THE SURRENDER
OF DUTCH MALACCA, 1795

The weakness of the resistance offered by the Dutch garrison at Malacca to the British occupation force in August 1795 gave rise to rumours of treason on the part of the Dutch governor, Abraham Couperus. As early as 1915 Mevr. C. R. G. Vlielander Hein-Couperus produced evidence to refute this charge. She described, for example, the numerical weakness of the Dutch garrison, the appeals for reinforcements made by Couperus in 1794—1795, the failure of the Batavia government to respond to his appeals although it recognised their validity, and the disintegration of the Dutch garrison into a disorderly mob on the night of the British landing. The exoneration of Couperus was carried one stage further in 1956, when Dr. Graham Irwin published the evidence collected at Semarang to the detriment of the governor in 1796, as well as Couperus' reply to the charges brought against him, written in Tranquebar in June, 1805. The letter from James Mackerras, the British Major of Brigade on the expedition of 1795, which Couperus included in his defence is, to my knowledge, the only British document of any importance relating to the events at Malacca in August 1795 to have been published. This omission is remarkable because Major Brown, the officer commanding the British invasion force, forwarded the papers relevant to his proceedings at Malacca to the governor-general and council in Calcutta. These documents are now preserved in the Bengal Secret and Political

3 Mackerras to Couperus, 1 April, 1805. Irwin, op. cit., pp. 112—113. Mackerras' letter was specifically designed to clear Adriaan Koek of the suspicion of treason, but it also served to exonerate Couperus, who was Koek's brother-in-law.
Consultations in the India Office Library, London. It is the purpose of the present article to re-examine the question of Couperus’ culpability in the light of the evidence they afford.

Couperus was faced with a very awkward situation. The copy of the famous Kew Letter of February, 1795, carried by the commanders of the British expeditionary force required the governor of Malacca to admit British military and naval forces to the town and harbour as friends and allies. The relationship which would exist between the British personnel thus admitted and the Dutch government of Malacca was not defined, but the British government at Madras, which had fitted out Brown’s expedition, had no reservations on this score. The instructions issued to Brown by Lord Hobart and Colonel Braithwaite, the governor and commanding officer of Madras, warned him categorically that “the entire Command of all the land Forces, means, and resources for defence or other Military Operations [in Malacca] must be Vested in you, or in such other Officer, originally in the British Service, as may succeed to the Command of the Land Forces, in consequence of any Casualty.” If Couperus refused to admit the British expedition on this footing, Brown was “to compel the delivery” of Malacca. The distinction between admitting British forces into Malacca as allies and abrogating his responsibility for the military defence of the town in favour of the senior British officer was too great for Couperus to ignore it.

The task of reconciling Couperus to the British interpretation of the Kew Letter fell upon Major Forbes Ross Macdonald, who accompanied the British expeditionary force. Macdonald was granted an interview by Couperus on the evening of 15 August, soon after the arrival of the British fleet in Malacca road. The interview began as a private affair, at which Macdonald delivered to Couperus the appropriate letters from the Dutch stadhouder and Lord Hobart. Couperus obtained permission subsequently to admit “two of his Friends, Messrs. Koek and Belmont, in whom he placed an unlimited
Confidence and who were then in the House”. The pretext given was the need to translate Hobart’s letter from French to Dutch, a process beyond Couperus’ own capabilities. The governor’s council was not expected to meet in Malacca until 8 a.m. on 16 August, so that the Macdonald-Couperus conversations, which continued until 1.30 a.m. on the morning of the 16th, were “Confidential and extra-official”. In the course of the discussions, Couperus expressed indignation at the construction placed upon the Kew Letter by the government of Madras, but was sufficiently enthusiastic in his expressions of loyalty to the stadhouder to convince Macdonald that a peaceful conclusion to the negotiations was possible.

