

Script 29.70: Episode 15

Hello and welcome to WDF: 15. Last time we examined what was, in many ways, a very difficult and sad episode in our narrative. With arguably one of the mainstays of this podcast now absent, it seems strange to carry on regardless, as if nothing has happened. Yet, much like the people in the DR and elsewhere had to do in late August 1672, we will have to do just that. With the Dutch holding on past the apparently worst phases of the conflict, and with the French being diverted to other fronts such as the Rhine, and remaining watchful of the Spanish at all times, Louis' great campaign seemed to have failed. It remained to be seen how he would recoup these losses and if France could regain the momentum it had lost. I will now take you to late August, 1672...

If the Dutch were men they would have made peace long ago, but since they are such beasts, we had better prepare ourselves for more war. Louvois, the French minister for war, October 1672.

Johan de Witt was dead. With him died arguably the greatest statesman of the DR since William the Silent, but on the other hand, with him also died the greatest challenge to the House of Orange. After many years of enduring the reduced honours of his ancestral station, William of Orange was now poised to seize the control he had always strived to hold in the Netherlands. The people had voted and agitated for him to be named, first CG, and then Stadtholder, and with the regent party evidently reeling, William could use the opportunity to spread this power base even further. Peter Geyl, who has nourished us with his knowledge since the SADW, makes his final appearance here, as his coverage unfortunately stops at 1672. Yet this renowned Dutch historian was able to complete his coverage of the eventual year, and he remains an important opinion to us because of that. It's difficult to miss the unrestrained joy that the Orangists expressed during the period immediately following the massacre of the de Witts; this joy was sourced mostly from the false belief that Charles II was only at war with the DR because of the regent party, and that he fought the regent party across the world because he wished to install his nephew into his offices, which were after all his birth right.

Yet, we know that this incredible porky, which had existed since the SADW a few years before, was just that, baseless, but we also know that Charles and his agents had done everything to encourage it, and that Orangists had regularly made known their favour for England, that England would save the Dutch from France, that Charles II was a noble

Protestant monarch who would never wage war against his nephew. In all of this the Orangists, the mob and all others who adhered to their cause, were fatally mistaken. Geyl notes with a palpable exasperation and sadness the extent of the Dutch people's mistake:

Inseparably linked to their jubilation was the thought of England, of Protestant England, the land of Charles II, who loved the Prince of Orange as his son, who had just declared that he was waging war for the sole purpose of putting an end to the intolerable presumption of the regents. To that false messiah, that enemy of the Dutch people, the foolish crowd had sacrificed two men who had so faithfully stood up to him in the nation's interest. The hearts of the late GP and the late deputy at sea were cut out and sold to England.¹

It shouldn't be difficult to understand where Geyl's feelings come from. The lie that England would save the republic had been proved false over and over, yet the sheer desperation of the citizens must have led them to believe in ideas which to us seem incredible. I suppose it's only fair to point out that the citizens of the DR in the early 1670s didn't possess the wealth of knowledge that I have of course accumulated on the nature of Charles II's character and schemes. Faced with the desperate situation, and appreciating the circumstances of the era which put great stock in the importance of family ties, perhaps it was only reasonable that they expected the uncle of their favourite Orange prince would be acting in their best interests. How were they to know that Charles had all but engineered the very lie which they now believed in, or that he had planned for the downfall of their state and an end to its independence, or that as far as he was concerned, the only acceptable DR was one which was wedded by force to both France and England?

However desperate the situation had been in the DR, by the time of the massacre of the de Witts, French soldiers had already mostly evacuated the south, and thus the most formidable challenges posed to Dutch sovereignty were removed. That's not to say that the republic was safe, but thanks in large part to the rumoured responses of the other powers, most notably in Spain, Brandenburg and Austria, Louis began to move his largest army, under the command of Marshal Turenne, over the Rhine while he himself returned to France. The King of France, having launched the war almost solely for the glory and prestige it would net him, and for the rich rewards he anticipated, had by early August largely accepted that little glory was to be had in the melancholy drudgery that fighting in the flooded Netherlands had descended into. Louis planned instead to pre-emptively order his marshals to take the fight to the enemy

¹ Geyl, p. 395.

