

“A Fierce Tempest”:¹ Disaster and Relief at the Luna Settlement, 1559–61

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Disaster relief efforts for early colonial North America demonstrate that remote locations and the delayed response time of communications and relief supplies directly affected the success or failure of early settlement efforts. This is particularly evident for the 1559 to 1561 Tristán de Luna y Arellano colonization attempt on Pensacola Bay. After just over a month, a hurricane struck the settlement in September 1559, destroying seven ships in Luna’s fleet and much of the colony’s food stores. This research presents an analysis of the disaster relief efforts undertaken in the hope of sustaining the colony.

Les efforts de secours en cas de catastrophe déployés au début de l’histoire coloniale de l’Amérique du Nord indiquent que l’éloignement des sites et la lenteur des communications et des approvisionnements de secours ont directement influencé le succès ou l’échec des premières tentatives de colonisation. Cela est particulièrement évident dans le cas de la tentative de colonisation de Tristán de Luna y Arellano dans la baie de Pensacola, entre 1559 et 1561. Un peu plus d’un mois après la fondation de la colonie, un ouragan s’est abattu sur elle en septembre 1559, détruisant ainsi sept navires de la flotte de Luna et une grande partie des réserves alimentaires. Cette étude analyse les efforts de secours entrepris dans l’espoir de sauver la colonie.

¹ “Don Tristán de Luna y Arellano to his Majesty, Port of Santa María,” 24 September 1559, Patronato 179, No. 5, Ramo 1, Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), in *The Luna Papers, 1559–1561*, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Ingram Priestley (University of Alabama Press, 2010), 245–47 (hereafter *LP*).

Introduction

Governmental responses to disasters have varied throughout history. They remain a contentious topic in contemporary society, and many of the modern-day procedures for disaster relief are the result of disaster responses from the sixteenth century to the present. The difficulties of disaster relief efforts for early colonial North America are particularly interesting in that the remote locations and delayed response time of communications and relief supplies directly affected the success or failure of these early settlement efforts. This is especially evident for the 1559 to 1561 Tristán de Luna y Arellano colonization attempt. Luna was dispatched with the expedition mandates of establishing a settlement at Ochuse, present day Pensacola, as part of a broader initiative by the Viceroyalty of New Spain to expand its territories by establishing an overland route to Santa Elena, on the Carolina coast, and claiming all lands of La Florida for the Spanish empire. After being in Ochuse for just over a month, the fledgling settlement was struck by a hurricane on 19–20 September 1559, destroying seven ships in Luna's fleet as well as the majority of the colony's food stores.² While Luna mounted expeditions into the interior to abate the hunger of the colonists, the viceroy of New Spain, Don Luis de Velasco, attempted to provide needed supplies on four relief fleets between November 1559 and early April 1561, with the last bringing Luna's replacement as governor, Angel de Villafañe.

By analyzing the correspondence of and between Velasco, Luna, and Gonzalo Gayón, ship's pilot on all four relief expeditions, the litigation documents, and testimony of members of the expedition, as well as the accounting records for this period, it becomes clear that at the onset, the viceroy was unaware just how dire the situation in Florida was. Contributing to this misunderstanding, road conditions in New Spain, weather conditions on land and at sea, and a lack of supplies available to be sent exacerbated the troubles plaguing Luna's colony and expedition mandates. In retrospect, it is easy to recognize what went wrong in the initial stages of the disaster relief effort, which ultimately forced the colony's abandonment after just over two years of continuous occupation.

Disaster Response and Relief

In the wake of the hurricane, Luna drafted a letter to the viceroy on 28 September 1559 in which he described the disaster as a "fierce tempest" from the north that lasted 24 hours and destroyed seven ships containing the majority

² "Don Tristán de Luna y Arellano to his Majesty," 24 September 1559, *LP*, 2:242–47.

The viceroy received Luna's letter regarding the hurricane on 13 October and immediately responded, directing Gonzalo Gayón, pilot of one of two relief ships being sent, to make for Ochuse.⁷ Fortunately, preparations for a resupply mission had been underway since approximately 24 September.⁸ This likely contributed to the speed and efficiency which characterized this first expedition. Many of the supplies needed for the relief effort were carried on the mule road between Mexico City and Veracruz, then transported to the port of San Juan de Ulua where they were loaded on the ships.⁹ Supplies of maize, hardtack, hides, and salted meats came from as far as Mexico City and as near as Veracruz, as well as the communities of Tlaxcala, Guaxocingo (modern day Huejotzingo), Puebla, and Perote, which were spread across the Mexican countryside.¹⁰ In Velasco's 25 September letter to Luna he expressed concern about the condition of the roads from Mexico City to Veracruz, stating that "it is not possible to carry supplies with promptness."¹¹ This reveals the first real problem facing the relief efforts – the infrastructure of New Spain was not equipped to deal with a disaster relief effort on the required scale in a timely manner.¹² The condition of the roads continued to hamper both relief efforts and vital communication regarding the state of the colony.¹³

