Spanish Conquest of the Aztecs

The conquest of the Aztecs began with a decision made by the governor of Cuba, Diego Velásquez, to send an expedition to investigate rumors of a wealthy civilization in Mexico. Velásquez chose Hernán Cortés, a career soldier, to put together an expedition to validate such claims. Cortés was supposed to be there for reconnaissance and only was supposed to use military force if he came across Christian prisoners. Believing that Cortés would betray him, Velásquez ordered Cortés to remain in Cuba. Cortés had the messenger delivering Velásquez's order killed before it ever reached him. On the 18th of February 1519, Velásquez went to the docks himself to prevent Cortés' departure, however Cortés responded by saying that "time presses" and blatantly disregarded his orders by sailing for what he referred to as New Spain.

The First Expeditions
Governor Diego Velásquez commissioned a fleet in 1517 of three ships under the command of Hernández de Córdoba to sail west and explore the Yucatan peninsula. Córdoba first landed at Cape Catoche where he read the Requirement of 1513 declaring Spanish supremacy and took two prisoners as interpreters. His expedition ended in a disaster after being ambushed by Mayans in the night. Córdoba himself was mortally wounded and only a fraction of the force that left Cuba returned safely. Conquest of the Mayans would not end until 1697, 180 years later.

Velásquez next sent his nephew, Juan de Grijalva, with four ships and 240 men to explore rather than settle the Yucatan peninsula. The expedition accomplished little. Grijalva refused to use military force and so found himself constantly retreating. He returned to Cuba with very little gold from trading with the natives, but came back with knowledge of a much wealthier empire to the West, the Aztecs.

Before Grijalva had returned, Velásquez began organizing a third and larger expedition. While many competed for this position, it was Cortés who was named commander. On 23 October 1518, Cortés signed an agreement that specified only for the establishment of a trade agreement with the indigenous peoples. Cortés would exploit a clause in the document that provided him the ability to take emergency measures "in the true interests of the realm." When he landed, he took total command over the force that sailed with him. In order to finance the campaign beyond what Velásquez provided, Cortés went heavily into debt, which he would have been unable to pay without great success in Mexico.

The Current Situation
The fleet has landed and taken control of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz. Hernán Cortés has now openly renounced the authority of Velásquez and declared himself to be supreme commander. He has sent a missive to the king of Spain which detailed his reasons for denouncing the authority of Velásquez and proclaimed himself to be a Christian ambassador to the heathen natives. With promises of Aztec gold, the King is not likely to interfere. After sending his letter, Cortés scuttled his ships effectively cutting off contact.
between those who might dissent in his force and Cuba. For now, Cortés has ensured that
this expedition has turned into a full-blown invasion, it is up to you collectively to decide
whether it will be a successful one.

At the committee's disposal shall be 32 ballestero (crossbowmen), 16 harquebusiers
(cavalry), 508 rodeleros (swordsmen), 13 musketeers, 10 brass lombard cannons, 4
falconets, 4 priests and 1 Mayan interpreter as well as various professionals, slaves and
crewmen.

**The Mindset**
The conquistadors believed that conquering the Americas was a God-given right,
confirmed by papal decree. They placed no value on the individuals or cultures of the
indigenous people because they did not believe that non-Christians were humans in the
same way that they were. As they saw it, God had abandoned these people who occupied
territory that rightfully belonged to God's chosen. As an afterthought, Christians desired
that Christianity be spread throughout the Americas, but not before they had relieved the
indigenous people of their gold and their land. The conquistadors tortured, enslaved and
destroyed wherever they went.

Cortés himself demonstrated relative restraint when compared to his contemporaries and
subsequent colonizers, even though numerous atrocities were committed by he and his
men. His standing orders were not to “vex or offend” the natives and looting and rape
were punishable by death. It was only by befriending native tribes that Cortés was able to
topple the Aztec empire. In the first few battles, Cortés' small force fought alone, but they
relied heavily on their native allies later in their campaign. To Cortés, the end goal is the
creation of a productive colony where the remainder of the natives have been converted
peacefully, the gold has been gotten and his name is known by every Christian in the
world. The majority of his men care less for his dream and more for their own personal
conquest. Most of his captains have participated in their fair share of combat in Italy or
previous expeditions in the Americas and they are anxious to make their fortune. They are
paid soldiers, but not an undisciplined mercenary band, they are a professional army.

**Directives**
As a crisis committee, actions taken by the committee as a whole will be in the form of
directives. Directives will not need signatories to be approved, they will be given to the
chair and passed by a simple majority. Cortés may make his opinions known to you, but
will generally listen to his advisers. Personal directives may be passed to crisis in the
form of notes. Collective action is more likely to be successful, so delegates may wish to
receive signatories on their personal directives.

**CHARACTERS**

*Hernán Cortés will be represented by the chair of the committee and his second in
command, Pedro de Alvarado, by the vice-chair.*

*Following the character's name, there are a few character traits that should help you*
determine your character's position within the committee.

