ore carts.  

The port and fort of Omoa created an unusual political situation. As a military plaza, it came under the direct supervision of the Captain-general—but it also had its own political government, municipal and other officers, customs-houses, royal treasury, and a delegate to the consulado in Guatemala. The Captain-general had more than just military and customs jurisdiction over Omoa, when compared to other forts in Central America, because of its
port of entry status. Omoa bordered on the Corregimiento of Chiquimula, and therefore fell under the government of Comayagua. But Comayagua only held jurisdiction over matters concerning the taxation of merchandise to and from Honduras, because Omoa controlled its own commerce, being the main port of entry for Guatemala City.

As far as the line of authority went, the Captain-general of the kingdom had final say over military matters. He held the responsibility for all armed forces on land and sea, named all the military assistants in the government, and appointed all other military ministers (quartermasters, treasurers, etc.). All the kingdom's forts fell under his direct supervision as part of the defense of the area: Omoa, San Juan de Ulúa, Trujillo, Golfo Dulce, Matina, etc. When the Audiencia separated the jurisdiction of the ports from the forts, the latter remained in the same line of authority; thus the town of Omoa became the concern of Comayagua, but the fort remained under the command of the Captain-general, while the port of commerce held its own authority, under the Audiencia.
Chapter Ten: Loss and Recovery

In May, 1779, Captain-general Matías de Gálvez appointed Simón de Desnaux, a forty-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel of Engineers, as military commander of Omoa. Gálvez expressed a serious concern for the fort's safety because of the recent outbreak of hostilities with England. He recognized the serious tactical errors made in the construction of the fort, and feared an attack, if only because of the closeness of the Balis (Belize) enemy camps. He visited Omoa, leaving Guatemala on the seventh of September. On the sixth of August Gálvez noted the completion of the new road between the capital and Omoa, and the clearing of the mangroves and swamps enough to render the place livable. As a result, he recommended the official court mail route be through Omoa, rather than through Veracruz.¹

The following September 21st, Desnaux took up his command at Omoa, and recognized immediately the intent of the British to take the fort by force.² Three days later he reported having recognized four enemy ships on the horizon at ten in the morning. Knowing the poor state of the fort's defense provisions, he put one small cannon on board a Spanish ship in the harbor and requested all available gunpowder be sent to the fort immediately. The
enemy ships entered the harbor flying Spanish flags—a popular pirate trick—but Desnaux fired at them. The British returned fire, damaging the walls of the fort slightly; at sunset the British raised their proper colors. Apparently landing just outside the bay at midnight, the pirates attempted to do some bartering with Spanish merchants for dyes. They then put out to sea on the morning of the 26th, leaving behind one frigate damaged in the fracas.³

Desnaux immediately sent Gálvez a request for reinforcements and war materiel, as his current stock had dropped to dangerously low levels. He needed money also: because of backpay problems, Desnaux felt little confidence in his men, who showed little interest in doing their jobs.

A company of Spaniards, 100 to 600 men strong, had earlier pressed an attack on the settlement at St. George’s Cay, in an attempt to send the baymen there packing. The Governor of Jamaica answered by sending Captain Dalrymple, the commander of a new force of Irish troops, to St. George’s relief. Admiral Sir Peter Parker also sent a squadron: the frigates Charon, Lowestaffe, and the Pomona, along with the schooner Race Horse, all under the command of Captain Luttrell. They had orders to intercept, if possible, several Register ships in the area.⁴ This and similar types of hostilities caused war to break out once more: the hostile conduct of the English despite the
treaty of 1763, united to other causes, made Spain declare war again on England.⁵

Luttrell and Dalrymple joined forces for the second attack on Omoa the following October: on the sixteenth, Desnaux sighted more enemy sails on the horizon. Twelve vessels in all showed up—two frigates, a ship, a paquebot, a brigantine, two other armed boats, and five vessels not described. The guns of the fort disabled one ship and ran another aground, whereupon the attack temporarily ceased. Desnaux issued an order threatening to execute anyone who did not show up for general quarters. Forty-five thousand pesos in the cashier's box he removed to safety, probably into the fort, but possibly he sent them to San Pedro Sula, to remove them from danger altogether. On the following day, the seventeenth, the British landed at Puerto Caballos and marched across to Omoa.

According to the Annual Register, 1780, the British forces numbered about five hundred, under the leadership of naval captains Parkénham, Nugent, and Parker, and Captain Carden of the 60th of Engineers.⁶ After a small skirmish with a group of negros, they took the hill near the town. Zamora claims Desnaux and his lieutenants Juan Dastier and Juan Antonio Martínez did not keep an adequate watch, and neither did the rest of the 230 men in the fort.⁷ José Rodríguez expresses the same opinion.⁸
Desnaux ordered artillery fire, but the cannon mounts still had not been completed, so the cannon could not be aimed very accurately. He moved several cannon from the Spanish ships in the harbor to the fort, for the lack of a decent number of artillery there. Then another problem arose—not enough men had the training to work the cannon. The British ships returned into the bay, exchanging several shots with the fort. Desnaux mentions the outstanding bravery of several artillery officers: Dastier, Ferrandiz, Toll, and Tomé. After setting fire to the town, the British footsoldiers and zambos began pressing their attack seriously. Because the torreón recommended by Murga and Méz had not been built, Luttrell found it easy to trap the Spanish ships in the harbor. By evening, the ill-trained soldiers in the fort had only 300 kegs of old gunpowder left. They could only wait for defeat or reinforcements from Guatemala.

The next day, the eighteenth, Desnaux moved several small cannon to the rear walls, but could only afford to fire one shot every quarter of an hour. Commander Juan Dastier went on a reconnaissance patrol, and reported that the counterscape, unfinished and without a landfill, provided an excellent shelter for the British, becoming a hindrance to the defense. On the nineteenth, officers Clerec and Menéndez tried twice to remove the British
infantrymen, but failed because they lacked proper cannon coverage.

