

Early June 1667

During May and the first few days of June 1667, when the Dutch were getting their fleet ready for sea the English did not lack for information.

This they received from various informants in the United Provinces, either directly or through intermediaries. Towards the end of May reports were coming in that the Dutch fleet was lying off Texel and that soldiers were ready to be embarked. On 31 May, Dr Mews, a member of the English peace delegation at Breda, wrote to Joseph Williamson and informed him that the fleet had left the rendez-vous off Texel on May 27, and that from the number of soldiers that had been taken on board it was thought that the Dutch intended a landing somewhere. De added that Dolman:

"...and all ye gang of Rebels here with ye addition of some malcontents out of Engd and Scotland have met in ye Hague..... Certain it is they [i.e. the Dutch] have great business in hand; and I presume will very shortly attempt to execute it."

In a letter from Amsterdam, written probably on 1 June, Pierre du Moulin informed Lord Arlington that he had been present when the Dutch fleet left Texel. He said it numbered about sixty men-of-war with fourteen or fifteen fireships, that nine or ten good ships had been left behind, but were soon to rejoin the main fleet, and that the Zeeland squadron was also to follow on. Du Moulin continued:

What their intention is now is kept here very secret only 'tis confidently reported that 20 merchant ships have been hired to follow ye fleet and carry both provisions and men, who they say are ready in ye Mase.

It seems incredible that in face of these, and other equally precise warnings, a spirit of what can only be described as fatuous complacency prevailed in Whitehall. Charles II himself seems to have relied with misplaced confidence on Louis XIV to bring pressure on the Dutch to make peace, in accordance with an agreement made in April 1667 between the two kings. But Charles was probably even more convinced that no bellicose move was to be expected from the Dutch after Louis XIV invaded the Spanish Netherlands on 24 May 1667 to pursue his claim that sovereignty over them had devolved on his wife, a daughter of Philip IV of Spain.

On the very same day Charles wrote his brother James, Duke of York and Lord High Admiral, informing him that as London was well supplied coal and merchant ships had safely returned from the Mediterranean. he had resolved on a further reduction in the number of men-of-war to be kept in service, leaving only a squadron of small ships to disturb Dutch trade. On 29 May Sir William Coventry followed up this royal move in an economy campaign by writing to the Navy Board and asking whether the King's might not be eased by reducing the complements of the fireships lying at Portsmouth, Harwich, Dover, Sheerness, and Chatham. Coventry suggested that indeed that only sufficient men should be left on board each ship as would be required to weigh anchor, if this should prove necessary.

The king's confidence that the Dutch were bent on peace and could not risk a show of force was

shared by his Secretary of State, Arlington, who expressed the opinion that the Dutch fleet preparations at the end of May were but a 'bravado' and that they could not afford to prolong the war. Nevertheless Arlington seems to have felt some apprehension. In a letter written from Whitehall on 5 June 1667 to Sir Robert Southwell, the English ambassador in Lisbon, he remarked:

The Dutch, now in this very conjecture, and at the first entry into the treaty [i.e. the Peace negotiations in Breda], have sent their fleet to seas. We having no strength to look them in the face which People always will always understand as an Evidence of our Weakness, but I can assure you, upon the maturest consideration of what is passed in this War, it was chosen as the wisest course to proceed thus.

The reports that the Dutch had embarked a large number of troops on board their fleet did at least prompt the English Government to take what steps they could to deter, or counter, an attempt at a landing. On 29 May Arlington wrote to each of the Lord Lieutenants of the maritime counties on the East and South-east coasts as follows.

*My Lord,
His Majesty understanding that the Dutch are ready in a few days to put to sea with their fleet, and believing they will not fail to appear before the coast, to give the alarm to the country, and possibly, if they find the occasion easy, make an attempt to land with the intent to spoil, burn and sackage what part they can of the country, His Majesty, out of his gracious care for the safety and quiet of his subjects, hath commanded to give you this notice of it, and to signify to you his pleasure that, forthwith upon receipt hereof, you give the order that the militia of your county be in such a readiness that, upon the shortest Warning, they may assemble and be in arms for the defence of the coast in case of any attempt or appearance of the enemy's fleet, taking care in the meantime that the several beacons upon and near the coast be duly watched, by the respective hundreds by which they are, for the preventing any surprise or sudden descent of the enemy. And His Majesty commands me particularly to mind you that, in all places where you shall be obliged to make head or appear to the enemy, you make the greatest show you can in numbers, and more especially of horse, even though it be of such as are otherwise wholly unfit and improper for nearer service, horse being the force that will most discourage the enemy from landing, for any such attempt.*

On 4 June, a few days after these instructions had been sent out, the Dutch fleet had sailed from Schooneveld. When, however, it reached the English coast, a few miles off the North Foreland on 5 June, a gale sprang up, and a number of the ships lost station and were dispersed. Eventually, however, they reassembled, and the fleet was made ready for action. It was a formidable force, comprising fifty-one large men-of-war, three frigates, six armed yacs, fourteen fireships and a number of galliots (a small vessel of shallow draught.) and other small vessels, bringing the total to about eighty ships. Because of the agreement signed by the French and Dutch in The Hague on 25 April, providing for joint naval operations against England, the Dutch hoped to make the combat

force even more imposing by effecting a junction with the French fleet. On 6 June, therefore, Cornelis De Witt sent a message to the Duc de Beaufort, who was in command of the French fleet, informing him of the whereabouts of the Dutch.

The news of the movements of the Dutch fleet at the end of May and the beginning of June had soon become public knowledge, for on 27 May an English newsletter had reported. 'The noise of the coming out of the Holland has reached some of our ports' It continued with a assurance which events were soon to be grossly misplaced: '.....who, by the late care of authority, are provided sufficiently for security' On Thursday 30 May the same newsletter stated:

About 4000 land-soldiers are put aboard the Dutch fleet – in order to a designe – who 'tis said are to be carried in de squadron under van Ghent and commanded by Dolman, and Englishman with whom de Witt had a long conference about that affair. 'Tis the guess there that they intend against Northwards to revenge their former baffle.

Again a note of complacency was sounded, for the writer continued:

Be it where it will we need not question but authority has an eye to their motion, and that they may find another as warm an entertainment, orders being issued forth to all places to put themselves into a posture of defence.

