

Welcome back to the war! So in the last episode, we saw how the tables seemed to be turning. By the middle of 1673, it was clear that the war was no longer a Franco-Dutch one alone, and that other powers were beginning to itch about the prospect of leaving the Anglo-French alliance to its own devices. In the case of the coalition composed largely of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs and Brandenburg, as well as some minor German princes, the war which the Dutch had somehow endured had taken on a new face. It was not the overwhelming deluge of French soldiers into the Netherlands, it was a tale of stubborn, at times apparently futile, resistance to the invader. This resistance had paid off; by the autumn of 1672, the French offensive had stagnated, and the bulk of Louis' forces had been redirected to the Rhine to guard against the curiously undeclared war which seemed to be bubbling to the surface, as the HR Emperor scrambled his support base, all the while keeping an eye on the Ottomans to the East. Marshal Turenne was ordered to sit tight for much of the rest of 1672, which as we saw infuriated him and handed William of Orange a chance to sally force and counterattack.

Though these campaigns along the River Meuse were unsuccessful in the late autumn of that year, they did demonstrate that the Dutch were by no means paralysed with the French presence, and that the Dutch were more determined than ever, having apparently sorted affairs out at home – brutally, I might add – to take the fight to the enemy. This put steel into the forces cautiously sent to prevent a total French takeover of their lands, and it made Louis XIV of France appear somewhat foolish, since it was clear by early 1673 that he had fundamentally underestimated both the Dutch determination to resist, and the tenacity of Prince William, whom the Dutch now pinned their fortunes upon. As the year wore on both sides claimed their share of successes; Turenne was able to pursue FW of Brandenburg back home and force him out of the war, yet his rampant march across German lands provided the final straw for many of its rulers. By the end of the summer, as we saw last time, the suggestive coalition had formalised their resolve against the Sun King, and it is from this tumultuous point in the conflict that we will now resume our narrative, as I take you to late summer 1673...

For war you need three things: 1. Money. 2. Money. 3. Money. Raimondo Montecucoli.

The frustrations and shortcomings of the Dutch campaign seem to have pushed Louis into a kind of corner, whereby direct action against a particular stronghold seemed like a better

alternative to the drudgery of pursuing what little opportunities for glory remained in the Netherlands. This is generally the explanation historians use when explaining the massive investment made by the French in the besieging of the greatest of Dutch fortresses, Maastricht, in mid-June 1673. Maastricht for over a year had withheld French attempts to seize it, and largely because it was seen as such an impregnable nut, Louis had skirted around it altogether in the opening phases of the invasion of the Netherlands, over a year before. Where once Louis had said on Maastricht:

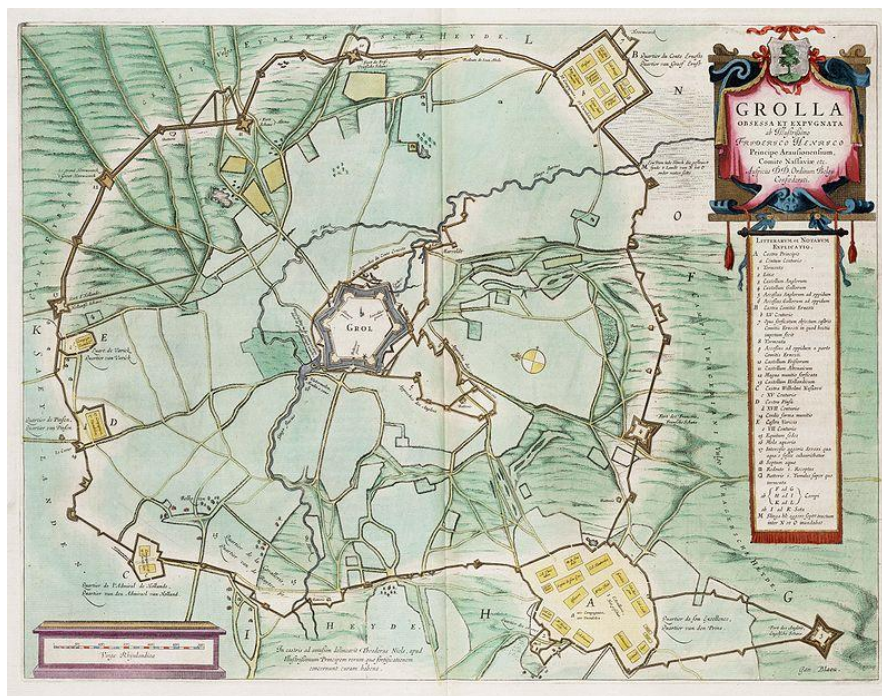
It has appeared to me so important for the reputation of my armies only to begin my campaign by some brilliant feat, that I have not considered an attack on Maastricht insufficient for the purpose...I have considered it more in accordance with my purpose and better calculated to enhance my prestige to attack simultaneously four places on the Rhine...I do not know the strength of the garrisons of these places, but we will do our best.¹

