

1735 — Treasure map leads to salvage operation

How an eighteenth-century map caused a major controversy

On the afternoon of Thursday, 3 February 1735, the two Zeeland ships *'t Vliegende Hart* and *Anna Catharina*, belonging to the Dutch East India Company, were on the roadstead at Fort Rammekens near Vlissingen, ready to set sail for the Dutch East Indies. They were carrying a valuable cargo of gold and silver intended for Batavia (present-day Jakarta). The sea level in the mouth of the Scheldt estuary was particularly low that day due to a combination of a strong northeasterly wind and a spring tide. Calculations showed the time of day when water levels would reach their high point; that would be the right moment to sail over the barrier of the Deurloo bank. But the easterly wind blew the two ships along rapidly, causing them to arrive at Deurloo too early. *'t Vliegende Hart* and the *Anna Catharina* ran aground on the shallow sandbanks and sank with all on board. As many as 431 sailors died in the disaster.

In the eighteenth century, the mouth of the Western Scheldt estuary was notorious for its treacherous waters. Various ships belonging to the Dutch East India Company sank in the 1720s, and in 1729 the company directors in the province of Zeeland brought up the matter in a general meeting. To improve safety, it was proposed that floating barrels or buoys should be installed in the estuary mouth. This plan was accepted by the national board of directors. In a subsequent meeting of the States of Zeeland, they were shown a 'figurative map' (*Kaerte Figuratief*) in which the barrels were drawn in pencil. In 1731, the parties gave permission for the buoys to be made, but it took a while before they were installed.

After the shipwreck of *'t Vliegende Hart* and *Anna Catharina* and the investigation into how they ran aground, the Zeeland directors ordered an accurate sea chart to be made. It was to show the locations of the wrecks as well as the buoyage and the depth of the navigation channels. That eventually resulted in this detailed sea chart on parchment, entitled *Droevige Aantijkening en Afbeelding op deze Caart* (Map containing a sorrowful note and image), showing the two

MADE BY Abraham Anias (mapmaker) **TITLE** Droevige aantijkening en afbeelding op deze caart wegens het verongelukken van de twee Oostindische Compagnies schepen 't Vliegende Hart en d'Anna Catharina beyde van 't Vlak gezeijlt den 3 februarij 1735 in den namiddaggh even na twee uren ... **PLACE OF ISSUE** [Middelburg] **DATE** [1735 or shortly thereafter] **TECHNIQUE** Manuscript on parchment **DIMENSIONS** 74 x 97 cm **SCALE** c. 1:117,500 (four German miles of fifteen in a degree = 25.4 cm) **ORIENTATION** North bottom left **SIGNATURE** Bodel Nijenhuis collection, COLLBN 054-05-001

shipwrecks and the numbered buoys. Johannes Tiberius Bodel Nijenhuis acquired the manuscript map in 1865.

In 1977, the historical cartographer Günter Schilder ascribed the map to the cartographer Abraham Anias (1694–1750), based on the drawing of the compass rose. He drew this conclusion on the basis of another manuscript map drawn and signed by Anias in 1728, namely of the northern Ari atoll in the Maldives. The Zeeland East India Company ship *Ravesteyn* had run aground there on 9 May 1726. Anias was the stepson of the East India Company cartographer Johan Roggeveen (1651–1723), whose brother Jacob (1659–1729) had discovered Easter Island in 1722. After the death of his stepfather, Anias continued his work and became a respected cartographer in his own right.

There can be no doubt that this parchment map of the Western Scheldt from 1735 is a contemporary copy by Anias for use by the salvage parties. The map shows not only the nine buoys that marked Deurloo and the navigation route to Vlissingen but also



Silver rijder, a coin showing a horseman, from the wreck of *'t Vliegende Hart*, 1729–1734 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1995-2-1-1).



Chest of money from the wreck of *'t Vliegende Hart*, 1734–1735 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1984-27).

the precise locations on the Vlakke Raan and Witte Bank where the *Anna Catharina* and *'t Vliegende Hart* respectively ran aground. Shortly after the disaster, the Zeeland directors asked the English diver James Bushell to rescue the cargo from the wreckage but he declined. They therefore concluded an agreement with his fellow diver John Mitchell. Mitchell started work in the summer of 1735 but his efforts were not very successful and he soon gave up. Then, at the end of January 1736, the directors offered William Evans a contract with a commission of no less than 50 per cent of the salvage value. The two parties signed a contract on 20 April 1736. Evans, a former ship's carpenter from Deptford, near London, was a well-known veteran diver who had been investigating wrecks for decades using a wooden diving bell. According to his logbook, which has survived, it was not difficult to find *'t Vliegende Hart* because the remains of the wreck were still sticking up above the surface. However, the salvage effort was made more difficult by the strong current, the poor visibility and the confusion of ropes. Evans was eventually able to recover an anchor, an artillery item, some silver coins and a large number of wine bottles. Then he gave up on the salvage operation.

In the decades that followed, Anias' map was printed and published several times. For example, Johannes van Keulen II (1704–1755) produced a copper engraving of the manuscript map, publishing it with the title *Nieuwe groote Paskaart, strekkende van Walcheren tot Duynkerken* (New large passage map, extending from Walcheren to Dunkirk). The buoyage had to be replaced around 1771 and so new maps were produced, with updated information on "dry banks and



Wine bottle still containing wine, sealed with a cork and wire, from the wreck of *'t Vliegende Hart*, 1730–1734 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1983-55).

depths". One highly accurate map was the manuscript map made in 1773 by Stephanus van der Loeff and Bonifacius Cau, which was printed and published one year later by the sons of Johannes van Keulen II. All these maps still show the locations of the wrecks, in addition to the buoyage from Deurloo towards Vlissingen.

In the twentieth century, Anias' map became topical again after Schilder noticed the mention of the wrecks on the map in 1977 and did some further digging in the archives. Two years later, an archaeological underwater operation started in a partnership between the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the English diver Rex Cowan and the English businessman John Rose. At first, it was agreed that Cowan and Rose would get 75 per cent of the proceeds and the Dutch state 25 per cent. The agreement was later amended to give only 10 per cent to the Dutch state, with the two British men getting the remaining 90 per cent. That is striking because when the East India Company was declared bankrupt in 1799 and the Dutch state took over the debts worth millions, it also acquired all the company's property.

The salvage partnership went smoothly until 1983, when one of the chests containing golden ducats was found. A bitter debate erupted about the recovery of cultural heritage by commercial salvage parties, who were called treasure thieves and alleged only to be interested in personal benefit. The Rijksmuseum withdrew from the partnership but the controversy dragged on for years. In total, over five thousand gold ducats and about nine thousand silver *real* coins and *rijders* were recovered between 1981 and 1993. The silver *rijders* were in fact coins that the crew had smuggled on board illegally. (RP)