Desnaux reported that on the 20th he had to force all the black artillerymen out of the barracks to man their cannon. That day the British forces began their assault on the south bulwark, then moved to the north side, where they forced the Puerta del Socorro and scaled the walls. Another account holds that on the 19th, the Spaniards ran out of powder, whereupon Bene Huelhe with 1,000 men scaled the counterscape on the west wall, built two varas lower than the parapets. They entered the moat and scaled the walls with, according to Mencos Fajardo, ladders owned by the fort but carelessly left outside. Rubio Sánchez quotes Desnaux' report that approximately 2,500 invaders took the entire garrison captive.

Zamora puts the time of the attack at 4:30 a.m., and mentions no resistance by the Spaniards other than one cannon fired by officer Menéndez which killed one Portuguese mercenary. Under-Lieutenant Clerac prevented Sergeant Thomé from firing two cannon with shot at the British after they entered the fort. The Annual Register presents a different story: after a cannonade since three that morning, 150 men with ladders approached the fort without being seen till they crossed the ditch. Several ladders broke under the cannonfire, but eventually two seamen mounted the walls and held the Spanish defenders,
Map showing troop and ship positions during the battle. Copy of an original by Joseph Antonio Martínez, sent to the Council by Joseph Gregorio Rivera in February of 1780. AGI Sevilla, sign. Mapas y Planos, Guatemala 241, in Zapatero, p. 189.
overcome by surprise, at gunpoint until the rest of the invaders climbed up. The Spanish fled over the walls, and hid in the casements.  

Bancroft tells the story in yet another way, stating that a better fate might have attended them the Spaniards had not some of the negro artillerymen and a company of regulars, dismayed by the odds against them, turned recreant and broken down with their axes the gates of the fortress.  

The number of captives taken varies according to the source: Mencos reports 400 prisoners and 100 men, including Desnaux, escaping. The Annual Register lists 355 rank and file, plus officers and townspeople taken. At the official surrender, the Governor and principal officers handed over their swords and keys, yielding to their captors the fort, the garrison, and the Register ships that had earlier eluded Admiral Parker's orders for their capture.  

After some negotiations, the captives marched out free, in return for the release of several British men from Cayo Cocian. The Church plate and ornaments from the chapel Huelhe held as deposit, to ensure compliance with his commands. The British took merchandise from the Register ships valued at over three million, either pesos or pieces-of-eight. García Peláez says Desnaux left his second in command and two chaplains as hostages. Desnaux
did offer a ransom for the 250 quintales of quicksilver, but Huelhe declined the offer, as the loss of the mercury could hinder Guatemala much more than the ransom might help the British. A similar offer of ransom for the fort he also turned down, leaving a small garrison to guard it.

There is some debate concerning the retaking of the fort by Spanish forces. Domingo Juarros and Andrés Calvo state that the British garrison had evacuated Omoa by the time Matías de Gálvez arrived there to lay siege. But García Peláez, Bancroft, and Modesto Lafuente wrote of a vicious fight for the reconquest.

Roberto Rivas, the governor of Yucatán, had just repulsed a British contingent from his province, and, hearing of the disaster at Omoa, headed that way. The account varies, but apparently he arrived too late, though his ships managed to chase down the Leviathan, which had foundered with all the money taken at Omoa. Bancroft records the story otherwise: the ship with the treasure foundered and sank in a storm, and the rest of the British ships barely managed to escape. Apparently the ship Rivas captured had on board some Spanish prisoners of war, which Huelhe had sent away from the scene so they could not be a hindrance to him or a help to his foes.

When Matías de Gálvez heard of the fall of Omoa, he raised an army, forced loans from the merchants of
Guatemala, and sent out requests for aid and support. The Viceroy in New Spain sent 500,000 pesos and troops through Oaxaca. Gálvez' itinerary took him through Chiquimula, Copán, and San José, where he waited for several days. Comayagua sent a contingent under Anzoátegui, and San Salvador sent an army under Colonel Manuel Francisco Pánigo. Gálvez arrived at Quesaila on the 31st of October. The Comayagua troops had arrived early--on the 23rd--and encountered many black slaves and escapees from Omoa. Gálvez armed 99 of these with machetes and lances, and waited for the 238 reinforcements from Guatemala. On the 9th of November he received 150 rifles, 46 quintales of bullets, 3 trabucos (blunderbusses), 106 pairs of pistols, 55 shotguns, and a large quantity of powder and flints.²⁰

By November 18, Gálvez had arrived at San Pedro Sula. Pardons were given to prisoners in San Salvador, San Vicente, San Miguel, and Sonsonate, on the condition that they join his army. Zamora claims Gálvez warned the Viceroy of New Spain, who sent Roberto Rivas with an army from Yucatán. The latter arrived too late for any action other than to capture the shipload of prisoners Bene Huelhe had sent to Lake Izabal. Huelhe had done this so Gálvez could not count on them to help in the force to retake the fort.²¹

On the 23rd of November, Gálvez and his army left San Pedro Sula. After camping at Choloma, they arrived the
next day at Rancho Ojo de Agua, two leagues from San Fernando de Omoa. On the 25th, he took the heights around the fort and the river, to prevent the British from restocking or retreating. A report of the Spanish army states they had 230 rifles, 2 quintals of powder, and 3 quintals of bullets, to be spread among the following troops:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>troops</th>
<th>officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batallón de Infantería</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squadron of Dragoons</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>militias</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prisoners or &quot;exiles&quot;</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blacks, slaves</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totals</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A group of blacks went to defend the river and beachfront. The prisoners dug trenches to within 100 paces of the British front lines. Twelve grenadiers of the Batallón de Infantería and five cadets²³ provided cover for the laborers, the latter holding up under tremendous return fire from the British lines. The blacks by the river caught some British sailors and beheaded two of them, though four managed to escape into the fort.