Such statements were made at the onset of the invasion, when the enemy seemed brittle and the prospects for glory unlimited, during the months of May and June 1672. Those forts Louis mentioned were actually protecting the softer underbelly of the Republic, and after capturing them and crossing the lesser Rhine Louis would then be treated to a spectacle of complete and utter military supremacy for the remainder of the season, if not the year. Indeed, Louis had at least been correct about one thing – bypassing Maastricht massively torpedoed Dutch hopes to resist as much as it added to the apparent force of the invasion, not to mention the panic within the republic. However, by the time a year had passed, the front had mostly stagnated. Holland was still mostly flooded, and enemies had emerged to challenge the French concentration across the Rhine as well as in the Spanish Netherlands. In such a situation, the profoundly well built and structured fortress of Maastricht, with its garrison of 6,000 under a confident commander assured of his importance to his master's war effort, had become a nuisance verging on a threat.

Positioned as it was along the River Meuse, which French troops regularly followed to return to the front, Maastricht had become something of a hazard thanks to the resolute ambition and tenacity of its commander and the tendency of the French to treat it as a defeated front. While technically speaking, Maastricht by June 1673 was in enemy territory, the Dutch never gave it up, recognising its importance or at the very least its power in delaying the enemy. Harboured as it did numerous Dutch soldiers, the fortress had also greatly aided William in his previous sojourn along the Meuse, when he wrecked French offensive plans and handed

¹ Cited in Faulkner, p. 74.

quite an embarrassment to Louis. Though William hadn't captured anything and his offensive was technically a failure, the Prince knew he was playing a long game, and that such offensives were all important if the Republic was to outlast France. In such a game, the little boosts which such an offensive as his granted both his own countrymen and the potential allies of the Republic were invaluable, as Louis well appreciated. Neither Louis nor his commanders could afford to be distracted or embarrassed again; before the war widened, Maastricht would have to be taken.



An example of lines of Circumvallation – lines which surround the enemy fortress, here pictured in use at the 1627 Siege of Groenlo where Dutch troops laid siege to a Spanish fortress. Lines of Circumvallation are the most basic of methods used to hem in the enemy and protect the besieger. It is generally only, but not always, when a besieging army feels threatened by potential allies of the besieged city, that the Lines of Contravallation are built – these are more useful for the besiegers to hide behind in case reinforcements arrive.

Thus, it wasn't just because he searched for a consolation prize that Louis' forces assembled before Maastricht in mid-June. Employing armies of peasants, who were required to dig massive sprawling lines circumvallation and contravallation. Just so we're all on the same page, this was a standard tactic of the besieger during the 17th century, and the Spanish and Dutch had used it endlessly during their 80 years' war. Lines of Circumvallation were essentially the first line of the siege; these were built to box the enemy in, and signalled that he was trapped. They provided something for the besiegers to hide behind, in case the garrison launched sorties, and they also meant that the besieger could keep an eye on his

enemy without worrying about getting shot at. The Lines of Contravallation on the other hand were like an additional line of defence, and were built as a second row of trenches behind the first lines. These served to defend the besiegers against any potential allies of the besieged coming to attack them, and at times represented a distinct fortress for the besieger in of themselves, depending how long the siege lasted. The most famous example of these two lines being put into use was arguable Julius Cesar's campaigns in Gaul, where he besieged Alesia and was then made aware of Gallic reinforcements, so he built a wall around his own besieging fortresses.