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before they organised themselves, with a wider plan aimed at recouping some glory and launching a grand campaign the following summer.

The international situation is thus a bit confusing at this time, mainly because nobody had officially declared war, but as we saw soldiers were still moving out from Germany and the Spanish Netherlands was also whirring into life. Most authors explain this by pointing to the fact that it was relatively late in the campaigning year by the time any actual fighting took place, and that there was a lot of posturing going on amongst the other European powers as they watched the situation unfold. There was also a good deal of trepidation, in the Emperor's case most especially, as Leopold was consistently on the lookout for signs of Ottoman activity to the east, and the almost compulsory Hungarian revolt that seemed to go along with it. Saying that, Habsburg agents had made contact with Madrid, and the Spanish decision to sign a defensive alliance with the Dutch in the months before the war meant, well, first of all, the Spanish weren't very good at alliances, since they had yet to officially enter, but it also meant that Spain was willing to sacrifice the strange safety which the TA had offered it.

Of all the interested parties, the Elector of Brandenburg is perhaps the easiest to explain. If you can remember back to previous episodes, the GE was always concerned at Louis XIV overwhelming the DR and he had gone to some significant diplomatic lengths to ensure that Louis wouldn't have a totally free hand. Once FW learned of the treaty signed between Louis and a somewhat reluctant HR Emperor in November 1671, he seemed to have felt compelled to act. His campaign to raise support for the Dutch in the months before the war were evidently a failure, and it is also likely that he was taken utterly by surprise when the French seemed to overwhelm all before them in such a short space of time. When rumours of the Dutch peace overtures were learned of in early July of 1672, FW would have believed that it was over. In spite of his pledges to aid his nephew William of Orange, the Anglo-French plot had simply moved too quickly for him to stop it. Yet, the nature of the communication and postal system in 1670s Europe meant that by the time FW believed it was all over the Dutch were having a fire lit under them by indignant and resilient towns in Holland, who banded together within their states to cooperate and flood their lands. Coupled with the resistance of these towns and the resulting calamity that this caused amongst Turenne's major force was the slow progress elsewhere – the German allies under Marshal Luxemburg and the Bishop of Munster had stalled outside the city of Groningen as they had attempted to besiege it over the month of August, so even with the continued French occupation and the contributions levied from these lands there was still reason to be positive.

We know that throughout July William and Charles continued their correspondence, while the English deputation arrived and was then baffled when William didn't fall over himself to ingratiate himself at London's feet. This put steel not only into Conrad van Beuningen, who reported back to the States of Holland on the event, but also the GE, whose agents had long since learned that the DR was in fact managing to survive. As if encouraged by the news that all hope was not lost, FW seems to have made the decision to move against Louis, but refrained from declaring war. In between about mid-July and early August, information on this period is very hard to come by folks, FW benefited from some Imperial soldiers lent to him by Leopold, though again Leopold wouldn't declare war either. Bolstered by these reinforcements, FW marched through Munster, concerning everyone's favourite Prince Bishop there. As Bernhard von Galen reacted to the Elector's moves, Turenne took up position on the Rhine, and what this looked like the map, for those of you without the benefit of the Patron's access to the episode scripts *wink, wink*, is that Turenne basically turned his force around as per Louis' orders. The Rhine, in other words, wasn't far, and this explains why there was a sense of urgency involved in Louis' orders – the French couldn't afford to allow their potential enemies to move closer and possibly box them in between the rivers Meuse and Rhine.

By marching first, Turenne ensured he was in a good position by January 1673, which incidentally was how long it took for FW to get into position. By now the GE possessed 25k soldiers in the combined Imperial-Brandenburg army which he now commanded.² In Turenne's mind, the GE should never have been allowed to get this far, but he had been vetoed from acting or launching an autumn campaign by Louvois, the French minister for war, and this inaction may have prolonged the war. Rather than march to meet the allied German army advancing towards the Rhine from the east in a pitched battle, Turenne was ordered to quarter his troops from November to early January for the sake of holding what Louis' court believed was a vulnerable flank along the Rhine, but Turenne was adamant that the French governing apparatus had no real concept of how affairs were unfolding along the frontline. In spite of his protestations though, his forces were commanded to sit tight, which must have been a particularly difficult order to abide by when it was learned that the Dutch were on the move, and they were in the process of launching a counterattack.