Such confidence that the Government had the situation firmly in hand was sadly misplaced. After the arrival of the Dutch fleet off the North Foreland on 5 June, reports began to arrive in Whitehall detailing its movements in the Thames Estuary, and these reports should surely have impelled the Government to take drastic action to prepare for the attack which it was now clear the Dutch were likely to make. Yet for three days more, while these reports were coming in, little positive action was taken

Indeed on 3 June Sir William Coventry had written to the Navy Board discounting the possibility of a Dutch attack in the Thames. However, he revealed a certain unease by recommending at the same time that an elementary precaution was taken:

We heare by letters from Holland that the Dutch fleete are certainly abroad, consisting of about 80 men of warre and neare 20 fireships, and although I doe not thinke they will make any attempt here in the River, yet it will be fitting that ye comandrs of the frigatts that are in the Hope be on board to provide against anything may happen.

Pepys recounts in his diary on 5 June how low the morale of the Navy had sunk at this critical juncture.,

Captain Perriman brings us word how the "Happy Returne's" crew below in the Hope, ordered to carry the Portugal Ambassador to Holland (and the Ambassador – I think – on board) refuse to go till paid; and by their example

two or more ships are in a mutiny: which is a sad consideration while so many of the enemy's ships are at this day triumphing at sea.

Meanwhile the Duke of York had ordered the Navy Board to give the alarm to the dockyards that the Dutch and the French fleet were abroad; and on 6 June Peter Pett wrote to the Board from Chatham to say that the alarm: "hath been intimated to all persons in this river, who, I hope, will strictly look to their duties"

Friday 7th - Sunday 9th June 1667

On Friday 7 June the fleet sailed into the King's Channel, one of the main approaches to the Thames, and anchored there. In the evening a Council of War was held on board "**De Zeven Provinciën**", and the objectives of the States-General, detailing the objectives of the operation, which had been revealed to the fleet commanders on 27 May, were now made known to the lesser officers. The conference was resumed on "**De Zeven Provinciën**" at 4 a.m. on 8 June, and it was then decided to send a small squadron into the Thames under van Ghent, with vice-Admiral De Liefde as his second-in-command. The decision was taken because a Norwegian merchantman was intercepted on his way out of the Thames, and from the skipper the Dutch learned that about twenty English merchantmen, attended by some frigates, were lying in Hope Reach just below Gravesend. van Ghent was ordered to capture and destroy as many of these as possible; but the decision to undertake the operation was made with reluctance by de Ruyter and the other naval commanders. They were, however, overruled by Cornelis de Witt,



Joseph Baron van Ghent.

The plenipotentiary of the States-General was spurred on by his imperious brother Johan's desire

for prompt and decisive action, but the naval officers feared, not without reason, that van Ghent's squadron, and indeed the entire Dutch Fleet might find themselves in trouble if English ships suddenly appeared behind them in the Thames Estuary. Sir Jeremy Smith, with some eighteen frigates, was known to be based on the east coast of Scotland, and other small squadrons were reported at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Dover. In case any of these scattered detachments should make an untimely appearance, it was agreed at the Council of War, that de Ruyter should remain with the main body of the fleet at the entrance to the King's Channel, while Vice-Admiral Schram with a small force should keep watch on the Straits of Dover.

Reports were sent to Whitehall that the Dutch had been sighted off the North Foreland, and later, in the King's Channel, but even now, when it should have been clear, that some enterprise was about to be attempted in the neighbourhood of the Thames Estuary, or in the river itself, the Government took no decisive action. Perhaps this was because it still believed that the movements of the Dutch fleet were a feint, and that the peace was as good as concluded. It is significant that on 7 June Sir Henry Coventry, one of the English plenipotentiaries at Breda, came to Dover in a Dutch vessel flying a white flag. He brought with him provisional articles of peace for King Charles approval; but the Royal consideration of these was to be deferred by the gathering momentum of the Dutch's fleet operations in the Thames and the Medway.



Cornelis de Witt,
1627 - 1672.

Elder brother of Johan de Witt
The architect of the Dutch "Golden Age"

At dawn on 9 June van Ghent, accompanied by Cornelis de Witt, and helped by a favourable wind and tide, sailed towards the mouth of the Thames, in the "**Agatha**", followed by other ships in his squadron. By evening, however, because the wind had dropped and the tide had turned, he had to anchor at Hole Haven, some eight miles from the Hope. During this enforced halt, the Dutch landed some men on Canvey Island in Essex, where they burned down barns and houses and killed some sheep to take on board for provisions. The local militia however, eventually drove them off.

The pause in the Dutch operation gave the Englishmen time to move the merchantmen higher up the river. above Gravesend, where the Dutch, uncertain of the state of the shore defences, decided it was too risky to press the attack. Frustrated van Ghent's squadron retired down river and Cornelis de Witt now decided to concentrate on the major objective of the expedition – the raid on the ships

and dockyard installations in the Medway.

On 9 June, the day of van Ghent's abortive sally up the Hope, English counter-measures were still quite inadequate. Sir William Coventry wrote to the Navy Board that day, informing them that the King thought the best way of hindering the Dutch fleet would be to employ fireships, and that inquiries were to be made at once which vessels lying in the Thames could be used for the purpose, Great speed, Coventry added, was essential in securing these ships.

At about 4 p.m. on Sunday 9 June, when he had been off Sheerness in the "*Henrietta*" yacht, Sir Edward Spragge, an Irishman with long and successful experience at sea, who had taken part in the Battle of Lowestoft, The Four Days Battle, and the **battle on St James Day**, had observed van Ghent's squadron sailing up the Thames Estuary, and he at once put back to Sheerness. Here he sent orders that the "*Monmouth*", which was lying at anchor in the Medway, about half-way between Sheerness and Gillingham should be got under way at once and be placed above the chain at Gillingham. Spragge also asked the acting Lord Lieutenant of Kent, the Earl of Middleton, to send to Sheerness the men of a Scottish regiment commanded by Lord George Douglas, who were stationed at Margate.