An artist's impression of Alesia once Cesar was finished reinforcing it

This bit of context actually tells us a lot about what Vauban was doing at Maastricht when the works began in June 1673. The lines of contravallation were built to protect French forces engaging in the siege, because Vauban fully expected, as did the Dutch garrison, that some relief force would have to be sent to save them and the symbolic Dutch fortress. Thus, the French got their peasant workers to build this double line to protect their rear, as they didn't want to be caught out. Such efforts took an incredible amount of time and effort, particularly as the latest tactic, popularised by the Ottomans in fact, was to dig the lines in a zig zag formation, mainly so that there would be more places to hide from the besieged, but also so that no cannon or shot could be fired down the length of them during a siege.

I know this podcast has never been about campaigning or sieges or armies or equipment, and that's not about to change, but because so many fortresses change hands over the next few years, and because siege engineering was a large part of the French stratagem during these years, I feel it is worth outlining a super brief description of how the work was carried out, if

nothing else so that you appreciate how difficult it was for the common soldier to capture a well defended structure, and how grim and grinding the actual process was, especially if both sides were well matched. It should be added though, that by and large the attackers normally won the day, and that the garrison generally surrendered so that it could be allowed out with flags waving rather than holding on to the bitter end. Military technology had so outpaced the ability of the defenders to resist, that a well-provisioned, well-prepared and determined besieger generally could expect to win without too much losses once he breached the walls. It was extremely rare for a besieged army to fight to the end, and affairs rarely reached the point even that the army retreated into the better defended citadel. In an era when many fortresses existed to be defended, both besieger and besieged preferred to fight another day, and thus as long as one made a show of resisting, he could expect to not be chastised by his master for surrendering.²

Incidentally, the biggest challenge for Vauban at Maastricht seemed to be reigning in his soldiers, so that they didn't needlessly sacrifice themselves through their impatience with his slow, steady, but tried and tested tactics. It shouldn't surprise us to learn that Frenchmen were eager to acquire some glory for themselves, as their sovereign had so regularly taught them the sanctity of the pursuit of glory, and they were after all in this very place because of his lusting after it. Vauban commented on the dangers of the siege, saying:

I know of nothing more difficult to surmount than the outer edge of the ditches – the counterscarp. Whether you take it at the first attempt or not, the effort is certain to entail heavy losses, especially if you fail, which happens all too often...It is always the case that in the siege of a fortress that puts up a resistance you lose three times as many people in taking the counterscarp as you do from then until the final reduction of the place. The loss is always a result of excessive haste, at the cost of our best troops, who perish miserably on such occasions.³

The tactic for taking a fortress was not much more refined than attacking out from the trenches, engaging with the garrison if they sent men out to defend, or undermining the walls in some fashion if the coast was clear. Either way, it involved stepping into the 17th century version of no man's land – what Vauban called the counterscarp, but which we could essentially term the open ground in between the besieger's lines of circumvallation and the settlement's walls. Here an attacker was at the mercy of the defender's skill, tenacity and experience, and the garrison of Maastricht possessed all these in spades. Numerous casualties

² Such facts are examined well by Faulkner, pp. 21-45.