The viceroy manifested several different possibilities for dealing with the needs of the colony and the transmission of supplies. Despite the lack of infrastructure, he intended to dispatch a scouting party to the north in December or January to see if taking cattle and horses overland was feasible.¹⁴ He said he would not send these animals until a route was decided upon, denying Luna much needed livestock.¹⁵ There was clearly a general lack of understanding of

⁷ "Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of New Spain," 19 October 1559, Santo Domingo 11, No. 41, ff. 1r-13v (1559:1r-v), AGI, translation by John E. Worth, 2017, Worth Collection, Department of Anthropology, University of West Florida. This document is a part of the much larger petition and service record of Gonzalo Gayón from 1567.

⁸ "Narrative of Don Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of New Spain, to his Majesty, relating the Events of the Fleet which he had sent to colonize the Coast and Land Of La Florida," 24 September 1559, Patronato 19, Ramo 9, AGI. Faulty transcription in AGI, Mexico 280, *LP*, 2:268–77; "Instructions to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco," 7 October 1559, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), Santo Domingo 11, No. 41, ff. 1r-13v., AGI.

⁹ Hortuño de Ybarra, "Audit of the 4 November 1559–31 August 1563 accounts of Pedro de Yebra, Deputy Treasurer of Veracruz," 1564, Contaduria 877, AGI, Reel 2, translation by R. Wayne Childers, 5 September 1999, Archaeology Institute, University of West Florida.

¹⁰ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564.

¹¹ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 25 October 1559, *LP*, 1:56–79.

¹² Priestley, "Historical Introduction," *LP*, 1:xxxvii.

¹³ Priestley, "Historical Introduction," *LP*, 1:xxxvii.

¹⁴ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 25 October 1559, *LP*, 1:56–79.

¹⁵ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 25 October 1559, *LP*, 1:56–79.

the distance that separated Mexico City and the colony at Ochuse. With some urgency, the viceroy instructed Gayón to pilot the ship *Francesillo* and meet a galleon being loaded with supplies in San Juan de Ulua.¹⁶ If the galleon was not ready within 10 or 12 days, Gayón should make for Ochuse alone.¹⁷ The plan was that Gayón would deliver a letter to the governor of Havana to procure the necessary livestock for the resupply effort, transport the first relief aid to Ochuse, then double back to Havana to pick up the livestock and return with it to Florida.¹⁸ This seems never to have come to fruition since two ships, under Gayón and his brother, left with the first aid at the end of November 1559 and returned to Veracruz at the end of January 1560.¹⁹ Nevertheless, substantial supplies were furnished to the colony in this initial relief effort.

According to the accounts of Pedro de Yebra, the first relief ships carried approximately 110,200 libras (Spanish pounds) of maize, 47,780 libras of hardtack, 5,100 libras of beans, 30,375 libras of salt beef, and 2,725 libras of salt pork, as well as calves, hens, pigs/piglets, and goats.²⁰ Quantities of salt, flour, vinegar, garlic, and onions were also provided.²¹ The first relief aid also included hoes, ploughshares, pickaxes, and machetes, tools for farming the land.²² Twelve spools of crossbow string and 171 barrels of gun powder were also sent, supplies for fulfilling the expedition’s mandates to establish a colony at Ochuse and a route to Santa Elena.²³ The incorporation of these non-food items suggests that both Luna and the viceroy believed the colony

¹⁶ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 31 October 1559, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 2r-v.

¹⁷ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 31 October 1559, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 2r-v.

¹⁸ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 31 October 1559, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 2r-v.

¹⁹ John E. Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony: Historical Background,” in *Florida’s Lost Galleon: The Emanuel Point Shipwreck*, ed. Roger C. Smith (University Press of Florida, 2018), 34–67; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129.

²⁰ White flour hardtack and wheat flour hardtack are represented in the accounting records as separate supplies, though I have combined them for this analysis; Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564. Calculations for these figures were made using standard sixteenth-century approximate conversions for fanegas, arrobas, pipas, and cargás. In cases where entries were somewhat ambiguous, such as “portions,” weights were extrapolated from other, more detailed, entries and averaged if necessary. In the case of “portions” an average of 1.28 portions per arroba was obtained. “Carretas” or cartloads were inferred to mean 10 fanegas as prescribed by Abad, 1983.