On the morning of the 26th, Gálvez sent a soldier with letters to Bene Huelhe, offering terms for surrendering. Huelhe refused to accept them, but wrote that he would consider a prisoner exchange. Later in the day a brigantine anchored and fired artillery at the Spanish forces. The latter put up a great show, playing band music
Guatemala, and sent out requests for aid and support. The Viceroy in New Spain sent 500,000 pesos and troops through Oaxaca. Gálvez' itinerary took him through Chiquimula, Copán, and San José, where he waited several for days. Comayagua sent a contingent under Anzoátegui, and San Salvador sent an army under Colonel Manuel Francisco Pánigo. Gálvez arrived at Quesaila on the 31st of October. The Comayagua troops had arrived early--on the 23rd--and encountered many black slaves and escapees from Omoa. Gálvez armed 99 of these with machetes and lances, and waited for the 238 reinforcements from Guatemala. On the 9th of November he received 150 rifles, 46 quintales of bullets, 3 trabucos (blunderbusses), 106 pairs of pistols, 55 shotguns, and a large quantity of powder and flints.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troops</th>
<th>Troops</th>
<th>Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batallón de Infantería</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squadron of Dragoons</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militias</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners or &quot;exiles&quot;</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>60</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>577</strong></td>
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in several places and lighting many bonfires, in an effort to fool the British into thinking they had more forces than they did. The following morning Gálvez sent a prisoner to request surrender again. He offered to punish the slaves who had killed the two British men by the river. Huelhe exchanged the prisoner for one of his, sending back another refusal. 24

On the 28th, the British forces fired all they had at the Spanish in the trenches, the river mouth, and the cattle yards. Six blacks attempted a sortie to obtain food, but had to leave the two cows they killed outside. Boats came and went by the fort all day: by nightfall Gálvez became suspicious, and ordered a patrol to spy out the fort. A company of grenadiers had already gotten wind of what the British were up to, and stormed the gates. They moved too late—Huelhe and his men had already sailed away. According to José Rodríguez, they had set fire to the stores, spiked the cannon, and stolen all the weapons and ammunition in the fort. 25

But there are several versions of the actual battle. Castañeda states that Gálvez wrote to Bene Huelhe to surrender, then forced him out after the latter’s refusal. 26 Rubio Sánchez has Gálvez’ version: after unsuccessfully negotiating with the British—at their request, writes Mencos Franco—he surprised and drove the enemy to their ships on the 30th of November. 27 Bancroft
says the British took several leading men from the village with them as hostages. The following morning, the 30th of November, Gálvez had his men fix the spiked cannon and take inventory of the fort artillery. They still had forty-three cannon, including mortars and culverins: ten on the exterior, six on the careenero, five on the land side bulwarks, seven on the seaside curtains, and fifteen on various other locations. No mention is made of the British sacking the fort or damaging anything other than the spiked cannon and wounded pride of the Spanish.

Rubio Sánchez writes of several references recognizing bravery during the episode: Felipe de Gallegos, on September 22, 1780, for leading the troops digging trenches while under fire; Francisco Aybar, on September 26, a sergeant major from Comayagua, who held off the British, not allowing them to retreat or use the Omoa river to restock their provisions; Antonio Esguardi, infantry, on the 24th of November, 1781, for valor in battle. The Audiencia gave promotions to: Fernando de Porras, to Colonel; Captain Félix Domínguez, to Lieutenant-Colonel; Francisco Troncoso, Luis Méndez de Sotomayor, Miguel Hermosilla, and Ventura Galván, to Captain.

News of Gálvez' recapture of Omoa soon reached the capital. On the seventh of December a proclamation was issued, declaring that:
a mass be said and a Te Deum sung in thanks for the happy restoration of the port of Omoa, executed the 28th of November, 1779, leaving as fugitives the garrison from England at seven that night.31

For his efforts, the Audiencia promoted Brigadier Matías de Gálvez to Field Marshall. Desnaux, on the other hand, stood trial for having surrendered the fort. His defense showed who really was at fault: there had been almost no powder or ammunition when he took charge. He had accepted the position on the promises of Gálvez to support and supply whatever he needed. These promises Gálvez did not keep; a request for powder and shot made August 18 was ignored, as were several subsequent orders. Had they been filled, Desnaux probably could have repulsed the British. Moreover, unknowingly of course, he had only been allowed one month in which to prepare for the attack.

I went to the Fort of Omoa to take charge of its command persuaded of the effectiveness of the order issued to the squadron of Dragoons of Guatemala and two companies of militias from Comayagua to reinforce [the fort]. In addition to these guarantees I would have the powder necessary to defend myself, all offered me by the president; but the 2d expedition of the British arrived first.32

Desnaux wrote to Mez Navarro that

Little would it have served me to deny total capitulation and remain obstinate in the defense, because this cannot be obtained while the fort is not finished, not properly manned, without powder or arms. . . . It was not possible for Omoa to be defended without aid, nor do I consider it possible that the General [Gálvez] could have sent what we needed.33
Desnaux made several suggestions for improvements. The assault proved that without the exterior earthworks (or at least completed works) the fort could not defend itself: English soldiers had even taken cover in the old arms plaza of San Francisco. All tall buildings, trees, or structures should be removed from within the fort's cannon range. Other weaknesses included the unfinished counterscape, the unfinished gun emplacements, bulwark landfills, etc. The town should be moved to the top of the hill, if only for health reasons: the swamps and mangroves still had not been controlled.34

Gálvez, impressed with Desnauz' defense, apparently also agreed with many of suggestions. But he spent more energy on an aggressive pursuit of the British, arguing that until the British had been eradicated from the Caribbean islands, the north coast of Honduras could not be safe, even if a coastguard force worked there.

Everything verifies more the necessity in which are found these stopping points of Honduras, for throwing out the English from the island of Jamaica, to free them from their piracies, and of the unmeasured help they give to the indian barbarians against us.35

Gálvez' rhetoric supported an offensive posture for Omoa, but he apparently meant an infantry challenge to the British forces, not a naval force. He, along with all the other governmental leaders in Guatemala, could not decide the purpose for which the fort at Omoa had been built.
Britain's attacks on Omoa during the war in 1779 appear in reality to have been merely a diversion to draw Spain's attention away from a major thrust toward Lake Nicaragua. Unfortunately for the British, these diversions actually ended up in a victory for Spain, and Nicaragua did not even suffer a small raid. After the war, Spain requested negotiations for the return of Gibraltar: the Spanish minister in London talked with an Irish ecclesiastic, Mr. Hussey, and later with a Mr. Cumberland. In return for Gibraltar, Spain promised to cede San Fernando de Omoa, Puerto Rico, lands in Oran, and to abrogate the treaty with France. Spain would also ally herself with England against the American insurgents, confirm the Treaty of Paris of 1763, and to pay heavy indemnities for any destroyed English property. England declined the offer.

