
Document 1645A

The unsuccessful Dutch plan to capture the Manila galleon near the Ladrones

Source: Abel Janszoon Tasman's Journal, edited by J.E. Heeres (1898), pp. 110-111; cited by Andrew Sharp, The Discovery of the Pacific Islands, section 19.

Admiral Vries' plans to cruise for the galleon near the Ladrones in 1645

Synopsis by Andrew Sharp.

Somewhere around 1645 Maarten Gerritszoon Vries, one of the captains of the Dutch East India Company, made a voyage from Batavia along the north coast of New Guinea and as far as the Western extremity of New Hanover, and thence to the Marianas. No further details of this voyage are known.

Synopsis by J. E. Heeres.

Very soon after this [June 1643] preparations were again set on foot at Batavia for the new voyage of discovery to the South-land. [François Jacobszoon] Visscher played an important part also in these preparatory measures and in the enterprise itself. Directly after the return of the second expedition, we again find traces of Visscher's restless activity. In a resolution namely of the Governor-General and Councillors, dated 17 October 1644, it is stated that Visscher and Tasman had pointed out a "new route and passage" for waylaying the Spanish silver-ships between Acapulco and Manila.¹

These memoirs or advices formed the basis for an important expedition of which Visscher formed part, but of which the leadership was entrusted to Commander

¹ Tasman's advice is contained in the chart, dated 8 September 1644, reproduced in the present work.

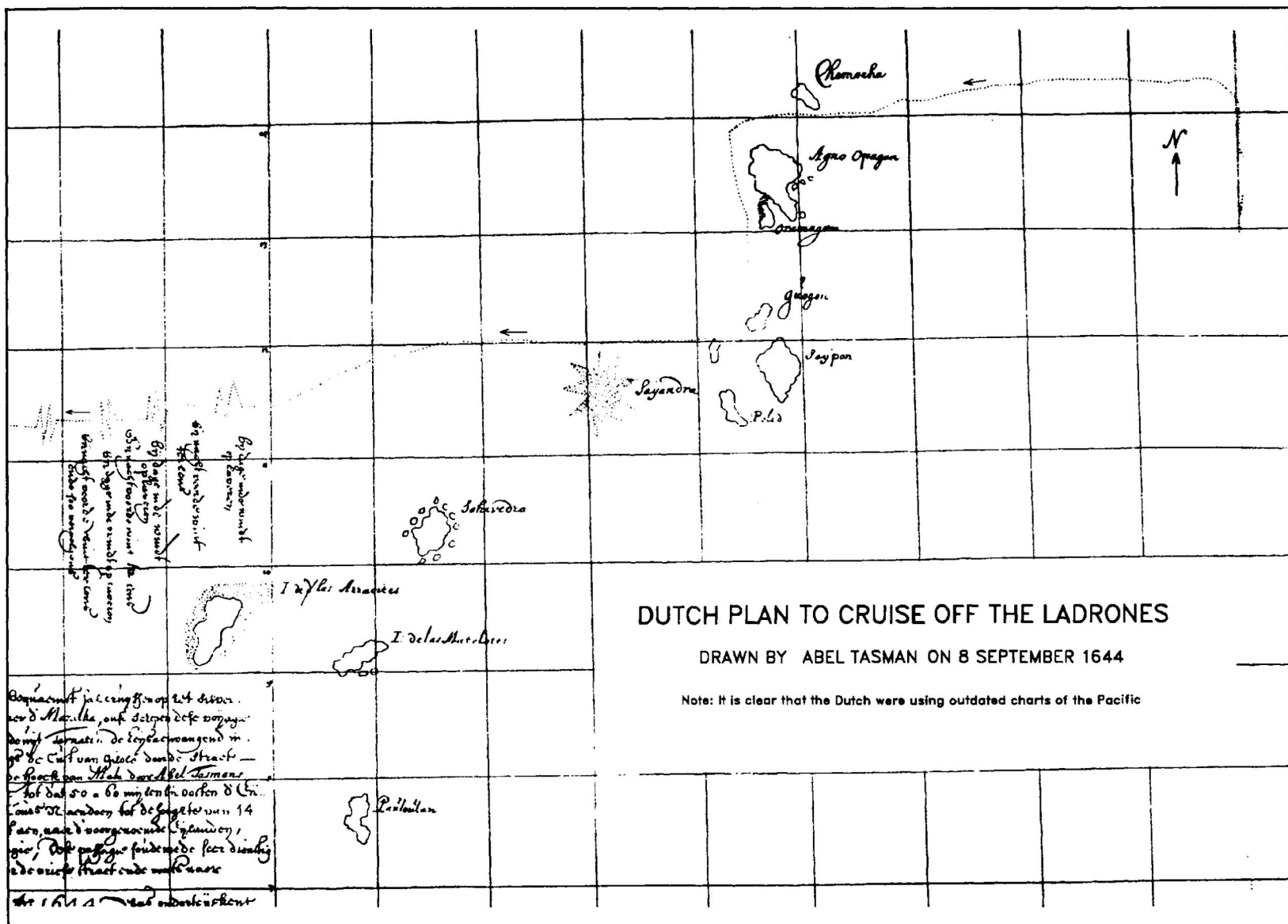
Maarten Gerritszoon Vries, who was expressly directed constantly to confer with the “pilot-major as regards the determination of the courses to be held.”¹

