

MILITARY POWER
AND THE
DUTCH REPUBLIC

War, Trade and the
Balance of Power in Europe

1648–1813

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FRONT COVER

William III lands at Torbay on 15 November 1688
(5 November OS). Oil on canvas, unknown English artist,
undated.

SPINE

Portrait of the painter Ludolf Backhuysen II (1717–1782)
in the uniform of the dragoons. Oil on panel, Tibout
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- FRONT Battle of Scheveningen, 10 August 1653
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Preface

Military Power and the Dutch Republic. War, Trade and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1648–1813 is the second book to be published in English in the *Military History of the Netherlands* series. Volumes covering the Eighty Years' War and Dutch military history overseas up to 1814 have already appeared in Dutch, and the volume on the Eighty Years' War has also been published in English. The present book – originally titled *Krijgsmacht en Handelsgeest. Om het machtsevenwicht in Europa, 1648–1813* – examines the operations carried out by the Dutch army and navy during the successive periods of the Dutch Republic (from 1648 to 1795), the Batavian Republic (until 1806), the Kingdom of Holland (until 1810), and the years of annexation to France (until 1813). Throughout this long period the armed forces' chief tasks were the protection of the country's trade and, of course, the defence of its territory.

It was an enormous challenge for such a small country, hemmed on all sides by larger powers, to be in a constant state of military readiness for the many wars in which it was involved. How did the Dutch government and military leadership endeavour to achieve that? How successful were they? Is there a connection between military operations and the Dutch Republic's rise and fall? What was the military factor in the Republic's oft-described economic, cultural and political flourishing in the second half of the 'golden' seventeenth century and its conspicuous decline in the eighteenth?

These questions recur like a leitmotif throughout the series, at whose core is a consideration of the objectives, resources and approaches of the Dutch armed forces – not as an isolated phenomenon, an *histoire de bataille*, but looked on as an element in broader political, economic, social and cultural developments, as part of the general history of the Netherlands. The series also aims to provide not only historians but everyone working in the field of security and defence, as well as history teachers within and outside the armed forces, students of history and the interested general reader, with a broad insight into the Netherlands' military past.

For this series the Netherlands Institute of Military History has sought the cooperation of historians from the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Nether-

lands Defence Academy and specialists associated with universities and other academic institutions. This volume makes grateful use of the research and initial concept of Olaf van Nimwegen and Ronald Prud'homme van Reine. After careful deliberation by the editorial board, however, it was decided to adopt an entirely new approach that corresponds more closely to what the editors have in mind for the series. The first draft became part of the NIMH collection, available for consultation and reference, and a new team of authors, consisting of Marc van Alphen, Prof. Jan Hoffenaar (project leader), Alan Lemmers and Christiaan van der Spek, was given a free hand. Although each has brought his own specialist knowledge to bear on this volume as a whole, all have contributed one or more individual chapters. Marc van Alphen is responsible for Chapters 1, 2 and 7, Christiaan van der Spek for Chapters 4, 5 and 8, Alan Lemmers for Chapter 3, and Jan Hoffenaar for Chapter 6. The Introduction and Concluding Observations are by Hoffenaar and Van der Spek. In this series the illustrations are just as important as the text. Image research and editing were in the hands of Alan Lemmers.

Several other people have made indispensable contributions to this book. Prof. Maarten Prak (Utrecht University), an unrivalled expert on the period, critically reviewed every page and provided a wealth of constructive commentary. Erik van Oosten made all the maps. Dirk Janse and Lysanne Leeuwenburg-de Jong supported the image editing. Martijn Wink wrote the sidebar on Dutch infantry uniform. Martijn Heijink and Martin Hoekstra carried out various supporting activities. The authors also benefited from the knowledge of Nico ten Brink, Jeroen ter Brugge, Teunis de Kruijf, Jan Piet Puype and Jeroen van der Vliet. A special word of thanks goes to Lee Preedy and Paul Arblaster who, aided by Alan Lemmers and Christiaan van der Spek, made sure our Dutch book received a worthy English translation, and to designer René van der Vooren, for making the English version as beautiful as the Dutch original. Finally we would like to express our gratitude for the commitment of our publisher, Leiden University Press.

The Editorial Board

Note to the Reader

Dutch Republic, Holland or Low Countries?