When the Dutch council met on Sunday morning, 16th August, the stadhouder’s letter was approved by a unanimous vote, but the translation of Hobart’s letter offered by Koek and Belmont was condemned as inaccurate. Hobart’s letter also incurred criticism as an improper comment on that of the stadhouder. Macdonald terminated the confused discussion which ensued by listing those articles of agreement to which Dutch consent was essential as a preliminary to further negotiation. It then transpired that the Dutch council was prepared to place Malacca under “the protection of His Britannic Majesty’s Arms”, but that the Dutch commandant objected strongly to the transfer of his European troops into British service, because “the acceptance of British pay would involve him in an Imputation of Treason to his Prince and Country.” In this view, he received the unanimous support of his fellow councillors. Similarly, while the council offered no objection to the British commanding officer taking his place as second member of the Dutch council at Malacca, it firmly declined to grant him the military command of the fort, which was the undoubted responsibility of Couperus. The remaining British proposals concerned the provision of funds to meet garrison charges and the allocation of responsibility for internal government. They provoked some

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9 Macdonald’s report on his negotiations with Couperus, 19 Aug., 1795. Loc. cit.
10 Macdonald’s Report.
12 These are the seven articles included in Encl. No. 3, with the marginal note: “No. 1 Referred to in Major McDonald’s Letter.” They were discussed between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. on 16 August and must be distinguished from the nine articles of the schedule marked “No. 2”, which was presented at 4.30 p.m.
13 Articles 1, 3 and 5 of Schedule “No. 1”.

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criticism, but the problem of internal military control remained the major obstacle to a settlement.

Macdonald’s impressions of the council meeting are not without significance. Ruhde, the Dutch fiscal, remains a shadowy figure in the evidence presented by Vlielander Hein-Couperus and Irwin, but Macdonald found him exceptionally helpful in translating the British proposals to the council. Indeed, when Ruhde fell ill at 11 a.m. on 16 August, Macdonald agreed readily to an adjournment of the council meeting, because “in losing the Fiscal, I was [deprived] of my best support, both as a distinct Interpreter and a cool, judicious, and in almost every article, a Zealous advocate.”

During the morning session, Macdonald had exerted all his diplomacy, “bringing forward Topics more likely to Conciliate” whenever deadlock appeared imminent, “and returning to the Charge when a moment of better humour favored the Attempt.”

During the adjournment on 16 August, Macdonald went aboard the British flagship Orpheus to press upon Major Brown and Captain Newcome, the naval commander, the expediency of modifying the more stringent British demands, Macdonald was convinced that the Dutch governor and council had more than acceded to the spirit of the Kew Letter “by admitting the British Commanding Officer to a Seat in Council, making themselves Responsible as far as their funds enabled them for the payment of the British Detachment, and divesting their own Senior Officer of his Rank, by placing him as a Captain under the Control of the British Commander, reserving to him [only] what is Sanctioned by every instance of the like nature, the Command of his own Troops as to their interior Oeconomy”. Had it not been for the inflexible nature of the instructions provided by the Madras government as to the terms of occupation, Macdonald would have accepted willingly the concessions offered by the Dutch council, “with such Modifications as a Conciliatory Spirit on both sides would have naturally suggested and approved.” He was strengthened in this attitude by an assurance from Couperus that he would surrender the military command to the senior British officer in the event of an enemy appearing off Malacca. As later events will show, it is not likely that Macdonald’s point of view was received with much sympathy by Brown and Newcome. Nevertheless, Macdonald extracted a few

15 Loc. cit.
16 Loc. cit.
17 Loc. cit.
concessions from his superiors and returned to present them to the Dutch council at 4.30 p.m. on 16 August. He was accompanied, at his own request, by Brigade Major Mackerras and Lieutenant Brough-ton, R.N.

The new “Schedule” of articles carried by Macdonald differed from the proposals made at the council meeting of that morning in several respects. Whereas Brown had insisted previously that the commander of the British land forces “be appointed Commandant of the Fort”, the revised article stipulated that he was “to be received and at all Times considered as commandant of the Fort and Garrison, both Dutch and English.” 18 The other matters upon which Brown had refused to yield earlier that day were that the granting of parole and the possession of the keys of the fortress should rest with the British commandant. 19 Under the revised schedule the granting of parole was to remain a British prerogative, but the keys of the fortress were to be lodged with the captain of the day or the officer of the main guard. 20