The Scots troops were embarked on Sunday night but were then ordered ashore again, and in the end only one company was sent to Spragge. The latter had meanwhile sent instructions to Peter Pett, at Chatham, He was ordered to ensure that the two guardships moored by the chain were fully manned, also that pinnaces and longboats, fully furnished with crews, arms and all necessary equipment were ready for service on the river.

Edward Gregory, Clerk of the Check at Chatham, who had been with Spragge in the "*Henrietta*", and who was sent to Chatham with Spragge's orders, was also told to have 100 men from the "*Monmouth*" sent down to Sheerness as a reinforcement, after the ship had been brought safely above the chain.

The men were embarked at midnight on Sunday 9 June, and the two small vessels which had carried them set sail at once for Sheerness. During the week hover, both run aground, whether by accident or design was never afterwards ascertained, and most of the men took advantage of the opportunity to make for the shore, despite the orders of Lieutenant Kirke, in command of them.. When the vessels were finally got off again, only forty-four men remained to continue the journey to Sheerness, the rest having simply taken to their heels.

Monday 10th June 1667.

Gregory returned to Spragge at daybreak on Monday 10 June, and shortly afterwards Spragge

sent the "*Dolphin*" fireship and two ketches to sink the Buoy of the Nore, so that it should not be a help to the Dutch in their navigation. This command was successfully carried out, though the Dutch had stationed a man-of-war, a fireship, and a galliott by the buoy to prevent attempts to sink it. The Dutch vessels offered no resistance to the English, however, and when the latter approached the buoy the Dutch vessels sailed away.

Later that morning, some people were observed waving from the Isle of Grain, across the river from Sheerness, so Spragge sent a boat over to investigate. His men were told that some Dutchmen had landed on the Isle of Grain, and help was accordingly requested to deal with them. Despite the slenderness of his own resources Spragge sent over twenty-six musketeers of the Scots company which had joined him, on the understanding that they should be sent back to Sheerness as soon as possible. These men did not return so the small garrison at Sheerness was further depleted.

Also during the morning of 10 June reports had come in that the Dutch had sailed up the Thames towards the Hope, and at last a sense of danger was reflected in measures now tardily taken, and letters which passed. The King ordered the Duke of Albemarle to go to Chatham to take charge there, and three days later he ordered Prince Rupert to Woolwich to organize defences. Pepys recorded in his diary on 10 June how he and other members of the Navy Board went to Whitehall and there met Sir William Coventry, *“who presses all that is possible for fireships..... So we all down to Deptford and pitched upon ships and set men to work, but Lord! to see how backwardly things move at this pinch.”*

On 11 June Coventry was still agitatedly pressing for fireships, and in a letter to the Navy Board he lamented the unpatriotic attitude of some shipowners who were refusing to put their vessels at the disposal of the Government for conversion into fireships.

For God’s sake get what you call of all sorts for fireships, and send them down as fast as you can lower into the river. If money or any other encouragements will procure men and give despatch, pray spare not.

In another letter to the Navy Board Coventry declared:

I believe that at this time, which is no less than invasion, His Majesty may by law use any man’s ships or goods for public defence, and any resisting will be adjudged criminals; but I hope better temper will be found. If men cannot otherwise be had to serve in the fireships they must be tempted with profit and even ready money given.....

The Kent Militia had been called out on 9 June, and during the afternoon of the following day a company of them arrived at Sheerness under the command of Major Hugessen, Their quality was so poor, and their morale so low, that Edward Gregory, in a letter to Pepys on 20 July 1667, remarked diplomatically that upon the major’s courage and his men’s resolution he would undertake to make no comment.

The general panic caused by the appearance of the Dutch in the Thames was manifested in a deplorable way in Gravesend. Pepys related in his diary on 10 June:

Down to Gravesend, where I find the Duke of Albemarle just come, with a great many idle lords and gentlemen, with their pistols and fooleries, and the bulworke not able to have stood half an hour had they [the Dutch] come up, but the Dutch are fallen down from the Hope, and Shell-haven as low as Sheerness, and we do plainly at this time hear the guns play..... I find the town had removed most of the goods out of the town, for fear of the Dutch coming up to

them; and from Sir John Griffen [Sir John Griffith, Governor of Gravesend Fort] last night there was not twelve men in the town to defend it.

In a letter to Sir William Coventry written at 1 a.m. on 11 June, Pepys described how he sailed down the Thames to Gravesend, and he continued:

"I mett several vessells in my going downe, loaded with the Goods of the people of Gravesend. Such was their fright....."

On 10 June, a few hours before Pepys letter was written, Peter Pett had sent a message to the Navy Board in despairing terms as follows:

Gen.

There is now appearing at ye Buoy of ye Norre upward of twenty sail of Hollanders more, ye one of w^{ch} Seames to be a very great Shipp, I feare they will git within Sheer Nasse this Eveing, there being little to interrupt them, and doe believe ye whole Stress of ye business will lie at ye Chain a lttle beyond Gillingham [where wee have moared to interrupt them as much as wee can from coming to ye chain] [four great stages]. I wish wee had some of your number to helpe advise and Act in these necessitus times, and y^e you come not too late.....

The event which had prompted Pett to send this despairing letter was the arrival off Sheerness of van Ghent's squadron returning from its unsuccessful foray up the Thames. The ships appeared off the Isle of Sheppey about midday Monday 10 June and the Dutch at once decided to amount an attack on Sheerness Fort, Captain Jan van Brakel in the "**Vrede**" followed by two other men-of-war, was ordered to sail as close to the fort as possible and engage it with cannon fire. The other ships of the squadron were to follow, and under covering fire troops were to be disembarked to attack the fort.

The opposition encountered by the Dutch was slight. Sir Edward Spragge had been put in command of the ships lying in the Medway and the few small vessels, including fireships and ketches which had been posted off Sheerness. The only ship there that was capable of offering opposition to the Dutch was the frigate "**Unity**" which had been stationed off the fort to act as guardship.

In the late afternoon of Monday, about 5 p.m., van Ghent's squadron, taking advantage of an incoming tide, approached Sheerness Fort. Captain van Brakel in the "**Vrede**" was leading and found the "**Unity**" frigate with some fireships and ketches lying in their path off Garrison Point, near the uncompleted Sheerness Fort. In this sixteen guns had been mounted but so very insecurely, that when they were fired the recoil drove their carriages into the ground. Several of the guns were made serviceable by placing loose planks under their carriages to take the recoil, but the fire from these was insufficient to deter van Brakel and his consorts.

