**Fall of Tenochtitlan**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to: [navigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#mw-head), [search](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#p-search)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Siege of Tenochtitlan** | |
| Part of the [Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_conquest_of_the_Aztec_Empire) | |
| [The Conquest of Tenochtitlan.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Conquest_of_Tenochtitlan.jpg) "Conquista de México por Cortés". Unknown artist, second half of the 17th century. Note that the depiction of the Aztecs' clothing and weaponry is inaccurate. | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Date** | May 26 - August 13, 1521 | | **Location** | [Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan), present-day [Mexico City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico_City), [Mexico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico) | | **Result** | Decisive Spanish and Tlaxcallan victory | | |
| **Belligerents** | |
| [Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain)[Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Empire) [Tlaxcallān](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlaxcala_(Nahua_state)) | [Aztec Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_Empire) |
| **Commanders and leaders** | |
| [Hernán Cortés](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s) [Pedro de Alvarado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_de_Alvarado) | [Cuitláhuac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuitl%C3%A1huac) [**†**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killed_in_action) [Cuauhtémoc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuauht%C3%A9moc)  [(POW)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner_of_war) |
| **Strength** | |
| 16 guns[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) 13 brigantines 80,000–200,000 native allies 86–96 cavalry 900–1,300 infantry[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) | 300,000 warriors[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-1)(including war *acallis*) |
| **Casualties and losses** | |
| 450–860 [Spanish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain)[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) 20,000 [Tlaxcallan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlaxcallan) | 100,000 warriors 100,000 civilians |

|  |
| --- |
| [Aztec calendar.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aztec_calendar.svg) |
| [**Aztec civilization**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec) |
| [**Aztec society**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_society) |
| [Nahuatl language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahuatl_language) |
| [Religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_religion) **·** [Mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_mythology) **·** [Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_philosophy) **·** [Calendars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_calendar) |
| [Human sacrifice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sacrifice_in_Aztec_culture) **·** [Medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_medicine) |
| [**Aztec history**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Aztecs) |
| [Aztlán](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztl%C3%A1n) **·** [Codices](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_codices) **·** [Warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_warfare) |
| [Aztec Triple Alliance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_Triple_Alliance) |
| [Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_conquest_of_the_Aztec_Empire) |
| **Fall of Tenochtitlan** **·** [La Noche Triste](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Noche_Triste) |
| [Montezuma II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montezuma_II) **·** [Hernán Cortés](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s) |
| * [v](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Aztec) * [t](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template_talk:Aztec) * [e](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Template:Aztec&action=edit) |

The **siege of Tenochtitlan**, the capital of the [Aztec Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_Empire), came about in 1521 through the manipulation of local factions and divisions by [Spanish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) [*conquistador*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquistador) [Hernán Cortés](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s). Though numerous battles were fought between the Aztecs and the Spanish army, which was composed of predominantly indigenous peoples, it was the siege of [Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan) that was the final, decisive battle that led to the downfall of the [Aztec](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec) civilization and marked the end of the first phase of the [Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_conquest_of_the_Aztec_Empire). The conquest of [Mexico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico) was part of the [Spanish colonization of the Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_colonization_of_the_Americas).

|  |
| --- |
| **Contents**   [[hide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan)]   * [1 Early events](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Early_events)   + [1.1 The road to Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#The_road_to_Tenochtitlan)   + [1.2 Tensions mount between Aztecs and Spaniards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Tensions_mount_between_Aztecs_and_Spaniards) * [2 Rapid deterioration of relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Rapid_deterioration_of_relations)   + [2.1 Massacre at the festival of Tóxcatl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Massacre_at_the_festival_of_T.C3.B3xcatl)   + [2.2 Aztec revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Aztec_revolt)   + [2.3 La Noche Triste and the Spanish flight to Tlaxcalan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#La_Noche_Triste_and_the_Spanish_flight_to_Tlaxcalan) * [3 Both sides attempt to recover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Both_sides_attempt_to_recover)   + [3.1 Shifting alliances](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Shifting_alliances)   + [3.2 Smallpox decimates the local population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Smallpox_decimates_the_local_population)   + [3.3 Aztecs regroup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Aztecs_regroup) * [4 Siege of Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Siege_of_Tenochtitlan)   + [4.1 Cortés plans and prepares](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Cort.C3.A9s_plans_and_prepares)   + [4.2 The first battles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#The_first_battles)   + [4.3 The Spanish advance closer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#The_Spanish_advance_closer) * [5 Fall of Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Fall_of_Tenochtitlan)   + [5.1 The Aztecs' last stand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#The_Aztecs.27_last_stand) * [6 The surrender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#The_surrender) * [7 See also](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#See_also) * [8 Notes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Notes) * [9 References](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#References)   + [9.1 Primary sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Primary_sources)   + [9.2 Secondary sources](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#Secondary_sources) * [10 External links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#External_links) |

