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Nigel Worden

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# ‘Below the Line the Devil Reigns’: Death and Dissent aboard a VOC Vessel

NIGEL WORDEN\*  
*University of Cape Town*

## Abstract

In 1732, the VOC vessel *Loenderveen* limped into Saldanha Bay after months at sea on a disastrous voyage from the Netherlands. Mortality levels had been abnormally high, and bitter dissent had broken out between different factions of the officers with both sides appealing to the diverse mixture of soldiers and sailors on board. A full mutiny was only averted by arrival at the Cape, and the ringleaders were arraigned before the Council of Justice.

The resulting evidence provides an insight into the operation of power and hierarchy aboard a VOC vessel. The paper will consider issues such as the mobilization of ethnic loyalties, the tensions between sailors and soldiers, masculinity, honour and blasphemy, and the ways in which cultural symbols and rituals were appropriated into the conflict. All of this is set against the background of the dead and dying, and the fears of new VOC recruits in a pre-Enlightenment era of unknown worlds beyond ‘the line’.

**Keywords:** VOC, sailors, soldiers, mutiny, honour, ritual, blasphemy, violence, masculinity, scurvy.

Several years ago, when combing through the criminal records of the Cape Council of Justice in search of material on sailors in eighteenth-century Cape Town, I came across a curious page. A circle was drawn on the parchment paper with 51 signatures written around and inside it [Figure 1].<sup>1</sup> It was a ‘Round Robin’, a letter of protest typical of mutinous crewmen in the early-modern Atlantic world. Rediker has characterised these as a ‘cultural innovation from below’, since their form concealed who were the leaders and instead asserted ‘the collective ethos of the seamen’s oppositional culture’.<sup>2</sup> This example had been produced by seafarers aboard the *Loenderveen*, a VOC (Dutch East India Company) vessel sailing from Amsterdam to Ceylon in 1732. It proved to be an entry point into the voyage of a particular vessel with wider implications for understanding the nature of eighteenth-century shipboard experiences.

1. Cape Archives (hereafter CA), Council of Justice (hereafter CJ), 337, Documents in Criminal Cases, 1733, f. 80r.
2. M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 235.

\*Author: Nigel.Worden@uct.ac.za



Figure 1: The Loenderveen 'Round Robin', CA, CJ 337, f.80r.

Recent work on seafaring voyages has focused on the significance of ships as, in Gesa Mackenthun's words, 'miniature geographies – social spaces in which the hierarchies of landed society are acted out, often in extreme ways, and are therefore in constant danger of being subverted'.<sup>3</sup> Michael Pearson, in an important recent article which extends these approaches from the Atlantic to the early-modern Indian Ocean world, has called for more focussed micro-studies which 'get away from the prevalent focus on trade and commerce, and instead try to bring a little culture into the discussion'.<sup>4</sup>

Writing on VOC ships has been exhaustive in many regards, but also somewhat conservative in its focus on quantitative data and general patterns rather than the details of social interaction and symbolic rituals of identity amongst seafarers.<sup>5</sup> However a recent study by Herman Ketting has taken a more anthropological approach to shipboard life in the early seventeenth century, while Dutch maritime historians of the older school are also turning more towards social and

3. G. Mackenthun, 'Chartless Voyages and Protean Geographies: Nineteenth-Century American Fictions of the Black Atlantic', in B. Klein and G. Mackenthun, eds, *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 145, cited in M. Pearson, 'Interrogating the Indian Ocean: Interaction in the Social Space of the early-Modern Ship' (unpublished).
4. Pearson, 'Interrogating the Indian Ocean', 3, citing Foulke.
5. Notably the massive data collection project published in the three volumes of J.R. Bruijn, F. Gaastra and I. Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (hereafter *DAS*) (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987) – and the ongoing *Opvarenden van de VOC* database project housed at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl).

cultural issues.<sup>6</sup> Voyage narratives can do much to deepen this understanding of seafarer experience in the ‘miniature geography’ of the VOC trans-oceanic trading vessel.

The study presented here contributes to such analyses. Like many other narratives of ships owned by the European trading companies, that of the *Loenderveen* is one of control, competition and violence. The evidence also includes numerous details of rituals and symbolic forms which highlight the tensions that could arise within the social space of an early-modern long-distance seafaring vessel. Yet, as Richard Woodman has pointed out, although mutiny ‘exerts a strange and enduring fascination’ as a moment of ‘disfunction in ship-board life’, it does not follow generalised ‘laws of cause and effect’.<sup>7</sup> Moreover not one cohesive narrative but a number of differing and sometimes competing stories emerge from the disparate archival traces of the *Loenderveen* case. The Round Robin emerged from a complex and fraught series of conflicts on board. We need to interrogate the details of these stories in order to endeavour to explain why this was so.

### The Ship of Death

On 18 November 1732, Governor Jan de la Fontaine of the Cape received an urgent dispatch from Pieter Goedhart, *schipper* of the Amsterdam *kamer*’s vessel *Loenderveen*. He was informed that ‘praise be to God’ the ship had arrived in Saldanha Bay, ‘after a melancholy wandering of six months and two days’ and he was earnestly requested to send men and provisions urgently since ‘we find ourselves in a desolate state, with fifty-one men dead and some sixty sick, and the remaining crew so weak that they can barely stand, and we have only 4–5 barrels of fresh water left’. Goedhart ended by apologising for his uneven handwriting since ‘my sick and weak body can scarcely hold a pen in my hand’.<sup>8</sup> He died five days later.

Although this was hardly good news, de la Fontaine must nonetheless have been relieved that the ship had not gone missing. His superiors in the Company were usually more concerned with its ships and their material contents than with the lives of crewmen. *Loenderveen* had sailed from the Texel on 15 May with the ‘Easter fleet’ of six ships. The Easter fleet was always more at risk than those which set out at other times of the year of becoming stuck in the doldrums between the Cape Verde islands and Cape Town, and this indeed had happened to all the vessels in the 1732 fleet.<sup>9</sup> The other five had arrived in Table Bay between 14 and 16 November, but *Loenderveen* had become separated from them. Possibly this was because it was a *fluit*, a vessel mainly used for the European or intra-Asian trade and smaller than the other five, which were long-distance ‘East Indiers’.<sup>10</sup> The *Loenderveen*’s journey to Saldanha Bay had taken 182 days, almost a month longer than the average run to Cape Town for *fluijten* from the Netherlands in this period.<sup>11</sup>

6. H. Ketting, *Leven, Werk en Rebelle aan Boord van Oost-Indiëvaarders (1595–1650)* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002); J. Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC in de Achttiende Eeuw aan de Wal en op de Zee* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2008).

7. R. Woodman, *A Brief History of Mutiny* (New York: Carroll & Graaff, 2005), 1, 10.

8. CA, C 439, Goedhart – de la Fontaine, 18 November 1732.

9. DAS, I, 68, 166.

10. H. Haalmeijer and D. Vuik, *Fluiten, Kitten en Fregatten: De Schepen van de VOC, 1602–1798* (Haarlem: De Boer Maritiem, 2002), 41–45; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (London: Penguin, 1965), 22, 75.

11. DAS, I, 55.

Men aboard vessels caught in the doldrums were liable to fall sick. All of the 1732 Easter fleet suffered higher than average death rates, but *Loenderveen*'s experience had been particularly bad.<sup>12</sup> Out of the 166 men aboard *Loenderveen* when it set sail, 52 had died, and seven more were to follow soon after arrival at Saldanha [see Table 1]. This gave a mortality rate of 35 per cent, considerably higher than the average rate of 8.2 per cent for VOC ships on the Netherlands-Cape route in this decade.<sup>13</sup> Death had primarily hit the lower ranks of soldiers and sailors, although a few lesser-ranking officers also fell victim.

Fatalities on board VOC ships in general were high from the 1720s. In 1730, an official investigation was carried out and all ship surgeons travelling to the Cape after 1729 were obliged to file reports on the medical condition of their crews.<sup>14</sup> That of Laurens Ekelboom, the surgeon aboard *Loenderveen*, was one of the first. It gave little doubt as to what had caused the problem on his ship. Scurvy was the culprit, a disease which, as Michael Pearson has argued for early-modern seafaring, was 'the most feared and loathsome threat ... it produced repulsive sores, madness and then death'.<sup>15</sup> Ekelboom recounted how the symptoms of bloody gums and loose teeth, blue patches on the skin and stinking breath were accompanied by loss of breath, painful joints, slow movement and general sleepiness. Like his fellows, he had little means of effective treatment since the causes of scurvy were still not completely understood. He gave 'stomach-improving medicines' and mild purgatives, and attempted to ensure that the victims' surroundings were made as clean and airy as possible – not an easy task aboard the cramped vessel. Vinegar was sprinkled around and herbs burned.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the men had died early in the voyage – malnutrition of crewmen recruited into the Easter fleet after the privations of a northern European winter meant that scurvy could break out after only a couple of weeks.<sup>17</sup> However, the main period of deaths came after four months on a diet lacking vitamin C. As Ekelboom reported, 'after that time the sick grew daily in number so that in a short period of time we saw the ship full of them ... the number of dead grew almost daily ... the cause of this sickness was scurvy which we ascribe to the length of the journey and the lack of necessary provisions'.<sup>18</sup> The record of deaths by month of voyage shows a peak in October and November, but fell again after arrival on shore and did not rise to such heights on the onward journey from the Cape to Ceylon [see Table 2].<sup>19</sup> Such a pattern bears close resemblance to other VOC vessels where deaths from scurvy were directly related to the length of voyage.<sup>20</sup>

