

The Dezembrada: The December Campaign That Decided the Paraguayan War

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HAVENA, Anapuena. The Dezembrada: The December Campaign That Decided the Paraguayan War. American Society of History, Arts and Letters, 2026. Disponível em: <https://www.theamericanshal.org/portal/publicacoes/the-dezembrada-the-december-campaign>.

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Área: Produções Acadêmicas

Publicado em 31 de agosto de 2026

It was a Sunday, December 6, 1868. The heat was suffocating and the ground treacherous. Looking back, into the annals of our Empire, we see that it was on exactly that day that the Paraguayan War began to write its final page. It was the day when the Marquis of Caxias, in an act of supreme military daring, began what we would later call the *Dezembrada* — the December campaign.

Until that moment the war had dragged on. Solano López felt secure behind the lines of Piquissiri, considered impregnable. But he underestimated the old Brazilian military fox. Caxias did the improbable: he marched the army through the Chaco, opened a way across marshes where no one imagined passage possible, and appeared in the Paraguayan rear, by surprise.

The first obstacle of that maneuver was the Battle of Itororó. It was no easy combat. The objective was to take a small bridge over the Itororó stream, a veritable funnel of death, where the imperial troops were mown down by enemy artillery. Discouragement began to spread through the ranks. It was then that the figure of the commander, already an old man, made the difference. Caxias drew his sword and threw himself to the front, shouting the phrase that today is engraved in the bronze of our history:

"Follow me, all who are Brazilian!"

The bridge was taken. The stream, the accounts tell us, ran red. But Itororó was only the fuse. Five days later came the Battle of Avaí, under rain and mud, a violent engagement. Then Lomas Valentinas, where the resistance of the regular Paraguayan army was at last broken before the year ended.

In less than a month, the Imperial Army dismantled what remained of López's military power and opened the way to the occupation of Asunción.

Today, at the Brazilian Academy of History and Literature, we recall not only the strategy but also the fiber of those men who, in a rainy and bloody December, wrote one of the decisive — and hardest — pages of Brazil's history in the River Plate.

In tribute to the historian and graphic designer Allan Fernandes

On December 15, 2018, we hosted at the Café Patriota — the historical and cultural space we founded in Fortaleza, Ceará — the lecture "A Dezembrada", given by the historian Allan Fernandes, a great friend who devoted himself to the study of the Paraguayan War and who generously shared his knowledge with us.

Sadly, Allan is no longer among us to go on sharing the fruit of his research. Were he here, a text of his own authorship would certainly be published today.

On this date, in recalling the Dezembrada, we also wish to honor the historian and graphic designer, a dear friend, who so enriched the work of our historical and cultural space with contributions full of aesthetic beauty and rich content.

Anapuena Havena — Brazilian Academy of History and Literature.

Translated from the Portuguese original published by the Academia Brasileira de História e Literatura.

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