The ships which formed part of this expedition, were ordered to proceed to the Moluccas, whence they were to be dispatched on a cruise to watch for the silver-ships. For several years past flotillas had been sent out for this purpose, but hitherto always without result. The Supreme Government, therefore, had “time and again contemplated other methods of action;” thus “the experienced pilot-major François Jacobszoon Visscher had proposed a certain manner of cruising near and about the Ladrões isles, departing from the latter between fourteen and twelve degrees Northern Latitude to run for the channels of the Holy Ghost [i.e. Cabo del Espiritu Santo] and Santa Clara, for the purpose of meeting the enemy’s ships at sea, and cutting them off from the land for the time being,” But the execution of this plan had hitherto been frustrated by the circumstance that “the rendez-vous assigned, being the Ladrões isles, is not be reached owing to the constant south-easterly winds prevailing in the great South Sea.” At present, however—we see that “the recent discovery of the South-land” was already bearing fruit—“the discovery of the unknown South-land and of the north-coast of Nova Guinea, made by Abel Tasman,” had opened up “a convenient route;” and according to the said navigator the Ladrões islands “could without much difficulty be successfully fetched up by running eastward along the said north-coast of Guinea.” Tasman’s proposal was, “with Visscher’s advice, duly ventilated, discussed and deliberated on” by the Governor-General and Councillors, and the upshot of this discussion was the instruction for the expedition.

The ships were ordered in the beginning of February to navigate from Ternate to the cape of Maba, through Patientie Strait along the coast of Weda, following Abel Tasman’s course along the north-coast of New Guinea, “sailing on the said course until you estimate yourselves to have come to 50 or 60 miles east of the [longitude of the] Ladrões islands, which point it is assumed you will be able to reach in a short time with the land- and sea-winds, together with the westerly or north-westerly winds (which are held to prevail on the said coast from the month of December down to the end of March, and to constitute the monsoon). If then you should find this to be practicable, we should deem it advisable for you to further survey the coast about 40 miles more to eastward, until you shall have got into the longitude of 168 degrees, this being the longitude of Salomon Sweers cape,” in order to run “as far as possible eastward of the Ladrões islands.” From Salomon Sweers cape they were directed to sail in a northerly direction as far as 13-1/2° N. Lat., and then to run for the Ladrões on a western course.

Should the plan to seize the silver-ships miscarry, the Plenary Council was authorized to decide on an attempt against the Philippines, if they should deem such attempt feasible, the Instructions here setting forth the information concerning the Babuyan islands,

1 Instructions, 31 October 1644.—As regards this expedition, see also L.C.D. Van Dijk, *Nedêrlands vroegste betrekkingen met Borneo*. Amsterdam, Scheltema, 1862, pp. 289-299; Leupe, *Nieuw-Guinea*, pp. 172-175.



obtained by Tasman in 1639. If, on the other hand, the rich booty should fall into their hands, they were to take it to the Pescadores and Formosa.

The voyage was unsuccessful so far as its main object was concerned, and the results of the *coup de main* upon the Philippines were nothing to speak of. The only thing that needs mention here, is that Vries sailed “along the (‘barren’) coast of Nova Guinea (about as far as Salomon Sweers cape), he having, as much as time and circumstances would allow, explored and surveyed the said coast by making occasional landings, and having found the inhabitants of it to be a wild, robust and warlike people”—he got into hostile contact with them—“of whom in the way of refreshments he could obtain nothing but cocoa-nuts, while he utterly failed to find any traces or collect information as to any precious metals, stones or other valuable commodities obtainable in those parts.”