The reception given to the schedule by Couperus and his colleagues was not as enthusiastic as Macdonald had hoped. Couperus still declined to surrender the command of the fort because this concession would involve him in a breach of this oath of allegiance. He was prepared, however, to yield on this point when an enemy made a “full appearance” at Malacca. 21 Couperus made similar objections to the loss of this right to grant parole, but was prepared to accept the article relating to the possession of the keys of the fortress. 22 By 8 p.m. articles 8 and 9, which provided for the recruitment of the German troops in the Malacca garrison into British service and the hoisting of the British flag on the main bastion, still remained undiscussed. At this stage, the patience of Brown and Newcome, waiting in the Orpheus, became exhausted. They instructed Macdonald to present Couperus and his council with an immediate ultimatum in the matters of command of the fort and the granting of parole. This step was repugnant to Macdonald as being contrary “to the Real Interests and Honor of my Country”, but, after consultation with a sympathetic Mackerras and Broughton, he saw no alternative but to press Couperus for an “unequivocal

20 Articles 2 and 3 of Schedule “No. 2”. Loc. cit.
21 Dutch reply to Article I of Schedule “No. 2”.
22 Dutch replies to Articles 2 and 3 of Schedule “No. 2”.
Assent" on those points. When the Dutchman refused to withdraw his earlier reservations, Macdonald “performed the ultimate, but most painful part of my Instructions, by declaring to him the Intention of the British Commanders to Commence Hostile operations on my Return.”

Couperus had won the respect of Macdonald, Mackerras and Broughton during the negotiations because of his “Candour and apparent anxiety to adjust every point in dispute without prejudice to his Honor.” In a subsequent letter to Lord Hobart, the unfortunate Dutch governor restated his dilemma as one which compelled him “either to Violate my oath of fidelity to the States General or to act on the Defensive against those whom I was willing to receive as Friends and Allies”. Couperus’ sense of duty inclined him to the latter course, but his natural inclination was to preserve peace, “for I do not think that true glory consists in the Exercise of Power and Command, but in promoting the Welfare of my Inhabitants.”

He had been associated with Malacca for seventeen years and recoiled from the prospect of exposing its inhabitants to “the fortune of War”. The ultimate responsibility in this respect was his alone, because the Dutch council, when pressed for a decision by Macdonald during the final stages of negotiation, “alleged their inability to interfere with the Sentiments of the Governor on any Military Topic, as by a particular Commission he was alone responsible for the Defence of the Fort.” It is interesting to reflect to what extent the personal obloquy suffered by Couperus later might have been lessened had the other members of the council been unable to shelter behind this convenient constitutional arrangement.

After Macdonald terminated the negotiations in the council shortly after 8 p.m. on 16 August, Couperus could not reconcile himself to the inevitable bloodshed. At midnight Brown and Newcome received a letter from the governor asking for an extension of the ultimatum to 9 a.m. on 17 August, when Couperus would make his final decision known. In the event of Couperus standing by his resolve to resist a British landing, he sought an additional two hours grace after the

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26 Loc. cit.
expiry of the ultimatum for the evacuation of non-combatants. 28 Newcome and Brown agreed to Couperus’ request in the hope that it reflected a wish on his part “to spare the unnecessary and Wanton Effusion of Blood.” It was arranged that Macdonald would wait upon Couperus for the last time at 9 a.m. on 17 August. 29

Macdonald, whose relations with Brown and Newcome were already strained, went ashore on the morning of the 17th “rather in a private capacity” than as an official plenipotentiary, being “willing to afford my best Exertions for the public Service”. 30 He regarded himself, apparently, as lacking authority to do more than receive the decision of Couperus and offer friendly advice, an attitude which his superiors seem to have encouraged. 31 The military commanders were now in the ascendant and the initiative was confirmed to them when Couperus revealed his determination to “wait the Lot of War”. 32 Macdonald returned to the Orpheus with this information and soon found himself so diametrically opposed to Brown that he declined to attend the conferences subsequently held by the two British senior officers. 33