² Lynn, p. 118.

William of Orange moved an army consisting mostly of militia to besiege Charleroi in a campaign that must have been balked at among the French soldiery. To put it in perspective, Charleroi is about 100km south west of Maastricht, which itself was literally surrounded by French troops. Charleroi was a fortress town situated on a westward flowing fork in the Meuse River called the Sambre. Since the opened sluices had inundated the land, French soldiers had been placed in frontier garrisons along the water line, while some had ventured daringly into the SN to collect forage that was so badly needed. As if to teach the Dutch a lesson, the right and left bank of the Meuse had been pillaged relentlessly by Marshal Luxemburg's men, who by this point had sort of swapped his region of command with Turenne, who now watched the Rhine front as Luxemburg had once done. Again, it should be added that knowing where everything was at this point isn't essential for you to grasp the whole story, though looking at a map may help you appreciate better what William did. Luxemburg complained in October amidst the cold winds and endless rain, in the backdrop of the flooded wasteland, that: 'the rain falls without stopping, at the moment it falls as if they were pouring it out in buckets, and I assure you that a man needs to be made of iron to bear it...all the roads are impassable and no one would dream of moving.'³

This frustration of the French advance and of their allies would lead them to do unsavoury things like pillage the Meuse valley as we saw, but it also enabled William to skirt around them and campaign down that river, which don't forget stretched into France. This counterattack by William, which culminated at his siege of Charleroi in November, but which began in September with march down the Meuse and past the French positions, is normally mentioned only insofar as it ended in defeat for the Dutch, as their siege was unsuccessful and they were forced withdraw back home. Yet, I would argue that the plain image of the Dutch campaigning at all in a form other than desperate resistance was highly significant. It was clear that the moving of Turenne's army had made all the difference – with that main thrust of the initial French invasion now waiting for the Germans along the Rhine, the window had been left mostly open for William to creep past and affect a change in the status quo of the French initiative. That William was unsuccessful was actually not as unfortunate for the Dutch as it may appear. William had taken minimal risks and lost a very small amount of men, while he made off with a number of supplies and cannon as well. These were important morale boosts, as William well understood, but they also served to demonstrate to the gathering but still unofficial coalition gathering against Louis that the Dutch, while they

³ Quoted in Faulkner, p. 78.

had undeniably been bloodied, were determined to resist and would take the fight to the invader if necessary. William's actions were also possible by Louis' questionable decision to release 20k Dutch prisoners in return for a scant ransom in early August, and this, along with Turenne's absence, the improving morale and the increase in professionalism that followed, enabled William to actually contemplate a further campaign for the new season of 1673.

William wasn't the only one looking to 1673 though. As the Germans marched towards Turenne's position and planned to cross at the fortress of Koblenz, Turenne finally had the means and information he needed to strike back at them. Led by the GE, these 25,000 men represented the most concrete threat to French interests in the current war, and if France was to have any prospect of turning the stagnation around it would first have to deal with these contingents of men. The GE, with Imperial troops on loan from the Emperor, made his way towards Trier, a fellow elector by the name of Karl Kasper von der Leyen, who had himself been persuaded by Leopold to allow the Brandenburg-Imperial army through his lands. While the GE was crossing over, Turenne struck, and in January, he attacked the combined allied army, defeated it and pushed it back through Trier. John A Lynn noted that Turenne pursued FW all the way to Brandenburg, and that 'Turenne's army entered the elector's lands and so desolated them that the elector agreed to peace, solemnised in the treaty of Vassem on 6th June 1673.'⁴



The Elector of Trier, and his domains superimposed on the map

⁴ Lynn, p. 118.