In actuality, neither Omoa nor Trujillo had been very effective in ending the smuggling or the piracy among the Spanish and British seamen. Part of the reason why the forts did not stop aliens or corsairs from making off with the riches of the Spanish Crown appears to have been the same Spaniards who supposedly defended these riches. They often helped to pillage the Royal Treasury—as in the
Commander Palma case, for instance. But when it came to an actual invasion of the colonies, the projects to take by force these lands from Spain generally failed. San Fernando de Omoa fell not through the fault of the Spanish military, or that of the fort itself solely, but rather because of the system that built it. Spain had overextended both in resources and organization, and its enemies proved too strong for her to hold an area so underdeveloped and sparsely inhabited. But its sheer size seemed to help the Spanish Empire: that may be one of the reasons why the fort at Omoa was not permanently lost to the British. Gálvez saved the fort's honor at arms by recovering it. But it was then left, practically abandoned, without the improvements its builders and inspectors recommended. In a way, Omoa reflected the rest of the many American fortifications, weak only by belonging to the most dilapidated system of defense ever erected. That system had been built by an empire exhausted, drained by its own effort to expand, but it still withstood constantly the most hardened attacks by Spain's enemies throughout the Caribbean. As Velázquez states in her analysis of the significance and effectiveness of the Spanish colonial defense system, through reviewing the history of this system there can be no doubt about the sharp insight of the Spaniards of the sixteenth century as they sought strategic places on the coasts of America.
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Why did the Omoa project not become one of the outstanding examples of this excellent defense system? It had everything going for it—a good bay, ease of defense, a location close to all the Central American trouble spots. The trouble stemmed from the lack of military organization at the higher levels of government. No consistent line of authority appears to have been set down for the planning and execution of the blueprints for San Fernando de Omoa. Anyone in the Audiencia or the Council of the Indies could and did alter anything they wanted to. The original concept called for an offensive garrison to outfit royal corsairs and fleets to combat pirates and enemy naval forces. The Viceroy Duke of the Palata first came up with the idea, which apparently Aranda and Mez used throughout the entire planning and construction stages. Bancroft quotes the royal cédula of August 30, 1740, ordering the fortification of Omoa "as a further protection for the coasts of Honduras, and to serve as a calling-place for the coast guards for these parts," to show its planned benefits.7

Right from the start Luis Mez Navarro had stated his theory behind the planning of the fort:

It seems more to our purpose to build a fort in this port and not at Trujillo for several reasons, one of which is that two galeotas or pirogues could be based there as corsairs to capture as many ships as the English send to Valis Belize to load dyewood. The latter still persist in dealing in the above mentioned
port of Trujillo, and the Spanish corsairs could continue to interrupt these incursions; all this is the reason for this proposal.

During the construction, however, the mentality of the administration in Guatemala changed enough to undermine the purpose for the use of the fort. Active aggression no longer held sway; passive defense became of paramount importance. The equipment and personnel sent to Omoa reflected this. No fleet received orders to operate from Omoa; only merchant ships used the port, except for an occasional military vessel docking for supplies.

This drastic change in the intent of the fort brought about its demise. In 1779 the Spaniards had to use a half-completed offensive fort in a defensive posture with rather predictable results. Had either concept been used consistently, it would have worked, as both had advantages. But either had to be implemented fully, within the limits of Spain’s economic conditions. Spain built the wrong fort for the wrong reason. It needed not to defend the area from invaders, but rather to police against illegal trade with its own colonists. A police force meant going out and stopping the smugglers, not scaring them off with a show of strength. Accusations like Antonio Porta's that Omoa could not stop smuggling even in the nearby areas of Chamelecón and Ulúa rivers were true, if only because the fort had been built in Omoa. Had it been assigned a fleet of ships to patrol the coasts, Omoa could have stopped, or at least
checked, the rampant smuggling. But the fleet was never assigned, so the smuggling continued.

Perhaps the cost factor had something to do with it; the fort took so long to build because of the many things going against it--unsanitary conditions, low priority, lack of adequate personnel--that the officials in Spain tired of throwing money at it. Because for so long commerce had been prohibited through Honduras, the colonists had established illegal lines of trade, making it impossible for the local government to collect enough taxes to pay for the project. Officials in Spain did not see much need for an expensive fort in a low-profit area, as can be seen in Arriaga's letter to Salazar, which showed that the Council wanted to finish the fort only to avoid admitting having wasted its money.9

The longer it took to build the fort, the longer it would take to establish commerce enough to pay for the fort. But Spain could not afford that much time or money in one lump sum. Neither could it afford to operate an offensive or a large enough defensive fort in the Central American provinces in the mid-1700's. So the plans had been altered, paving the way for a major flaw in the defensive system of the colonies. By building the fort, Spain attracted the attention of the British military, like an invitation to attack. The fort had not been built for
that kind of attack; it needed a squadron of ships to complete its defenses. For this reason San Fernando de Omoa fell so easily to Dalrymple and Suttrell in 1779: the resistance put up by the Spaniards from a poorly equipped and unfinished fort could not meet an enemy force of equal strength, for no ships defended the bay in concert with the fort. 10

So the vast amount of lives and money spent on the construction of Omoa came to naught. Without counting the slight possibility of some deterrence earlier on in the project, Omoa became a fiasco, a monument to Spain's cumbersome government and lack of an effective, consistent defense policy.
Chapter One

Granada had been sacked in 1665, Panama in 1671, Golfo Dulce in 1679, León in 1685, to cite a few of the more devastating and humiliating acts of piracy by British buccaneers. Troy S. Floyd, The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Moskitia (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), pp. 30-37.


Roland Hussey, "Spanish Reaction to Foreign Aggression in the Caribbean to about 1680," Hispanic American Historical Review IX 3 (August, 1929; reprint), p. 287.