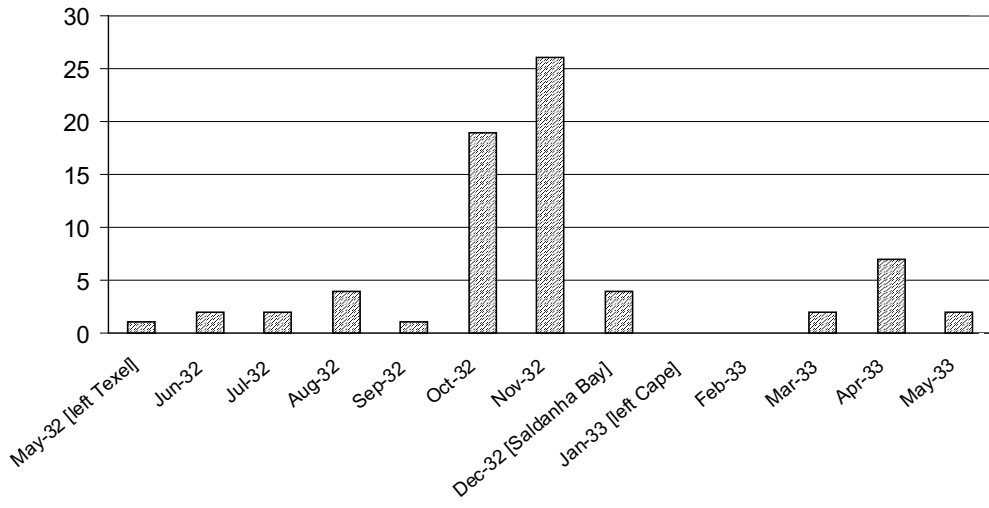
12. Some of the other ships in the 1732 Easter fleet also had high mortality, such as *Reigersbroek* with a death rate of 31 per cent and the *Huis den Eult*, with a 29 per cent mortality rate. Mortality rates on the other ships were lower: *Elizabeth* (8 per cent); *Huis te Foreest* (6.5 per cent); *Karsenhof* (12.6 per cent): data from *DAS*, II, 424–425.
13. *DAS*, I, 162–163.
14. A. Leuftink, *Harde Heelmeesters: Zeelieden en hun Dokters in de 18de eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 1991), 90.
15. Pearson, 'Interrogating the Indian Ocean', 14.
16. CA, C 2467, Verklarings (Attestatiën), August – December 1732, report of Lorens Ekelboom, surgeon of *Loenderveen*, 12 December 1732, 101–102.
17. Leuftink, *Harde Heelmeesters*, 72; I. Schöffner, 'Did Holland's Golden Age Coincide with a Period of Crisis?', in G. Parker and L. Smith eds, *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 93.
18. CA, C 2467, report of Lorens Ekelboom, surgeon of *Loenderveen*, 12 December 1732, 101.
19. Dates of death obtained from Nationaal Archief, The Hague (hereafter NA), VOC 4960, *scheepsoldijboek* of *Loenderveen*, 1732. Some of the crew data from this volume is now available online at [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl), accessed 10 May 2008.
20. I. Bruijn, 'Chirijngijsarbeid en VOC-beleid: Hun Invloed op Ziekte en Sterfte aan Boord' (Doctoraal scriptie, University of Leiden, 1986), 71; *Harde Heelmeesters*, 52–53, 227–238.

TABLE 1: LOENDERVEEN PERSONNEL, Texel – Cape Town (15 May - 27 Dec 1732)

	wage	Dutch	German	Scand.	Unknown	Total	Deaths on board	
							N	%
<b>SEAFARERS</b>								
schipper (master)	66	1				1	1	100%
opperstuurman (first mate)	48	1				1		
oppermeester	36	1				1		
onderstuurman (second mate)	32	1				1		
ondertimmerman (carpenter's mate)	26-36	4				4		
tweede meester	26	1				1		
derde waak (third mate)	26	1		1		2		
assistant (clerk)	24	1				1		
ziekentrooster (sick-visitor)	24	1				1		
hoogbootsman	22	1				1	1	100%
constapel (master gunner)	22	1				1		
schienman (boatswain's mate)	20	1				1		
bottelier (steward)	20	1				1		
kok (cook)	20	1				1	1	100%
opperzeilmaker (sail-maker)	20	1				1	1	100%
oppercuijper (cooper)	16	1				1	1	100%
derde meester (third master)	14	1				1		
bootsmansmaat (boat-swain's mate)	14	1				1	1	100%
botteliersmaat (steward's mate)	14	1				1	1	100%

	wage	Dutch	German	Scand.	Unknown	Total	Deaths on board	
schiemansmaat	14			1		1		
constapelsmaat	14	1				1		
koksmaat (galley boy)	14		1			1		
quartiermeester (quartermaster)	14	3				3	2	66%
ondercuijper (cooper's mate)	14	2				2	1	50%
onderzeilmaaker (sailmaker's mate)	14	1				1		
trompetter (trumpeter)	14		1			1		
provost (master at arms)	12			1		1		
bosschieter (able seaman)	10-11	18	3	7		28	18	64%
matroos (seaman)	8-9	19	9	4	2	34	11	32%
hooploper (apprentice seaman)	7	4				4		
jongen (ship's boy)	5	3				3		
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>73</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37.5%</b>
<b>MILITARY</b>								
corporaal (corporal)	14	1				1	1	100%
landspassat (lance corporal)	12	1				1		
adelborst (cadet)	10		2			2	1	50%
Soldaat (private soldier)	9	10	38	4	5	57	18	30%
tamboer (drummer)	9				1	1		
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32.2%</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>35.5%</b>

TABLE 2: DEATHS ON BOARD LOENDERVEEN BY MONTH, 1732–3



By the time that *Loenderveen* limped into Saldanha Bay ‘the number who were still healthy could not have been above ten’.<sup>21</sup> If little else, it was understood that scurvy could be cured by landing on shore.<sup>22</sup> This doubtless explains why *Loenderveen* made for Saldanha Bay, rather than spending longer trying to reach Cape Town. The sick were then immediately taken to land and housed in a makeshift tent. Seven more died that week who had ‘been in a very weak state on board,’ including the *schipper* who was buried on a nearby island.<sup>23</sup> The rest, finally provided with fresh water and food, recovered in due course and were taken back on board.

However, their problems were not at an end. *Loenderveen* had to be swiftly provisioned and brought to Table Bay since the small outpost at Saldanha Bay could only provide emergency refuge and had limited amounts of rations and fresh water.<sup>24</sup> But *de Snuffelaar*, the *hoeker* dispatched by De la Fontaine with men, drinking water, bread, beans and green peas was forced too far north by strong winds and only re-appeared three weeks later.<sup>25</sup> Another supply boat, *Vittoria*, had to make the journey, by which time the Cape Town commander was short both of spare men and fresh water casks. Although now replenished, strong counter winds prevented *Loenderveen* from getting out of Saldanha Bay for another two weeks. It was finally able to sail on Christmas Day, some six weeks after its arrival, and it reached Cape Town two days later.<sup>26</sup>

During this time dispatches had been carried back and forth overland between an increasingly frustrated Governor and the officers of *Loenderveen*. The Governor’s displeasure was caused not only by the delays in getting *Loenderveen* from Saldanha to Table Bay. He had also discovered

21. CA, C 2467, report of Lorens Ekelboom, surgeon of *Loenderveen*, 12 December 1732, 102.

22. C. le Guin, ‘Sea Life in Seventeenth-Century England’, *American Neptune*, 27 (1967), 118.

23. CA, C 439, Steenmetz, *posthouder* of Saldanha Bay – de la Fontaine, 24 December 1732, 121–122.

24. On the use of Saldanha Bay for ships in need, see *DAS*, I, 67, 69, 87; D. Sleight, *Die Buiteposte* (Pretoria: HAUM, 1993), 415, 444–446.

25. CA, C 1485, Letters dispatched, 1732, de la Fontaine – *opperhoofden* of *Loenderveen*, 21 November 1732, 521; CA, C 439, Incoming letters, September – December 1732, Steenmetz – de la Fontaine, 11 December 1732, 66–67.

26. CA, C 439 Steenmetz – de la Fontaine, 25 December 1732, 123–124.



that there was another story to be told. A clue came in the final, almost incidental, sentence of Ekelboom's medical report: 'the sickness and death on board has been furthered by maltreatment from the *opperstuurman*'.<sup>27</sup>

### The Violent First Mate

Simon van Oorelien could not have expected to find himself in command of the *Loenderveen* when it set sail from Texel. He was appointed *opperstuurman*, the senior navigational officer or 'first mate', under the command of *schipper* Pieter Goedhart from Rotterdam. Goedhart had worked his way up the ranks of the VOC in a way characteristic of Rotterdam higher officers, being *onderstuurman* on the *Patmos* in 1723–4 and *opperstuurman* on the *Groenswaart* in 1725–7, both of which had voyaged to Batavia and back.<sup>28</sup>

We have no such evidence about van Oorelien. His appointment to the *Loenderveen* is the only listing in the Nationaal Archief's database of Company employees, although this is not yet complete. He must have had considerable experience at sea to have been appointed – all senior officers were examined by the Amsterdam *kamer* to prove their ability to perform the job – but this may have been in the marine or on ships of another trading company.<sup>29</sup> It is tempting to speculate that his name indicates French origins, although he is listed as coming from Leiden. This was in itself unusual, although there was one junior officer on board from that town, the *schienman* (boatswain's mate) Abraham du Bois, with whom, as we shall see, van Oorelien was to have a fraught relationship.<sup>30</sup>

As *opperstuurman*, Simon van Oorelien would have been responsible for supervising the loading of men and provisions into *Loenderveen* at the Texel, before *schipper* Goedhart came aboard.<sup>31</sup> After that he was under Goedhart's command, although as a senior officer he was a member of the ship's council which Goedhart chaired, together with the *oppermeester* (who on this voyage also acted as the surgeon) the *onderstuurman* (second mate) and *hoogbootsman* (boatswain). On VOC vessels, although the *schipper* was its chairman, this council had considerable authority and the captain required its assent by voting in matters such as promotions or judicial sentences on board.<sup>32</sup> These men together with other specialised officials such as the ship's surgeon, the provost, *ziekentrooster* and the captain of the militia occupied the cabins on the upper deck, while lesser ranking officers and specialists such as the *assistant* (clerk), *constabel* (master gunner), *schienman* (boatswain's mate), *bottelier* (steward) and *oppercuijper* (cooper) were situated in shared cabins on the lower 'half deck'. Both of these rankings were distinct from the large majority of sailors and soldiers who were housed in the cramped quarters below deck.<sup>33</sup>

27. CA, C 2467, report of Lorens Ekelboom, surgeon of *Loenderveen*, 12 December 1732, 103.

28. P. Moree, 'Gezagvoerders op VOC-schepen van de Kamer Rotterdam in de Achttiende Eeuw', in M. van de Heijden and P. van de Laar eds, *Rotterdamers en de VOC: Handelscompagnie, Stad en Burgers (1600–1800)* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2002), 141, 152. For Goedhart's previous appointments, [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl) (enter both Goedhart and Goedhard), accessed 21 July 2009.

29. Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC*, 125–126.

30. On Leiden as a supplier of recruits for VOC officers, see Bruijn *Schippers van de VOC*, 16–17, 100.

31. Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC*, 176.

32. Many VOC vessels also had a senior *koopman* on board who was member of the Council but, as a *fluit*, the *Loenderveen* had a smaller contingent of senior officers. It also lacked a *predikant*.

33. For a particularly useful summary of the ship's hierarchy and its spatial organisation, see B. Werz, '*Een Bedroefd, en Beclaaglijk Ongeval*': *De Wrakken van de VOC-schepen Oosterland en Waddinxveen (1697) in de Tafelbaai* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2004), 24, 28. See also *Harde Heelmeesters*, 56–57.

These details are of significance because the high number of deaths on board *Loenderveen* had a major impact on its command hierarchy. The most striking case was the lengthy illness and subsequent death of *schipper* Goedhart.<sup>34</sup> As a result, van Oorelien took over effective command as the next most senior officer on board. However, for most of the voyage Goedhart was sick, not dead. Command on board was thus potentially divided, if the two men did not see eye to eye.

Governor de la Fontaine would have been well aware of the potential dangers of such a situation when he received news of the *Loenderveen*'s arrival and Goedhart's incapacity. Indeed history was repeating itself. A violent dispute had broken out between *schipper* Matthew Swaen and *opperstuurman* Jan Hokkeling on board *Loenderveen* when it was returning from Batavia to the Cape as part of the return fleet in 1728. These were different men – the officers and crew of VOC ships changed with each voyage – but de la Fontaine would certainly have been aware of the episode since Hokkeling was taken off the ship in Cape Town and sentenced by the Cape Council of Justice to dismissal and disgrace.<sup>35</sup> Maybe this is why de la Fontaine was particularly sensitive to the nature of the dispatches he received from Saldanha Bay.

The missive informing him of Goedhart's death was signed by van Oorelien on behalf of the senior officers. What also aroused de la Fontaine's suspicions was that it was not signed by the others (as had been the case in the first dispatch he had received from Goedhart), and that van Oorelien had also taken this opportunity to ask for immediate promotion.<sup>36</sup> Although van Oorelien was indeed the next most senior officer on board and the ship needed a new *schipper*, promotion to this high rank required careful consideration and assurance that the candidate had no blemishes on his record.<sup>37</sup> De la Fontaine wrote to the *boekhouder* on board, Jacob van Schoonderwoert, asking why the dispatch had not been signed by them all, and requesting information about the ordering of affairs now that the *schipper* was dead, in particular on 'the conduct of the senior and other officers ... on which matters you have kept silent'.<sup>38</sup> Van Schoonderwoert's reply confirmed his concerns: 'the *opperstuurman* Simon van Oorelien has been in continual contest with *schipper* Pieter Goedhart and other officers throughout the voyage, and is highly disliked by the ordinary crew because of his frequent and unconscionable brutality.'<sup>39</sup>

The cat was now out of the bag. De la Fontaine ordered the senior officers on board to send him information collected from the 'junior officers and others' about the allegations so that the 'guilt or innocence' of van Oorelien could be established.<sup>40</sup> This was the context of the Round Robin. It was signed on 5 December by 51 men, out of a total surviving number of 106 [see Table 3], in response to the Governor's demand, and was sent to him together with a letter and other testimonies outlining the main grievances against van Oorelien.<sup>41</sup> As a result, when *Loenderveen* finally reached Cape Town, van Oorelien was taken ashore and cross-examined by the Fiscal along with other key witnesses.

34. Goedhart had made his will, an ominous sign of the seriousness of his illness, on 20 October – see Table 6 below.

35. Although he was not at that time the Cape governor. This is yet another narrative to be told, and maybe one day I will try to do so. The case is referred to in Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC*, 210–211 and the evidence is in the Cape Archives, CJ 332, f.97–129.

36. CA, C 439, Simon van Oorelien – de la Fontaine, 23 November 1732, 35–36.

37. *DAS*, I, 115; Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC*, 133.

38. CA, C 1485, de la Fontaine – Jacob van Schoonderwoert, 27 November 1732, 529–531.

39. CA, C 439, Jacob van Schoonderwoert – de la Fontaine, 29 November 1732, 43.

40. CA, C 1485, de la Fontaine – *opperhoofden* of *Loenderveen*, 2 December 1732, 537–538.

41. CA, CJ 337, f.78r.– 83v.

The complaints made in the letter signed with the Round Robin focused on van Oorelien's physical violence: 'throughout the voyage he has behaved very brutally, kicking and hitting the crew and behaving in a most unruly way with all who came into contact with him.' It singled out three cases of assault: two leading to the deaths of *oppercuijper* Paulus Strydbeek and *quartiermeester* Agge Pieter Breed and one incapacitating *schiemman* Abraham du Bois so that 'although he is still living he is in no state to carry out the Company's service because of the ill treatment he has received from the *opperstuurman*'. The Round Robin signatories continued to accuse van Oorelien of many other unspecified acts of violence against those who

are now dead as well as those living, and further that he is of an unbearably bad and evil temper, that it is impossible for him to live with anyone in peace, and that we have heard how he throughout the whole journey carried out maliciousness against the deceased *schipper* and other officers on the half deck, they being honest and honourable officers, unlike the afore mentioned Simon van Oorelien who has always behaved in an unseemly manner, but we can only attest that our *onderstuurman* David van Estern and other officers are worthy of honour and praise and we all hope to continue with such officers on board, but...we cannot continue our journey with such an *opperstuurman*.<sup>42</sup>

A further accompanying joint testimony made on board to *boekhouder* van Schoonderwoert came from both senior and middle-ranking officers and craftsmen who had all also signed the Round Robin: *hoogbootsman* Jan Smit, *constabel* Jacob van der Hoeve, *oppertimmerman* Thomas Andries and *onderconstabelsmaat* Sjerck van Overwijk, while another was sent from some of van Oorelien's surviving victims 'lying sick in the tent' on shore, *schiemman* Abraham du Bois, *bottelier* Jan van Warnsteijn and *mattroos* Jacob Jansz Leur, outlining their maltreatment.<sup>43</sup> Both provided further details of the assaults.

These accusations were elaborated in the more detailed cross-examinations held in Cape Town in early January 1733. *Krankbezoeker* Pieter Boumans stated that at the beginning of the voyage there had been 'great harmony between the *schipper*, *opperstuurman* and the other friends of the half deck' but that 'a short time afterwards disputes broke out between them on matters which he cannot better guess than that the *schipper* was making a lot of work for the friends'. However Gerhart had kept a good command and there was no *onordentlijkheden* such as unseemly drinking on board. By contrast, Boumans noted that *opperstuurman* Simon van Oorelien treated the ship's crew 'brutally without any sufficient reason'. When *schipper* Goedhart fell ill, van Oorelien had immediately assumed control and asserted it in no uncertain terms, as Boumans had heard from many while doing his rounds of sick visiting.<sup>44</sup>

The most serious accusations were those made in the Round Robin letter that van Oorelien's behaviour had led to the death of two of the junior officers, *oppercuijper* Paulus Strijdbeek and *quartiermeester* Agge Breed. Abraham du Bois described how he attacked Strijdbeek when he found that there were insufficient numbers of available buckets on board, grabbing him by the hair, kicking him and throwing a heavy bucket into his stomach.<sup>45</sup> *Constabel* Jacob van der Hoeve added the detail that he had heard van Oorelien swear at Strijdbeek with the words, 'You dog what are you doing there? Stand still', before hitting him, a detail confirmed by a young sailor

42. CA, CJ 337, circular signed letter to Jan de la Fontaine, Governor of the Cape, 5 December 1732, f.78r.-79r.

43. CA, CJ 337, f.81r. - 83v., 5 December 1732.

44. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Pieter Boumans, *krankbezoeker*, 5 January 1733, f.89r.

45. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Abraham du Bois, *schiemman*, 6 January 1733, f.84r.-v.