With the GE effectively defeated, and the first allied joint venture of the war also overcome, Turenne could at least feel satisfied that his master would appreciate his service. In a sense though, the defeat of the allies here made the widening of the war almost inevitable. Leopold had been content to watch from the sidelines, merely using his considerable rights and privileges to pressure his peers in Germany to look unfavourably upon the French. In some cases he didn't have much luck, such as in Bavaria, but in other cases like the aforementioned Trier and of course Brandenburg which was Vienna's major ally by this point, the Emperor's influence was palpable. By handing the allies their first defeat, Turenne virtually forced all involved to take French ambitions more seriously. With French armies almost unopposed along the Rhine, the narrative of the wicked French invader could be presented to the rest of the HRE, and though it would enjoy varying degrees of success, it ensured that Leopold would have to enter an official war against Louis in the near future, simply lending his allies troops was evidently no longer going to suffice.

In addition to this, the Spanish had been made increasingly wary of French moves, particularly as the forces under Marshal Luxemburg strayed into the Spanish Netherlands in desperate search of forage. The tenacity and determination of Count Monterey to join the Dutch meant that garrison soldiers would periodically be marched menacingly up to the border with the Dutch, and in fact by November Monterey was lending the Dutch these soldiers to employ along the water line in Holland, a striking example of Spanish-Dutch cooperation that was surely not lost on Louis. Yet Madrid also exerted its influence in diplomacy – over the course of autumn 1672 the Spanish government became increasingly more active in petitioning English agents to break with France.⁵ At the same time, the Swedes proposed that they would mediate the Franco-Dutch war, but this was opposed by the GE, since in his mind Brandenburg would not benefit from the reduction in Dutch power, which a peace with France would surely bring about by late 1672. In FW's mind, and in those of his advisors, the Dutch and indeed the balance of power in Europe could best be helped through a determined effort poised against Louis. FW's belief that Louis had to be opposed seems to have driven his policy, though on the surface he would flip flop between pro and anti-French depending on the direct threat that kingdom posed to his own lands.

Indeed arguably the most significant pariah of these disparate events was not the HR Emperor, but Charles II, king of Britain. It was he who had to deal with the worst of all

⁵ C. R. Boxer, p. 84.

dilemmas – an unpopular war which was becoming increasingly difficult to win. The money voted by Parliament had long since dried up, and though Charles prorogued Parliament in October, unwilling as he was to hear the pleas of MPs to bring the war to an end, he knew that by February 1673 he would have to face the music, as not only would proroguing Parliament once more be seen as dangerous, but he was in fact planning to ask them for money. How had the English fared in their efforts to glean some benefit from Louis' triumphant march across both the Dutch and European sensibilities? The short answer is that by and large, once the initial enthusiasm wore off, the British people were in a majority opposed to the war. The long answer, well, let's take a closer look.

The nature of British public opinion, the waning popularity of Charles' regime, the paranoia and importance of religion in British society, the concern many MPs had for the House of Stuart in general, and the blatant disrespect Charles had shown Parliament in the past – all combined to ensure that the very constitution of Britain would work against its monarch if Charles couldn't work himself at either securing some kind of victory which would instil national pride, or find some other means to boost the popularity of the conflict. As we know, British society had been divided in the years before between those of an anti-Dutch or an anti-French persuasion – the former normally emphasised the Dutch ambitions for universal monarchy by coin, the latter normally emphasised the French ambitions for universal monarchy by forceful Catholicism. The anti-French party tended to be more concerned with religious affairs, and their concerns were greatly inflamed with Charles' attempts to install the Declaration of Indulgences mere weeks before the war with the Netherlands was declared. This ill-timed venture was meant to ensure Catholic or non-conformist support for the war, but all it really did was inflame passions on both sides. Steven Pincus, in his article 'From Butterboxes to Wooden Shoes: The Shift in English Popular Sentiment from Anti-Dutch to Anti-French in the 1670s', paints a critically important story for our narrative, and helps to explain the pressing question of why the British people seemed to switch their sensibilities from so resolutely anti-Dutch to living in fear of France, and eventually signing an alliance with the Dutch in the late 1670s. Pincus noted that:

When England, in concert with France, declared war against the United Provinces in spring 1672 the English political nation was forced to decide which was the greater threat. Most moderates trusted the government's assessment and supported the war. Seamen volunteered to serve in the fleet in droves, provoking one observer to exclaim that 'never so great a cheerfulness [was] known in the seamen to

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enter into that service as now; everyone freely offering themselves to it & pressing who shall get in first.’⁶