²¹ Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564.

²² Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564.

²³ Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564; “The King to Luna, Toledo,” 18 December 1559, transcribed by Juan de Vargas, [29] August 1560, *Justicia* 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 119r-120r., *AGI, LP*, 2:14–19.

could be maintained and the expedition goals met despite the disaster. This assumption, of course, was conditional on the arrival of additional supplies, and the viceroy included word that a second round of relief would be delivered in February or March, and April at the very latest.²⁴ Luna had also procured additional supplies immediately after the hurricane by dispatching to Havana “in the fury of winter, at great risk to his person” expedition treasurer Alonso Velázquez, who returned with two ships of provisions.²⁵ Given the extent of the supplies that were collected, it is impressive that only two months passed before the vessels for the first relief expedition left Veracruz. Coupled with the supplies Velázquez obtained from Havana, the colony could have sustained itself until the arrival of the second relief in February, and Luna may have rationed the supplies according to this expectation. The viceroy commented in his 25 October letter that if Luna decided to move inland, he should not go “farther from the port than may be necessary to sustain the people,” insinuating that a second round of relief would be promptly dispatched.²⁶ This may be why Luna delayed moving the camp into the interior until February, believing that the second round of supplies would arrive before moving was necessary, or that the new supplies could be transported with the main body of the colony to Nanipacana. Luna also became ill during this period, “[losing] his senses and saying nonsensical and foolish things,” which appears to have contributed to his refusal to move inland.²⁷

When the second relief did not arrive by February and after the existing supplies had been exhausted, Luna “came to himself” and finally decided to move the camp to Nanipacana, where the earlier detachment reported an abundance of corn in possession of the natives.²⁸ However, Luna’s decision to wait until February proved detrimental to the colony’s survival, since, by the time they arrived in Nanipacana, the Indigenous inhabitants had fled with their

²⁴ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 25 October 1559, *LP*, 1:56–79. Clearly this letter was written over a number of days since his estimates for the supplies’ arrival changes across several pages; “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 17 January 1560, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 6r-v, mentions the end of March or at the very latest the middle of April.

²⁵ “Declaration regarding service of Alonso Velázquez by Sancho Ortiz de Agurto,” 23 February 1562, in Petition and Service Record of Alonso Velázquez, Mexico, 1562, Patronato 65, No. 1, Ramo 14, ff. 23r-24v, AGI; PDF copy, trans. John E. Worth, 43, University Archives and West Florida History Center, University of West Florida. “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129.

²⁶ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 25 October 1559, *LP*, 1:56–79.

²⁷ “Testimony,” Montalván, 11 August 1561, *LP*, 2:282–301.

²⁸ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129; “Testimony,” Montalván, 11 August 1561, 2:282–301.

food.²⁹ Two expedition members testified that Luna’s failure to send boats to the detachment in Nanipacana, combined with his delay in leaving Ochuse, resulted in the natives having time to flee.³⁰

The majority of the colonists now resided in Nanipacana with no access to food and desperately awaiting the second round of relief, their “need [growing] so great that horse meat was publicly weighed out to give rations to the people.”³¹ Luna sent a detachment of 100 men upriver to find Indian towns; they returned in 22 days and reported that although they had discovered towns, the natives had abandoned them, burned all the cornfields, and even destroyed the edible wild plants to further deny the Spaniards food.³² After their return, a second detachment was sent to find the province of Coosa, visited by Hernando de Soto and located in modern-day Georgia. In an abandoned village they discovered between 35 and 80 fanegas of corn, which they sent down the river to the colonists at Nanipacana.³³ This did little to abate the hunger and deprivations of the colonists, for on 11 June 1560 the married men filed a formal petition that they be sent back to New Spain because they, their children, and wives “are suffering from the great hunger which we at present are enduring.”³⁴ Luna responded that the fleet from New Spain was expected “any day” and that “if within fifty days there should not be sufficient relief” he would write to the viceroy on their behalf.³⁵ By 17 June, the men resubmitted their petition, arguing that “they have no prospect of food from any quarter” and that “the fleet from New Spain does not come, has not come, and even in case it should come now ... more than fifty days would pass before any food might reach this camp, and during that interval the army might die.”³⁶

²⁹ “Testimony and report given by certain Soldiers concerning what happened on the Journey to La Florida, which was made by Don Tristán de Luna y Arellano by Order of the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Luis de Velasco,” 12 August 1561. Testimony of Miguel Sánchez Serrano, Patronato 19, Ramo 10, ff. 6v-8r, AGI, *LP*, 2:312–19; “Testimony,” Montalván, 11 August 1561, 2:282–301.