³ Cited in Faulkner, p. 80.

were taken on by the French, who possessed an army over 40k strong by the time the attacks against Maastricht began. Amongst these soldiers were non-French men of service as well; these included Germans, but also Englishmen loaned by Charles for a hefty price to his cousin. Within the ranks, it may interest you to learn, was one John Churchill, later to become the Duke of Marlborough and the bugbear of the French during the other two great wars of Louis' reign, but in the first one he fought on Louis' side. Who was he regularly alongside during this siege? None other than a certain Claude-Louis-Hector de Villars, at this stage a cavalryman seeking his fortune like so many others. History buffs will recognise Villars as the virtual saviour of France during the twilight years of the WSS, but they should also know him as the marshal charged with providing a desperate defence to Marlborough in the battle of Malplaquet in 1709. So yes, these future enemies on the field, so iconic in their right, were during this time fighting side by side in the early stages of their respective careers. Just one more reason I find this era so freakin' fascinating!

Despite its great position and hearty garrison, William knew full well that he couldn't afford to relieve Maastricht with the limited resources at his disposal. In his mind, Maastricht was meant to provide a foil to Louis' armies or at the very least a distraction, and it was serving its latter purpose well. If this seems cold and calculating on the part of William, we should remember that in choosing not to relieve Maastricht he was supported and urged in this direction by his allies. There was no suggestion that these men were being 'abandoned'; under no circumstances would the garrison of Maastricht be cut down or imprisoned, instead they were expected to be let walk free into the next awaiting Dutch fortress or town, whereupon their service would be noted and they would be placed back into the army's employ once more. So it was that on 1st July the commander of Maastricht surrendered, and was permitted, as expected, to march out of the fortress with his comrades, flags waving and trumpets playing. The futility of this gesture, when it was well appreciated that these soldiers would soon be fighting against the French again, was not lost on the French. Yet, as we said, this was an era and above all a region in Europe, where possession of fortresses was arguably more important than the possession of large armies in the field. This of course contradicts what we also know about the likelihood of success a besieging army enjoyed when attacking such a fortress, but this was outweighed by the ability of the defender to call upon reinforcements, which, it was believed, was easier to do when one commands a great deal of *other* fortresses.

Thus the Dutch lost Maastricht and Louis could claim a grand victory, thereafter hyping it up as much as possible in an effort to perhaps distract his people from the general futility of capturing such a place. Ever since the campaign had bogged down, Louis had been mindful that France needed a triumph it could point to in order to justify the grand claims to military glory which its king so clamoured after. He would have been far happier to have been dining in The Hague by this point with his cousin, as the original war plans had allowed for. However, Maastricht, as far as consolation prizes go, was still an impressive feat of arms, and one which would surely bolster his allies and concern the growing band of enemies which threatened to move against him.

But if Louis supposed that by capturing Maastricht he would pre-empt the growth of an anti-French coalition, he would have been mightily disappointed. William took the loss mostly in his stride, accepting from the moment it had been avoided that Maastricht would likely become a casualty of the Dutch resistance, but hoping that such a sacrifice would bring about greater rewards, and he was right. Unfazed by the Dutch loss, Madrid and Vienna formalised their alliance and commitments to one another in August 1673 under an offensive and defensive alliance, while both the HR Emperor and the governor of the Spanish Netherlands promised immediate aid. Charles of Lorraine then threw his lot in, an act which roused his people, under the French yolk since their duke's ejection by Louis in 1671, while even the recently defeated Elector of Brandenburg seemed itchy to re-enter the war.

Curiously, in spite of their declarations to one another, the coalition members had yet to make the declarations which mattered – against France. Count Monterey, the governor in the SN, had already spent many months bolstering his defences, and actually lending the Dutch some soldiers as per a defensive pact signed in spring of 1672. Leopold I was for his part, stuck between fearing an Ottoman advance and anticipating the death of Carlos II of Spain, both of which were events that required French cooperation if the Habsburg interest was not to be overwhelmed. One of the incredible facts of the era would prove to be that these two events – an Ottoman invasion greater than any other before it, and the death of Carlos II – would, in time, come. However, these events would occur not simultaneously or currently, but in succession, and their occurrence would not complicate a war, but in both cases define them. Little did Leopold know what the future held, and for the moment his pro and anti-French advisors continued to squabble over the details of their Spanish agreements, and whether the veteran Imperial commander, Raimondo Montecuccoli, was in fact permitted to campaign against him.