Ever the optimist, which is weird considering how wholly against the war with the Dutch he initially was, if we remember back a few episodes, the Earl of Arlington noted that ‘It cannot be denied, but the world is now generally convinced that the provocations his Majesty hath exposed in his declaration to have received from the Dutch do sufficiently justify the war he is making upon them.’⁷ Furthermore, did the Venetian Secretary in London note on the outbreak of war that:

War against Holland was proclaimed yesterday at all the usual places in London...[there] were crowds of people who being aware of the causes, through the declaration reported, approved of the step, blessing his Majesty with one accord and willingly sacrificing all commercial considerations for the sake of the honour and glory of the country.⁸

If the war was initially exciting or enticing enough to be popular, this view didn’t last. For a variety of reasons, the war soon dipped and then plummeted in popularity, as Pincus explained:

Yet even as news reached England of the spectacular early successes of the allied forces in the very first campaign, English popular opinion turned against the war. Political moderates, those who had been willing to accept the government’s argument that the Dutch Republic represented a more immediate and dangerous threat than the French monarchy, reversed their assessment.⁹

The mood was such that by January 1673, a month before Charles was due to ask for more money to fight the Dutch with, a memorandum was circulating amongst MPs, which stated that ‘...all the mischiefs we have felt or may hereafter fear from the Hollanders, though ten times greater than what are falsely pretended, cannot possibly be of half that dangerous consequence to us, as the advantages now given to the growth of French power, by this pernicious league’, and added that these advantages had enabled Louis to ‘overcome the

⁶ Steven C. A. Pincus, ‘From Butterboxes to Wooden Shoes: The Shift in English Popular Sentiment from Anti-Dutch to Anti-French in the 1670s’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), pp. 333-361; referenced in this case is p. 343.

⁷ Arlington to Henry Coventry, 29 March 1672, Coventry MSS LXV, fo. Issr. The letter also emphasizes the enthusiastic support for the war declared to implore divine support in the war. For the declaration itself see: *His Majesties declaration against the States General of the United Provinces of the Low-Countries* (London, 1672). See also John Trevor to Henry Coventry, 2 April 1672, Coventry MSS LXV, fo. I59v.

⁸ ‘Alberti to Doge and senate’, 29 March/8 April 1672, CSPV, p. 195. See also ‘Alberti to Doge and senate’, 3/ I 3 Nov. 1671 CSPV, p. 119.

⁹ Pincus, p. 344.

greatest difficulty in his way to that universal monarchy to which he has so long aspired.¹⁰ By August 1673, one MP noted that ‘The dissatisfaction is so great at this conjunction with the French that the general speech in the City and that amongst the soberest and chiefest persons is that unless this alliance with France be broken the nation will be ruined!’¹¹ Yet, a whole year before, while the DR seemed at breaking point in July 1672, a correspondent for the *Whitby* noted that ‘Our country talk is of no war but, if any, with France.’¹² Some claimed that a latent sympathy for the Dutch existed in Britain, as one MP noted how ‘we are so Dutchified here that a Dutch man cannot be more dejected than our people are generally for the sad condition we understand the Hollander to be in.’¹³

How could Charles possibly hope to stem this anti-French and apparently pro-Dutch tide, and inspire his people to fight an increasingly unpopular war? Charles believed that by investing in the pamphlet war, the people would be informed of his version of the ‘truth’. Thus we see an emergence of a number of English and Dutch pamphlets from autumn 1672 to the following year, with the English editions claiming that Charles was waging war only for the sake of his nephew and to bring down the regents, a further example of this lie being parroted, and the Dutch pamphlets emphasising the actual events of the war, dismantling the English arguments and from early 1673, talking up the Dutch will to resist the French. In short, what Charles hoped would result in a propaganda boost turned out to be a PR disaster for his reign. Once the de Witts were murdered, it became increasingly hard for Charles’ faction to argue that they were only fighting for William’s rightful offices, especially when that same William so blatantly refuse to consider the offer of being an English vassal. We will return to the issue of pamphlets in the future, particularly as the very authors themselves begin to change their tune, and find it harder and harder to put forward a sound reasoning for a war with the now Orangist Netherlands, led by the nephew of the kind.