Est. Leg 817, fol 16, Archivo General de Simiancas, in Manuel Fernández Alvarez, "Orígenes de la Rivalidad Naval Hispano-Inglesa en el Siglo XVI," Revista de Indias VIII 28, 29 (April-September, 1947), footnote 79, p. 338. Stranke and Willfort captured two Spanish ships, sewed half of the crews into the sails, tied the rest to the bare rigging, and set them to drift, after throwing the sails (with the sailors in them) into the ocean, to be towed by the ships.

Floyd, pp. 26-7.

10 Cespedes del Castillo, pp. 245-6.


13 Settlers who worked along the coasts, fishing or sailing for a living, were known as baymen. Those who worked in the interior were known as buccaneers (a word derived from a Dutch term for cattle rustlers) or woodcutters, depending on just what they did. Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1762 (London: printed for J. Dodsley), p. 239.

14 Cespedes del Castillo, p. 243.


Chapter Two

1Cóspedes del Castillo, p. 239.

2Milla y Vidaurre frequently comments and paraphrases García Peláez; several scholars believe he relied almost exclusively on the latter, much to his detriment. José Milla y Vidaurre, Historia de la América Central Desde el descubrimiento del País por los españoles (1502) hasta su independencia de la España (1821) precedida de una "Noticia Histórica" relativa a las naciones que habitaban la América Central a la llegada de los Españoles (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1937), v. 2, pp. 346-7.


4Fernández Alvarez, p. 313.


6Ibid., law XII.


10Cóspedes del Castillo, p. 264.

11Hussey, p. 292.

12Rodríguez, p. 11.


17 "Letter from Antonelli to His Majesty, dated in Panama, defending himself from the faults attributed to the fortifications erected by him in Habana," dated May 24, 1569, in Angulo InIíguez, pp. 5-6.

18 "Letter from Juan Tejeda to His Majesty, giving account of the travesty and of the works realized in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo" (dated June 4, 1587, Historia Documentada de S. Cristóbal de la Havana en el Siglo XVI, La Havana, 1927; Santo Domingo, 127: published by Wright), in Angulo InIíguez, p. 32.

19 Francisco de Paula García Peláez, Memorias para la Historia del Antiguo Reyno de Guatemala vol. 2 (Guatemala: 1851-2), p. 70.

20 Antonio Batres Jáuregui, La América Central Ante la Historia (Guatemala, 1949), p. 255.

21 José Rodríguez, Estudios de Historia Militar de Centroamérica, primera parte (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1930), p. 121.

22 Velázquez, p. 23.
Chapter Three

1 Encyclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europea Americana, 1925, s.v. "Honduras."


3 Ibid., p. 300.


7 Milla y Vidaurre, v. 2, pp. 187-8. Only certain ports, both in Spain and the Americas, were allowed to export and import goods. These were called ports of entry, because through them entered all the trade of the entire area. Guatemala, for instance, had usually two ports of entry, one on the Pacific side (for the Manila Galleons), and one on the Caribbean. At one point the Caribbean port was closed, and all Central American trade had to go overland to Veracruz.

8 Ibid., p. 472.


11 Angulo Iñíguez, pp. 33-8.

12 241 miles. One legua equalled 3.45 miles, and 17 1/2 standard leguas equalled one degree.


14 Chamberlain, pp. 166-7.

15 Calderón Qüijano, "El Fuerte de San Fernando de Omoa: su Historia e Importancia que tuvo en la Defensa del


19 A1.23 leg. 4603 fol. 131, AGCA, Guatemala.

20 One arroba equals 25 pounds.

21 A1.23 leg. 4603 fol. 131, AGCA, Guatemala.


23 Ibid.

24 The Spaniards tried to clear the mangroves and swamps, without much success, even after the fort had been built, in hopes that the increased air circulation would calm the diseases. This can be seen in the report giving notice of

the areas cleared of mangroves since the 14th of the present month till now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Varas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North to south</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East to west</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

signed and dated on May 23, 1795 by Francisco Dávila Galindo. They succeeded to some degree, by reducing the death rate, though they could never control it. Rubio, "Historia," pp. 66, 303.


27 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

29 Floyd, pp. 81-82.


Chapter Four

1"Real Orden de Felipe V al Virrey de Nueva España, 24 de Marzo, 1741," documento cédula inédita vol. XI folio 151 160 (AGI, Sevilla), in Floyd, p. 78.


5Luis Díez Navarro, "Informe hecho en este Superior Gov.no pr. Dn. Luis Díez Navarro Ingeniero Ordinario por Su Magd. en la Vicicta que hiso en las Provincías y Puertos de Comayagua, Nicaragua y Costa rica yen que proponelo medios convenientes para la defensa yseguridad del reino," A2.1 leg 3 exp 38, AGCA, Guatemala.


7Calderón Quijano, "Noticias ...," pp. 40-47.

8The Spanish monetary system seems very confusing. One peso meant one troy ounce of gold coin, worth 50 pence in British currency. A peso could be broken down into eight reales fuertes (the famous pieces of eight) or twenty reales vellón. Salaries were usually paid in pesos ensayados (assayed pesos) worth twelve and a half reales vellón, or the mine peso, worth thirteen and one fourth reales. The maravedí varied according to the real: the assay peso equalled 450 maravedís, at 34 per real. Luis Díez Navarro's salary of 1000 pesos per year came to about 310 British pounds.


11Zapatero, "Estudio Asesor," p. 44.

12Díez Navarro, "Informe."


15. Ibid.

16. Luis Díez Navarro, "Copia Literal del informe del Ingeniero Don Luis Díez Navarro, con motivo de la visita que hizo a las Provincias y Puertos de Comayagua, Nicaragua y Costa Rica," Revista del Archivo y de la Biblioteca Nacional de Honduras V #1-4 (February 5, 1909), pp. 17-25. This is a published version of Díez Navarro, "Informe."