The "**Unity**" fired one broadside at the approaching Dutch, but then, when a blazing Dutch fireship bore down on her, she beat a retreat up the Medway, followed by her own fireships and ketches.

Meanwhile the Dutch ships continued to fire on Sheerness Fort, and soon one of the men servicing the guns, was killed, and another had a leg and thigh shot off. The injured man was carried off screaming out loud for a surgeon; and then a rumour spread that no surgeon was available, Thereby all but seven of the men serving the guns deserted their posts, and shortly after the faithful seven, including Sir Gregory, were also forced to abandon the unequal contest, especially since they learnt that a considerable force of Dutch troops had been put ashore about a mile away.

Gregory and his companions were taken on board Sir Edward Spragge's yacht "*Henrietta*" and a discussion took place about what could best be done to hinder the troops the Dutch had put ashore. Captain Annesly, one of the gallant seven, was instructed to see whether steps could be taken to flood the marshes in order to obstruct the Dutch if they should try to make for Queensferry and cross from Sheppey to the mainland. As a further precaution Captain Douglas with his company of Scots troops was ordered to station himself at the ferry and remain there till further notice to guard it.

Spragge also sent Gregory off in pursuit of the "*Unity*" and her accompanying vessels with orders to remain at the Mussel Bank, just before the narrow band where the Medway turns South into Gillingham Reach. Gregory afterwards returned to the "*Henrietta*" and remained in it with Sir Edward Spragge, watching helplessly while the Dutch continued their cannonade. They did not stop firing till about 9 in the evening, and then, Sheerness having been lost, Spragge sailed up the Medway in the "*Henrietta*" for Chatham.

Long before this the Dutch had captured and abandoned Sheerness Fort.

Some 800 men had been landed under command of Colonel Dolman, but a small party of seamen under Cornelis Gerrits Vos, Captain of the yacht the "*Jonge Prins*" were the first to enter the fort. Disembarking from their longboat they pulled down the English Flag and hoisted the Dutch Flag in its place. Cornelis Gerrits Vos later received from the Admiralty of the Maas 100 ducats as a reward for the enterprise he had shown.

In addition to the guns in the fort, the Dutch found at Sheerness valuable stores, such as sawn timber, masts, spars, quantities of iron and brass, and barrels of gunpowder, resin and tar. They estimated their value as equivalent to four or five tons of gold

(equivalent to 400.000 -- 500.000 guildens); but later English appraisals calculated their worth, including that of the storehouse buildings, at some £ 3.000.

After the action on Monday 10 June had ended Cornelis de Wit sat down in his cabin on board the "*Agatha*" and wrote a letter to the States-General, giving an account of what had happened since his letter on 7 June. After telling of the capture of Sheerness Fort, he stated that the guns, and as much of the stores as could conveniently be carried in the ships of van Ghent's squadron had been taken aboard and that he had given orders that what remained on shore should be burned or otherwise destroyed. Cornelis ended his letter triumphantly:

*“From the “**Agatha**” lying at the angle of the river of Chatham before Sheerness Fort, 20 June [10 June in the Old Style, Julian Calendar; the Dutch had already adopted the new Gregorian calendar] late in the evening.*

Some hours later, Peter Pett was writing another letter, this time in quite a different vein. Late at night on Monday 10 June he wrote to the members of the Navy Board, from Chatham, as follows:

I am sorry that I can give you noe better newes than to let you know that after 2 or 3 hours dispute wth Dutch by S^r Edward Sprage Sherenese is lost. Wee have resolvd the sinkeing of two small fireships in the midst of long reach tomorrow morning the removeing of w^{ch} againe I apprehend will be noe greate difficultie. Wee shall doe whatever wee call in servicing the Navy, and doe wish wee had some of your assistence in soe great a concerne to his Ma^{tie} and the Kingdom.

The implied reproach to the members of the Navy Board revealed that Commissioner Pett was understandably apprehensive of what the Dutch might do next. His fears were justified, for the events of the next few days were to involve him much more closely and directly than the action at Sheerness had done. A situation was in fact developing which proved to be a national disaster.

After he gave the alarm on 6 June to the personnel of the dockyard and the ships in the Medway, Peter Pett does not seem to have taken any positive steps to meet a possible emergency, until Sunday 9 June. Even then he had to be spurred on by the orders of Sir Edward Spragge, brought to him on Sunday evening by Edward Gregory. On receipt of Spragge’s orders Pett began to issue instructions to the boatswains of ships in the Medway and to shipwrights in the dockyard. These were ordered to take charge of the pinnaces and long-boats which had been assembled in accordance with the Duke of York’s instructions of 25 March. These small vessels were necessary for such vital tasks as towing ships and transporting soldiers, seamen, provisions, stores, and ammunition from place to place. Pett was able to provide a crew (usually numbering from twelve to fifteen men) for each of the boats commanded by a shipwright; but boats belonging to the men-of-war in the river, each in charge of the boatswain of a ship, had no crews provided, and the boatswains were left to collect what men they could find. Eleven boats were provided for the shipwrights, and about 150 men were employed as crews for these. Another nineteen boats, most of which were commanded by boatswains, had scratch crews of seamen, usually very few in number, and no record remains of the total number of men employed in these boats. George Moore, boatswain of the *“Triumph”* managed to get together thirteen men to man his boat, and the *“Vanguard”* provided ten for hers, but most of the other boats were insufficiently manned. The boatswain of the *“Helversome”* for example, could find only one man to serve; and the boatswain of the *“Rainbow”* only two, because the men on board the men-of-war had been ordered to perform other duties.

One of the shipwrights, Thomas Dry, who had been told to take command of a boat, discovered that no boat had been provided for him. Using his own initiative, however, he found a small craft, normally used for transporting pitch and tar, and he managed to get some pressed men, who were strangers to him, as a crew. Another shipwright, E Perkins, was given a crew, but found out that no boat had been provided for him, so he and his men remained in the dockyard, no doubt not

unwillingly. In not a single case did the crew of a boat whether commanded by a shipwright or a boatswain, receive arms. They asked for these, but the reply given was none were available.

