

Wellington's Dutch Allies 1815



Ronald Pawly • Illustrated by Patrice Courcelle

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Series editor Martin Windrow

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1813: INDEPENDENCE REGAINED

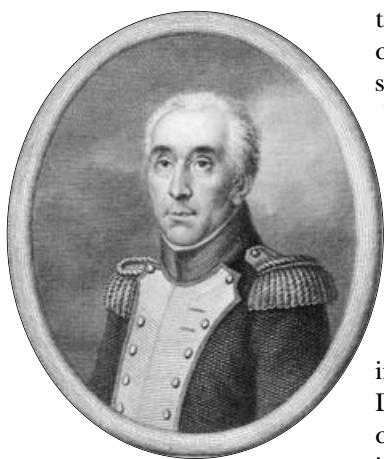
UNTIL 1568 THE NETHERLANDS were ruled by Spain. Between 1568 and 1648 the seven northern provinces fought for their freedom, and finally achieved independence as the republic of the United Provinces, under the constitutional leadership of the House of Orange. The southern part remained under Spanish rule and in 1713 would become, for dynastic reasons, a possession of the Austrian imperium.

The United Provinces – roughly, modern Holland – was a proud and thriving independent state for some 200 years; but in 1794–95 it was conquered by French Republican armies (the same fate befalling the southern Austrian provinces). The *Stadhouder* or sovereign, Prince William V of Orange, was driven into exile in England. Under French domination Holland survived, until 1806, under the name of the Batavian Republic. In that year Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother was 'called to the throne by the Dutch people' – in other words, installed on a newly invented throne by French bayonets, as the country became a vassal state of France. However, this member of the Bonaparte clan displayed an unexpected determination to govern as an independent sovereign, and showed some sympathy for the true interests of his new subjects. This earned him popularity among the Dutch people, and the fury of his brother. In 1810 Napoleon annexed his country as part of France, and King Louis (to the Dutch, Lodewijk) fled into exile in his turn. Most former Dutch troops were incorporated into the French army; and for the first time in their history, the Dutch felt the burden of mass military conscription. While their young men left their bones in Spain and Russia as cannon-fodder for Napoleon, his 'Continental System' of maritime blockade ruined Dutch commerce.

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With the defeat of the French at Leipzig in October 1813, French withdrawal unexpectedly turned into an almost uninterrupted retreat towards the borders of France, and Germany was evacuated apart from some fortified cities. Expressions of national fervour broke out in several countries occupied or dominated by France: the torch was lit by Prussia, but Holland was not far behind.

Even before the Dutch uprising, the widow of the last Stadhouder (William V had died in exile), who was the sister of the King of Prussia – the Dowager-Princess Frederika Sophie Wilhelmina – asked her brother for permission to create a Dutch 'Legion of Orange' (Oranje Legioen) in the hope of liberating Holland and restoring the dynasty. On 28 October 1813 the king gave his approval – but not his financial support. The princess borrowed money against her houses, even her furniture, to fund her cause. The Legion's garrison was to be at



Colonel Gysbert C.R.R. van Brien (1771–1821). Created colonel of Amsterdam's Guard of Honour by King Lodewijk (Louis), he commanded the National Guard in 1813. During the popular uproar which accompanied the French withdrawal from the city Van Brien, at the head of the National Guard, paraded through the streets to show that there was still a force in being to keep the peace, while leaving the citizens free to celebrate their liberation. Later, King William I of the Netherlands created Van Brien a Commander in the Military Order of William for his sensible handling of the uprising. (Stichting Iconografisch Bureau, The Hague)

Schwedt-am-Oder and a recruiting office was established in Berlin; and the princess eventually found a commander in Lt.Col. J.V. Baron de Constant Rebecque.

Recruitment among Dutch prisoners of war captured by the Allies was slow; but when cities such as Dresden, Danzig, Torgau and Wittenberg fell into Allied hands the situation improved, and particularly after the fall of Stettin, on 30 November 1813. Part of the captured French garrison was the 3e Bataillon, 123e Régiment de Ligne, a Dutch-manned unit. The Legion's 1st Bn – organised on 6 December 1813 – was soon at full strength, mustering some 1,080 men in ten companies, with enough officers left over to organise two more battalions and an artillery company. All three took part in the liberation of Holland, and fought at Gorinchem.

Early in November 1813 the first Cossacks arrived in Holland over the north German border – the forerunners of a largely Russian and Prussian Allied 'Army of the North', commanded by Crown Prince Bernadotte of Sweden. Short of troops, the French Gen. Molitor moved his headquarters from Amsterdam to Utrecht on 14 November. Thus began a chain of events which soon accelerated with bewildering speed. The next day, when the citizens of Amsterdam heard this news, rebellion broke out; patriots distributed orange cockades and ribbons, and the hated French Customs office was burned down. On the 16th the Duke of Plaisance, the French governor-general, left Amsterdam for the more secure city of Antwerp, giving supreme command of the troops in Holland to Gen. Molitor. In this power vacuum, Col. G.C.R.R.van Bienen van de Groote Lindt, commander of the National Guard of Amsterdam, set up an interim government.

