

THE CAMPAIGN IN HOLLAND, 1799

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The Campaign in Holland, 1799 by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

**THE CAMPAIGN
IN HOLLAND, 1799**

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CAMPAIGN IN HOLLAND,
1799.

BY A SUBALTERN.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE object of the following pages is to give a fair and impartial account of the Duke of York's Campaign in Holland, in the year 1799. The naval successes obtained on the occasion of the Expedition to the Texel have been fully described in the different Naval Histories; but I believe that there is no military history which gives a description of the subsequent military operations, in such detail as to be at all commensurate with the importance of the subject. In the compilation of the following pages, an attempt has been made to supply this deficiency, by consulting the Naval and Military Magazines, the files of the "Moniteur," and other contemporary publications and periodicals, also the official dispatches of the hostile Commanders-in-Chief, and the Military History of Jomini.

FORT MANOEL, MALTA,
23rd October, 1861.

THE
DUKE OF YORK'S
CAMPAIGN IN HOLLAND
IN 1799.

CHAPTER I.

IN the summer of the year 1799, the British Ministry came to a resolution to send an army into Holland, with the view of driving out the French, overturning the Republican Government established under their protection, and bringing the country once more under the dominion of the House of Orange and Stadtholderat. On the Continent, all things seemed favourable to the success of such an undertaking; for, during the last few weeks, the French army, under Jourdan, had been defeated by the Austrian Archduke Charles, in a succession of battles between the Danube and the Lake of Constance, driven out of Suabia, and compelled to retrace the Rhine, while Massena was hard pressed in Switzerland; and the whole of Italy, with the exception of the maritime fortress of Genoa, had been overrun by the Austrian and Russian armies, under Melas and Suwarrow. The appearance of a powerful British army in Holland would, it was considered, effect an important diversion in favour of the allied armies now operating against the French Republic, by forcing the Government of the latter to send to the assistance of their Batavian allies a great part of the troops hitherto destined to reinforce their army of the Rhine.

Acting on these considerations, therefore, the Government of King George the Third lost no time in opening negotiations with

the Emperor Paul the First of Russia, with a view to obtain from him the assistance of an auxiliary corps of Russian troops in the contemplated expedition. This Prince entered heartily into their plans, being of opinion that the deliverance of Holland from the power of France would have a decided influence on the results of the war; and, on the 22nd of June, a treaty was concluded, by which he agreed to furnish a force of seventeen battalions of infantry, two companies of artillery, one company of pioneers, and one squadron of hussars, amounting in the whole to 17,593 men. For the service of these 17,593 troops, Great Britain was to pay to Russia the sum of £88,000 sterling—one half to be paid when they should be ready to embark at Revel, and the other three months later; also a subsidy of £44,000 a month, to be computed from the day the troops were ready. Horses were to be furnished for their officers, artillery, and baggage; while, in case the Russian troops should be unable to return to their own country before the ensuing cold season, Great Britain was to find them good quarters in her own dominions. In order to provide for the conveyance of a portion of his troops, the Emperor of Russia undertook to furnish six ships of the line, five frigates, and two large transports, all armed *en flûte*; the remainder were to embark on board English or other transport vessels freighted by His Britannic Majesty.*

On their side, the British Government bound themselves, by this treaty concluded with the Emperor of Russia, to contribute 13,000 troops—or, at least, 8,000, should the smaller number be deemed sufficient, to include a proportion of cavalry sufficient for the service of so large an army. They also proposed to support by their fleets the operations of the combined forces. Strange as it may appear, the assembling even of 8,000 troops in this country would have been, a few months before, a task of almost insuperable difficulty. This unfortunate state of things was attributable to a succession of causes reaching as far back as the commencement of the Revolutionary War in 1793. At that time the British army was made up of mere skeleton regiments, expensive in time of peace and most inefficient in actual service, as was proved in Flanders, whither all such as could be spared were sent