Brave – Individual units that brave character's are attached to will fare better in battles than others.

Captain – Captain's orders are more likely to be followed as they carry greater authority.

Chaplain – The chaplain is the religious authority attached to the expedition force.

Commander – Commanders are fit to command forces of greater numbers.

Disloyal – Disloyal characters believe that Cortés should not be leading the expedition.

Loyal – Loyal characters believe strongly in Cortés' leadership.

Rival – Rivals are characters that were originally considered for Cortes' position.

Rodelero – Rodeleros are the common soldiers and are promised less fortune than higher ranks.

Wealthy – Wealthy characters own their own armor, slaves and horse.

Hernán Cortés: Commander, Wealthy
“Sly and artful as he is, he will be the means of ruining you, if you are not upon your guard.”

• Juan Millan “the Astrologer”

Pedro de Alvarado: Captain, Commander, Loyal, Wealthy
“He may have been about thirty-four years of age when he came with us to New Spain. His build was both beautiful and strong; his countenance was all cheerfulness, and his eye had a remarkably sweet expression. It was on account of his pleasant looks that the Mexicans called him Tonatio, or the sun. He was of a slender figure, a splendid horseman, open and agreeable in conversation, and remarkably neat in his dress, which was always of the richest stuffs.”

• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Bernal Díaz del Castillo: Rodelero
Bernal Díaz del Castillo was born to a poor family in Medina del Campo in 1492. Under Pedrarias Davila, Diaz sailed on an expedition to settle Panama, but seeing little opportunity to make his fortune there, he eventually sailed to Cuba. Before joining Cortés' company, Diaz set off on two other unsuccessful expeditions, the first led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba and second by Juan de Grijalva. Diaz cares more for the well being of the common soldier than those closer to Cortés, but is still more concerned with his quest for personal wealth. Much of what we know about Cortes' conquest is through Bernal Diaz's written works.

Bartolomé de Olmedo: Chaplain
Bartolomé de Olmedo was born in Olmedo to the family of a wealthy doctor. He was ordained a priest in 1518 after studying at the monastery in Santo Domingo for four years. Olmedo served as Cortés' chaplain with enthusiasm. He was referred by Diaz as a sweet singer, good man and devoted servant of God. Olmedo believed his mission to be religious in nature and perhaps thought spreading Christianity to be more important than Cortés did. It is noteworthy that Olmedo was frequently used by Cortés as a diplomat.
Juan de Escalante: *Captain, Commander, Loyal, Wealthy*
“... Cortés ordered the alguacil-major, Juan de Escalante, a young man of very great
courage, and who was a close adherer to him, utterly hating Diego Velasques because he
had neglected to give him any considerable commendary in Cuba, to take all the anchors,
ropes, sails, in short everything that might be of use to us out of the vessels, and run the
latter all on shore, with the exception of the boats.”
• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Alonso Hernández Portocarrero: *Captain, Loyal, Wealthy*
Not much is known about Portocarrero prior to the expedition besides that he was from
Meddelin. He was described by Díaz as a “stout cavalier” and was known to be one of
Cortés' most loyal followers. Clearly concerned over the commitment of the men to
Cortés, Portocarrero was quoted by Díaz as once saying, “I tell you, only look at this rich
country, and keep strict command over us.”

Cristóbal de Olea: *Brave, Captain, Loyal, Wealthy*
“Here I must not forget to mention the very brave soldier Cristóbal de Olea, a native of
Medina del Campo. He was twenty-six years of age when he joined our ranks. He was of
middling stature; his limbs were strong and beautifully proportioned; his chest and
shoulders broad; his face was full and cheerful; his hair and beard curly, his voice strong
and clear.”
• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Francisco de Montejo: *Captain, Loyal*
“The chief justice and governor of Yucatan, Montejo, was of middling stature, had a
pleasant-looking countenance, was a good horseman, and much addicted to all kinds of
pleasures. He was about thirty-five years of age when he came to New Spain, but was
rather a man of business than a soldier. He was generous of disposition, but lived beyond
his income.”
• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Gonzalo de Sandoval: *Captain, Commander, Wealthy*
“Gonzalo de Sandoval was a man of extraordinary courage and of heroic valour. He was
twenty-two years of age when he joined us ... He knew no more of the arts and sciences
than he required, was not in the least avaricious, and never took more than his rightful
share. He was fond of seeing soldiers act strictly up to their commands, but favoured and
assisted them in every possible manner. He was not a man who put on rich garments, but
dressed simply like a good soldier.”
• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Diego de Ordás: *Brave, Captain, Wealthy*
“Diego de Ordas, a native of Campas, was forty years of age when he came to New Spain.
He was a capital officer with the sword and buckler, but did not excel as a cavalry soldier.
He was equal to anyone in foresight and courage. He was rather tall and strong of limb;
his face carried with it the very expression of muscular power; his beard was thin and black. He stuttered a little, and many words he could not pronounce plainly; but he was open and agreeable in conversation.”

• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Francisco de Morla: *Brave, Captain, Wealthy*

Very little is known of Francisco de Morla. He was a captain under Cortés and was wealthy enough to afford his own horse and armor. Díaz's account of him is brief. “Francisco de Morla, of Xerez, likewise a brave and distinguished cavalry soldier, lost his life in the night of sorrows.”

• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Gonzalo Dominguez: *Brave, Wealthy*

“Neither must I forget to mention Gonzalo Dominiguez and Larez, who were considered equal in courage to Olea. Both were strong of limb, well proportioned, had agreeable countenances, and were men of excellent dispositions; in short, they may be considered among the bravest soldiers Spain ever possessed.”

• Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Pedro Gonzalez de Trujillo: *Brave, Wealthy*

Pedro Gonzalez de Trujillo served as a cavalryman under Cortés. He rode his own horse, a chestnut that Díaz praised. Besides mentions of him in relation to his horse or the cavalry, little is known of de Trujillo.

Cristóval de Olid: *Brave, Wealthy*

“... He sent a small ship with some soldiers in search of us, under the command of Cristóval de Olid, a person of consideration and very energetic.” De Olid was largely motivated by wealth. After the conquest of Mexico, he was sent by Cortés on an expedition to Honduras. De Olid betrayed Cortés by declaring himself independent of Spain or any other ruler before taking Honduras.

Juan Sedeño: *Wealthy*

Juan Sedeño is known to be from Havana and “was considered to be the most wealthy man” on the expedition according to Díaz. He came with Cortés in his own ship and brought African slaves with him, which Díaz notes were worth their weight in gold.

Bartolomé García: *Wealthy*

“... Alonzo de Avila to whom was given the horse belonging to Ortiz the musician and Bartolomé García, for neither of these men were good horsemen.” García owned a number of gold mines in Cuba. Besides his ownership of these mines and a reference to him as a mountaineer, little is known of García.

Luis Marin: *Brave*

“The captain Luis Marin was a well-built, powerful, and courageous man. His legs were rather bowed; his beard of a ruddy hue; his face broad, rather pitted with the smallpox,
but cheerful. He was thirty years of age when he came to New Spain, was a native of San Lucar, and he lisped a little like the inhabitants of Seville. He was an excellent horseman and an agreeable companion.”

- Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Andreas de Tapia: *Brave*

“Andreas de Tapia was also a courageous officer, and was about twenty-four years of age when he joined us. He had rather an unpleasant expression of countenance, which was of a leaden colour; his beard was thin, but his figure was stately. He was both a capital horse and foot soldier.”

- Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Pedro de Ircio: *Rodelero*

“The captain Pedro de Ircio was of middling stature, had short legs, but a pleasant-looking countenance. His tongue was never silent, and he was always relating his stories of Don Pedro Giron and of the earl of Ureia. He was more bold in word than in deed; we therefore called him the Agramant of many words and few works.”

- Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Buena de Trinidad: *Rodelero*

Buena de Trinidad owned a horse that Díaz remarked was “no good for anything.” He joined the expedition when Cortés' forces stopped in Trinidad on their way to Mexico. Not much is known of de Trinidad.

Juan Velázquez de León: *Brave, Captain, Disloyal, Rival, Wealthy*

“Juan Velázquez de León, of Old Castile, may have been about twenty-six years of age when he joined our ranks. His limbs were straight and beautifully formed; his chest and shoulders were broad, and he was altogether a powerful man. His face was full, and he used to dye his curly beard. His voice was harsh and unpleasant, and he stuttered a little. He was uncommonly courageous, agreeable in conversation, and shared his last farthing with his comrades ... He was a splendid horseman, but fought equally well on foot as on horseback.”

- Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Hernando Lopez de Avila: *Disloyal, Wealthy*

Pedro de Alvarado shared a horse with de Avila prior to arriving in Mexico, but took the other half share in the mare by force. De Avila still holds a grudge against de Alvarado, who serves as Cortés' second. Little is known about de Avila besides his connection to the horse.

Alonso Dávila: *Brave, Captain, Disloyal*

“Alonso Dávila was thirty-three years of age when we arrived in New Spain. He was of good stature, had a cheerful countenance, was remarkably courageous, and eloquent and persuasive in argument. He was very open-hearted towards his comrades, but rather imperious, jealous, and turbulent...”
Amador de Lareas: *Brave, Rival, Wealthy*

“Neither must I forget to mention Gonzalo Domínguez and Lareas, who were considered equal in courage to Olea. Both were strong of limb, well proportioned, had agreeable countenances, and were men of excellent dispositions; in short, they may be considered among the bravest soldiers Spain ever possessed.”

Bernal Díaz del Castillo