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=1)**] Early events**

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=2)**] The road to Tenochtitlan**

In April 1519 [Hernán Cortés](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s), the Chief Magistrate of [Santiago, Cuba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santiago,_Cuba), came upon the coast of Mexico at a point he called [Vera Cruz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veracruz,_Veracruz) with 508 soldiers, 100 sailors and 14 small cannons. Governor Velazquez, the highest Spanish authority in the Americas, called for Cortés to lead an expedition into Mexico after reports from a few previous expeditions to Yucatán caught the interest of the Spanish in Cuba.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-PBS-2) Velázquez then revoked Cortés' right to lead the expedition and soon after sent an army led by [Pánfilo de Narvaez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A1nfilo_de_Narvaez) to take Cortés into custody. Cortés lacked the authority to execute his plan, a fact that would return to haunt him when he returned to Spain.

As he moved inland Cortés came into contact with a number of polities who resented the repressive Aztec rule; Cortés clashed with some of these polities, among them the Totonacs and Tlaxcalans, who surrounded his army on a hilltop for two agonizing weeks, protected by the fire from his cannons. [Bernal Diaz del Castillo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernal_Diaz_del_Castillo) wrote that his numerically inferior force probably would not have survived if it were not for [Xicotencatl the Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xicotencatl_the_Elder) and his wish to form an alliance with the Spaniards against the Aztecs.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-atlas-3)

It once was widely believed that the Aztecs first thought Cortés was [Quetzalcoatl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quetzalcoatl), a mythical god prophesied to return to Mexico--coincidentally in the same year Cortés landed and from the same direction he came. This is now believed to be an invention of the conquerors, and scholars agree that the Aztecs were well aware that Cortés was not a god.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-4)

Aztec leader Moctezuma sent a group of noblemen and other emissaries to meet Cortés at Quauhtechcac. These emissaries brought golden jewelry as a gift, which greatly pleased the Spaniards.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5) According to the [Florentine Codex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florentine_Codex), Lib. 12, f.6r., Moctezuma also ordered that his messengers carry the highly symbolic *penacho* (headdress) of Quetzalcoatl de Tula to Cortés and place it on his person. As news about the strangers reached the capital city, Moctezuma became increasingly fearful and considered fleeing the city but resigned himself to what he considered to be the fate of his people.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Le.C3.B3n_Portilla-6)

Cortés continued on his march towards Tenochtitlan. Before entering the city, on November 8, 1519 Cortés and his troops prepared themselves for battle, armoring themselves and their horses, and arranging themselves in proper military rank. Four horsemen were at the lead of the procession. Behind these horsemen were five more contingents: foot soldiers with iron swords and wooden or leather shields; horsemen in cuirasses, armed with iron lances, swords, and wooden shields; crossbowmen; more horsemen; soldiers armed with [arquebuses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arquebus); lastly, native peoples from Tlaxcalan, Tliliuhquitepec, and Huexotzinco. The indigenous soldiers wore cotton armor and were armed with shields and crossbows; many carried provisions in baskets or bundles while others escorted the cannons on wooden carts.

Cortés' army entered the city on the flower-covered causeway ([Iztapalapa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iztapalapa" \o "Iztapalapa)) associated with the god Quetzalcoatl. Cortés was amicably received by Moctezuma, who told him, "You have come to sit on your throne." The captive woman Malinalli Tenépal, also known as [La Malinche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Malinche) or Doña Marina, translated from Nahuatl to Maya chontal; the Spaniard [Gerónimo de Aguilar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ger%C3%B3nimo_de_Aguilar) translated from Maya chontal to Spanish.

Moctezuma was later taken hostage as a safety measure by the vastly outnumbered Spanish. According to all eyewitness accounts, Moctezuma initially refused to leave his palace but after a series of threats from and debates with the Spanish captains, he agreed to move to the Axayáctal palace with his retinue. The first captain assigned to guard him was none other than [Pedro de Alvarado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_de_Alvarado). Other Aztec lords were also detained by the Spanish.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5) The palace was surrounded by over 100 Spanish soldiers in order to prevent any attempt to rescue the Huey Tlatoani (emperor).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Cervantes_Salazar-7)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=3)**] Tensions mount between Aztecs and Spaniards**

