**Fall of Tenochtitlan**

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| **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 |

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| [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) |

the killing of many thousands of Aztec nobles, warriors and priests. [[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan" \l "cite_note-12)

that 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 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**