(The National Guard was a French creation extended into the country when Holland was annexed into France's departmental system in 1810, but its manpower was Dutch. It consisted of three levels or *bans*: the first, of men between 20 and 26 years of age, was an active force organised as 88 *cohortes*, each of six fusilier companies, an artillery company and a depot company – every six 'cohorts' formed a brigade. The second *ban* gathered men between 27 and 40, and the third, between 41 and 60 years.)

In The Hague, too, patriotic citizens looked for leaders. Count Leopold van Limburg Styrum accepted the function of governor of the city in the name of the hereditary Prince of Orange. This marked the beginning of a general uprising against French power. However, the Provisional Government – led by Van Hogendorp, Van Limburg Styrum and Van der Duyn van Maasdam – had at their disposal only a handful of armed men: 300 National Guards commanded by Col. J.G.van Oldenbarneveldt; 50 civilians armed with hunting weapons; 50 half-pay officers; 50 veterans of the former Dutch Guard; 400 volunteers known as the 'Friends of the Allies'; 20 young

Detail from J.W.Pieneman's painting of G.K.van Hogendorp accepting leadership of the Provisional Government in the name of the prince-sovereign on 20 November 1813. This shows officers and men of the National Guard still in their French uniforms, but with the imperial eagle emblem broken off the top of their shako plates – see top left. The National Guard were almost the only properly trained and equipped troops at the disposal of the Provisional Government; they would, of necessity, retain their old uniforms for lack of funds to have any new ones made. (Stichting Iconografisch Bureau, The Hague)



mounted civilians, and some volunteers armed with pikes. From these modest beginnings the rebellious cities of The Hague and Amsterdam, followed by Rotterdam and Geertruidenberg, would soon raise seven infantry battalions.

Prussian troops entered Holland on 19 November. At The Hague, the 'Orange-Prussia Battalion' would soon be created from soldiers of the French garrison's 4e Régiment Étrangère – a unit raised from Prussian former prisoners of war. Formally dismissed from French service on 25 November, on 27 December they would be organised into the new ten-company unit. Those who only wanted to serve until the French were expelled formed two Oranje-Jäger companies.

On 20 November the National Guard of The Hague was re-baptised as the Oranje-Garde (increased to six companies on 1 December). On 21 November two 'corps' were created at The Hague. That led by Gen. J.D. Baron Sweerts de Landas (300 men from the Orange-Prussia Bn, 40 mounted volunteers and two 8-pounder guns) kept watch in the direction of Gorinchem. The second, led by Gen. C.F. de Jonge (300 former National Guardsmen – 'Old Guards' – under command of Col. J.E. van Doorn, 32 mounted volunteers and two 8-pdrs), guarded the approaches from Utrecht. Former Lt. Col. P.J. Timmerman was authorised to raise a unit of cavalry. In Rotterdam, some days later, Col. J.E. Phaff was appointed commander of a volunteer infantry regiment which for the time being existed only on paper; later it would fight at Breda and Naarden.

The Provisional Government had accepted power on behalf of the Prince of Orange, but they were not in contact with him; from 19 November they sent messengers to England and Germany to establish liaison. In the meantime they proclaimed a general call to arms on 22 November. In this confused situation of local insurrections groping towards a co-ordinated national effort, the first Cossacks arrived in Amsterdam on 24 November, the same day that Maj. Gen. C.R.T. Baron Kraijenhoff became governor of the city.

On the 22nd the city of Leiden had recognised the Provisional Government. To strengthen their position, on the 23rd some 250 men led by Gen. de Jonge's and Col. Tullinh's National Guard of The Hague marched from Leiden and captured nearby Woerden without much difficulty. General Molitor, surprised by this daring expedition, reacted on the 24th by sending some 1,600 French troops, who drove the patriots out of Woerden after a couple of hours' skirmishing and re-entered the town, killing 26 citizens and wounding several others.

Nearby towns that had supported the new government became worried for their safety. It was high time for reinforcement from the Allies to boost morale; and help was to arrive from an unexpected quarter. On 26 November an English merchant, one Charles Grant, arrived in the neighbourhood of The Hague. He was immediately brought to Van Hogendorp, the representative of the Provisional Government, who exclaimed, 'My God! If I only had one British uniform to show, then all the French garrisons would crawl back into their barracks!' They did find one – and Mr Grant, clad in it, walked around The Hague radiating confidence and spreading the word that help was on the way.



General Cornelis R.T. Kraijenhoff (1758–1840). A doctor of philosophy and medicine, he is represented here as a general under King Lodewijk (Louis Bonaparte), wearing French-style uniform with a black cockade, the Commander's cross of the Order of the Union, and the aiguillettes of an ADC to the king. A *général de brigade* under the Empire, he was contacted by the new Provisional Government and resigned from French service in November 1813. As military governor of Amsterdam he created several battalions, and led the siege of Naarden. Promoted lieutenant-general, he was appointed Inspector-General of Fortifications & Engineers, Sappers & Miners, and thus was not present at Quatre-Bras or Waterloo. (Stichting Iconografisch Bureau, The Hague)