TABLE 3: LOENDERVEEN ROUND ROBIN SIGNATURES

Place of origin	Dutch	German	Scand.	Unknown	Total	Survivors	% signatories
<b>SEAFARERS</b>							
schipper (master)						0	
Opperstuurman (first mate)						1	0
Oppermeester						1	0
Onderstuurman (second mate)						1	0
ondertimmerman (carpenter's mate)	4				4	4	100
tweede meester						1	0
derde waak (third mate)						2	0
assistent (clerk)						1	0
ziekentrooster (sick-visitor)						1	0
Hoogbootsman						0	
constapel (master gunner)	1				1	1	100
schieman (boatswain's mate)	1				1	1	100
bottelier (steward)	1				1	1	100
kok (cook)						0	
opperzeilmaker (sailmaker)						0	
oppercuijper (cooper)						0	
derde meester (third master)	1				1	1	100
bootsmansmaat (boatswain's mate)						0	
botteliersmaat (steward's mate)						0	
schiemansmaat						1	0
constapelsmaat	1				1	1	100
koksmat (galley boy)		1			1	1	100
quartiermeester (quartermaster)	1				1	1	100
ondercuijper (cooper's mate)						1	0

Place of origin	Dutch	German	Scand.	Unknown	Total	Survivors	% signatories
onderzeilmaaker (sailmaker's mate)	1				1	1	100
trompetter (trumpetter)						1	0
provost (master at arms)			1		1	1	100
bosschieter (able seaman)	4	1	3		8	10	80
matroos (seaman)	7	4		2	15	23	65
hooploper (apprentice seaman)	1				1	4	25
jongen (ship's boy)	1				1	3	33
<b><i>SUB-TOTAL</i></b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>MILITARY</b>							
corporaal (corporal)						0	
landspassat (lance corporal)						1	0
adelborst (cadet)						1	0
soldaat (private soldier)	2	9	1		12	39	38
tamboer (drummer)						1	0
<b><i>SUB-TOTAL</i></b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>28%</b>
Unidentified signatures					3		
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>48%</b>

witness, Christiaan Lammersz.<sup>46</sup> The same witnesses recounted how he had also assaulted Agge Breed, kicking him in the side ‘so that from then on he was unable to perform his duties’.<sup>47</sup> Several others also recorded hearing the victims complaining on their sick beds that van Oorelien would be the cause of their deaths. According to van der Hoeve, Agge Breede told the *kranbezoeker*, ‘I hope that God will have my soul but the *opperstuurman* is the cause of my death for which I call the vengeance of God upon him’.<sup>48</sup> Both of these episodes took place when sickness had already set in on board the ship. Breede died on 17 September and Strijdbeek on 5 November. Ekelboom’s medical notes however indicate that both died as a result of injuries sustained from van Oorelien and there is no mention of any symptoms of scurvy in either case.<sup>49</sup>

Details of the assault of *schierman* Abraham du Bois were more readily available, since he was able to testify to the Fiscal himself. He had fallen out with van Oorelien from the start of the voyage in the Texel, when van Oorelien had countermanded an order that du Bois had given to the unskilled and novice crewmen. Van Oorelien seized a rope and beat du Bois with it about the face, calling him a *hontletcher canalje* (dog-licking rogue) in the presence of the crew. Then in early September, when du Bois was suffering from the onset of scurvy and was unable to properly perform his watch duty, van Oorelien again assaulted him, throwing him to the ground and kicking him on the side and face, so that du Bois lost several teeth and suffered a contusion that bled and did not heal for three weeks.<sup>50</sup> Ekelboom’s notes indicate that du Bois was by this stage suffering from breathlessness, aching joints and lassitude from scurvy, but that it was van Oorelien’s assault that put him out of action, although he survived to tell the tale.<sup>51</sup>

This, however, was not all. As the testimonies unfurled, further examples of van Oorelien’s physical violence emerged. The *bottelier* Jan van Warnsteijn, an ‘old and simple man’ who was not up to the job, reported how he had been cruelly treated by the *opperstuurman*, who on several occasions had hit him with a piece of firewood and twice with an iron crowbar so that he was forced to take to his bunk and was only revived by the surgeon.<sup>52</sup> Further details were given in the testimony sent from Saldanha Bay: the *bottelier* had begged van Oorelien to preserve his life to which the latter had replied, ‘you accursed dog, I’ll kill you before the journey is over’.<sup>53</sup> *Constabel* van der Hoeve reported that van Warnsteijn had been so knocked about that ‘it was a wonder his arms and legs were not all broken’.<sup>54</sup> He was in great pain, accentuated by the onset of scurvy and was one of the sick put ashore at Saldanha, where he recovered sufficiently to be returned to the ship on 9 December.<sup>55</sup>

46. CA, CJ 337, Testimonies of Jacob van der Hoeve, *constabel*, 6 January 1733, f.87r. and Christiaan Lammersz. van Amsterdam, *jong*, 16 January 1733, f.102r.

47. CA, CJ 337, *eijisch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.61v.

48. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jacob van der Hoeve, *constabel*, 6 January 1733, f.87v.

49. These dates are according to the ship’s journal of *oppermeester* Lourens Ekelboom, who acted as medical officer on board, CA, CJ 337, f.106 and 107–108. According to the NA database, Breede died in December, but this appears to be an error.

50. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Abraham du Bois, *schierman*, 6 January 1733, f.84v. and *eisch* of Daniel van den Hengel, 2 April 1733, f.64v.–65r.

51. CA, CJ 337, f.109.

52. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan van Warnsteijn, *bottelier*, 6 January 1733, f.86r.

53. CA, CJ 337, statement of Abraham du Bois, Jan van Warnsteijn and Jacob Leur to *boekhouder* Jacob van Schoonderwoert, 5 December 1732, f. 82v.

54. CA CJ 337, testimony of Jacob van der Hoeve, *constabel*, 6 January 1733, f.87v.

55. CA, CJ 337, medical notes of Lourens Ekelboom, f.110.

Marten Tromp, the *quartiermeester*, was assaulted three weeks before reaching Saldanha Bay, when van Oorelien grabbed him by the hair, threw him down and kicked him in the face and side, causing heavy bleeding. He retreated to his bunk but resumed work several days later, only to be hit once again by van Oorelien which left him in constant pain.<sup>56</sup>

Such assaults on officers and middle-ranking seamen were calculated to produce dissent among the commanders on board. But it was not only officers who were attacked. *Matroos* Jacob Jansz. Leur reported how he had been 'severely beaten' by van Oorelien throughout the voyage while reports were also received that two sailors, Jan Schepper and an 'old sailor', Hendrik Henke, had died as a result of assault.<sup>57</sup> Du Bois reported how van Oorelien had lashed at Henke with a rope when he was washing the deck, and since he was already weakened by scurvy, he died several days later, on 8 October.<sup>58</sup> Van Oorelien had also continuously assaulted Jan Schepper, grabbing him by the nose and hitting him on the cheeks. The *derde meester* Christiaan Onvroom reported that when he went to visit the scurvy-ridden Schepper in his bunk, he said several times that van Oorelien would be the real cause of his death. He subsequently expired on 6 November.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly Simon van Oorelien was a man who easily resorted to violence. This was not in itself unusual on board ship, or indeed in any of the command situations within the VOC. However, as the Fiscal pointed out, there were aspects of his behaviour which were particularly objectionable. The unpredictability and randomness of his attacks were a cause for concern, going beyond the limits of acceptable physical punishment on board.<sup>60</sup> Many of his assaults were against men who were already weakened by illness and over-worked because of the high loss of men on board. Indeed, the incapacity of men under his command because of their physical weakness seems to have been a particular cause of his frustration, exacerbated by those who were inexperienced or simple-minded. But violent assault was not the answer: the Fiscal stressed in his *Eijtsch* that van Oorelien should have brought complaints about inadequate crew to the ships' council rather than taking 'the hard route because of his disposition'.<sup>61</sup> The Fiscal found it particularly outrageous that van Oorelien had done this to fellow officers, and especially in front of the rest of the crew. Such actions produced 'not only great disorder on board but also diminished respect for a deck officer'.<sup>62</sup> The honour of such men had been impugned.

56. CA, CJ 337, medical notes of Lourens Ekelboom, f.111

57. CA, CJ 337, statement of du Bois, van Warnsteijn and Leur, 5 December 1732, f. 82v.–83r.

58. CA, CJ 337, recollection to testimony of Abraham du Bois, 7 January 1733, f.85v.

59. CA, CJ 337, testimony of *derde meester* Christiaan Onvroom, 20 January 1733, f.104r.

60. On the function of physical punishment and objections to its randomness on board British ships of the period, see K. Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 174–177.

61. CA, CJ 337, *eijtsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.64r.

62. CA, CJ 337, *eijtsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.63v.–64r.; 66r.

Honour was also compromised in other ways which may seem matters of small detail to us but were serious issues in an age when linguistic forms and physical actions embodied heightened symbolic significance.<sup>63</sup> The Fiscal was particularly shocked by van Oorelien's use of an iron bar as a weapon, not (as we might think) so much because of its danger, but because it was 'an instrument used in public justice for execution and such an extreme punishment can well be described as the executioner's business'.<sup>64</sup> The shame of any association with the instruments or person of an executioner, particularly among German and northern Europeans has been highlighted by Kathy Stuart.<sup>65</sup> Hitting on the face and pulling hair were also severe slights to honour, especially against social equals. Ketting has argued that on board VOC ships in the early seventeenth century there was also a limit to the number of slaps an officer could administer to ordinary crewmen: more than one was considered an insult which could justify retaliation.<sup>66</sup> Swearing was hardly unusual aboard ship, but words of abuse which referred to animals such as *hond* or included *schelm* (scoundrel) were particularly insulting and so were reported in the testimonies in detail.<sup>67</sup> Van Oorelien's treatment of the elderly *bottelier* was in the Fiscal's eyes particularly indicative of his lack of appropriate behaviour: 'since in place of the kindness which this old and simple man might have expected as his due he had to taste the merciless hands of this *knaap* ('brash young fellow')'.<sup>68</sup> Age, physical and mental infirmity were no protection against such a man.