Thus when Charles did meet with his MPs in a stormy session over spring 1673, he did so in the backdrop of a failing PR campaign, a rising feeling of Francophobia, and an increasing identification with both the Prince of Orange and the Dutch Republic itself as the necessary bulwark against the designs of the warmongering French. The *London Gazette* reported on 14th February 1673 that:

¹⁰ Sir John Hobart to Mr John Hobart, 1 Nov. 1673, Bodleian Library, Tanner MSS 42, fo. 56. Cited in Pincus, pp. 344-345.

¹¹ Cited in Pincus, p. 345.

¹² Cited in *Ibid.*

¹³ Cited in *Ibid.*

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Here is great hopes the Parliament of England will express a dissatisfaction at this war, and be unwilling to assist the King with supplies necessary to carry it on. But if these hopes should be dashed, the spirits of this people would altogether fail them, who stick not openly to declare, they promise themselves great matters from the Parliament on their behalf, the great ones here endeavour to persuade the people, that the Parliament of England will blame the King for joining with France against them, and that they will not supply him with money to go through with it.¹⁴

That Parliament did approve more funds for Charles' war is surprising, but these approvals came only reluctantly, and only in return for Charles' pledge to cancel the Declaration of Indulgences, which MPs believed was leaving their country open to religious intrigues from the French, and they would only grant a paltry £70k a month for 18 months, hardly enough to sustain Britain's war effort for long. C. R. Boxer noted at the same time that the resident MPs likely only approved this minimum amount at all because they envisioned a repeated of the Dutch attack up the Medway if their navy could not be supplied or sent out to sea. £70k a month was barely enough to maintain a fleet for the year, but with such a low sum there could be virtually no independent British actions in the war, which Charles must have known meant increased inaction and dallying in Britain, which in turn would lead to increased dissatisfaction with the war.¹⁵ With much exasperation did Charles note in mid-March, in response to the heavy demands of the MPs in return for the granting of war funds:

What you then voted unanimously did both give life to my affairs at home, and dishearten my enemies abroad: but the seeming delay it hath met withal since, hath made them take new courage, and they are now preparing for this next summer a greater Fleet (as they say) than ever they had yet. So that if the supply is not very speedily dispatched, it will be altogether ineffectual, and the safety, honour, and interest of England must of necessity be exposed. Pray lay this to heart, and let not the fears and jealousies of some, draw an inevitable ruin on us all.¹⁶

Boxer perceptively notes that the desperation palpable in Charles' pleas, coupled with the reports in the London Gazette of the weighty sacrifices agreed to by the MPs, didn't exactly gel with that paper's consistent reports that the Dutch were buckling, that the war was unpopular in the Netherlands, and that victory was merely weeks away. In other words, if the Dutch were so nearly beaten, why did the King require so much resources to keep the war going?

¹⁴ Cited in Boxer, p. 87.

¹⁵ Boxer, pp. 86-88.

¹⁶ Cited in Boxer, pp. 87-88.

Such a contradiction was not lost on the Dutch pamphlets, who had remained far more objective in their coverage of the war. Above all though, what readers of the British pamphlets would have understood, as did Charles, was the fact that they never signed up for a long war, or a Europe-wide war. The war was barely sustainable with only the Dutch, but so long as other powers didn't declare against the French, and make Louis appear even more like the villain of the story, Charles may have hoped that it could be brought to at least a semi-successful conclusion. Therefore, when it became clear that the recent French defeat of the unofficial allied attempts to forestall Louis' war effort had put steel into these same powers, rather than scared them off, Charles must have known that he was in trouble. In August 1673, the Emperor and Spain signed an alliance with one another, and separate alliances with the Dutch. Both the Spanish and Dutch in their agreement committed to reduce France to its 1659 borders; while Charles of Lorraine, whom Louis had evicted from his domains in 1670, also joined the grouping. By the middle of October, Spain and France were at war, and the FW then resumed Brandenburg's commitment to the Dutch, pledging his state back into the allied camp by the end of that month. Thus, by late 1673, it seemed that the gamble had failed. Charles II, for all his ambitions, wasn't merely a participant in a minor European war; he was now a stakeholder in the first of Louis' major wars, and the only thing he wanted, was out.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lynn, pp. 121-122.