³⁰ “Testimony,” Serrano, *LP*, 2:312–19; “Testimony,” Montalván, 2:282–301.

³¹ “Documents of the Suit between Luna and his Followers,” 27 August–13 September 1560, transcribed by Juan de Vargas, 9 January 1561, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 96r-161v, AGI, *LP*, 1:198–253, 2:2–137.

³² “Testimony,” Montalván, *LP*, 2:282–301; “Reply of the Maestre de Campo to the Decision of the Governor,” 19 June 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 80r-v, AGI, 1:152–59.

³³ “Testimony,” Montalván, *LP*, 2:282–301; “Fray Domingo de la Anunciación and Others to Velasco, Coosa,” 1 August 1560, transcribed by Juan de Vargas, 1 December 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 108r-111v, AGI, 1:232–43.

³⁴ “The Married Soldiers ask that they be sent to New Spain,” Petition to Tristán de Luna y Arellano, 11–17 June 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 71r-74v, AGI, *LP*, 1:133–43.

³⁵ “The Married Soldiers ask that they be sent to New Spain.”

³⁶ “The Married Soldiers ask that they be sent to New Spain.”

By this time, Luna had received word from the Coosa detachment that, though the journey was difficult, they were in a “well-populated land with abundant food.”³⁷ Luna declared that he and anyone who would follow him would go inland to Coosa.³⁸ The *maestre de campo* and captains responded that no one in the camp was in a condition to make the arduous journey to Coosa and they should instead retreat to modern day Mobile Bay, where there was abundant shellfish, palmettos, and deer.³⁹ With mounting pressure from his men, Luna conceded on 22 June to move the camp downriver to Mobile Bay and from there they made their way back to Ochuse, arriving just eight days before the second relief fleet, which brought “scant supplies indeed.”⁴⁰

The second relief expedition met with numerous setbacks and the delay proved detrimental to the survival of the Luna settlement. Though the viceroy stressed the urgency to Gayón, the fleet did not leave until 23 June 1560.⁴¹ In his letters to Luna, the viceroy said the relief vessels were still being refitted as of 6 May and had not been dispatched because a fleet of 10 ships bound for Spain left the port “bare of provisions” for the settlement’s relief.⁴² The viceroy further explained that he decided to hold the ships so as “not to cause confusion between the two [fleets] in despatch [*sic*].”⁴³ He did indicate, however, that two trips to Havana would be made to procure additional provisions once the initial supplies from Mexico were delivered to the colony.⁴⁴ While he mentioned horses and cattle as most essential to the preservation of the army, he did not

³⁷ “Declaration made by Luna,” 19 June 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 78r-79r, AGI, *LP*, 1:147–53. The declaration is about moving inland to Coosa.

³⁸ “Declaration,” 19 June 1560, *LP*, 1:147–53.

³⁹ “Reply of the Officers,” 19 June 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 80r-v, AGI, *LP*, 1:152–59; “The Captains represent the many obstacles to going inland,” 19 June 1560, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 81r-82v, AGI, 1:158–65; “The Letter which the Captains wrote to the Camp of the Sargento Mayor in Reply to his,” 9 September 1560, transcribed by Juan de Vargas, Justicia 1031, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 155v-158r, AGI, 2:118–25.

⁴⁰ “The Letter which the Captains wrote,” 9 September 1560.

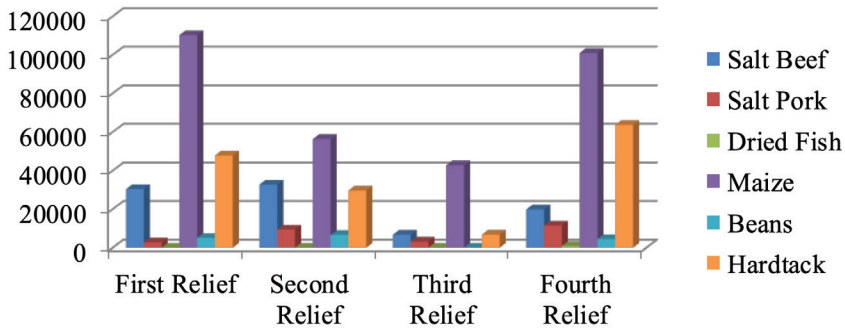
⁴¹ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 17 January 1560, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 6r-v; “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 7 February 1560, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 5r-v; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95.