It is uncertain why Moctezuma cooperated so readily with the Spaniards. It is possible he feared losing his life or political power. It could also have been a tactical move: Moctezuma may have wanted to gather more information on the Spaniards, or to wait for the end of the agricultural season and strike at the beginning of the war season.[[*clarification needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Please_clarify)] However, he did not carry out either of these actions even though high-ranking military leaders such as his brother [Cuitlahuac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuitlahuac) and nephew [Cacamatzin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacamatzin) urged him to do so. With Moctezuma captive, Cortés did not need to worry about being cut off from supplies or being attacked. He also assumed that he could control the Aztecs through Moctezuma. However, Cortés had little knowledge of the ruling system of the Aztecs; Moctezuma was not all-powerful as Cortés imagined. Being appointed to the throne and maintaining the position was dependent on the king’s ability to rule decisively; he could easily be replaced by another noble if he failed to do so. At any sign of weakness, Aztec nobles within Tenochtitlan and in other Aztec tributaries were liable to rebel. As Moctezuma made orders as demanded by Cortés, such as commanding tribute to be gathered and given to the Spaniards, his authority was slipping, and quickly his people began to turn against him.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

Cortés and his army were permitted to stay in the Palace of Axayacatl, and tensions continued to grow. While the Spaniards were in Tenochtitlan, Velazquez assembled a force of nineteen ships, more than 800 soldiers, twenty cannons, eighty horsemen, one-hundred and twenty crossbowmen, and eighty arquebusiers under the command of [Pánfilo de Narvaez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A1nfilo_de_Narvaez) to capture Cortés and return him to Cuba. Velazquez felt that Cortés had exceeded his authority, and had been aware of Cortés's misconduct for nearly a year. He had to wait for favorable winds, though, and was unable to send any forces until spring. Narvaez’s troops landed at San Juan de Ulúa on the Mexican coast around April 20, 1520.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-8)

After Cortés became aware of their arrival, he brought a small force of about two hundred to Narvaez’s camp in Cempohuallan on May 27. Cortés ambushed Narvaez’s camp late at night, taking Narvaez hostage and easily gaining his surrender.[[*clarification needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Please_clarify)] Evidence suggests that the two were in the midst of negotiations at the time, and Narvaez was not expecting an attack. Cortés had also divided Narvaez’s forces with promises of the vast wealth in Tenochtitlan, inducing them to surrender more quickly. Narvaez was imprisoned in Vera Cruz, and his army was integrated into Cortés’s forces.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=4)**] Rapid deterioration of relations**

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=5)**] Massacre at the festival of Tóxcatl**

During Cortés’s absence, [Pedro de Alvarado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_de_Alvarado) was left in command in Tenochtitlan with 120 soldiers.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-9)

At this time, the Aztecs began to prepare for the annual festival of [Toxcatl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toxcatl) in early May, in honor of [Tezcatlipoca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tezcatlipoca), otherwise known as the Smoking Mirror or the Omnipotent Power. They honored this God during the onset of the dry season so that the god would fill dry streambeds and cause rain to fall on crops. Moctezuma secured the consent of Cortes to hold the festival, and, after Cortes left for the coast to deal with [Panfilo de Narvaez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panfilo_de_Narvaez), Moctezuma confirmed with [Pedro de Alvarado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_de_Alvarado), the conquistador who Cortes had left in charge, for permission to hold the festival. Alvarado agreed to allow the festival on the condition that there were no human sacrifices. This condition was naïve. The Toxcatl festival featured human sacrifice as part of its climactic rituals to ensure that there would be water during the dry season. The act of prohibiting human sacrifice during this most sacred of religious festivals was as absurd as prohibiting communion during a Catholic mass. [[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-10)

Before the festival, Alvarado encountered a group of women building a statue of Huitzilopochtli and the image unsettled him, and he became suspicious about the eventuality of human sacrifice. He tortured priests and nobles and discovered that the Aztecs were planning a revolt. Unable to assert control over events, he sequestered Moctezuma and increased the guards around the Aztec Emperor. [[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-11)

By the day of the festival, the Aztecs had gathered on the Patio of Dances. Alvarado had sixty of his men as well as many of his Tlaxcalan allies into positions around the patio. The Aztecs initiated the Serpent Dance. The euphoric dancing as well as the accompanying flute and drum playing disturbed Alvarado about the potential for revolt. He ordered the gates closed and initiated the killing of many thousands of Aztec nobles, warriors and priests. [[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-12)

Alvarado, the conquistadors and the Tlaxcalans retreated to their base in the Palace of Axayacatl and secured the entrances. Alvarado ordered his men to shoot their cannons, crossbows and harquebuses into the gathering crowd. The Aztec revolt became more widespread as a result. Alvarado forced Moctezuma to appeal to the crowd outside the Palace and this appeal temporarily calmed them. [[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-13)