Meanwhile, Mackerras, accompanied by Lieutenants Hoskins and Maugham of the Orpheus and Intrepid, had explored the beach to the south of Malacca fort and selected the landing point, while Newcome detached a second boat to examine the north beach as a diversionary measure. 34 The disembarkation orders for the landing force were issued to the British officers concerned at 5 p.m. on 17 August, the objectives of the operation being explained to the men in the ships’ boats before they pushed off from the main fleet. A compass bearing had already been taken on the landing place, which would be approached under cover of darkness. Major Brown occupied a central position among the landing craft on the barge of the Orpheus, with the boats of the Resistance and Ewer on his right hand and those of the Orpheus and Carnatic on his left. Four companies of

31 Ibid.
infantry were involved, together with nine six pounder guns manned by lascars, and a detachment of pioneers. Perfect silence was enjoined upon the troops of all branches in gaining the beach, where the infantry were to form up in companies with their back to the sea, the guns falling into the intervals left for them, with the pioneers on the right flank to the rear of the line. The men were not to be allowed to prime and load their muskets until they had reached their positions, after which they were to "stand perfectly steady and silent till they receive further Orders."  

Major Brown praised his men in the highest terms in his subsequent report for their efficiency and discipline. The invasion force left the fleet at 7 p.m. in 29 boats and made an exact landfall two hours later. The entire operation seems to have been carried out with the skill one would expect of an army officer of twenty-six years service.

Meanwhile, Couperus, warned of the actual outbreak of hostilities by the British attack on the Dutch brig Constantia, had "ordered every one to their Quarters and was determined not to deliver up the Place." The strength of the garrison available to Couperus seems to be a matter of dispute. Vlielander Hein-Couperus quotes Couperus' letter of 26 August, 1795, to prove that the forces of the Dutch Company numbered only 339 men, in which were included only fifty good European soldiers. Dr. Irwin shows, however, from Couperus' own defence, that the governor had a total of 392 soldiers in the town, of whom 334 were actively employed in the defence of Malacca. According to Dr. Irwin's evidence there were 95 Europeans in the garrison, of whom 63 were fit for duty.

37 Narrative of circumstances relative to the landing of the British Troops. Loc. cit., Encl. No. 5.
38 Brown sought permission to return to Europe after the Malacca operation, having spent 26 years of continuous service in India. Brown to Abercrombie, 30 Aug., 1795. Loc. cit., Encl. No. 1.
40 Vlielander Hein-Couperus: De Overgave van Malakka. Indische Gids, vol 37, pt. 1, p. 520. Vlielander Hein-Couperus here gives the date of the letter as 25 August, but dates it 26 August on pp. 519 and 521.
41 Irwin: Governor Couperus and the Surrender of Malacca, 1795. JMBRAS, vol. 29, pt. 3, pp. 114–117. Couperus' arithmetic must be wrong when he estimates the total garrison as 269 (p. 119).
The letter used as evidence by Vlielander Hein-Couperus was written more than a week after the fall of Malacca, when it was in Couperus' interest to minimize the forces at his disposal. The figures provided by Couperus in his defence of June 1805 were collected almost ten years after the event to which they refer. It is interesting, therefore, to compare the estimates used by Vlielander Hein-Couperus and Dr. Irwin with the garrison returns made and attested by Couperus and Mackerras jointly in August 1795. The total number of soldiers in Dutch pay in Malacca was given there as 375, of whom 13 were old or disabled. Of this force, 73 soldiers deserted on the night of 17 August, but this loss would not lessen the strength of the garrison during the initial stages of the defence. Mackerras and Couperus also signed a separate return to show the strength of the "Corps of Military Guns" as it stood in Malacca on 17 August, 1795, but whether this body represented artillerymen in addition to the men included in the general return is not clear. Couperus had under his command 100 artillery officers and other ranks to man 104 cannon and 17 mortars and howitzers in the fort and surrounding batteries. Sixty-eight of the gunners were Javanese recruits with two or fifteen days service and it is not surprising that they deserted en masse on the night of the British landing. If Macdonald is to be believed, the European infantry under Couperus' command was unreliable, too. Most of them were Germans, not Dutchmen, and their pay was long overdue.

