

Chapter 2.1

The Western Design, part II



FIGURE 1 - WESTERN DESIGN ROUTE

ON 13 APR 1655, Harry Morgan and the English fleet arrived off Santo Domingo, the settlement on Hispaniola, which Sir Francis Drake had successfully raided in 1586. According to the *Swiftsure's* log, the army contingent—4,000 strong—landed about 25 miles from the town at the mouth of the River Nizao. They were supplied with three days' provisions but without entrenching tools and other appropriate equipment. The fleet did not land the remainder of the force until 14 Apr.

The delay caused by a three-day march through the difficult tropical terrain to Santo Domingo proved decisive because any hopes Venables had of surprising the Spanish were dashed. Consequently, the colonists had time to

reinforce their defences and prepare for his assault. Besides, the expedition had not been well equipped for the terrain they encountered—water bottles, for example, had not been provided. As a result, the English suffered greatly from the unaccustomed heat and the lack of freshwater—at the time, Santo Domingo was suffering from a drought. Many, including Venables, fell ill.

The English force reached Santo Domingo on 17 Apr, but before they could launch an attack, they were ambushed. And, had it not been for Goodson's sea regiment, the inexperienced and poorly disciplined infantry surely would have been routed.

General Venables ordered a withdrawal and personally retired to his cabin to be nursed by his wife. He had embarrassed himself by allowing his wife to accompany him. His men, though, stayed onshore for about a week while they recovered. Many were sick, and most were without shelter or adequate supplies throughout their stay.

The attempt on Santo Domingo was probably young Ensign Morgan's first taste of battle, and it was certainly his first experience at trekking over and through tropical terrain. Both experiences would serve him well in the future, however. He likely acquitted himself well on both accounts, for he would later excel in such actions. It is also likely the young officer impressed his seniors, some with whom he served in several similar actions.

Shared experiences such as those Harry had on Hispaniola frequently lead to lifelong bonds of trust, friendship, and loyalty between comrades-in-arms. As we will see as our story develops, several of the men who sailed with Penn and Venables would remain fast friends for decades to come and fight alongside each other many times.

On 24 Apr, Venables led a second land assault on Santo Domingo with Penn's fleet bombarding the town from the sea. But, once more, a Spanish ambush ended the land attack. And again, it was Goodson's better-disciplined seamen that held firm and, in doing so, helped avoid a disaster of even greater proportions. Penn offered to support the army with the fleet if they decided on another attack, but he found the land officers were not so inclined "for they [the army contingent] would never be brought to stand."

So that was that. The expedition was a dismal failure, and its commanders agreed to abandon any further attempt on Hispaniola.

William Penn's fleet to the Caribbean in 1654-1655

(38 ships of which 20 were un-named transports)

- 2nd Rate Swiftsure, 60 guns 350 sailors and 30 soldiers William Penn, General and Jonas Poole flag captain
- 2nd Rate Paragon, 54 guns 300 sailors and 30 soldiers William Goodson, Vice-Admiral
- 3rd Rate Torrington, 54 guns 280 sailors and 30 soldiers George Dakins, Rear-Admiral

- 3rd Rate Martson Moor, 54 guns 280 sailors and 30 soldiers Edward Blagg
- 3rd Rate Gloucester, 54 guns 280 sailors and 30 soldiers Benjamin Blake
- 3rd Rate Lion, 44 guns 230 sailors and 30 soldiers John Lambert
- 3rd Rate Mathias, 44 guns 200 sailors and 30 soldiers John White
- 3rd Rate Indian, 44 guns 220 sailors and 30 soldiers James Terry
- 4th Rate Bear, 36 guns 150 sailors and 30 soldiers Francis Kirby
- 4th Rate Laurel, 40 guns 160 sailors and 30 soldiers William Crispin
- 4th Rate Portland, 40 guns 160 sailors and 30 soldiers Richard Newberry
- 4th Rate Dover, 40 guns 160 sailors and 30 soldiers Robert Sanders
- 4th Rate Great Charity, 36 guns 150 sailors Leonard Harris
- 4th Rate Heartsease, 30 guns 70 sailors and 160 soldiers Thomas Wright
- 4th Rate Discovery, 30 guns 70 sailors and 160 soldiers Thomas Wills
- 4th Rate Convertine, 30 guns 75 sailors and 200 soldiers John Hayward
- 4th Rate Katherine, 30 guns 70 sailors and 200 soldiers Willoughby Hannam
- 20 ships for transports with 352 guns 1,145 sailors, 1,830 soldiers, and 38 horses
- 6th Rate Martin, 12 guns 60 sailors William Vesey
- 4 small craft

[Source: Wm. Laird Clowes, The Royal Navy, A History, From the Earliest Times to the Present Vol II (Sampson Low, Marston and Company Limited, 1898), Page 205]