20. Ibid.


24. Ibid., p. 536.


28. One vara equals approximately three feet.


31. Idem, "Informe."


33. García Peláez, Memorias 3, p. 62.

34. No fort commander could have another job. Recopilación, law XII (March 8, 1603), p. 37.
Letter from the Engineer Don Luis Díez Navarro to the Marqués de la Ensenada, informing him of how convenient to the Royal Service would be the formation of a new government on the coast of Honduras, fortifying the port of Omoa; likewise to make of the province of Nicaragua two governments and suppress the four corregimientos in it and the utilities that would result for H.M. and to the good of the public and makes a description of said provinces, August 31, 1751, "estante 102 cajón 5 legajo 18, AGI Guatemala, in Boletín del Archivo General del Gobierno, vol. XI, years 1 and 2, June, 1964, pp. 54-58.


38Ibid., p. 13.

39Ibid., pp. 26-27.

40A1.22 leg 1509 fol 10, AGCA, Guatemala.

41José Antonio Villacorta Calderón, Historia de la Capitanía General de Guatemala (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1942), p. 41.


45Ibid.
Chapter Five


7Ibid., pp. 84-85.

8Cristóbal de Rojas, Teórica y Práctica de Fortificación conforme las medidas y defensas destos tiempos, repartido en tres partes (Madrid, 1589), in Ibid., p. 85.

9Rubio, "Historia," p. 47.


12A1.23 leg 4618 fol 262, AGCA, Guatemala.


14Ibid., pp. 75-82.

15Ibid., p. 103.


17Ibid., pp. 57, 67.

18Ibid., p. 48 and passim.


201 Quattro Primi Libri di Architettura (Venecia, 1554), libro-Primo, Cap XVI fol 18, in Rubio, "Historia," p. 66.
21 A3.6 exp 33111 leg 2229; AGCA, Guatemala.

22 Rubio, "Historia," p. 103.


27 The civilian signers were Joseph Antonio García, Manuel Mendoza and Benito Quiñones, and the military, Captains Xpobal Zelalla, Manuel de Banegas, Joaquin Madariaga, and Joseph Licona Manuel de Quiñones. A1.39 leg 1752 fol 431, AGCA, Guatemala.

28 A list of these included Juan Castro, Joseph Castro, Juan Manuel Chulo, Alejandro Carcamo, Juan Velázquez, Nicolás Ulloa, Joseph Benito Pavón, Calixto Ríos, and two who died, Christoval Reyes and Joseph María Ponze. Ibid.

29 Ibid.


32 A3.1 exp 36980 leg 2532, AGCA, Guatemala.


34 Méz Navarro, "Informe."


36 Tomás Hermenegildo de Arana, "The means which the Captain of Spanish Infantry, Governor of the Province of Honduras, judges efficient for the quick fortification of the Port of San Fernando de Omoa; Extermination of the illicit commerce in those Provinces; and following that, the loosening of the English of the Río Tinto, and constrains and reins in the Zambos-Miskitos." May 30, 1764, sign 2823, fol 177-187, Archivo de Palacio, Madrid, in Ibid., p. 114.

37 Ibid.
Chapter Six


2 Interview with Mario Argueta, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, March 23, 1983.

3 1.23 exp 39450 leg 4587 fol 20v, AGCA, Guatemala, in Argueta, p. 22.

4 The group came from the towns of La Campa, Coloete, Colusucu, Caiquin, Erandique, Guajatique, Gualcisme, Joconguera, Lepaera, Malutena, Gualmoaca, Piraera and Guarcha. A3.12 (4) exp 5300 AGCA, Guatemala, in Ibid.

5 A41.22 exp 5071 leg 215, AGCA, Guatemala, in Ibid., p. 23.

6 Interview with Victor Cruz Reyes, Historical Research Director, Instituto Hondureño de Antropologia e Historia (IHAH), Tegucigalpa, Honduras, March 23, 1983.

7 A3.12 exp 1883 leg 186, AGCA, Guatemala, in Argueta, p. 23.

8 Ibid.

9 A3.12 (4) exp 5300 leg 509, AGCA, Guatemala, in Ibid.

10 Jose Maria Tojeira, Los Hicaques de Yoro (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Guaymuros, 1982), p. 18.


12 A3 exp 13273 leg 709, AGCA, Guatemala, in Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 24.

15 Ibid., p. 30.

"Documents pending concerning the purchase of one hundred blacks, for the Port of Omoa, on account of his majesty, by which a deal was made with don Gaspar Holl Neighbor of Jamayca. Office of Guerra Gutiérrez." Rubio, "Historia," pp. 651-652.

Ibid., pp. 652-654.

A2.3 exp 2019 leg 102, AGCA, Guatemala; interview with Víctor Cruz Reyes, IHAH, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, March 24, 1983.

Rubio, "Historia," p. 131. Rubio does not explain how long the pay period was, though it seems logical to assume it was one month.

Ibid., p. 144.

Ibid., p. 158.


Interview with Víctor Cruz Reyes, IHAH, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, March 24, 1983.

Rubio, "Historia," p. 308. By point of comparison, in Comercio de y entre las Provincias de Centroamérica vol. 1 (Guatemala: Editorial del Ejercito, 1973), Rubio provides a list of the number of towns in each of the corregimientos in Honduras in 1730:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tegucigalpa</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesacoa</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olancho</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trujillo</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Pedro</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoro</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comayagua</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracias</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choluteca</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

gives the following figures for the population of Guatemala by provinces at the end of the 18th century:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chiapa</td>
<td>99,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suchitepéquez</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escuintla</td>
<td>24,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonsonate</td>
<td>24,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Salvador</td>
<td>137,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verapaz</td>
<td>54,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiquimula</td>
<td>52,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>93,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>68,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totonicapán</td>
<td>58,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quezaltenango</td>
<td>34,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sololá</td>
<td>27,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimaltenango</td>
<td>40,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacatepéquez</td>
<td>72,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>833,196</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bancroft, vol. 3, p. 613, official Doc., 1 January, 1886, set the population at 1,322,544; Guatemalan Mem. Sec. Fomento, 1886, anex 1, sets the population of Guatemala in 1886 at the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladinos</td>
<td>430,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negros</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,200,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 The map showed the house of the royal accountant, the guardhouse, the prison, the kitchens, the barracks, the stores, the granary, the bakery, the armory, the chapel and the parsonage. "Map, or Yconographic Description and scenographic of the Port of San Fernando de Omoa and the Coast of Honduras. Guatemala, October 31 of 1768. Scale of 500 varas for the plans, and of 50 varas for the Profiles." Sign 5,172; p-b-11-11 hoja 7a, Serv. Hist. Mil. Madrid, in Zapatero, "Estudio Asesor," p. 117.