⁴² “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129. Though dated 6 May 1560, this letter was clearly begun in April since he mentions that he hopes the relief fleet will sail “at the end of this month of [*sic*, presumably “or”] the first of May”; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 20 August 1560, 1:180–95.

⁴³ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 7 May 1560, 1:128–31.

⁴⁴ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 7 May 1560, 1:128–31.

Figure 2. Quantities and totals of dry goods and casked meats by weight (libras) for the four Luna Settlement relief expeditions.



	Salt Beef	Salt Pork	Dried Fish	Maize	Beans	Hardtack	Total Weight in Libras
First Relief	30,375	2,725	0	110,200	5,100	47,780	196,180
Second Relief	32,700	9,375	0	56,400	6,600	29,594.5	134,669.5
Third Relief	25,600	3,162.5	0	42,750	0	6,800	78,312.5
Fourth Relief	19,825	11,462.5	812.5	101,000	4,400	63,612.5	201,112.5

send them from Mexico, believing they could be procured from Havana, and 2,000 pesos were given to Luis Daza for this purpose.⁴⁵ The viceroy also listed other supplies he was sending, such as blankets, arquebuses, powder horns, flasks, helmets, matchcord, and a forge.⁴⁶ These supplies suggest the viceroy still believed reaching Santa Elena within the year was possible, and he was apparently ignorant of the near-starvation that the colonists were facing. In his 16 May letter to Gayón, he relayed that Angel de Villafañe, the alcalde mayor, carried the dispatch for the ships and that Luis Daza, Royal factor of the expedition, was already on his way.⁴⁷ Interestingly, he also mentioned that there was little time to make two trips to Havana before September, hurricanes being frequent during the month and making it too dangerous.⁴⁸ At this point,

⁴⁵ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129; Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564. The accounting lists the amount as 3,000 pesos.

⁴⁶ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 6 May 1560, *LP*, 1:92–129.

⁴⁷ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 16 May 1560, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 8r-v.

⁴⁸ “Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco,” 16 May 1560, in Gayón Petition and

too much time had passed since the first relief fleet had reached Ochuse; it was too late to replace the munitions and non-food supplies with the essential food stores the Luna colony needed.

The second relief fleet finally left San Juan de Ulua on 23 June 1560.⁴⁹ It is here that the real disaster of the Luna colony began to take shape. The supplies sent with the second relief included approximately 56,400 libras of maize, 29,594.5 libras of hardtack, 6,600 libras of beans, 32,700 libras of salt beef, and 9,375 libras of salt pork.⁵⁰ Livestock, namely goats and cows, as well as sugar, flour, oil, vinegar, chilis, almonds, and raisins were also provided, presumably for the sick.⁵¹ Strikingly, the relative weights of dry goods, specifically maize and hardtack, represent approximately half the amounts sent on the first relief.

This deficiency seems to be the result of letters received by the viceroy from Nanipacana, which suggested most of the colonists were in the interior, had abundant supplies, and were, perhaps, even on their way to Coosa.⁵² As of Luna's 19 July letter to the viceroy, the second relief fleet still had not arrived.⁵³ While it must have arrived shortly thereafter, nearly seven months had passed since the first relief vessels had returned to New Spain. The provisions the ships carried were substantially reduced from those of the first relief, and as their foray to Nanipacana and back had proved, no supplies could be procured from the interior. This realization must have been disheartening to the colonists, and it essentially sealed the fate of the colony.

With the arrival of the second relief fleet also came a letter from the king instructing Luna to immediately dispatch an expedition to Santa Elena.⁵⁴ Upon receiving the instruction, Luna ordered two ships under Biedma and Doz to make for Santa Elena, though a storm pushed them back and by 15 September 1560 they arrived back in New Spain.⁵⁵ In his 15 September letter, the viceroy suggested that Luna make for Coosa with the majority of the remaining colonists and that, if this was not possible, the port of Ochuse should not be abandoned.⁵⁶ Coincidentally, on 27 August, Luna had already decreed that

Service Record (1567), 8r-v.

⁴⁹ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95.

⁵⁰ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564.

⁵¹ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564.

⁵² "The Letter which the Captains wrote," 9 September 1560, *LP*, 2:118–25; "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, 1:180–95.

⁵³ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95.

⁵⁴ "The King to Luna, Toledo," 18 December 1559, transcribed by Juan de Vargas, [29] August 1560 *LP*, 2:14–19; "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 6 May 1560, 1:92–129; Worth, "Florida's Forgotten Colony," 55.