However physical violence and affronts to honour were not the only complaints made against van Oorelien. The Round Robin letter also made an accusation which its signatories knew would particularly incense the VOC authorities. This was that he had gone to the soldier Jasper Martin when he lay sick in his bunk and told him that he would do his best to ensure that Martin would be promoted to the rank of *landspassaat* (lance corporal) in return for payment of 40 guilders. News of such dealings soon spread, so that 'the soldiers had been mumbling all day that if only they had 50 guilders they could also become lance-corporals'.<sup>69</sup> Sale of office was particularly forbidden by the Company, although high-ranking officials had to pay to be nominated by the *kamers*.<sup>70</sup> But this was clear corruption. Moreover van Oorelien had still to persuade the *schipper* to agree to call a meeting of the ship's council to confirm the promotion. But sick as he was, Goedhart was still in charge, and unwilling to be coerced by the '*brutaal stuurman*'. Instead he

63. For the burgeoning literature on honour, status and physical symbolism at the VOC Cape, see R. Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870: A Tragedy of Manners* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–39; N. Worden, 'Artisan Conflicts in a Colonial Context: The Cape Town Blacksmith Strike of 1752', *Labor History*, 46, 2 (May 2005), 155–184; N. Taylor, 'A Scapegoat of Status on the Streets of Eighteenth Century Cape Town', *Historical Approaches* (Historical Studies Department, University of Cape Town), 4 (2007), 12–18 and numerous papers in N. Worden, ed., *Contingent Lives: Social Identity and Material Culture in the VOC World* (Cape Town: Department of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, 2007).

64. CA, CJ 337, *eijisch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.69v.–70r.

65. K. Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honour and Ritual Pollution in Early-Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

66. Ketting, *Leven*, 221–222.

67. *Ibid.*, 234–226; P. van Sterkenburg, *Vloeken: Een Cultuurbepaalde Reactie op Woede, Irritatie en Frustratie* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 2001); A. Keunen and H. Roodenburg, 'Schimpen en Schelden: Eer en Belediging in Nederland, c.1600–c.1800', *Volkskundig Bulletin*, 18, 3 (1992), 289–294.

68. CA, CJ 337, *eijisch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.67r.

69. CA, CJ 337, declaration of *assistant* Jacob van Schoonderwoert, *onderstuurman* David van Elteren, *constabel* Jacob van der Hoeff, and *corporal* van de soldaten Jan Beekhof, undated, f.91r.

70. Bruijn, *Schippers van de VOC*, 131.



sent a delegation of his officers and the acting corporal of the soldiers (the appointed corporal had died earlier in the voyage) to find out from Martin what was going on. Martin soon spilt the beans, although he was to die several days later.<sup>71</sup>

Van Oorelien was furious at this frustration of his schemes. At this point the ship reached Saldanha, and his dispute with Goedhart and other officers became acute. He tried to win over the crew by accusing the *schipper* of being a '*randsoen en een bloeddief van 't volk*' ('stealer of rations and blood from the men'), since he had taken more than his fair share of the drinking water.<sup>72</sup> Although this was justified by the surgeon on the grounds that Goedhart was sick and it was needed as part of his medication, this was a serious charge when water was in such short supply, and particularly so since lack of fresh water was believed at the time to be one of the main causes of scurvy and the deaths with which the crew were surrounded.<sup>73</sup> He further accused Goedhart of drinking the wine rations of the officers, a charge which was denied by the surgeon who emphasised that Goedhart drank as much as necessary for his health, although he did admit that he had suffered from hangovers.<sup>74</sup> But as the Fiscal emphasised, such accusations were particularly outrageous when made by a subordinate about his superior 'to whom he owed all duty and respect'.<sup>75</sup>

Van Oorelien's attempts to win over the crewmen thus seemed to have failed, and it was shortly after this that he was exposed to the Cape Governor. There is one other intriguing accusation that only emerged during the subsequent hearings in Cape Town which emphasise how alienated from the crewmen he had become. It was reported to the Fiscal on 6 January, in almost identical wording, by *schierman* Abraham du Bois, *bottelier* Jan van Warnesteijn, *constabel* Jan van der Hoeve and *bootsman* Jan Smit that van Oorelien had imposed an unusual and humiliating ceremony on the *pluimgraaf*, the man whose responsibility it was to look after the live animals on board. As they recounted, whenever one of the pigs on board died, van Oorelien 'hung it around the neck of the *pluimgraaf* on a collar, and also painted whiskers on his face and put a large stick in his hand, in which posture he was made to walk around the deck singing'. Further details in some of the accounts added that he had to walk around the deck three times, and that he was made to sing in Latin.<sup>76</sup>

This seemingly bizarre episode is characteristic of early-modern European charivari-style rituals which also took place on board VOC ships. These were carefully constructed punishments by fellow crewmen involving highly theatrical and symbolic rituals. Those who transgressed acceptable ways of behaving on board such as cheating at dice, which was not an offence subject to official punishment, were thereby publicly shamed.<sup>77</sup> In this case the *pluimgraaf* may have been held responsible for the death of an animal on board which would deprive the crew of future fresh food supplies. However this particular ritual was not conventional or acceptable.

71. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.70v–71r. CA, CJ 337, declaration of *assistant* Jacob van Schoonderwoert, *onderstuurman* David van Elteren, *constabel* Jacob van der Hoeff, and *corporal van de soldaten* Jan Beekhof, undated, f.91r–92r.

72. CA, CJ 337, testimony of *constabel* Jacob van der Hoeff, 6 January 1733, f.88r.

73. Leuftink, *Harde Heelmasters*, 140–141.

74. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Lourens Ekelboom, *opperchirurgijn*, 5 January 1733, f.101r.

75. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.71v.

76. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Abraham du Bois, *schierman*, 6 January 1733, f.85r., Jan van Warnesteijn, *bottelier*, 6 January 1733, f.86r., Jacob van der Hoeve, *constabel*, 6 January 1733, f.87v. and Jan Smit, *bootsman*, 6 January 1733, f.97v.

77. On VOC ship rituals, see Ketting, *Leven*, 251–252.

The Fiscal's response was that 'such an extraordinary and ridiculous practice seems not to exist anywhere in the world, while it cannot be said to be a cruel punishment, it is not only laughable that an officer should enforce such a shameful punishment on the *pluimgraven*'. It would seem that van Oorelien had imposed this ritualised humiliation on the unfortunate man involved. This in itself was a transgression which threatened shipboard order, since it was unacceptable for an officer to be involved in such actions. Charivari rituals were part of life below deck and an alternative ritualised form of chastisement carried out by those of fellow status, in contrast to the formal punishments imposed by the Company and its officers.

Moreover, as the Fiscal pointed out, the form that this ritual took was particularly insensitive to the feelings of the men: 'it may also be said that the matter contains certain profanities, since the men are accustomed to carry the bodies of the dead around the ship three times as a final honour'.<sup>78</sup> Burial at sea was every crewman's fear: consignment to the unknown waters was an awful fate in comparison to that of burial on shore and a ghastly reminder of one's own potential fate. It was therefore most important to ensure a level of dignity.<sup>79</sup> Many such rituals had been taking place on the decks of the *Loenderveen*, the ship of death. But in his profane mockery of such ceremonies, by forcing the *pluimgraaf* to march around the ship three times while singing in Latin, Van Oorelien had severely over-stepped the mark once again. This time he had mocked and dishonoured not only the living but also the dead.

The case against van Oorelien appeared to be damning. Certainly he was highly unsuited to act as commander of *Loenderveen* for its onward journey to Ceylon, having lost the trust and respect of so many on board. As Fiscal van der Henghel stated in the opening page of his *Eijsch*, 'not only most of the deck officers, but also the whole of the men, both soldiers and sailors' had complained about him.<sup>80</sup> Almost half of the surviving men had signed the Round Robin and it indeed appeared that the signatories came from all ranks and from the whole gamut of Dutch, German and Scandinavians on board [see Table 3]. In general, however, the Round Robin was more a product of the lower-ranking officials and was signed by a higher proportion of sailors than soldiers. However, the signatories were not experienced in the principles of Round Robins. Rather than a complete circle, the signatures veer off to the top right hand of the page, thus revealing who the first ones were to sign.<sup>81</sup> And among them were some of the ringleaders whose names occur frequently in the evidence against van Oorelien.

The complaints in the accompanying testimonies and in the subsequent hearings in Cape Town were dominated by a small grouping of middle-ranking officers, led by *schierman* Abraham du Bois, himself a victim of van Oorelien's assault, whose gave the first testimony to the Fiscal on 6 January 1733 and whose signature predominates on the Round Robin. Others whose evidence closely corroborated his allegations included *constabel* Jacob van der Hoeff, *assistant* David van Sternen, *derde waak* Jacob Clapwijk and *bootzman* Jan Smit, as well as the old and 'simple-minded' *botelier* Jan van Warnesteijn. Their evidence was supported by the higher-ranking *boekhouder* van Schoonderwoert, *onderstuurman* David van Elteren, *krankbezoecker* Pieter Boumans and Ekelboom the surgeon, all of whom worked closely with the *schipper*

78. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.74r.

79. P. Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 187; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 195–197. For the rituals of VOC burials at sea, see *DAS* I, 167, and Ketting *Leven*, 195–196.

80. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.58v.

81. I am grateful to Marcus Rediker for this observation.

Goedhart and who were particularly outraged by van Oorelien's challenges to his authority. Few of these had signed the Round Robin, preferring to give testimonies of their own directly to van Schoonderwoert or the Fiscal.

Van Oorelien's response to all of these allegations was initially one of hurt pride. In his dispatch to the Governor of 5 December, written on the same day as the Round Robin was being signed, he wrote of his 'heavy heart ... to defend my case as an honourable man as it pleases God before your Excellency'. He proceeded to emphasise the difficulties he had faced commanding the ship for two-thirds of the voyage while the *schipper* lay sick, commenting that he had kept silent about the unruliness on board in his initial dispatch to the Governor, waiting until such time as it might be appropriate to speak directly to him and the Cape Council.<sup>82</sup>

These deferential words were decidedly less blustery than the outburst that, according to *kranbezoeker* Pieter Boumans, van Oorelien had made when *Loenderveen* anchored in Saldanha Bay: 'I have kept quiet so long, but now I shall reign so that the devil will see my glory'.<sup>83</sup> It was a shocking statement to make in an age when the devil's presence was firmly believed in and feared. But van Oorelien had not been the only person on board to invoke the devil, as he was about to reveal.