The term 'Dutch Republic' is used to refer to a confederation of seven provinces — Groningen, Friesland, Gelderland, Overijssel, Utrecht, Holland and Zeeland — that revolted against the Spanish Habsburg empire in the late sixteenth century and formed the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The provinces which after the Revolt remained part of the Habsburg empire are referred to as the Southern, Spanish or Austrian Netherlands depending on the period or context. In these pages 'Holland', sometimes used in English to denote the whole of the Netherlands, refers only to the province of that name. The term 'Low Countries' encompasses all of the present-day Benelux area and part of the modern French departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais.

England or Great Britain?

From 1603 the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland shared a crown but were still separate states. In 1707, however, the two countries were united by the Acts of Union and their respective parliaments merged to create the Kingdom of Great Britain.

Other Names

The names given to battles and wars differ depending on who the belligerents were and who is describing them. The Dutch refer to the Battle of Kijkduin and Two Days' Battle, for instance, while to the English they are known as the Battle of Texel and St James's Day Battle. This book uses the most common English names.

The names of countries, provinces, towns and natural features such as rivers are in the language of their country except for those that usage has anglicised, such as The Hague or Antwerp, or tradition has normalised, such as Ypres and Bruges (rather than Ieper and Brugge) in Flanders.

Names of sovereign rulers are anglicised. Other personal names are according to nationality.

Stadholder and Grand Pensionary

During the late-medieval rule of the dukes of Burgundy in the Low Countries, the power of the crown was often exercised at provincial level by a lord lieutenant, almost always a member of the highest nobility, known as a *stedehouder*. In the course of the Dutch Revolt the posi-

tion of stadholder was retained as the foremost executive and military officer of the Republic. Although stadholders exercised some of the powers traditionally held by a monarch, and some of them might have had monarchical pretensions, in principle they remained lieutenants of the sovereign, which now meant the provincial States (the assembly of the principal towns and nobles of a province) rather than the monarch. In practice, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the stadholder of a province was always a member of the princely House of (Orange-)Nassau, who usually exercised the function in more than one province at a time (although before 1747 never in all provinces at once). For two periods, 1650–1672 and 1702–1747 (known as the first and second Stadholderless Periods), Holland and a number of other provinces did without a stadholder. During these periods the leading government functionary was the grand pensionary, the highest civilian official of the province of Holland and leader of the province's delegation to the States General.

Old Style and New Style

In 1582 Pope Gregory III introduced the Gregorian calendar to replace its Julian predecessor. In the following years it was adopted by many European countries, some more reluctantly than others. The various provinces of the Dutch Republic accepted the new calendar at different times between 1582 and 1701. England continued to use the Julian calendar until 1752, referring to it as the Old Style (OS) calendar to avoid confusion with the New Style (NS) Gregorian version. There is a difference of ten or eleven days between the two systems. Thus, for more than half the period covered in this book, both calendars were in use. As the Dutch Republic is the book's subject, the dates given here are New Style, but there are instances — primarily in reference to the Anglo-Dutch wars — where the Old Style date has been added for clarity.

Guilders and Stivers

The main units of currency in the Dutch Republic were the guilder (*guilder*), stiver (*stuiver*), and penny (*penning*). A guilder was worth 20 stivers; a stiver was worth 16 pennies.



The formation of the fleet with which William III sailed to England in 1688.
Etching, Adriaen Schoonebeek, 1688.

Introduction

On 13 November 1688, an enormous seaborne invasion force left the Netherlands and headed for the south-west coast of England. The fleet stretched from Dover to Calais, drawing thousands of spectators on both sides of the English Channel and making a deep impression on all who saw it. With over four hundred ships carrying tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors and support troops, it was the largest naval operation ever undertaken, larger by far than the famous Spanish Armada of a century earlier. It was led by William III, prince of Orange and, since 1672, stadholder and supreme military commander of the Dutch Republic. The objective was to remove England's Catholic monarch James II from the throne and so prevent England and France from making common cause against the Republic, as had occurred 1672. William, a Protestant, was married to James II's eldest daughter. Officially, in embarking on the expedition he was acting in a personal capacity, but all the competent Dutch authorities were closely involved. The eventual success of the enterprise — William III replaced James II on the English throne — therefore affected the whole of the Netherlands. The 1688 expedition was the ultimate proof of the Republic's might, mettle and manifold means. That small country on the North Sea was a force to be reckoned with.¹