⁵⁵ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 15 September 1560, *LP*, 2:156–63.

⁵⁶ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 15 September 1560, *LP*, 2:156–63.

100 men would be provisioned and sent to Coosa; however, this was met with a lawsuit from his men, who refused to split the meager provisions remaining in the port, stating that “food at present ... will not be more than enough for this coming month of September.”⁵⁷ By 9 September the *maestre de campo* dispatched Juan de Porras to Coosa to retrieve the men stationed there, and they arrived back in Ochuse in November.⁵⁸ The litigation that took place in the port of Ochuse was a direct result of the lack of supplies sent by the second relief expedition. In the previous litigation documents from Nanipacana, both *maestre de campo* Jorge Cerón and the captains requested of Luna that rather than attempting to reach Coosa they instead return to the port and await the relief supplies before making the trek inland.⁵⁹ Luna had conceded to this plan in Nanipacana, but when he attempted to follow through from Ochuse, the expedition members dissented, citing the scant supplies that arrived with the second relief. Luna drafted a list of rations in late August for the hundred men he intended to dispatch to Coosa.⁶⁰ This list accentuates the dire situation the remaining colonists faced, with the soldiers being allotted “two large ounces of bacon, two of biscuit, nine tortillas, and six ounces of dried beef” per day and servants being allocated just over half of that.⁶¹ Given these meager rations, it is no wonder that Luna’s men refused his directive.⁶² The dissension between Luna and his men had been sown in large part by his desire to pursue his mission to settle Santa Elena despite the paucity of provisions sent by the viceroy.

Upon receiving Luna’s letter regarding the state of the colony at the end of July, the viceroy attempted to justify not only the delayed arrival of the second relief ships but also the drastic decrease in allotted provisions, stating he believed the people who went inland would not be lacking food and that they had clearly not reached Soto’s country where previous explorers “had never suffered want.”⁶³ Surprisingly, hearing about the hardships the colony was enduring, the viceroy pressed Luna about establishing an overland route to Santa Elena by way of Coosa, believing it would not be difficult because

⁵⁷ “Documents of the Suit between Luna and his Followers,” 27 August–13 September 1560, *LP*, 1:198–253, 2:2–137.

⁵⁸ “Documents of the Suit between Luna and his Followers,” 27 August–13 September 1560, *LP*, 1:198–253, 2:2–137; Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 57.

⁵⁹ “Reply of the Officers,” 19 June 1560, *LP*, 1:152–59; “The Captains,” 19 June 1560, 1:158–65.

⁶⁰ “He still orders them to get ready,” [28] August 1560, *Justicia* 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 116v–117r, *AGI*, *LP*, 2:6–9.

⁶¹ “He still orders them to get ready,” [28] August 1560, *LP*, 2:6–9.

⁶² John E. Worth, personal communication to author, December 2016.

⁶³ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 15 September 1560, *LP*, 2:156–63.

Spaniards had done it with far less.⁶⁴ Further, he dismissed the colony's very real plight, saying "it is not a new thing with armies that there should occur shortage of provisions, misfortunes, and failures, we need not marvel that such a thing has happened to that camp."⁶⁵ Clearly, the viceroy was besotted by the romanticized tales of Soto's Coosa, though if, as Herbert Priestley suggests, "Soto had found the country as opulent as [his stories suggest] ... he would have ceased his wanderings then and there."⁶⁶ The viceroy also seemed wholly unaware of just how desperate the colonists were. It is possible that Luna's communiques lacked the sense of urgency for food that the colony was, in reality, experiencing. By the time the viceroy's letter of 20 August arrived in Ochuse in December with the third round of relief, the Coosa detachment had returned to the port and all attempts by Luna's men to reach Santa Elena had been abandoned.

As of this letter, preparations for the third relief expedition had begun and the viceroy redirected a ship bound for Campeche to instead take supplies to Ochuse, and he once again dispatched Gayón with urgency.⁶⁷ He further requested that Luna promptly send the caravel back to New Spain so it could be loaded with additional supplies, which Pedro Menéndez would deliver on his way to Spain.⁶⁸ The viceroy lamented that he would have liked to send more provisions with the third lot, but could not for "lack of ships."⁶⁹ At this point, the viceroy still believed the road to Santa Elena could be established, and he exerted much time and energy trying to incorporate this part of the plan into the third relief expedition.⁷⁰ This is his most significant failure. If he had instead focused his efforts on stabilizing the colony with substantial food stores and establishing a foothold in Ochuse for the duration of the winter months, Santa Elena could possibly have been reached the following year. Perhaps such stability would also have quelled the dissent between Luna and his officers. However, the viceroy was under extreme pressure from the king to settle Santa Elena as soon as possible, particularly since 300,000 pesos had already been spent on the expedition.⁷¹ Once again, weather and road conditions hampered

⁶⁴ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 15 September 1560, *LP*, 2:156–63.