### Entering the Devil's Realm

The Fiscal heard the evidence against Simon van Oorelien on 5–7 January, and each witness confirmed his statement, read out in the *opperstuurman*'s presence. It appeared that the case against him was overwhelming and clear-cut. However, on 8 January, van Oorelien struck back. He had already complained to the Governor that the key witnesses were in league with the deceased *schipper*, and were caballing with each other to give 'false oaths' against him.<sup>84</sup> Now to back up his claims he produced no fewer than nine witnesses over the next three days who gave the Council of Justice a very different version of events on board the *Loenderveen*.<sup>85</sup>

These new witnesses were all men who had not been mentioned in the testimonies of van Oorelien's accusers [see Table 4]. Four of them had signed the Round Robin, but they now claimed that they 'were greatly against doing so' and that they had been pressed into it by Abraham du Bois and *constabel* Jan Stuurman as they lay sick in the tent on shore and had done so because of their persistence and in order to be rid of them. Jan Kriger said that he had been persuaded only by the authority with which du Bois and Stuurman pressed their claim, as well as by their assurance that if van Oorelien was made *schipper*, they would throw the paper into the water. To be on the safe side, he signed with a cross, although he was perfectly well able to write his name.<sup>86</sup> Frederick Godloofdam said he 'signed a declaration in a circle without having heard it or read it or known what was in it and had signed it thinking that it was sent by the *Heeren* at the Cape'.<sup>87</sup> Several also added the significant detail that they spoke '*hoogduits*' (High German) and did not properly understand the statement since it was written in 'the Hollands language'.<sup>88</sup>

82. CA, C 439, Simon van Oorelien – Governor and Council of the Cape of Good Hope, 5 December 1732, 54–56.

83. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Pieter Boumans, *krankbezoeker*.

84. CA, C 439, Simon van Oorelien – Governor and Council of the Cape of Good Hope, 5 December 1732, 55.

85. A note in the secret minutes of the Council of Policy, dated 10 January, reported that new information had been received in the case which required urgent investigation, C 255, 102.

86. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan Kriger, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.133r.–v.

87. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Frederick Godloofdam, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.139v.–140r.

88. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Abraham Tiquet, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.131r.; testimony of Jan Jurgen Kriger, *soldaat*, f.133r.

TABLE 4: WITNESSES ON BEHALF OF SIMON VAN OORELIEN

NAME	REGION OF ORIGIN	RANK	ROUND ROBIN SIGNATORY?
Jan Joost Schuijt van Bromvelt	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	No
Jan Harmensz. Kraek van Amsterdam	Netherlands	<i>matroos</i>	No
Abraham Tiquet van Stockholm	Sweden	<i>soldaat</i>	Yes
Jan Jurgen Kriger van Kenderen	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	Yes
Jan Helmus van Bergen	Norway	<i>derdewaak</i>	No
Johannes Tijssel van Valkenau in Duits Bohemen	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	No
Frederick Godloofd van Dresden	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	Yes
Jan Reijs van Danzig	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	No
Frans Anthonij uit Damen in den Elsas [Alsace]	Germany	<i>soldaat</i>	Yes

TABLE 5: LOENDERVEEN PERSONNEL BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

	Dutch	German	Scandinavian	Unknown	Total
Seamen	73 (70%)	15 (14.5%)	14 (13.5%)	2 (2%)	104
Military	12 (19%)	40 (64.5%)	4 (6.5%)	6 (10%)	62

When taken as a group, the nine witnesses differed in important ways from the majority of van Oorelien's accusers. Only one was a sailor; seven were soldiers, and the ninth was *derde waak*, a relatively high-ranking officer. Only one was Dutch. This points to divisions on board which had hitherto been concealed in the evidence given against van Oorelien. As was the case with other VOC vessels at this period, the large majority of sailors on board were of Dutch origin, and those who were not came from the German North Sea coastline or Baltic Scandinavia, all with some maritime experience. The majority of the soldiers, however, were German, many from places far inland and some from the heart of continental Europe [see Table 5].<sup>89</sup> As the Fiscal stated, they were a group of 'unskilled and inexperienced men' with no previous experience of sailing.<sup>90</sup> Here then was a group of primarily non-Dutch speaking soldiers who differed in rank, origin and experience from the majority of the crewmen.

89. For discussion and explanation of this pattern, see in particular, R. van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch Avontuur: Duiters in Dienst van de VOC* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1997); *DAS*, I, 146, 153, 157–158; K. Schoeman, 'n Duitser aan die Kaap, 1724–1765 (Pretoria: Protea, 2004); J. Parmentier and J. de Bock, 'Sailors and Soldiers at the Cape: An Analysis of the Maritime and Military Population in the Cape Colony during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century' in Worden, *Contingent Lives*, 549–558.

90. CA, CJ 337, *eijisch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.189r.

Rivalry and tension between these two groups were widespread in the VOC world, both on board and on land.<sup>91</sup> Some soldiers might thus have been less inclined to go along with Abraham du Bois and his associates in their campaigns against van Oorelien, particularly if the *oppersturman* had not offended them directly. As one of them stated, when the Round Robin was produced, many sailors signed, but ‘none of the soldiers’, a comment that was not strictly accurate but nonetheless indicated a marked pattern.<sup>92</sup>

Their testimonies contained information of two types. One was an affirmation that Simon van Oorelien, contrary to the evidence the Fiscal had heard earlier, was in fact ‘an attentive officer who looked after his men both on board and on land’ and that ‘he never behaved in an unseemly manner or hit anyone without good reason’.<sup>93</sup> ‘Good reason’ was then defined. It was true that he had sometimes found it necessary to discipline some of the junior officers and crew, and that this may have been somewhat harsh, but that was his job and he only hit them with his hand, as was permitted, and indeed expected, and they deserved this.<sup>94</sup> Jan Helmus of Bergen, who had been transferred onto *Loenderveen* from another ship of the Easter fleet during the voyage, pointed out that the *schiemman* Abraham du Bois and the *botelier* Agge Breed were often drunk and negligent in their duties.<sup>95</sup> Jan Joost Schuijt reported that *kwartiermeester* Marten Tromp, one of van Oorelien’s victims, had complained to the corporal in charge of the soldiers that they were not pumping fast enough, after which he hit him. When he complained, he received several further blows from *derde waak* Jacob Klapwijk. This was particularly offensive, since the soldiers were helping out by working on the pumps, which was not their duty, because so many sick and dead sailors had caused a shortage of manpower.<sup>96</sup> Du Bois was clearly perceived as no friend of the soldiers.

These records thus reveal further the tensions on board between the marine officers and the militia. The soldiers’ testimonies provided a litany of complaints in a virtual mirror image of the accusations that had been made by the others against van Oorelien. As both Jan Kraek and Jan Schuijt recorded, ‘like the others on the voyage [they] had not been badly treated by the accused [i.e. van Oorelien] and had certainly not seen him kicking anybody, but that *schiemman* Abraham du Bois, *kwartiermeester* Marten Tromp and Agge Pietersz. Breed, and in particular the first of these three, had indeed treated the men very badly, that they were drunk for most of the time, and when they had no more drink left they demanded it from the other men’. Kraek, the only sailor in the group (and therefore the one likely to have had some previous experience on board) added that ‘he had never seen such outrageous behaviour from the accused as he had from these three deck officers’.<sup>97</sup>

91. For examples of this in VOC Cape Town, see N. Worden, ‘Strangers Ashore: Sailor Identity and Social Conflict in Mid-18th Century Cape Town’, *Kronos* 33 (2007), 72–83. In the evocative words of one historian of Spanish sixteenth-century soldiers and sailors, they were ‘like oil and water’: Pérez-Mallaina, *Spain’s Men of the Sea*, 219.

92. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Abraham Tiquet, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.131r.

93. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Abraham Tiquet, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.131v., Jan Jurgen Krigen, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.133r.

94. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan Helmus van Bergen, *derdewaak*, 8 January 1733, f.135r.

95. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan Helmus van Bergen, *derdewaak*, 8 January 1733, f.135r.

96. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Jan Joost Schuijt, *soldaat*, 10 January 1733, f.127r. and Jan Reijs van Danzig, 8 January 1733, f.141r.

97. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Jan Joost Schuijt, *soldaat*, 10 January 1733, f.127r. and Jan Kraek, 10 January 1733, f.129v.

Abraham du Bois came in for the most criticism. He was, like van Oorelien, from Leiden, but there the similarities ended.<sup>98</sup> Indeed the two men were bitter enemies on board and du Bois was the main ringleader in the campaign to have van Oorelien dismissed, as the soldier witnesses clearly realised. They cited episodes when he had particularly offended them. Jan Kraek reported an incident which doubtless explains why he, as an Amsterdam sailor, joined in with the German and Scandinavian soldiers in their support for van Oorelien. Du Bois had accused him of performing his work poorly and hit him above the eye so that it bled and Kraek covered his eyes with his hands to staunch the wound. Du Bois then contemptuously and ironically said to him, 'You wretched child, shall I give you a handkerchief so that you can dry your eyes?'<sup>99</sup> Not only was Kraek physically attacked, but du Bois was verbally assaulting his bravery and manliness by accusing him of being like a weeping child. In his later defence, du Bois denied this by rather unconvincingly claiming that he had offered Kraek a handkerchief to tie around his wound.<sup>100</sup>

Du Bois's behaviour when the men were on shore at Saldanha was also a particular cause of resentment. He was himself sick and was in the tent, together with a number of the surviving soldiers and sailors. It appears that he was the most senior officer there. When Simon van Oorelien sent a vat of 60 pounds of butter and fresh meat to them, du Bois and his *bakvolk* (eating comrades) took the best for themselves and distributed very little of the remainder.<sup>101</sup> Failure to distribute rations was a serious matter, especially when the men were so sick, and du Bois's behaviour contrasted markedly in the soldiers' minds with that of the acting commander van Oorelien, who by this stage was clearly trying to curry favour at a time when the Round Robin was being circulated.<sup>102</sup>

Du Bois's behaviour on board was no better. He swore constantly at the men, using the particularly offensive phrases '*Neukt jou moer, jouw moerneukers*' ('Fuck your mother, you mother-fuckers') although van Oorelien had asked him not to do so.<sup>103</sup> While van Oorelien had encouraged the scurvy sufferers to walk around the deck in order to exercise their aching joints, de Bois had by contrast humiliated them when he was in charge of the watch, by making them crawl around singing songs about their condition.<sup>104</sup> He had also participated in the charades around the dead pigs, being the person who had painted whiskers on the face of the unfortunate *pluimgraaf*.