30 Recopilación, pp. 32-34, laws XI and XIII.

31 Ibid., p. 31, law VI, 1593.

32 Ibid., pp. 30-32, laws XII, XIII.

34 Ibid.

35 *Recopilación*, p. 30, law I.

36 Ibid., law III.

37 Ibid., p. 33, law I, 6 March 1608, law II.

38 Ibid., p. 34, laws XII and XIII.

39 Ibid., p. 37, law X, March 1607.
Chapter Seven


2 Ibid., pp. 133-134.


4 "Plan of the Fort which is being constructed for the protection of the Port of San Fernando de Omoa according to the State in which it is found on this date. Omoa 28 of April of 1769." Antonio de Murga Sign 5.172; P-b-11-11, hoja 4a, Serv. Hist. Mil. Madrid, in Zapatero, "Estudio Asesor," pp. 138-139.


6 A1.23 leg 1541 fol. 26, AGCA, Guatemala.

7 A3.1 exp 12975 leg 689 fol 49, AGCA, Guatemala.

8 "Castillo de San Fernando de Omoa. Brass Cannons: of 24 caliber, mounted, 6 good; of 12, 2 good; of 4 mounted, 11; of 12 mounted, 8 good; of 6 mounted, one good one; of 4 mounted, one good one; of 3 mounted, 3 good; of 2 unmounted, 4 good; of one mounted, two good. Catapults of one pound, one hundred good. There follow scoops on poles for all calibers; sponges, pincers and scrapers on poles, the same. Cord, 54 mozos. Smooth bullets of brass of 18, one hundred and twenty-two; of 4, three hundred and sixty-six; of one, one hundred and fifteen. Smooth bullets of iron of 24, eight hundred and ninety; of this same tenor of 18, 12, and 6 in proportion, of 4, one thousand five hundred, and 50 of 3, of 2, and 1. Buckshot in sacks of 24 to 12, 8, 6, and 4; and besides 120 arrobas of loose. Palanquetes of 18, one hundred and ninety-two. Of 12, six hundred and eight. Muskets, 200 good, 395 medium, and 751 useless; bayonets, pikes and lances in proportion; pistols, 151 useless; swords, 102 good and 20 useless. There follow flints, cartridge mounters and scrapers, medium. Hand grenades, 480 medium. Molds to pour bullets, 14 medium, and 278 flats of lead. Cartridges for muskets, 4,500 good; bullets, 142 arrobas, and powder, 338 quintales at four arrobas per quintal. Tools, hoes, pokers, adzes, saws, hatchets, machetes in quantity. Locks, cauldrons, bars, sledge hammers, dies in proportion, square and level." García Peláez, p. 69.

9 García Peláez, p. 73.

11"Plans for the Fort that is being constructed for the defense of this port of San Fernando de Omoa, on the coast of Honduras, according to the condition which on this day it is found. Omoa 28 of August of 1772. Antonio de Murga." Sign 5.172; P-b-11-11, hoja 2a, Serv. Hist. Mil. Madrid, in Ibid., p. 146.

12Ibid., p. 149.

13A3.1 leg 18 exp 157, AGCA, Guatemala.

14"Plans for the Fort that is being constructed for the defense of the Port of San Fernando de Omoa on the Coast of Honduras according to the condition it is in on this day. San Fernando de Omoa and May 12 of 1773. José González Ferminor." Sign Guatemala 194--according to the "Catálogo" of Torres Lanzas, AGI, Sevilla, in Zapatero, "Estudio Asesor," p. 153.

15Ibid., p. 154.

16"Plans for the Fort being built for the defense of this Port of San Fernando de Omoa on the Coast of Honduras according to the condition in which today is found the works. S.n Fernando de Omoa, and Dec.re 25 of 1774. Jph. González Ferminor. Is a copy of the original. New Establishment 1st of February of 1775. Navarro." Sign Mapas y Planos, Guatemala, 149, AGI Sevilla, in Ibid., pp. 155-156.

17Ibid., p. 155.

18This is apparently a regionalism which literally means "with the cannon at three threads."


22 "A3.1 exp 22;189 leg 1294 fol 18, AGCA, Guatemala.


24 Culebrinas were small, ancient portable cannon, similar to the British culverins. Escrito del Presidente de la R.l Audiencia de Guatemala. 4 de Mayo, 1777, ref Guat. 878. AGI Seville, in Ibid., p. 161.

25 The route was as follows: Guatemala City to Hacienda San Miguel, 1 1/2 leagues; to Pueblo de los Arcos, 3 3/4 leagues; to Cuajinicuila, 2 3/4; to Sacualpa, 3 3/4; to Justiapa, 4 3/4; to Santa Catalina, 3 1/2; to Hacienda Agua Blanca, 1 league 2 1/2; to Hacienda Piedras Gordas, 3; to Esquipulas, 4; to Hacienda Santísimo Cristo, 1 league 1 1/2; to Hacienda Tupilango, 2 3/4; to Copán, 2 3/4; to Venta de Copán, 14; the trip then went around the Sierra de Copán, through the towns of Quimistán, Santa Cruz, Magdalena, San Pedro Sula, and to San Fernando de Omoa. Zapatero, "Estudido Asesor," pp. 164-171.