The problem which confronts the historian, therefore, is not whether Couperus could have defended Malacca successfully against the British invasion force, but whether, having committed himself to resistance, he could have organised a more resolute defence than he did. One of the interesting features of the skirmish between the British and Dutch forces was its purely nominal character. There is, for example, no mention of casualties on either side. With the exception of a few shots fired by the Dutch battery on the Vriesche Berg (St. John's Hill), no effective resistance appears to have been offered by the garrison. The sense of betrayal which is reflected in many of the

42 For the Couperus/Mackerras returns see Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, 9 Oct., 1795, Encl. 6C and 6D.
43 Macdonald stated that all the N.C.O.'s and privates of the European contingent were Germans, whose pay was overdue and whose contracts of service had expired in many cases. See his report, Bengal Sec. Pol. Cons., 9 Oct., 1795, vol. 39, Encl. 3.
44 Irwin, op. cit., pp. 89, 90, 97, 98, 104.
depositions made by former inhabitants of Malacca at Semarang in 1796 has its origin in this fact. The soldiers were prepared, so they declared, to fight more bravely than they were permitted to do by their superiors.\textsuperscript{44}

Is there any basis for the suggestion that Couperus deliberately restricted the degree of resistance which his men could offer? The account of his actions which Couperus sent to Lord Hobart on 28 August, 1795,\textsuperscript{45} agrees substantially with the summary given by Vlie-lander Hein-Couperus in 1915. The civilian population of Malacca, and particularly the Chinese, sought safety in flight before sunset on 17 August, abandoning their property to would-be looters. Many of the Chinese shops contained large supplies of arrack. The patrols which Couperus sent around the streets kept up a semblance of order until darkness fell, but thereafter the governor lost control of the situation. By 8 p.m. the Dutch garrison inside the fort began to resort to pillage, 54 men deserting from the fort by that time, while another 47 fled from a battery on the north side of the town.\textsuperscript{46} To add to his difficulties, Couperus received a false report of a British landing from twelve boats on the north beach, but this red herring was soon countered by "authentic intelligence" that the entire British force had disembarked on the southern beach. Couperus records that the Dutch battery on St. John's Hill endeavoured to beat off the British landing by firing shots into the darkness, but without much effect. Couperus then sought to strengthen the garrison of the fort itself by bringing in detachments from the town, but found "scarcely one Sober man" among them, "a few Europeans excepted."\textsuperscript{47} Plundering by Javanese, sepoys and slaves was so general by this time, taking place even in the presence of Couperus, that it became "a general Opinion that a Plan was formed to render the Devastation general."\textsuperscript{48} The sight of Government House in flames and the unanimous recommendations

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\bibitem{46} These figures do not correspond with the 73 deserters mentioned in the Couperus/Mackerras returns, unless the 73 deserters were infantry only. The artillerymen would then have to be considered as a separate unit from which there were an additional 68 desertions by the Javanese. This would imply that the garrison consisted of the 375 men mentioned in the general return plus 100 artillerymen. Couperus must be exaggerating the desertions or minimising the garrison.
\bibitem{47} Couperus to Hobart, 28 Aug., 1795. \textit{Loc. cit.}
\bibitem{48} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
of those around him were decisive, according to Couperus, in persuading him to write to Brown inviting the British forces to occupy the fort and to consider the Dutch garrison as prisoners of war.

Such was the picture of disorder and mutiny which Couperus presented as his justification for surrendering. If the situation was as desperate as he described it when he wrote his capitulation to Brown, few historians would question his decision, although they might have doubts as to the fitness for governorship of a man whose personality inspired so little respect in a time of crisis. But the British records show that Couperus' letter was received under flag of truce aboard the Orpheus between 9.30 and 10.0 p.m. on 17 August, less than an hour after the British troops had landed on the south beach. Captain Newcome's reply to Couperus was signed at 10 p.m., which provides a definite upper limit as to the time of the receipt of Couperus' letter. In order that Couperus' letter might be written, carried out to the Orpheus, delivered with due formality and answered by 10 p.m., Couperus must have made his decision to surrender almost immediately after receiving information of the British landing. The landing was not completed until 9 p.m. and the report of it would take some time to reach Couperus. The rapidity of Couperus' decision suggests that he was influenced by the very fact of the successful landing rather than by the confusion in the town.