98. Unlike van Oorelien (it would appear) he had worked his way up through the ranks of the VOC, serving a *quartiermeester* on the Amsterdam East-Indiaman *Karsenhof* in 1726, and spending five years in Batavia before returning to the Netherlands in 1731. He soon afterwards signed up for another contract on *Loenderveen*, [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl), accessed 10 May 2008.

99. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan Kraek, *matroos*, 10 January 1733, f. 129r.

100. CA, CJ 337, *interroratoria* van Abraham du Bois, 19 May 1733, art.7, f. 194r.

101. The *bakvolk* was the group of about seven men who shared their meals on board ship. Only the higher-ranking officers shared a table in the upper deck *kajuit* cabin: Ketting, *Leven*, 140–146. It is not clear who formed part of du Bois's *bak*, but it is notable that use of this basic unit of shipboard social organisation was continued in the sick tent on shore.

102. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Jan Joost Schuijt, *soldaat*, 10 January 1733, f. 127v.; CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, 189r.

103. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Johannes Fijzel van Valkenau, 8 January 1733, f. 137r. For the particular offensiveness of these phrases in a historical context, see P. van Sterkenburg, *Vloeken*, 470, 479–480.

104. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Abraham Tiquet, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f. 131v. and Jan Kriger, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f. 133v.

And he had particularly offended the soldier Frans Anthonij on one such occasion by accusing him of being a Jew.<sup>105</sup>

The most serious accusation was made by four of the soldiers. They recalled that when the ship had crossed 'de linie' (after leaving the Cape Verde islands), du Bois had said to the men on one of the watches, 'Now the devil reigns, there is no God any longer here, fuck heaven, there is no God any more'.<sup>106</sup> The Fiscal was clearly shocked: these were 'truly words which would cause the stoutest soul to shake and tremble with fright'.<sup>107</sup> And particularly so when they were uttered to inexperienced soldiers, crossing the Equator for the first time and entering into a fearful and unknown world, a world which was to be most marked by the onset of gruesome symptoms of sickness and a relentless toll of death. The borders between life and death were highly permeable.<sup>108</sup> Indeed it appeared that they had entered the realm of the devil.

### The Ship Sails On

What was the Cape Fiscal to make of these divergent accounts? He was somewhat suspicious of some of the claims of the nine witnesses produced by van Oorelien, not least that they had not properly understood the Dutch of the Round Robin letter they had signed, since they 'suddenly seem to perfectly understand the *hollands spraak* now that is a case of discharging the *opperstuurman* and accusing the *schienman*'.<sup>109</sup> It was also obvious that van Oorelien had influenced the men and that he was trying to 'cleanse' himself of the accusations made against him by shifting the blame onto his leading accusers. However all of the deponents declared that they had not been forced to testify and that they had done so 'only for the love of justice'.<sup>110</sup>

The Fiscal then turned the spotlight on van Oorelien's leading accusers. On 15 January, he re-examined seven of them: *schienman* Abraham du Bois, *boekhouder* Jacob van Schoonderwoerd, *krankbezoeker* Pieter Bouman, *onderstuurman* David van Elteren, *oppermeester* Lorens Ekelboom, *constable* Jacob Verhoef and *bootsman* Jan Smit. This time they were under suspicion of having formed a cabal against the *opperstuurman*. Each was asked in turn whether he had been bribed by promises of promotion or by gifts to bring false witness against van Oorelien and if they themselves had not been guilty of 'rousing up the *scheepsvolk*' against him after the *schipper's* death. In particular, each was questioned about a specific allegation made by van Oorelien, that a plot had been hatched in the *cajuit* (cabin) of the *constabel*, shortly before their arrival at Saldanha, to bring about van Oorelien's downfall.<sup>111</sup> All men denied the allegations, claiming that they had spoken nothing but the truth and that although they had met together this was at the request of the *schipper*. They had organised the signing of the Round Robin, but no-one had been forced to sign. After all, the request to provide information about van Oorelien had come from the Cape Governor himself.

105. CA, CJ 337, testimony of Frans Anthonij, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.143v. It is not clear why du Bois said this. Jews were rarely employed as sailors in the VOC, although some may have been soldiers, P. Spierenburg, *Written in Blood: Fatal Attraction in Enlightenment Amsterdam* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 15.

106. CA, CJ 337, testimonies of Jan Kriger, *soldaat*, f.113v., Johannes Vijsel van Valkenau, *soldaat*, f.137r., Frederick Godloofdum, *soldaat*, 8 Jan. 1733, f.139r.–139v., Frans Anthonij, *soldaat*, 8 January 1733, f.143v.

107. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.189v.

108. Ketting, *Leven*, 191, 193, 197.

109. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.191r.

110. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.190r.

111. CA, CJ 337, *contra interrogatoria*, 15 January 1733, f.113r. – 126v. The questions posed to each of them were identical.

**TABLE 6: WILLS MADE ON BOARD *LOENDERVEEN*, 1732**  
**(Grootboek of the *Loenderveen*'s 1732 voyage, NA, VOC 5960, unpaginated).**

Date of will	Date of death	Name	Rank	Inheritor/s	Witnesses
2 June	7 June	Sieuwart Sieuwartsz. van Arnhem	<i>kwartiermeester</i>	Agge Breed, <i>kwartiermeester</i>	1. Jan van de Linde, <i>bootsman</i> 2. Jacob van der Hoeff, <i>constabel</i> 3. Abraham du Bois, <i>schierman</i>
4 August	11 August	Dirk de Kramer van Amsterdam	<i>corporaal</i>	1. David Seun, living at Cape of Good Hope 2. Paulus Strijdbeek, <i>opperkuijper</i> 3. Jan Loos, <i>botteliersmaat</i>	1. Jacob van der Hoeff, <i>constabel</i> 2. Abraham du Bois, <i>schierman</i>
15 September	17 September	Agge Breed van Amsterdam	<i>kwartiermeester</i>	Martin Tromp, <i>kwartiermeester</i>	1. Jacob van der Hoeff, <i>constabel</i> 2. Abraham du Bois, <i>schierman</i>
2 October	19 October	Assuerus Pietersz. van Amsterdam	<i>opperzeilmaker</i>	1. Jacob van der Hoeff, <i>constabel</i> 2. Jacobus van Sichem, <i>onderzeilmaker</i>	1. Jan Smit, <i>bootsman</i> 2. Jan van Warensteijn, <i>botelier</i>
20 October	23 November	Pieter Goedhart	<i>schipper</i>	1. David van Elteren, <i>onderstuurman</i> 2. Pieter Bouman, <i>ziekentrooster</i>	1. Lorens Ekelboom, <i>oppermeester</i> Jacob Klapwijk, <i>derdewaak</i>
17 November	25 November	Johannes Loots van Amsterdam	<i>botteliersmaat</i>	Jacob van der Hoeff, <i>constabel</i>	1. Jan Smit, <i>bootsman</i> 2. Martin Tromp, <i>kwartiermeester</i>



Certainly there were factions aboard. Suggestions about what united the nine witnesses that van Oorleien produced have been made above. An indication of the inter-connections of some of his leading accusers is given by the six wills made on board and recorded by *boekhouder* van Schoonderwoerd in the ship's *grootboek* (see Table 6). They were made by officers who were close to death. What is significant is that the inheritors and the witnesses all came from the same group of men, and that many of these who survived the voyage led the accusations against van Oorelien. The latter is conspicuous by his absence, either as inheritor or as witness, in these documents. Clearly he was not part of the circle of trusted officers that surrounded *schipper* Goedhart.

The Fiscal was thus faced with a quandary. Both groups of testifiers had raised serious matters about Simon van Oorelien and about his leading accusers, and as the Fiscal rather optimistically commented, 'nobody who values his good name and honour would sully his soul out of passion against one party and love for the other by testifying falsely before the Council of Justice'.<sup>112</sup> But time was passing, and *Loenderveen* needed to get on its much delayed way to its ultimate destination in Ceylon. It left Table Bay on 25 January, carrying a dispatch from de la Fontaine to his counterpart in Ceylon, explaining the delay. The refreshed ship carried 16 new men on board to replace at least some of those who had died on the outward journey, three of them taken from other ships and thirteen from the Cape garrison and wharfside. These included an *opperkuijper*, a *landspassaat*, five regular soldiers, a *schierman*, *bootzman*, *bosschieter* and six sailors.<sup>113</sup> There was also a new *schipper*, the captain of the *Snuffelaar*, the *hoeker* that had been sent to *Loenderveen*'s rescue at Saldanha who, the Governor assured his Ceylonese colleague, was 'an old and trusty seaman'.<sup>114</sup> Other men aboard received promotions to fill the gaps. Among them was *onderstuurman* David van Elteren who was promoted to the rank of *opperstuurman* and who had been singled out for praise by the signatories of the Round Robin.<sup>115</sup>

From this it is apparent that two men were not aboard. Both Simon van Oorelien and Abraham du Bois had been replaced by others and were detained in Cape Town to face the Council of Justice. This took some time to arrange, for reasons which are not apparent, and it is tempting to wonder how the enemies were kept apart during their two months of waiting. Finally on 2 April the Fiscal presented his *eijsch* against van Oorelien. The evidence, he argued, was conclusive. Van Oorelien deserved the death penalty for manslaughter, although it was not clear that he had deliberately killed Breed and Strijdbeek, despite the fact that 'even the dumbest person should have realized that one can kill someone by kicking him in the head and side'. Banishment might therefore be more appropriate than execution. Certainly it was clear that he had placed the Honourable Company's ship in the greatest danger by his irresponsible and violent actions. The Fiscal therefore recommended that he be stripped of his rank, declared *inhabel* (unworthy) and returned to the Netherlands, never again to be employed in the Company's service.<sup>116</sup> Van Oorelien appealed to the Council that he not be 'ruined into the ground'.<sup>117</sup> On 16 April, he was given

112. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.191r.