The massacre had the result of resolutely turning all the Aztecs against the Spanish and completely undermining Moctezuma's authority. [[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-14)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=6)**] Aztec revolt**

When it became more clear what was happening to the Aztecs outside the Temple, the alarm was sounded. Aztec warriors came running, and fired darts and launched spears at the Spanish forces.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5) This may have been due to the fact that their military infrastructure was severely damaged after the attack on the festival, as the most elite and seasoned warriors were killed.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

Alvarado sent for word to Cortés of the events, and Cortés came back to Tenochtitlan on June 24 with 1,300 soldiers, 96 horses, 80 crossbowmen, and 80 arquebusiers. Cortés also came with 2,000 Tlaxcalan warriors on the journey.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) Cortés entered the palace unscathed, the Aztecs had planned to ambush them. The Aztecs stopped sending food and supplies to the Spanish. They became suspicious and watched for people trying to sneak supplies to them; many innocent people were slaughtered because they were suspected of helping them.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) The roads were shut and the causeway bridges became raised. The Aztecs halted any Spanish attacks or attempts to leave the palace. Every Spanish soldier that was not killed was wounded.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

Cortés failed to grasp the full extent of the situation, as the attack on the festival was the last straw for the Aztecs, who now were completely against Moctezuma and the Spanish. Thus, the military gains of the attack also had a serious political cost for Cortés.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

Cortés attempted to parley with the Aztecs, and after this failed he sent Moctezuma to tell his people to stop fighting. However, the Aztecs refused.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) The Spanish asserted that Moctezuma was stoned to death by his own people as he attempted to speak with them.[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-16) The Aztecs claimed that Moctezuma was murdered by the Spanish.[[1][1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) Two other local rulers were found strangled as well.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-serge-17) Moctezuma’s younger brother [Cuitláhuac](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuitl%C3%A1huac), who had been ruler of Ixtlapalapan until then, was chosen to be the new Tlatoani.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=7)**] La Noche Triste and the Spanish flight to Tlaxcalan**

*Main articles:* [*La Noche Triste*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Noche_Triste) *and* [*Battle of Otumba*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Otumba)

This major Aztec victory is still remembered as “La Noche Triste,” The Night of Sorrows. Popular tales say that Cortés wept under a tree the night of the massacre of his troops at the hands of the Aztecs.

Though a flight from the city would make Cortés appear weak before his indigenous allies, it was this or death for the Spanish forces. Cortés and his men were in the center of the city, and

were useful for contributing food, laborers, and supplies. This only worsened the position of the Aztecs. Throughout the siege, the Aztecs had little aid from outside of Tenochtitlan. The remaining loyal tributaries had difficulty sending forces, because it would leave them vulnerable to Spanish attack. Many of these loyal tributaries were surrounded by the Spanish.

Though the tributaries often went back and forth in their loyalties at any sign of change, the Spanish tried hard not to lose any allies. They feared a “snowball effect,” in that if one tributary left, others might follow. Thus, they brutally crushed any tributaries who tried to send help to Tenochtitlan. Any shipments of food and water were intercepted, and even those trying to fish in the lake were attacked.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) Many Aztecs drank salt water because of their severe thirst and contracted dysentery. The famine was so severe that the Aztecs ate anything, even wood, leather, and bricks for sustenance.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5)

The Spanish continued to push closer to Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs changed tactics as often as the Spanish did, preventing Cortés’s forces from being entirely victorious. However, the Aztecs were severely worn down. They had no new troops, supplies, food, nor water. The Spanish received a large amount of supplies from Vera Cruz, and, somewhat renewed, finally entered Tenochtitlan.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=16)**] Fall of Tenochtitlan**

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=17)**] The Aztecs' last stand**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LastDaysofTenochtitlanB.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LastDaysofTenochtitlanB.jpg)

"The Last Days of [Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan), [Conquest of Mexico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquest_of_Mexico) by Cortez", a 19th century painting by [William de Leftwich Dodge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_de_Leftwich_Dodge).

The Spanish forces and their allies advanced into the city. Their advance was slow and painful. Aztec warriors attacked them from every angle, in front, behind, even above.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) The fighting was street by street and even building by building. But, despite their bravery and inflicting heavy casualites on the Spanish, the Aztecs could not halt the Spanish advance. While the fighting in the city raged, the Aztecs cut out the hearts of 70 Spanish prisoners at the altar at Huichilobos. By August, many of the people of the city had fled [Tlatelolco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlatelolco_(altepetl)).[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) Cortés sent emissaries to negotiate with the Tlatelolcas to joi were useful for contributing food, laborers, and supplies. This only worsened the position of the Aztecs. Throughout the siege, the Aztecs had little aid from outside of Tenochtitlan. The remaining loyal tributaries had difficulty sending forces, because it would leave them vulnerable to Spanish attack. Many of these loyal tributaries were surrounded by the Spanish.