26 "Plan of defense for the Fort of San Fernando de Omoa made by Order of the King by the Brigadier of Infantry Don Agustín Crame in accordance with the Colonel of Militias don Antonio Férmandiz, Commandant interim of said Fort. San Fernando de Omoa at 17 of April of 1779. Agustín Crame and Antonio Férmandiz." Serv. Hist. Mil. Madrid, in Ibid., pp. 172-80.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 A2.5 exp 687 leg 50, AGCA, Guatemala.
Chapter Eight

1. A1.22 leg 1508 fol 294, AGCA, Guatemala.


4. Rubio, Commercio, pp. 165-166.

5. Batres Jáuregui, p. 381.


9. Ibid., pp. 77-78.


16. A3.6 exp 3620 leg 477, AGCA, Guatemala.

17. A1.2.5 exp 16,307 leg 2249, AGCA, Guatemala.


20. Rubio has lists of the ships that arrived and left from Omoa, though documentation and figures on the type and quantity of merchandise are scant if and when available:
in 1764----------2 ships arrived
1766----------2 ships left
1770----------1 ship left
1771---------3 ships left, 4 arrived
1773---------5 ships left, 1 arrived
1774---------3 ships left
1775---------7 ships arrived
1778---------1 ship arrived, 1 left
1779---------1 ship arrived
1780---------1 ship left
1781---------1 ship arrived
1782---------1 ship arrived.


21A3.2 exp 15425 leg 830, AGCA, Guatemala.
Chapter Nine

1 Annual Register 1780, p. 21.

2 Ibid.

3 Salvatierra, "Los Castillos," p. 166.


6 File 877, AGI, Guatemala, in Ibid., pp. 660-663.

7 Ibid., pp. 675-678. See also p. 135.


9 A3.1 exp 36980 leg 2532, AGCA, Guatemala.

10 Rubio, "Historia," pp. 139-140.

11 A3.1 exp 30090 leg 1930, AGCA, Guatemala.


13 File 458, AGI Guatemala, in Ibid., pp. 129-130.

14 The "D" in the total probably stands for "dos mil," meaning two thousand. The total cost would thus be 2,887 pesos. Ibid., p. 186.

15 A1.17.3 exp 38,304 leg 4501, AGCA, Guatemala. See Antonio Porta's report, note 22, below.


17 Batres Jáuregui, p. 258.

18 Capítulos de la Real Orden a Salazar en 11-12-764, files 876 and 877, AGI Guatemala, in Calderón Quijano, "El Fuerte," p. 547.

20Ibid.; p. 239.

21Zamora, p. 83.

22Antonio Porta y Costas,"Statement of the survey of the Castillo de San Fernando de Omoa, its port, surrounding area, beaches, docks [fondeaderos], neighboring rivers, where enemies can enter the provinces; conditions in which can be found the works, essentials and accessories available at said fort, those lacking and projected for its conclusion, defects seen on those already executed, repairs needed and a projection of those which should be built so the fort ends in a defensive stance, in an estimate of some and others that, in virtue of the superior order of the Excellent President, Governor and Captain-General of this Kingdom, Don Bernardo Troncoso, given on the 6th of September of 1791, has practiced the ordinary engineer, Don Antonio Porta y Costas." A1.17.3 exp 38,304, AGCA, Guatemala.

23Ibid.


25One such case can be seen in the 1747 order against royal funding for defense in Honduras, while sending the plans for a fort at Omoa to Somodevilla. Another example is Fernández de Heredia's letter to Ensenada requesting a new lines of authority to circumvent a capricious Captain-general.


27Ibid., pp. 25-27.

28Ibid., pp. 14 and passim.


30Milla y Vidaurre, pp. 37-38.
Chapter Ten

2. Ibid., p. 199.
3. Rodríguez, p. 110.
4. Annual Register, 1780, pp. 211-212.
6. Annual Register, 1780, p. 212.
8. Rodríguez, p. 110.
11. Zamora, p. 68.
18. Mariano y Chao, Historia de España, in Rodríguez, p. 111.
Zamora, p. 68.

Ibid., pp. 66-69.

Ibid., p. 72.

Zamora lists the cadets by name: Francisco Fernández de Maresia, Manuel de Mencos, Under-Lieutenant Manuel de Salas, Lieutenant and Major Francisco Troncoso and Captain Félix Domínguez. Ibid., p. 71.

Ibid.

Rodríguez, p. 111.

Gustavo A. Castañeda S., El Dominio Insular de Honduras (San Pedro Sula, Honduras: Tipografía Pérez Estrada, 1939), p. 112.

Rubio, "Historia," pp. 198-211.

Bancroft, v. 2, p. 647.

Zamora, p. 72.


A1.25 esp 10357 leg 1702 fol 169, AGCA, Guatemala.


Ibid.


García Peláez, v. 3, p. 85.
Chapter Eleven


2Floyd, pp. 152-162.

3Calderón Quijano, "Incidente," p. 771.

4Velázquez, p. 29.


6Velázquez, p. 23. There is some speculation that Spain's colonial defense system may have been too strong, and in the end helped in the demise of her Empire:

Spain's need to protect and defend itself against the aggressions of its European enemies forced it to create an instrument that, in the end, helped the colonies oppose the metropolis. Ibid., p. 12.


10Annual Register, 1780, pp. 211-213.
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Navarro en 1745." Guatemala: Archivo General del
Gobierno. A1.17.3 exp 17,508 leg 2335.

... "Informe hecho en este Superior Gov.no pr. Dn.
Luis Díez Navarro Ingeniero Ordinario por Su Magd. en
la Vicitita que hizo en las Provincias y Puertos de
Comayagua, Nicaragua y Costa Rica y en que proponen los
medios convenientes para la defensa y seguridad del
reino. Guatemala: Archivo General del Gobierno. A2.1
leg 3 exp 38.

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where enemies can enter the provinces; conditions in
which can be found the works, essentials and
accessories available at said fort, those lacking and
projected for its conclusion, defects seen on those
already executed, repairs needed and a projection of
those which should be built so the fort ends in a
defensive stance, in an estimate of some and others
that, in virtue of the superior order of the Excellent
President, Governor and Captain-general of this
Kingdom, Don Bernardo Troncoso, given on the 6th of
September of 1791, has practiced the ordinary engineer,
Don Antonio Porta y Costas. A1.17.3 exp 38,304, AGCA,
Guatemala.

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dándole cuenta del robo que hicieron 4 navíos Franceses
en Puerto de Cavallos, y de las prevenciones que
hizo . . . Septiembre 30, 1558." AGI, Guatemala.
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