On Sunday night, some of the boats were employed by Peter Pett to take soldiers from the **“Monmouth”** aboard two hoys which were to take the men to Sheerness, on Sir Edward Spragge’s orders, other boats and pinnaces, also in accordance with Spragge’s orders, were directed to tow the **“Monmouth”** to a position just above the chain at Gillingham; and others again were sent to bring powder and shot from Upnor Castle to the dockyard.

In his two letters of 10 June to the Navy Board, Pett lamented the absence of senior officials of the Navy, whose help and advice he needed. Soon, however, as the crisis developed, two members of the Navy Board, Sir John Mennes and Lord Brouncker, made their way to Chatham, and early in the morning of Tuesday 11 June, The Duke of Albemarle himself arrived. Under him in positions of authority were, in addition to Mennes and Brouckner, Lord Middleton, Sir Edward Spragge, Lord Douglas, Peter Pett, and the two Masters of Attendances in Chatham Dockyard. Captains John Brooke and William Rand. This proved to be a superfluity of leadership, for as the emergency developed these officials tended to give orders independently of each other. Thus instructions given by one were sometimes countermanded by another, or two sets of conflicting instructions were given. This led to confusion, not to say chaos, and had a bad effect on the already weak morale of the seamen and the dockyard-men.

On Monday 10 June some of the pinnaces and longboats were employed under Pett’s direction in transporting soldiers of Lord Douglas’s regiment from the dockyard to Upnor Castle and Gillingham. >From the latter place they were sent aboard the two guardships lying near the chain, the **“Charles V”** and the **“Matthias”** Soldiers were also put aboard the **“Royal Charles”** and the **“Royal James”** lying nearby in Gillingham Reach. Other boats were directed to the chain, where their crews helped to raise it so that a new stage could be put under it. One of the shipwrights, Richard Penney, was ordered by Pett to take his boat lower down the Medway in the direction of Sheerness, to try to find out what was happening there. Sheerness Fort had, however, already been taken by the Dutch, and the same evening Sir Edward Spragge, appearing off Gillingham in the **“Henrietta”** yacht, was able to give full details of the melancholy event.

Spragge joined Lord Middleton on board the **“Monmouth”** and discussions at once took place about what should be done to counter a further advance of the Dutch, since it was to be expected that they would without delay make an attempt to destroy the ships and dockyards at Chatham. It was suggested therefore that fireships should be sunk near Musselbank, just below the bend in the Medway, where the river turns south between Hoo and Darnett points to enter Gillingham Reach. Spragge was doubtful whether sinking fireships at the Musselbank would be effective, since in his opinion, not enough vessels were available to block completely the two navigable channels near the Musselbank.

Despite Spragge’s doubts, the project was pursued, after Albemarle had sanctioned it. This he did because Peter Pett had assured him that in his opinion, and that of the two Masters of Attendance, three vessels sunk at the Musselbank would be sufficient to stop the advance of the Dutch, Captain Rand, one of the Masters of Attendance, had been ordered early on Tuesday morning to take the

“Royal Charles” higher up the river with the help of a pilot, Some shipwrights, with their boats and crews, were allotted to him to carry out the operation, which, from evidence given later by Richard Penney, one of the shipwrights, was ordered by Peter Pett, ‘ Rand was, however, subsequently ordered to leave the **“Royal Chartles”** and to supervise instead the sinking of three small vessels, previously intended for use as fireships, at the Mussel Bank. These vessels were the **“Constant John”** the **“Unicorn”** and the **“John and Sarah”**, and Rand successfully carried out this task during the morning of Tuesday 11 June.

Edward Gregory, Clerk of the Check at Chatham, witnessed the sinking of the three ships and he later described this as: *“an unadvised piece of worke”* Shortly after leaving the Mussel Bank, he met Lord Brouckner and Peter Pett who were on their way there, and at their request Gregory went down to the Mussel Bank again with them. He expressed his doubts about the effectiveness of sinking ships there but these carried no weight with Pett and Brouckner although they decided to make sure the blockage was complete more ships should be sunk.

Two more fireships, (the **“Barbados Merchant”** and the **“Dolphin”** , two ketches, (the **“Edward and Eve”** and the **“Hind”**), and the **“Fortune”** a dogger, (a small two-masted fishing boat) were accordingly also sunk at the Mussel Bank, but the work was done in haste, since men and boats were wanted for many other urgent tasks that day.

One of the most important of these was to remove the men-of-war lying in Gillingham Reach, higher up the river. Chief among these were the **“Royal Charles”** and the **“Royal James”**, and during the morning on Tuesday 11 June the latter was taken to a new position just above Upnor Castle. The **“Royal Charles”**, however, which should also have been moved, remained at her moorings. This was because the boats and crews that Peter Pett needed to move her, were sent on other tasks, including the sinking of the ships at the Mussel Bank. It seems that these boats and crews, nominated by Pett to move the **“Royal Charles”** were taken from that task and commanded elsewhere by the Duke of Albemarle himself. In a report he made subsequently to the House of Commons, he recounted:

He [i.e. Peter Pett] came and told me that he would carry her [i.e. the **“Royal Charles”**] up that tide, if he might have boats, which I could not then spare; for if they were gone all aour batteries must have been neglected, and I could not transport the timber, powder shot and men, to them to resist the enemies the next day. And besides, it was thought advisable, at that instant, if the Dutch should have landed in the marsh by the crane, she [i.e. the **“Royal Charles”**] might have been useful and have hindered them having guns aboard. Nevertheless, upon notice shortly after that there was neither sponge, ladle powder or shot in her. I sent Captain Millett, commander of the **“Matthias”** about ten in the morning with orders to Commissioner Pett to carry her up as high as he could, the next tide. Who pretended he could not then do it, because there was but one pilot that would undertake it, and he was employed about sinking ships. And seeing she was not removed in the morning, I myself spake to him, the said Commissioner Pett, in the evening in the presence of Colonel MacNaughton and Captain Mansfield, to fetch her off that tide. But notwithstanding these orders the ship was not removed.

Tuesday 11th June 1667.