Furthermore, had the disorder in the fort and town reached the catastrophic proportions described by Couperus by 9.15 p.m., which would be the approximate time when he wrote his letter to Brown? Many of the depositions made by the inhabitants and soldiers of Malacca at Semarang in 1796 concerning the loss of the town were based on hearsay and rumour, but a few were the result of personal experience. The Dutch quartermaster, David Steur, for example, was convalescing in the hospital inside the fort at the time of the British landing, but he was fit enough to walk around the precincts of the castle. He testified that the fire in the slaves' quarters at Government House occurred at 12.30 a.m. on 18 August and that he assisted in extinguishing the flames. Couperus was seen by Steur at the scene.

49 The actual letter from Couperus to the British commanders has a marginal note that it was received by Newcome at 10 p.m., but in an accompanying list of papers it is said to have been received at 9.30 by the captain of engineers. The "Narrative of circumstances relative to the landing" also states that the officer arrived aboard the Orpheus under a flag of truce at 9.30. See Encl. 2, 3 and 5 already cited.
of the fire. This testimony does not agree at all with the statement made by Couperus that it was the sight of Government House in flames which induced him to make his offer to surrender. There is a discrepancy of at least three hours between the effect and its reputed cause. Similarly, unless one is prepared to assume that the Semarang depositions are complete fabrications, one must acknowledge the evidence they contain that numbers of soldiers remained at their posts on the night of 17 August. The Madurese soldiers appear to have been at their posts at the Tranqueira battery as late as midnight, when they were surprised to receive the order to lay down their arms. Gunner Westerman, bombardier Potjer and captain Thiel of the artillery were in positions near the land gate and the Wilhelmus bastion on the south east side of the fort facing the British advance until approximately 1 a.m. According to David Steur, the Dutch battery on the Vriesche Berg was firing until some time after 1 a.m. and the British “Narrative” forwarded by Brown to Calcutta confirms this statement. It is clear that individual members of the Dutch garrison were attempting to continue resistance three to four hours after Couperus made his proposal to surrender. Surely they were supported by comrades who did not give testimony at Semarang?

When Newcome received Couperus’ offer to surrender aboard the Orpheus, it still remained to arrange some means of resuming peaceful negotiations. Macdonald was sent ashore to explain to the Dutch authorities the “Signals established for a mutual meeting”, while Newcome hastened to find Major Brown, who was with the invasion force to the south of Malacca. The signals which were to be used to bring the representatives of the two contestants to a common meeting

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50 Irwin: Governor Couperus..., JMBRAS, vol 29, pt. 3, p. 101. Steur confines himself to a purely factual account and displays no personal hostility towards Couperus.
51 Irwin: op. cit., p. 89.
52 Irwin: op. cit., p. 98.
54 Narrative of circumstances relative to the landing of the British Troops. Bengal Sec. Pol. Cons., 9 Oct., 1795, vol. 39, Encl. 5. It is significant that this defiant battery was manned, according to Couperus’ own testimony, by 1 bombardier 1 gunner and 8 Javanese artillerymen (See Irwin, p. 116). Hence if the Javanese artillerymen deserted during the night of 17/18 August, the desertion cannot have been as soon or as complete as Couperus’ description might suggest.
56 Newcome to Couperus, 10.0 p.m., 17 Aug., 1795. Loc. cit.
place merit full quotation because so many of the Semarang depositions contain garbled and sinister references to them. The arrangement read as follows:

"On my [Newcome] landing [the British are] to fire three Guns, and burn a false fire. To be answered by the Fort by firing three Guns and three Rockets, and then answered by us [the British] by one Gun.

Then to meet at Mr Kocks [Koek's] Garden House."

It was this complicated system which gave rise to the story that Adriaan Koek had hoisted three lanterns in the trees of his plantation to guide the British forces to their landing point and that he had entertained them subsequently to a sumptuous meal at his house. Mackerras firmly refuted the suggestion that the British troops had landed as far up the coast as Koek's house, or that signals had been hoisted to assist the landing. The story of the supper was pure fantasy, although the British troops might well have wished it was true.