These squabbles were mostly solved thanks to the fact that, after Marshal Turenne's success in driving the elector of Brandenburg out of the war, Montecuccoli was put forward as the Imperial representative of the Austrian Habsburg war effort, and left with an army of 25k while the anti-French camp were in the ascendency in Leopold's court, throughout early summer. Montecuccoli's task was to link up with William, but to achieve this he would have to first bypass the army under Turenne's command. John A Lynn, always reliable for simplifying the nitty gritty of military details, summarised the campaigning season of 1673 thus:

From August through November, Turenne and Montecuccoli manoeuvred against one another in a game of march and counter-march eventually won by Montecuccoli. His forces were better supplied, while the French, who lacked bread, resorted to pillage. Montecuccoli finally joined William at Bonn, where both armies besieged the city, and the French garrison capitulated on 12th November. Turenne put his troops into winter quarters in Alsace and Germany.⁴



The celebrated Italian/Imperial General, Raimondo Montecuccoli

It was in the midst of his campaigning that Vienna seemed to have come down on the side of the anti-French camp. With Leopold concerned at his eastern flank, but now more determined to make the Imperial presence felt along the Rhine and for the sake of Madrid, which had

⁴ Lynn, p. 121.

risked it all in spite of the threat French arms posed. With the war declared, there could be no going back. From the end of September 1673, France was officially at war with both branches of the Habsburg family. This meant two critical things – that the Dutch had outlasted the most trying portion of the war, and that the war would now take on a radically different shape. French arms could point to 1673 as a year of triumph, thanks to the seizure of Maastricht, but the fact remained that most of Europe had turned against France, the campaign against the Dutch was quietly being abandoned and the different fronts along the Rhine, in the SN and along the Pyrenees were opening up. As the first full year of the war came to an end, Louis XIV may have wondered if it had all been worth it; a conflict launched for such an apparently petulant reason – to acquire glory, had ignited most of the continent against his kingdom, and worse news was emerging with his sole ally across the Channel...



The Battle of the Texel on 21st August 1673 was a bloody affair, with the only casualties being in men, rather than ships. Yet its outcome ensured Dutch security and doomed the Anglo-French alliance.

Charles II was in dire straits by the time it was learned that both Vienna and Madrid had elected to make an alliance with one another and separately with the Dutch, to be aimed wholly against France. There was much pressure to treat with this coalition in the face of such opposition, as the last thing Charles wanted or needed was a long war against continental powers with little chance of gain. His gamble for glory, much like Louis' had evidently failed by the autumn of 1673, but it hadn't been for want of trying. As was the English custom, the main thrust of its offensive against the Dutch came at sea, when it fought and lost the battle of the Texel on 21st August 1673. On paper, the results tell little tales, aside from the curious fact that two thirds of the 3k casualties were Anglo-French, and that not a single ship was lost on either side.

The real story though, in the Dutch mind, was that attempts to prepare the way for a landing of British soldiers had been repelled, and on top of this, an injection of funds through the safe

arrival of a much needed Spice Fleet immediately after the battle massively boosted both the morale and the coffers of the Netherlands. Admiral de Ruyter had initially been hesitant to risk his force, outnumbered and outclassed as he was by larger Anglo-French vessels. However, William – who was also Admiral-General of the DR – recognised the importance of the aforementioned Spice Fleet, and so de Ruyter, along with Cornelius Tromp as his second, were encouraged to be more aggressive. Crucially for the course of the battle, and arguably the course of the war, de Ruyter believed that he could separate the two allied squadrons, and in this he was correct. Unbeknownst to the British admiral on the scene, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Louis had given orders to the French admiral not to overtly risk his fleet, and thus when the French became separated through the initial Dutch attack, they made little effort to resume the fight. That at least was how the English later saw and reported the day's events, but the fact that the Dutch had the weather gauge also helped their cause. With the French out, it turned into a familiar scene of the two naval rivals pulverising one another until, with one of the English seconds dead, the joint fleet withdrew, handing a tactical victory to the Dutch, and sowing seeds of bitter anti-French opinion amongst both the sailors, the people and soon, the politicians.