Just over 120 years later, little of that reputation remained. Once again there was talk of an invasion, but this time the roles were reversed. The Netherlands, or rather the Kingdom of Holland, as it had now become, was reduced to the status of a French satellite state when a 40,000-strong British expeditionary force landed on the coast of Walcheren on 29 July 1809. Louis Napoleon, who had been made king of Holland by his brother Napoleon Bonaparte in 1806, had only a meagre four to six thousand troops with which to oppose the landing. There was nothing that pitifully small force could do to stop the British from overrunning the entire island in just a few days. It was the same story at sea. The fleet, such as it was, was no match for the might of the Royal Navy. The few (small) ships that were left could only cower in the estuaries. All in all, the British invasion made it painfully clear that the Dutch were

no longer able to defend themselves. It was the French who had to step in and pull the Dutch chestnuts out of the fire. Which in the summer of 1810 gave Bonaparte the perfect pretext for annexing the Kingdom of Holland to the French Empire.²

The contrast between the two invasions could hardly be greater. In 1688 the Republic was at the height of its power; 'Walcheren' marked its final demise as an independent nation state. In a sense, therefore, those two amphibious operations sum up the entire military history of the Netherlands on the European continent between 1648 and 1813, from its spectacular rise in the second half of the seventeenth century to its dramatic fall in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The extreme nature of that evolution never ceases to amaze. The success of 1688 makes one wonder how a country like the Dutch Republic, small in extent on land and sea, could become one of Europe's dominant military powers. The failure of 1809 makes one equally curious to know how it lost that leading role and why it was relegated to such a lowly walk-on part on the international stage

Such questions are not new, of course. Numerous studies have adduced multiple explanations for the rise and fall of the Republic as a great power. Generally, they describe the country's success in economic terms. Thanks to its strong trading position and resulting wealth it could maintain a relatively sizable military force whose actions contributed to its leading international position. But those studies rarely spend much time on how that military force operated,³ as if a well-run economy is in itself a sufficient explanation for the Republic's military success in the seventeenth century, as if the possession of enough well-motivated, well-trained troops, the quality of ships and weapons, the type of leadership or the way in which soldiers and sailors were deployed and provisioned were not equally important factors.⁴ The only authors to explore that side of the equation are pioneers like Jaap Bruijn and Olaf van Nimwegen. Without their detailed studies of the Dutch fleet and Dutch army respectively, this book could not have been written.⁵

In historiography in general, too, explanations for the Republic's decline are usually economic, though not exclusively. There are several reasons why the country lost its leading role: because of the (relative) economic atrophy consequent on the emergence of competitors, the growing burden of debt as a result of decades of war, the extensive centralisation of state power in France, Great Britain and Prussia and the Republic's own inability to carry out institutional reforms, and the halt in the country's population growth and the creation of a closed oligarchy of regents.⁶ To a greater or lesser extent all those factors influenced the Republic's lapse into a second- or third-class power, yet when it comes to explaining how they affected the operation of the army and navy and whether that in turn contributed to the country's decline, general historiography is once again more or less silent.⁷

The aim of this book is to give that military dimension a more prominent place in the grand narrative of the Dutch Republic's rise and fall as a great power. Trade and prosperity played a very large role in that record, of course, but economies do not win battles on either land or sea, armies and navies do. The country's dominance, the place it occupied at European negotiating tables, was determined not only by the size of its treasury but also by its military prowess and performance on the battlefield. Both things are inextricably linked, but the one does not automatically follow from the other. Yes, the Republic was rich, but it was rich in the eighteenth century too, when it played a much less influential role. The question then was more a matter of the choices political administrators made, how they employed their financial resources in supporting the armed forces and how they used the army and navy to promote the country's prosperity.

As its title suggests, *Military Power and the Dutch Republic. War, Trade and the Balance of Power in Europe, 1648–1813* in essence revolves around the continuous interaction between political and economic objectives on the one hand and financial and military (im)possibilities on the other. It complements the many socio-economic, political and cultural publications about the Dutch Republic that have already been written by examining the action, organization and operation of the armed forces as well as the doings of the ordinary soldiers and sailors and their relationship to the civilian population. How did the Republic use its armed forces to protect its own trade and prosperity, territorial integrity, and the balance of power in Europe? Which were the factors that motivated military action and prompted preparations for war? And what ultimately deter-

mined success and failure in battle? In answering those questions, *Military Power and the Dutch Republic* will hopefully add a martial dimension to the already existing explanations for the flourishing and fading of the Republic.