Further adjustments were made to the chain on Tuesday 11 June. At 1 a.m. Pett had ordered a floating stage to be towed down to Gillingham, and later the chain was heaved up to be able to place the stage underneath. The position of the two guardships, lying just above the chain, (the "**Charles V**" and the "**Matthias**") were adjusted to be able to bring their broadsides to bear upon it, and additional soldiers were put aboard them. The "**Monmouth**" was also moored above the chain, in such a position that she could bring her guns to bear on the gap between the "**Charles V**" and the "**Matthias**". And the "**Unity**" which had come up from Sheerness too late to be brought above the chain, was moored just below it as an extra defence.

The Duke of Albemarle, who was at the centre of all this activity, had found a state of crisis at Chatham when he arrived there in the early hours of Tuesday morning 11 June. In his report to the House of Commons he described the situation at Chatham thus:

I found scarce twelve of eight hundred men which were then in the king's pay in his Majesty's yards; and these so distracted with fear, that that I could have little or no service from them. I had heard of thirty boats, which were provided by the direction of His Royal Highness. [e.g. the Duke of York.]

but they were all, except five or six taken away by those of the yards, who went themselves with them, and sent and took them away by the example of Commissioner Pett, who had the chief command there, and sent away his own goods in some of them. I found no ammunition there, but what was in the "**Monmouth**" so that I presently sent to Gravesend for the Train [of Artillery] to be sent to me, which got thither [i.e. Chatham] about two of the clock the next day [i.e. Wednesday 12 June]

After I had despatched this order I went to visit the chain, which was the next thing to be fortified for the security of the river, where I found no works for the defence of it. I then immediately set soldiers to work for the raising two batteries, for there was no other men to be got; and when I had employed them in it, I found it very difficult to get tools, for Commissioner Pett would not furnish us with above thirty till, by breaking open the stores, we found more. I then directed timber and thick planks [there was such a scarcity of planks in the dockyard that the floor of the roperyard was ripped up as a desperate attempt to get material for the batteries] to be sent to the batteries, and guns also, that they might be ready to be planted as soon as the batteries were made; and I in the next place sent Captain Vintour with his company to Upnor Castle, which I took to be a place very fit to hinder the enemy from coming forward if they should force the chain. And, upon further consideration, altho' I had horse near the fort, lest the enemy should land there, I commanded Sir Edward Scot and his company

for a further strength of the place, and gave him the charge of it, with orders to let me know what he wanted for the security thereof

Having thus provided for Upnor, I considered where to sink ships without the chain [i.e. below the chain] next to the enemy, as a further security to it....

advising with Commissioner Pett and the Masters of Attendance, and the pilot how to do it Pett told me that it was their opinion that if three ships were sunk at the narrow passage near the Mussel Bank, the Dutch fleet could not be able to come up. And I, relying on their experience, who best knew the river, gave orders accordingly for the doing of it. But when this was done they said they wanted two ships more, which I directed them to take and sink. After this I ordered Sir Edward Spragge to take a boat and sound whether the sinking of those ships would sufficiently secure the passage. Which he did, and found another passage, which the pilot and Masters of Attendance had not before observed to be deep enough for great ships; but it was deep enough for great ships to come in. I thereupon resolved to sink some ships within [i.e. above] the chain.....

Late in the evening of Tuesday 11 June, a conference was held in Commissioners Pett's house, attended by Albemarle, Brouncker, and leading dockyard officials, including Edward Gregory, to discuss the advisability of sinking ships near the chain. Gregory had discovered the day before, from soundings which he had taken, that the chain was lying nearly nine feet under the surface of the water between the stages, because of its weight. It was presumably because of this discovery that Pett, early in the morning of Tuesday, had ordered a fresh stage to be brought down from the dockyard to enable the chain to be raised higher.

Nevertheless, Gregory was not satisfied and remained convinced that the Dutch might have fireships of shallow draught which would be able to ride over the chain. At the conference in Pett's house he proposed therefore that three or four small ships should be sunk in Upnor Reach near the Castle, to present a further obstacle to the Dutch, should they successfully break through the chain at Gillingham.

After some discussion the Masters of Attendance stated that in their opinion Gregory's proposal was not feasible, but in order further to reinforce the chain it was resolved with Albemarle's agreement that three vessels. the "**Marmaduke**" "**Sancta Maria**" {a fine vessel of 70 guns, previously captured from the Dutch by whom she was known as the "**Slot van Honingen**"}, and the "**Norway Merchant**" flyboat should be towed down from the dockyard and sink as near the chain as possible. Albemarle concluded the conference by ordering Pett and the Masters of Attendance to see to it, "*at peril of their lives*" that the ships were brought to the chain and sunk there by Wednesday morning. Since it was 11 p.m. on Tuesday, and high tide was at 1 a.m. on Wednesday, Pett and the two Masters of Attendance were left with only two hours in which to act. Desperately they told Sir Gregory to go and search for men who would be used to take the three vessels down the river; but in the prevailing conditions such a mission seemed doomed to fail. Nevertheless

Gregory, undaunted, mounted a horse and scoured the neighbourhood of Chatham for men. By some miracle he managed to collect some 150, whom he brought to the dockyard. They were at once sent aboard the three ships, which were then taken down the river towards the chain at Gillingham. In cockham Wood Reach, however, between Upnor and Gillingham, the "**Sancta Maria**" ran aground, and Phineas Pett alleged later that this was due to the negligence of Captain John Brooke, one of the Masters of Attendance, who was in charge of her. According to Phineas, Brooke wasted time to bring the ship down river so that the tide ebbed and the "**Sancta Maria**", because of her deep draught, grounded. After unsuccessful attempts to get her afloat again the men aboard her were transferred, some being sent to the "**Royal Charles**" others to the batteries at the end of the chain.

Meanwhile, the "**Marmaduke**" and the "**Norway Merchant**", which had been taken down to the chain without mishap, were sunk there about 8 a.m. on Wednesday. A cable was afterwards brought from the "**Royal Charles**" and fastened between the two ships as an additional hindrance to the Dutch. This was but one of a number of desperate last-minute measures taken under Albemarle's direction. They were prompted by forebodings that the Dutch would not remain content with their easy victory at Sheerness, but would be encouraged by the lack of resistance they had there encountered to venture further up the Medway and attack the ships and dockyard at Chatham. These fears were to prove fully justified.