The last thing Charles could afford was for the country to become even more anti-French, but the pre-existing Francophobia of the British didn't help matters. This trend only worsened Britain's prospects, as CR Boxer noted:

The failure of the naval campaign in the summer of 1673 finally crystallized the disillusionment of the great majority of English-men of all parties with the war. Rightly or wrongly, the blame for this failure was placed on the French squadron, which was alleged to have left the English in the lurch by deliberately ignoring Prince Rupert's signals at the battle of the Texel. "Who will make the English love the French?" asked Pope Pius II despairingly, when vainly trying to unite Western Christendom against the Turks after the fall of Constantinople; and the same thought must often have occurred to Charles II in the autumn of 1673. Anti-French feeling, always latent among the xenophobic Anglo-Saxons, became quite hysterical at this period, reinforced as it was by a pathological dread of Popery, which was sharpened in its turn by the realization that the Duke of York was a Roman Catholic.⁵

By now Charles had worn out the patience of his subjects – while they had initially looked on the war as an opportunity for booty, and some had valued an opportunity for revenge, this additional failure, coupled with the evident lack of return that the continuing war gave, sapped morale to its lowest point. I particularly liked the example of the courtier Edward

⁵ Boxer, p. 89.

Verney, who began the war holding the traditionally patriotic views on the situation, but through a number of events, including the initial Dutch defeats and incredible French advance, became steadily more anti-French. His conversion was examined by the historian Steven Pincus in his article ‘the Shift in English popular sentiment from anti-Dutch to anti-French in the 1670s’, wherein he writes that Mr Verney:

He now had nothing but praise for the Dutch, comparing them to the courageous Romans facing Hannibal at their gates. By contrast, he hoped that ‘the one time Grand Monarch, so glorious, so opulent, so magnificent, so powerful, so formidable, would become a poor little ridiculous gnat.’ Nevertheless Verney was well aware of the reality of French power. For this reason, he thought that ‘it was the interest of all Christendom to chase the French from the Low Countries’. At home, Edmund explained to his father, ‘all our great danger of losing’ our ‘property, liberty, privileges and laws’ stemmed from Louis XIV’s political support. By aiding the French king against the Dutch, he concluded, the English ‘gained neither honour, nor profit, nor security, but ran the risk of being eaten by him last, which was the ordinary reward of crazy men.’⁶

Increasingly more statesmen came to see the war as a distraction from the true business which warranted Britain’s attention – if anything, war should come against France, not the Dutch. So it was that Pincus concluded:

Although different people perceived the danger from France at different times, and expressed their concerns with varying degrees of sophistication, the events of the third Anglo-Dutch War convinced most moderates that the most serious aspirant to the universal monarchy and the greatest threat to English political culture, was Louis XIV. People were not disillusioned with the war because it was a military disaster; they felt rather that it was manifestly contrary to England’s interest. The English people not only called for the end of an economically disruptive war, but also for a diplomatic and ideological realignment.⁷

After having leapt into the war, following years of treacherous diplomacy, bare faced lies to his peers and allies and a heavy amount of ambitious dreaming, Charles II was now coming around to the fact that the entire venture, and all that it had cost him, had been an abject failure. With war clouds threatening to turn what had once seemed like such an attractive campaign into a full-blown European war, it remained to be seen how the gambling man in Charles II would play his cards. Would he buckle under pressure, or find the trump card to rally his nation against that of nephew. Would, indeed, his people tolerate him if the war continued? All of these questions were turning in the mind of Charles II, as the first full year of war ended, and 1673 became 1674.

⁶ Steven A Pincus, p. 349.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 351.