

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Leather gorget from the wreck site of BATAVIA

Date

c 1629

Medium

Leather

Dimensions

Overall: 254 x 260 mm

Name

Gorget

History

The BATAVIA was built for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). In October 1628, it set sail for its maiden voyage from Texel, the Netherlands, for Batavia, Dutch East Indies (present day Jakarta, Indonesia) to collect a cargo of spices. For the trip out, she was carrying trade goods and chests of coins and was in a fleet of about seven vessels. In command was Francis Pelsaert, and Ariaen Jacobsz was skipper. These two men had a pre-existing acrimonious relationship, which deteriorated further as the voyage progressed. On board were approximately 332 crew, soldiers, and passengers. Jacobsz became friendly with a fellow crew member, Jeronimus Cornelisz, and the two plotted to take command of the ship by mutinying and turning to a life of piracy. After calling at the Cape of Good Hope, Jacobsz steered BATAVIA off course and away from the rest of the fleet. He and Cornelisz had gathered a small group of men with similar views to mutiny, but just prior to their plan taking effect, BATAVIA hit a reef at the Houtman Abrolhos, off the Western Australia coast on 4 June 1629. The ship was unable to be re-floated and started breaking up. The crew and passengers were ferried to nearby islands using the ship's two smaller boats, along with the water and food supplies. Some of the men drowned during this operation, but all the women and children reached land safely. The islands on which they landed did not have available fresh water and Pelsaert organised a reconnaissance trip to the mainland to try to find a water supply. This proved unsuccessful and Pelsaert made the decision to try to reach Batavia in the long boat. Pelsaert, Jacobsz and 46 crew and some passengers reached Batavia on 7th July 1629, without loss of life. Jacobsz was promptly placed in prison due to his conduct on board BATAVIA. Back on the island, Cornelisz took control of the remaining 268 survivors and weapons. Still dreaming of mutiny, he sent 20 of the soldiers to a neighbouring island to look for water, and then proceeded to murder any of the remaining survivors who he perceived as a threat to his command or a burden on supplies. Eventually, Cornelisz and fellow mutineers murdered 125 men, women and children. The soldiers, under the leadership of Webbe Hayes, had found a source of water and food on their island. They sent up smoke signals, as arranged with Cornelisz, which were ignored, and

some of the survivors fleeing from the other islands reached the soldiers and told them of the mutiny and massacres. In anticipation of a confrontation, Hayes started making weapons out of debris of the BATAVIA, built a stone fort (still extant) and posted a watch. Cornelisz, realising his supplies were rapidly diminishing, decided to attack the soldiers and take theirs. Several battles ensued in which the better fed Hayes and his men were able to keep control and eventually capture Cornelisz. The mutineers regrouped under the command of Wouter Loos and attacked again. But at that moment, Pelsaert arrived in the rescue ship SARDAM. Hayes was able to explain the situation to Pelsaert and the remaining mutineers were captured. Pelsaert conducted a short trial and the lead mutineers, including Cornelisz, were taken to another island and executed. Wouter Loos and a cabin boy were marooned on the Australian mainland as their crimes were not considered serious enough to warrant execution. When SARDAM reached Batavia, Pelsaert was held responsible for the loss of the BATAVIA due to his lack of control and his assets were seized. He died a year later. Jacobsz never admitted to plotting the mutiny and was spared execution due to lack of evidence. It is unknown what happened to him. The shipwreck of the BATAVIA was formally identified in 1963 and is protected under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.