After the Dutch had captured Sheerness Fort, in the late afternoon of Monday 10 June, they decided that because they lacked a sufficient number of troops, they could not place a garrison in the fort to hold it. For the same reason they decided also not to venture further inland. Gerard Brandt, the biographer of de Ruyter, placed another construction on the motives which caused the Dutch to make the latter decision. He affirmed that after taking Sheerness Fort they were well placed to revenge the burning of fishermen's houses on the island of Terschelling by the English in 1666, by ravaging the Isle of Sheppey. But Brandt continued: "*They [i.e. the Dutch] wished to act with greater generosity, leaving to barbarous nations this cruel way of waging war and visiting the sins of the guilty upon innocent people*"

According to the "*Hollandsche Mercurius*" (1668) which published extracts from the logbooks from Captain van Brakel for June 1667, some of the crew of the "**Vrede**" ventured into the interior of the Isle of Sheppey, found that the inhabitants had fled, so plundered their houses and returned with much booty. Another Dutch source, a broadsheet published by N. Visscher in Amsterdam in 1667, which described the Dutch operations during June, stated that a detachment of troops marched to Queenborough after Sheerness had been captured. The inhabitants of the town were said to have begged the Dutch to spare it and to have offered them a considerable sum of money, whereupon Queenborough was left unmolested.

There is however, no confirmation of this in the Queenborough borough archives, so it may be an exaggeration of some small foray in which the crew of the "**Vrede**" were concerned. One English account related that the Dutch had marched inland and plundered Queenborough, but gave no detail of the operation.

A. Daly, the historian of the Isle of Sheppey, stated that the Dutch captured Queenborough after the Mayor had flown the white flag from the town hall, but he did not quote his authority for the statement.

Whatever the Dutch may have done at Queenborough, there is no doubt that some of the unfortunate inhabitants suffered from the hands of the English and Scots troops sent to defend the town.

These looted and destroyed goods which they found in houses which their terrified owners had abandoned in fear of the Dutch. Among the townsmen who suffered in this way was Captain Abraham Ansley, a Master of Attendance at Sheerness dockyard.

Meanwhile on Tuesday 11 June, a small Dutch force comprising two armed yachts (One of them the "**Jonge Prins**" commanded by the redoubtable Cornelis Gerrits Vos) accompanied by sloops and longboats had been sent on reconnaissance up the Medway. to take soundings, and also to find out what opposition, if any, the English were preparing to meet the Dutch attack. The little force ventured as far as the Mussel Bank, where they spied the English busy at work sinking the "**Constant John**" "**Unicorn**" and "**John and Sarah**" in the South Channel there.

This news, when it was brought back to Cornelis de Witt and van Ghent at Sheerness, did not deter them for one instant for resolving on an immediate attack on Chatham dockyard and the ships lying in the river near it. These were indeed a tempting prey, in a sketch made by John Evelyn on the hill above Gillingham, near the church, and which he sent to Pepys at the latter's request, the names and positions of the ships were recorded in detail. The sketch was entitled: "*A Scheme of the Posture of the Dutch Fleete and action at Sherenesse and Chatham 10th, 11th, and 12th of June 1667, taken upon the place by J.E.*" It showed the chain, with the "**Unity**" moored on the Gillingham side, just below it and with the "**Charles V**" and "**Matthias**" just above it. The "**Monmoth**" lay beyond them in Gillingham Reach, and then above her, stretching as far as Rochester Bridge, the "**Royal Charles**" "**Mary**" ["**Sancta Maria**"] "**Royal Oak**" "**Loyal London**" "**Royal James**" "**Catherine**" "**Princess**" "**Old James**" "**Guiden Ryter**" ["**Gelderse Ruyter**"] "**Triumph**" "**Rainbow**" "**Unicorn**" "**Henry**" "**Helverson**" ["**Hilversum**"] and "**Vanguard**".

Cornelis de Witt and van Ghent decided that a small detachment comprising three frigates, four armed yachts, and two fireships, should sail up the Medway forthwith as an advance force, under Captain Thomas Tobiasz., and that the rest of the squadron should follow soon after, under the two leaders. Strict orders were issued that no sailors were to be allowed ashore during the operation, no doubt to prevent repetitions of the plundering foray of the crew of the "**Vrede**" which might have endangered the enterprise.

Tobiasz and his advance force left Sheerness on Tuesday 11 June, and when they arrived at the Mussel Bank they spent some time moving the ketch "**Edward and Eve**" which the English had sunk there earlier in the day. This took a considerable time, and meanwhile the tide had ebbed, so the Dutch ships anchored and made no progress that day.

Wednesday 12th June 1667.

On Wednesday morning, 12 June, in accordance with their decision to abandon Sheerness Fort, the Dutch removed the guns, and these were transferred to the ships of van Ghent's squadron. Stores, which it was thought worth while to keep were also taken aboard, and the rest were destroyed. Lastly, the fort itself was demolished as completely as was possible within the short time available. The Dutch also expertly destroyed embankments near Sheerness in order to cause inundation and Lord Brouncker wrote to the Navy Board later, on 22 June, saying that, if the banks were not speedily repaired before the next spring tide, much land would be flooded.

Tobiasz and his advance force freed a passage for the rest of van Ghent's squadron, which left Sheerness about 6 a.m. on Wednesday 12 June, favoured by an east-north-east wind and an incoming tide. When they arrived in Gillingham Reach they found that Tobiasz and his advance force were held up by the chain and by fire from the guardships and batteries.

The entire Dutch force was in formation of line astern, partly for tactical reasons, partly because the increasing narrowness made any other alignment difficult and hazardous. In front were the three frigates of the advance guard, with Tobiasz in the "*Bescherming*" at the head.

Then came the yachts, followed by two fireships, the "*Susanna*" and "*Pro Patria*"; and they in turn were followed by other fireships and the remaining men-of-war of van Ghent's squadron. The entire Dutch force, spread out as it was, stretched from a position near the chain to the Mussel Bank, and must have made an impressive sight, especially when the main body approached Gillingham Reach at about 10 a.m.