⁶⁵ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 15 September 1560, *LP*, 2:156–63.

⁶⁶ Priestley, "Historical Introduction," *LP*, 1:xliv.

⁶⁷ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95; Velasco, letter to Gonzalo Gayón, 15 September 1560, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 9r-v.

⁶⁸ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95; "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 3 September 1560, 1:194–99.

⁶⁹ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 13 September 1560, *LP*, 2:136–51.

⁷⁰ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 20 August 1560, *LP*, 1:180–95; "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 13 September 1560, 2:136–51.

⁷¹ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 13 September 1560, *LP*, 2:136–51; "Velasco to Luna, Mexico,"

the transportation of provisions to San Juan de Ulua, and as of the beginning of October, the caravel had still not left port with supplies.⁷² In the meantime, the viceroy received a flurry of letters and reports from Luna and other expedition members as more colonists evacuated the port.⁷³ By the end of the first year, less than 500 colonists remained in Florida; most had left with the first and second relief expeditions or on other ships carrying communiques.⁷⁴

The third shipment of relief aid arrived in December 1560 but carried even fewer supplies than the second: approximately 42,750 libras of maize, a mere 6,800 libras of hardtack, 25,600 libras of salt beef, and 3,162.5 libras of salt pork (see figure 2).⁷⁵ Other items included flour and cheeses, though apparently no beans or livestock were sent.⁷⁶ If the second shipment had already spread supplies thin, this expedition added insult to injury, the colonists being “reduced to eating the hides of the cattle which they had brought from New Spain and all the horses that they had.”⁷⁷ Further, in May 1562 Luis Daza turned over 3,000 pesos given to him for purchasing food for the colony from Havana, indicating that he never procured any supplies or livestock from Havana with the funds.⁷⁸

The significant drop in supplies for the third relief shipment could be explained by a number of factors. As many of the letters suggest, procuring ships and supplies was hampered by heavy rains and poor transportation.⁷⁹ Additionally, as with the previous expeditions, the viceroy intended to provide relief from Havana as well as dispatch additional relief efforts from Veracruz in relatively acceptable time frames. It is also possible that, given the number of people that had returned from the colony to New Spain and those he still assumed were in the interior, the viceroy had erroneously calculated the provisions necessary for the people who remained; he was also unaware of the Coosa detachment’s return to Ochuse in early November.⁸⁰ The viceroy would

2 October 1560, 2:174-177; Report of Tristán de Luna, 1561, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 2r-3v, AGI, 1:4-9.

⁷² “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 13 September 1560, *LP*, 2:136-51; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 15 September 1560, 2:156-63; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 2 October 1560, 2:174-77.

⁷³ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 23 September 1560, *LP*, 2:162-65; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 25 September 1560, 2:164-69; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 1 October 1560, 2:168-71.

⁷⁴ Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 57.

⁷⁵ Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 58; Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564.

⁷⁶ Ybarra, “Audit,” 1564.

⁷⁷ “Testimony,” Montalván, *LP*, 2:282-301.

⁷⁸ “Testimony,” Montalván, *LP*, 2:282-301.

⁷⁹ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 13 September 1560, *LP*, 2:136-51; “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 15 September 1560, 2:156-63.

⁸⁰ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 4 October 1560, *LP*, 1:80-83; Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten

later claim that the supplies that arrived with the third relief fleet should have lasted the colony six months.⁸¹ Whatever the causes, by the time the third relief arrived, the situation between Luna and his officers, extensively recorded in letters and litigation documents sent back to the viceroy, had deteriorated substantially, due in no small part to their ever-dwindling rations.