On the other hand, Mackerras' statement that the British commanders became aware of the existence of Koek's house only after the road to it was discovered by patrols seems improbable because Newcome, who was then aboard the Orpheus, selected "Mr. Kocks Garden House" as the site of the Anglo-Dutch parley. There seems to be no reason to doubt the honesty of Mackerras in any respect, but it may well be that he was not aware of matters outside his immediate military duties. Certainly, the official British "Narrative" reveals that the pre-arranged signals for a meeting were made on both sides, while the Dutch Semarang depositions describe the firing of three rockets from the Wilhelmus bastion which faced directly towards the south beach.

The business of firing the signals seems to have taken place about 1.30 a.m. on 18 August. Shortly afterwards, Fiscal Ruhde met Newcome and Brown at Koek's plantation to settle the arrangements for the British entry into Malacca fort. At the first meeting it transpired that Ruhde was not authorised to grant immediate right of entry to

58 Mackerras to Couperus, 1 April, 1805. The British troops had eaten their ration of salt beef and biscuit by the time they reached Koek's house. See Irwin, op. cit., pp. 112—113.
59 Mackerras to Couperus, 1 April, 1805. Irwin, op. cit., p. 112.
the British forces and the fiscal was compelled to return to Couperus for further instructions. On his second visit to Koek's house, Ruhde indicated that the British troops were free to march in, but deprecated Brown's plan to send a company of grenadiers to occupy both gates because "several of the Dutch Soldiers were in a State of Intoxication" and an accidental skirmish might ensue in the dark. "As it was then some Minutes past 3 o'Clock in the Morning, it was agreed to defer taking possession until daylight."

At dawn on 18 August, commandant Thiel and the Dutch commissary waited on Major Brown and his assembled officers at Koek's plantation in order to offer him their swords. Brown declined to receive the swords because he hoped to confirm the Dutchmen in their commands. The Dutch battery on St. John's Hill, some two hundred yards from the scene of the conference, was then handed over to a British grenadier detachment, after which the remainder of the British force marched into the fort. "The Dutch Guards were permitted to remain armed at their Posts, the Fifes and drums to beat a March, and the Officers at the Gate to salute as we entered at the head of the Detachment; which having got to the place of General Parade in Front of the Government House, we found the Governor with his hat off and in front of the part of the Garrison which was off duty. As the British Troops were drawing up in front of the Dutch Troops, their Arms were presented, their Fifes and drums were permitted to beat a march, and their Officers to Salute, which compliment upon the Detachment being drawn up and dressed in their front, was returned by the British Troops". This colourful scene came to an end when Couperus presented Brown with a list of the Dutch guards, who were then relieved by their British Counterparts.

Thus the military government of Malacca changed hands in a more amicable atmosphere than might have been anticipated. It was left to admiral Rainier to terminate the Dutch civil administration five months later. The British archives make it abundantly clear that Couperus was not guilty of treason in this unhappy affair. Had Brown and Newcome permitted him to retain even the outward semblance of

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63 Ibid.
64 See W. C. Lennon's Journal of a Voyage through the Straits of Malacca on an Expedition to the Molucca Islands, published in JSBRAS, No. 7, June, 1883. Lennon served as engineer and secretary to Rainier's expedition.
military command in Malacca, Couperus would probably have admitted the British forces peacefully. Unfortunately, the instructions of Hobart and Braithwaite to the British commanders allowed them no latitude in this respect so that Macdonald's efforts to find a compromise solution failed. Even so, Couperus' decision to resist was a reluctant one and it may well be that he resolved privately to restrict actual hostilities to a minimum, while preserving his honour by making an outward show of resistance. Such a course would be in keeping with his attitude during the preliminary negotiations. Subsequently, in order to justify his decision to surrender, it seems likely that Couperus exaggerated the rapidity with which the internal government of the town and fort broke down. His motive was one of humanity rather than cowardice, but his actions would not be readily explicable to the more loyal members of the Dutch garrison, particularly when they observed the signal lights and rockets, the comings and goings of Ruhde, and the general lack of resistance. It seems likely that Couperus was not without enemies, who exploited the ugly rumours which became current and fostered the charge of treason.

D. K. BASSETT

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65 In addition to the evidence cited above, it is noteworthy that fiscal Ruhde stated as late as 3 a.m. on 18 August that "several" Dutch soldiers were drunk. This does not seem to imply a general breakdown of discipline, but pride may have restrained Ruhde from further revelations.