113. NA, VOC 5960, *grootboek* of the *Loenderveen*, 1732, f.163–178.

114. CA, C 1486, de la Fontaine – Diederik van Damburg, Governor and Director of 't eijland Ceylon, 24 January 1733, 7.

115. CA, C 91, Resolutions of the Council of Policy, 19 January 1733, f.81. The original volume needs to be consulted, since this material was not included in the TANAP transcriptions of the resolutions.

116. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of Daniel van der Hengel vs. Simon van Oorelien, 2 April 1733, f.74r.–77r.

117. CA, CJ 15, 2 April 1733, p.12–13.

a week to present a counter-defence. With his supporters on their way to Ceylon, he returned on 23 April saying that he was alone as a stranger in the Cape and had been unable to find anyone to help him, and so placed himself under the decision of the council. He was duly sentenced to deportation as an *inhabiel*. He asked for copies of the materials presented against him, which was granted. Clearly he intended to appeal, but this was the last that we hear of him in the Cape records. He was returned to Europe but, as the Cape Council decreed, he was not employed again by the VOC.<sup>118</sup>

With van Oorelien's case concluded, the Fiscal turned his attention to Abraham du Bois. He was interrogated on 19 May about the allegations made against him some four months earlier. He admitted that he had hit some of the crewmen and sworn at them, but strongly denied uttering the phrase 'motherfuckers' or any 'godless' or 'devilish' expressions. He agreed under duress that he deserved punishment for his attack on Kraek, but continued to deny that he had used 'godless words'.<sup>119</sup> Clearly blasphemy was a more serious matter than assault. Three days later, the Fiscal presented his case against du Bois to the Council. He was accused of 'brutality, heavy swearing and blasphemy', which 'offended honourable ears'. Sometimes, the Fiscal stated, the law can overlook such words said unthinkingly in anger or haste, but it appeared that he had invoked the devil deliberately in order to intimidate the men on board. Blasphemy was in itself a punishable offence since 'an officer of the law, who received his authority from Almighty God needs to ensure that His worshipped and godly Majesty was not soiled, violated or blasphemed by his unworthy subjects'.<sup>120</sup>

Alain Cabantous has argued that in western Europe blasphemy was by the eighteenth century increasingly viewed as an offence to be treated in private or by religious rather than secular authorities.<sup>121</sup> In the Netherlands matters of blasphemy were usually dealt with by the consistories of the Reformed Church.<sup>122</sup> However at the Cape blasphemy was identified as an offence against both God and society and subject to punishment by the Council of Justice. A Cape edict of 1712 singled out 'misuse of the Lord's name' as a cause of disorderliness amongst the Company militia, subject to penalties of tongue boring, dismissal 'and further punishment according to the circumstances' for multiple offences.<sup>123</sup>

Throughout Europe, blasphemy was considered to be particularly heinous when uttered at sea since it placed the whole ship in danger of retribution from God's punishment. When practised by captains or officers, such risks were compounded since, according to Cabantous, 'within the closed world of the [ship], in which social relations were easily set on edge, the slightest altercation or violent gesture might ignite simmering disgruntlement. As the speech of provocation,

118. So at least it appears from the currently incomplete database of VOC employees at [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl), accessed 5 June 2009.

119. CA, CJ 337, *interroratoria* van Abraham du Bois, 19 May 1733, f.194v.–195v.

120. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.191v.–192r.

121. A. Cabantous, *Blasphemy: Impious Speech in the West from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

122. H. Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur: De Kerkelijke Tucht in de Gereformeerde Gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578–1700* (Hilversum: Veerloren, 1990).

123. M.K. Jeffreys, ed., *Kaapse Plakkaatboek, Deel II (1707–1753)* (Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd., 1948), 145. Raath argues that the death penalty was prescribed, although this is not specified in the edict: A. Raath, 'Federal Jurisprudence in the Public Sphere of the Early Cape Settlement, 1652–1708', *Publius*. 30, 2 (2000), 102–103.

blasphemous talk was dreaded for its overlap with dissent and also for the symptomatic protest it might let loose.<sup>124</sup> The situation aboard *Loenderveen* well demonstrated such dangers.

It was particularly heinous for du Bois to have evoked the realm of the devil. The presence of the devil as an active and malevolent force in the world was an integral part of Reformed theology, to be countered only by prayer and God's grace. But as van Deursen has argued, in popular belief of the early-modern Netherlands fear trumped God's love: 'it is preoccupied with supernatural enemies: above all Satan is the great opponent, the arch-corrupter of the human race' and '[Satan's] power could make itself felt in unnatural and horrifying ways'.<sup>125</sup> This certainly applied to the terrified men on board the *Loenderveen* as they entered an unknown world and it was the duty of the Council of Justice to take firm action. To evoke the devil, argued the Fiscal, was du Bois's most serious offence, even punishable by death.

However, van der Hengel would be merciful. He recommended that as a 'brutal and evil subject' du Bois be banished from the Cape and returned to Europe with costs.<sup>126</sup> Du Bois continued to deny the charge of blasphemy, but admitted that he may have sworn and hit out at some men in haste and anger, and requested to be allowed to continue to Batavia. This was denied, and he was also shipped back to Holland.<sup>127</sup> However he was not prevented from returning to Company service, and indeed he served as *constapel* (master gunner), a slight promotion over his previous rank, on board the Enkhuizen *kamer*'s vessel *Kasteel van Woerden* the following year and finally reached Batavia, where he died in 1737.<sup>128</sup>

The ultimate fate of du Bois was similar to that of many of the men who had sailed from the Cape on *Loenderveen* in early 1733. The onward journey to Ceylon appears to have been less traumatic than the first stage to the Cape, although a further 13 men died on board. Of the 84 men who finally reached Ceylon, precisely half were to die in Asia without ever seeing Europe or the Cape again. Ceylon did not appear to have been as fatal a place to arrive as Batavia, however, and a number of soldiers extended their contracts with the Company and lived there for many years. The last to die was Johann Meier from Mortheim, who ended his days in Trincomolee in 1775. Some had adventurous times: Johann Reis of Danzig was captured by the king of Travancore in 1741 and was kept hostage for over a year.<sup>129</sup> The *Loenderveen* also did not make the return journey. This was the fifth voyage it had undertaken between Europe and Asia, and after this fateful journey it seems to have been retained for use within Asia.

124. Cabantous, *Blasphemy*, 84–85.

125. A.Th. van Deursen, *Plain Lives in a Golden Age: Popular Culture, Religion and Society in Seventeenth-Century Holland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 235 and 247. For the prevalence of belief in the Devil in early-modern Netherlands, see W. Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 107 and 109. An evocative account of the inability of seventeenth-century Dutch urban authorities to deal with Satanic possession is B.J. Kaplan, 'Possessed by the Devil? A Very Public Dispute in Utrecht', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49, 4 (1996), 738–759.

126. CA, CJ 337, *eijsch* of van der Henghel vs. Abraham du Bois, 21 May 1733, f.192r.–v.

127. CA, CJ 15, 22 May 1733, f.40–3.

128. [www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl), accessed 23 August 2008.

129. Details from NA, VOC 5960, *grootboek* of the *Loenderveen*, 1732.

## The Devil in the Detail

With this the *Loenderveen* disappears from the archival record. But the story of its tumultuous voyage to the Cape provides an unusually detailed case study of the tensions and rivalries that could arise on board ship.

The disputes were not simply ones of crewmen versus officers. There were factions aboard the ship, but these were primarily divides between the officers. This was not a mutiny against a captain, although it may well have turned into one if van Oorelien had been appointed to that rank after Goedhart's death, and the *schipper* was implicated in one of the camps involved. Van Oorelien had certainly overstepped the mark on a number of counts, alienating both fellow officers and the rank and file of men aboard so that over half were ready to sign a Round Robin statement against him. But it appears that he was nonetheless able, against the odds, to mobilise support by utilizing the particular resentment of German soldiers against insulting and dishonouring actions of the Dutch *schienman* and his maritime officer allies on board. These soldiers were also the newcomers on board, the inexperienced first-timers who were particularly intimidated by stories of the unknown world 'below the line'. Experience, place of origin, and soldier or sailor status seem to have been more significant on this ship than divisions of rank alone.

The context of all of this lay in the crisis aboard the ship during the last few months of its lengthy journey to the Cape. The men were surrounded by sickness and death. This had a direct impact on the pressures of work on the survivors. Food and water shortages created further concerns and potential conflicts. The notions of honour and masculinity brought from shore, both among officers and soldiers and sailors, meant that relatively small incidents could be remembered as major insults. In this way, as Pearson has argued, the social space of the ship 'exaggerated the kind of relations one finds on land'.<sup>130</sup>

In the process it is clear that what might seem to us as curious or trivial detail held major significance for the men aboard. It was not so much violence *per se* that offended them (although that which led to death certainly exceeded acceptable limits) but rather, in the words of the Round Robin, the 'unseemly manner' in which it was carried out. Physical force was a fact of life on board but its use was prescribed by custom and a sense of justness, and was opposed when it exceeded this by disrespecting honour among men of any rank. Gesture, ritual, language and blasphemy played key roles in causing such dissent. The devil, in this case literally, lay in these details.

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<sup>130</sup> Pearson, 'Interrogating the Indian Ocean', 3.

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