Though the tributaries often went back and forth in their loyalties at any sign of change, the Spanish tried hard not to lose any allies. They feared a “snowball effect,” in that if one tributary left, others might follow. Thus, they brutally crushed any tributaries who tried to send help to Tenochtitlan. Any shipments of food and water were intercepted, and even those trying to fish in the lake were attacked.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) Many Aztecs drank salt water because of their severe thirst and contracted dysentery. The famine was so severe that the Aztecs ate anything, even wood, leather, and bricks for sustenance.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5)

The Spanish continued to push closer to Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs changed tactics as often as the Spanish did, preventing Cortés’s forces from being entirely victorious. However, the Aztecs were severely worn down. They had no new troops, supplies, food, nor water. The Spanish received a large amount of supplies from Vera Cruz, and, somewhat renewed, finally entered Tenochtitlan.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=16)**] Fall of Tenochtitlan**

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=17)**] The Aztecs' last stand**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LastDaysofTenochtitlanB.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LastDaysofTenochtitlanB.jpg)

"The Last Days of [Tenochtitlan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenochtitlan), [Conquest of Mexico](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conquest_of_Mexico) by Cortez", a 19th century painting by [William de Leftwich Dodge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_de_Leftwich_Dodge).

The Spanish forces and their allies advanced into the city. Their advance was slow and painful. Aztec warriors attacked them from every angle, in front, behind, even above.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) The fighting was street by street and even building by building. But, despite their bravery and inflicting heavy casualites on the Spanish, the Aztecs could not halt the Spanish advance. While the fighting in the city raged, the Aztecs cut out the hearts of 70 Spanish prisoners at the altar at Huichilobos. By August, many of the people of the city had fled [Tlatelolco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlatelolco_(altepetl)).[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) Cortés sent emissaries to negotiate with the Tlatelolcas to join his side, but the n his side, but the Tlatelolcas remained loyal to the Aztecs.

Throughout the battles with the Spanish, the Aztecs still practiced the traditional ceremonies and customs. Tlapaltecatl Opochtzin was chosen to be outfitted to wear the quetzal owl costume. He was supplied with darts sacred for Huitzilopochtli, came with wooden tips and flint tops. When he came, the Spanish soldiers appeared scared and intimidated. They chased the owl-warrior, but he was neither captured nor killed. The Aztecs took this as a good sign, but they could fight no more, and after discussing with the nobles, Cuauhtémoc began talks with the Spanish.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Sahagun-5)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=18)**] The surrender**

The Aztecs surrendered on August 13, 1521. Supposedly, Cortés demanded the gold lost during [La Noche Triste](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Noche_Triste) soon after. [Cuauhtémoc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuauht%C3%A9moc) was taken hostage and later executed.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cuahtemoc.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf8/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cuahtemoc.jpg)

"The Torture of [Cuauhtémoc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuauht%C3%A9moc)", a 19th century painting by [Leandro Izaguirre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leandro_Izaguirre).

Aztecs fled the city as the Spanish forces continued to attack the city even after the surrender, slaughtering thousands of the remaining population and looting the city.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-spears-15) As this practice was generally not done in European warfare, it suggests that Cortés’s indigenous allies had more power over him than he suggested. The survivors marched out of the city for the next three days.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) Almost all of the nobility were dead, and the remaining survivors were mostly very young children.[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-serge-17) 240,000 Aztecs are estimated to have died during the siege, which lasted eighty days. The remaining Spanish forces consisted of 900 Spaniards, eighty horses, sixteen pieces of artillery, and Cortés’s thirteen brigantines.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-Hassig-0) In addition to the massive numbers of civilians killed, military casualties were high on both sides. About 450–860 Spanish soldiers and 20,000 Tlaxcalan warriors were killed during the siege. 100,000 Aztec warriors died of combat, starvation, or disease during the fighting.

It is well accepted that Cortés’s indigenous allies, which may have numbered as many as 200,000, were responsible for his success, though their aid was virtually unacknowledged and they derived little benefit aside from being rid of the Aztecs. As there were several major allied groups, no one in particular was able to take power, and the person who benefited was Cortés.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan#cite_note-atlas-3)

**[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fall_of_Tenochtitlan&action=edit&section=19)**] See also**