The fact that general histories of the Dutch Republic rarely go too deeply into the operation of the armed forces does not mean that the army and navy have never been studied. On the contrary, as the bibliography at the end of this book shows, countless works of varying length have been published over the years besides those by Jaap Bruijn and Olaf van Nimwegen. Most of them are highly descriptive in character, however, or deal solely with a specific aspect or a shorter period (a single war or a single battle). In many of the books written in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, moreover, the strongly nationalistic tone that was common in the historiography of the time can be heard. That became far less prevalent following the Second World War as attention shifted from generals and admirals to the ordinary troops and from the actual fighting to matters such as logistics, culture, recruitment, financing and gender.⁸ The field also began to be dominated by a number of critical debates, most significantly in relation to military revolution, the fiscal-military state, and total war. Yet there was still no sign of an in-depth survey in which the actions and operation of the Dutch armed forces were considered in a broader political, economic, social and societal context.

What *Military Power and the Dutch Republic* hopes to add to the existing literature is in the first place a recognition of the coherence between the deployment and actions of the army and navy. Describing the two branches of the armed forces conjointly, comparing them, and submitting them, as and when possible, to a common analysis – something that has not been done before – provides an insight into the many assessments, calculations and considerations involved in the creation of the Republic's security policy in the period dealt with here and puts military success and failure in a broader perspective. The book's second distinguishing feature is the time span it examines. It covers the entire period from 1648 to 1813, allowing continuities and discontinuities to be better differentiated and thus the great changes that took place after the fall of the Republic in 1795 to be more clearly highlighted. Thirdly, in the following pages a point is made of giving more space to the common soldier and sailor and to the ordinary citizen's involvement with the military, things that have often gone unmentioned in the past. Finally, by taking an approach that incorporates all of those



Model of a 72-gun Dutch warship, the 'William Rex'. In the eighteenth century 68 to 74 guns became the most common class for the Dutch navy's ships of the line. The model was built to decorate the Admiralty Chamber in Middelburg, 1698.

elements it is hoped that *Military Power and the Dutch Republic* will contribute to the broader historical debate and so interest a wider audience in the military factor in the Republic's rise and fall.

That the invasions of 1688 and 1809 were far from being isolated events is evident from the bare statistics of this period. For more than 80 of the 165 years covered by this book, the Dutch Republic (or one of its subsequent manifestations) was at war. Before one conflict ended the next had already begun. It would be all too easy to lose one's way in that

military maelstrom, so to avoid that *Military Power and the Dutch Republic* has been split into two complementary parts. Part I, which contains four chapters, provides a chronological survey of the major developments in and characteristics of military operations in their international, (domestic) political, economic and (partly) social context. It covers all the wars in which the Republic was involved and introduces the men who played leading parts in them. It focuses particularly on the objectives of the operation, on what military power was used for (the

‘why’ of a military operation) and the extent to which those objectives were or were not achieved (the ‘how’). In other words, these chapters deal mainly with the politically and militarily strategic level of military action. The way the chapters are divided — at the breaking points of 1689, 1748 and 1795 — corresponds to the Republic’s changing role from independent state to alliance partner, to neutral power and finally to dependent satellite.

The second part of this study comprises four thematic chapters, each providing a more detailed basis for the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the Dutch Republic’s military action. Comparisons between the army and navy are made whenever possible. Chapter 5 explains the expansion and contraction of military capabilities, as set out in the first four chapters, by analysing the development of the direction, organisation and financing of the armed forces, and of personnel policy (and the availability of personnel). Chapter 6 examines how the armed forces actually operated within the frameworks outlined in Chapters 1 to 5, considering such things as tactics, materiel, leadership and proficiency, and the question of what made for victory in one battle and defeat in another.

Chapter 7 looks at what all that (the defence policy, the style of leadership, organisation and financing and the form of military action) meant for the individual soldiers and sailors who ultimately had to carry out the battle plans. Finally, Chapter 8 examines how, and how tightly, society and the armed forces were interwoven and what that tells us about support for the armed forces among the population.

That approach and division notwithstanding, *Military Power and the Dutch Republic* is far from being a complete history of military events occurring within a given time frame. With a subject as broad and diverse as the armed forces and a period of more than a century and a half, that would hardly be possible. Choices have had to be made, with the result that not every battle is discussed in the same detail and not every technological development receives the same amount of attention. Extra care has been taken with the maps and illustrations. They not only add colour to the text but also clarify and supplement it. Together, the text, maps and images tell the story of the Dutch Republic, and that is very much a military story too.