* See Appendix No. 1, for details concerning the Russian Contingent.

to assist the Austrians. They behaved well as often as they met the enemy, but the hardships of a retreat in the depth of a severe winter told severely on troops unused, as they were, to shift for themselves in the field. Such regiments as remained after the conclusion of the last disastrous campaign were at once shipped off to the West Indies, to effect the reduction of the French and Spanish islands; and while thus engaged, the men died by thousands.* Thus it came to pass, that, by the end of 1795, there was scarcely any regular army at all. To fill up the vacuum, recourse was then had to the system of raising men for rank, which opened a field to the most disgraceful traffic without effecting the object in view. In a short time, indeed, there were no less than 135 regiments of infantry alone on paper—for officers anxious to obtain rank took almost any men who offered; nor were those who passed the recruits more particular. Hundreds of men made a regular trade of enlisting to receive the bounty in one regiment, and then deserting to play the same game over again in another. This system was put a stop to by the Duke of York as soon as he came into command, for, on perceiving all its evils in their full force, he caused all the new regiments, numbered from the 101st, or Fullerton's, to the 135th, or Hunt's Limerick, to be reduced, and their few effective men draughted to the skeleton regiments sent home about this time from the West Indies. After an unsuccessful attempt, made in 1796, to induce the rank and file of the supplementary regiments of militia to volunteer, the army remained, until 1799, in the lowest possible state of efficiency. As an instance of the incomplete state of regiments at this time, the 6th Royals could only bring 120 men into the field at Castlebar.

At length, early in the year 1799, Mr. Pitt brought a Bill before Parliament, by which one-fourth of the effective strength of every militia regiment were to be permitted to volunteer into

* From the 1st March, 1796, to the end of 1799, there died, in the Leeward Islands, 2 brigadier-generals, 19 lieutenant-colonels, 12 majors, 72 captains, 169 subalterns, 11 adjutants, 9 quartermasters, 14 surgeons, 19 assistant-surgeons, and 14,327 non-commissioned officers and men, besides about 187 of the latter belonging to draughted regiments, who were left, in July, 1796, in the different general hospitals. The highest mortality was greatest in St. Lucia and Grenada.

the line; and this Bill he succeeded in carrying, in spite of serious opposition on the part of some lord-lieutenants of counties and of the militia colonels, who had an interest in keeping the regiments intact. This measure proved most successful, for the militiamen came forward in thousands, their military ardour being greatly excited by the preparations already set on foot for the expedition to Holland. On the 12th of July, a squadron under Captain Sir Home Popham had sailed for Revel, there to embark the Russian auxiliary troops, while a considerable corps, formed of regiments drawn from Ireland and the Channel Islands, was encamped on Shirley Common, near Southampton, under the orders of Lieutenant-General Sir Ralph Abercromby. Towards the end of July this corps was moved to Barham Downs, situated about four miles from Canterbury, on the high road to Dover, where the volunteers from the militia began to come in; and in three weeks after, several regiments which had come into camp with scarcely 300 rank and file, found themselves with 1,700 or 1,800 on their muster rolls, and were consequently obliged to form second battalions; while the 4th and the 9th, being favourite regiments, were enabled to form three each.*

For some time, considerable doubt had existed in the councils of the British Government as to the part of Holland where a disembarkation could be effected to most advantage. Most military men were of opinion that the landing should take place near the mouth of the Meuse, or on the side of Terheyde or Scheveningen, with a view to the occupation of the Hague, in which city the partisans of the Stadtholder formed a numerous and influential party. From the Hague the expeditionary force would threaten the line of communication between the French troops to the northward and their own country, and the least success obtained over them would probably cause Amsterdam to hoist Orange colours, and throw open its gates to the British as deliverers. Finally, however, the peninsula of the Helder, forming the northern extremity of the province of North Holland, was selected, from the circumstance of its shores being more easy of access than

* See Appendix No. 2, for distribution of the British army at this period.