After receiving accounts of the events at Ochuse from various members of the expedition who had returned to New Spain, the viceroy's tone changed significantly in his letters to Luna by the beginning of October 1560. On October 4, the viceroy wrote suggesting Luna should "come away from that land to recover" from the illness he was suffering and suggested *maestre de campo* Cerón as his replacement.⁸² Despite this suggestion, the viceroy sent Angel de Villafañe with the fourth and final relief aid expedition to replace Luna as governor.⁸³

The fourth relief aid, comprised of four ships piloted by Gayón, arrived in early April 1561, and on April 9, Villafañe, as acting governor of Florida, gave Luna official license to go to Spain by way of Havana and give an account of the expedition to the king.⁸⁴ The relief supplies that accompanied Villafañe were more like those delivered in the first relief aid than either of the two intermediate fleets (see figure 2). The expedition carried approximately 101,000 libras of maize, 63,612.5 libras of hardtack, 4,400 libras of beans, 19,825 libras of salt beef, 11,462.5 libras of salt pork, and 812.5 libras of dried fish.⁸⁵ Given that the first relief had been intended to feed 1,500 colonists and well under 500 now resided in the port, this seems like a startling increase. In fact, this increase represents that this was not only a relief expedition; in conjunction with Villafañe's appointment as governor, he had also been tasked with establishing a colony at Santa Elena, the initial task Luna had failed to complete.⁸⁶ The accounting documents clearly support this, since along with foodstuffs, sizable quantities of gun powder, matchlock fuses, arquebuses, and pack animals were also sent.⁸⁷ A significant number of nails, tacks, and structural spikes accompanied the expedition as well.⁸⁸ The viceroy also gave

Colony," 58.

⁸¹ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 30 January 1561, *LP*, 1:8–15.

⁸² "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 4 October 1560, *LP*, 1:80–83.

⁸³ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 30 January 1561, *LP*, 1:8–15.

⁸⁴ "Letter to Gonzalo Gayón from Luis de Velasco," 31 January 1561, in Gayón Petition and Service Record (1567), 13r-v; "Angel de Villafañe gives License to Don Tristán to go to Spain," 9 April 1561, Justicia 1013, No. 2, Ramo 1, ff. 4r, AGI, *LP*, 1:8–9.

⁸⁵ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564. The dried fish is indicative of the time of year, as it was for Lent.

⁸⁶ "Velasco to Luna, Mexico," 30 January 1561, *LP*, 1:8–15.

⁸⁷ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564.

⁸⁸ Ybarra, "Audit," 1564.

permission for a number of Luna’s officers and royal officials to return to New Spain and specified that the provisions accompanying Villafañe were only for those going to Santa Elena and the people staying in Ochuse, not for the returnees.⁸⁹

Villafañe reached Santa Elena on 27 May with four ships and approximately 160 to 200 men and began exploring the coastline northward.⁹⁰ However, the ships became separated, and both frigates were lost with all hands in a storm on 14 June 1561.⁹¹ After retreating down the coast and refitting the remaining ships on Hispaniola, Villafañe sailed for Havana and then to Ochuse in mid-August to retrieve the remaining inhabitants, effectively abandoning the settlement after just over two years.⁹²

Conclusion

With the failure of both Luna and Villafañe to establish a colony at either Ochuse or Santa Elena, the Spanish foothold in Florida would wait for Pedro Menéndez’s settlement of St. Augustine just four years later in 1565.⁹³ While the hurricane of 19–20 September 1559 was the catalyst for the failure of the Luna settlement, the disaster relief response that followed was the fuel. Numerous contributing factors such as poor land and sea transportation, the difficulties of colonial long-distance communication, the Spanish *flota* that soaked up the colony’s much needed provisions, the lack of native allies to provide sustenance, and misunderstandings and/or misrepresentations by both Luna and the viceroy compounded an already difficult disaster relief effort. Despite the fact that, as Priestley laments, the viceroy’s “difficulties were enormous,” he still did not handle the relief effort appropriately and should have realized, after the second relief expedition, that the colony would need much more than he was providing or it would face ruin.⁹⁴ Looking at the figures, the colony was arguably lost after the extremely deficient second relief expedition, which not only provided little relief for their hunger but also prompted the deterioration of relations between Luna and his officers.

The significance of understanding the Luna settlement disaster relief efforts is clear, not only for understanding the Luna colony but the difficulties of contact and colonialism as a whole. Likewise, even today disasters and

⁸⁹ “Velasco to Luna, Mexico,” 30 January 1561, *LP*, 1:8–15.

⁹⁰ Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 59.

⁹¹ Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 59.

⁹² Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 59.

⁹³ Worth, “Florida’s Forgotten Colony,” 59.

⁹⁴ Priestley, “Historical Introduction,” *LP*, 1:xxxvi.

disaster response leave an indelible impact on the people and communities to which they occur. Such calamities, whether natural or manmade, affect cultures the world over, and those experiencing them are often forced to change and adapt. The Luna colony is not only a case study in sixteenth-century disaster response and relief but a sobering example of how the past, present, and future are shaped by disasters, often exacerbated by human responses to them.

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