Because of the narrowness of the fairway, which prevented the Dutch from massing line abreast, their ships were unable to bring a sufficient volume of fire to bear to silence the opposition at the chain, and because of the chain itself they were deterred from sailing on. At this critical juncture, when the enterprise seemed destined to fail, the situation was saved for the Dutch by the bravery of one man. This was Captain Jan van Brakel, of the "*Vrede*" (Forty guns, complement 125 men).



Jan van Brakel (??? -- 1690)

He was from Rotterdam and had already given proof of his courage and his enterprise in the Four Day's Battle in 1666, and, lately, during the assault on Sheerness. After this recent exploit, however, he had been put under close arrest in the "**Agatha**" by order of Cornelis de Witt for having allowed his men to land on the Isle of Sheppey and forage into the interior in search of plunder.

Hearing of the opposition which had been encountered in Gillingham Reach, van Brakel saw a change of ending his irksome captivity in the "**Agatha**".

He offered to sail up to the chain in his own ship, the "**Vrede**" and while thus drawing the English fire, enabled two fireships to be sent against the chain. Cornelis de Witt, in despair, accepted van Brakel's offer, since there appeared to be no alternative but a retreat; and so van Brakel was released from arrest and returned to the "**Vrede**" which was lying in the rear of the Dutch squadron.

He then carried out an exploit which, both for its daring and its momentous consequences, ranks as one of the most remarkable in the annals of naval warfare. He quickly got the "**Vrede**" under way, and sailed past the leading Dutch ships, followed by two fireships, until approaching the chain he came under heavy fire from the English guardships and batteries. He sailed on, however, and soon there was nothing between him and the chain but the "**Unity**", with forty-four guns, and some 150 men on board.

Holding his own fire van Brakel sailed straight for the "**Unity**" lying near the shore at the Gillingham end of the chain, and when he was near he fired at her, then came quickly alongside, boarded, and captured her. The opposition from the English ship had been negligible, and this was not surprising in view of the nature of her crew. A number of Thames' watermen who had been brought down from London had been sent aboard the "**Unity**" to complete her complement, but they proved useless. A watch had to be set to prevent them from deserting, and when the Dutch approached they were the first to abandon ship. Some of the crew who did not manage to escape, were taken prisoner, and among these was John Stanley, the ship's surgeon, who three months later after his return from Dutch captivity, sent in a claim for £ 32, which he said represented the value of equipment which he had lost when the "**Unity**" was captured.

The only casualties suffered by the "**Vrede**" were three men wounded of whom two later died; and the lack of fighting spirit aboard the "**Unity**" which this reveals can also be gauged from the fact that earlier in the day Stephen Woolgate, boatswain of the "**Great Victory**" had been ordered by Sir Edward Spragge to lie alongside the "**Unity**" with his long-boat to prevent any of the men aboard her from trying to escape ashore. Woolgate obediently acted as watchdog until he saw the "**Vrede**" approaching, whereupon he took his boat up an adjacent creek and so avoided capture by the Dutch. For Woolgate the day had been more than usually eventful largely because of the way he was shuttled about as a result of conflicting orders. Early in the day he had been told by Lord Brouckner and Commissioner Pett to go aboard the "**Royal Charles**", but was intercepted by Sir Edward Spragge, who told him instead to go and look for seamen ashore, and bring back as many as he could find as quickly as possible. Woolgate returned saying he had been unable to find any men, and Spragge then asked him what his original orders had been. Woolgate replied that he had been

detailed by Brouckner and Pett to go aboard the **“Royal Charles”** and stay there till further notice. Despite this, Spragge ordered Woolgate to take one of the boats of the **“Royal Charles”**, man it with some of the crew and then report to Albemarle for further instructions. Woolgate did this, and after he had carried out a task allotted to him by the Duke, he reported back to Spragge, and it was then that he was told to station his boat alongside the **“Unity”** Woolgate was one of several boatswains and shipwrights who received orders from one officer only to have them cancelled by another, and this lack of cohesion on the English side, resulting from too many persons giving orders without reference to one another, undoubtedly hampered the preparation of countermeasures against the Dutch.

Meanwhile, as van Brakel was engaging the **“Unity”** the first of two fireships which had followed the **“Vrede”** and which was called the **“Susanna”**, sailed up to the chain but failed to break it, and soon afterwards caught fire. The second fireship, the **“Pro Patria”** followed close behind the **“Susanna”** rode hard at the chain, and broke it. She then positioned herself alongside the **“Matthias”** lying just above the chain near the Gillingham shore, and set her afire. She burned furiously for a while, and then, with a huge detonation, blew up. Some of her crew, including the surgeon, was badly burned, but rescued from the water by the boatswain in charge of the long-boat of the **“Triumph”** who was sent by Sir Edward Spragge to pick up survivors.

A third Dutch fireship, the **“Delft”**, which attempted to place herself alongside the other guardship by the chain, the **“Charles V”**, on the Hood side of the river, was sunk by cannon-fire from that ship, but meanwhile another fireship managed to get herself alongside the **“Charles V”** and set her on fire. Shortly afterwards van Brakel left the **“Unity”** in a boat manned by a few Dutch sailors, and made for the burning **“Charles V”**. The crew of this vessel were now so demoralized that some of them escaped in boats in seeing the Dutch approach, while other in their panic jumped overboard and began swimming ashore. Those remaining on board surrendered without putting up any opposition when they saw van Brakel climbing up over the bows with his sword drawn, followed by his men, climbing over the bulwarks. After the English had handed over their weapons to the Dutch van Brakel ordered a trumpeter to go aloft and haul down the English flag, and this final humiliations appeared to have been too much for the captain of the **“Charles V”** who had surrendered with the remnant of his crew. He despairingly tried to escape by diving over board, but was picked up and brought back on board. The exact number of men taken prisoner aboard the **“Charles V”** is not known, but according to Dutch sources the total of prisoners from the **“Charles V”** and the **“Unity”** was fifty-six.

The fire on the **“Charles V”** took such a hold that the Dutch were unable to put it out, and the ship, after burning for the rest of the day, finally blew up. Before this occurred it seems very probable that she had drifted up the river. In 1876, when new basins were being constructed during extensions to Chatham dockyard, the remains of an old men-of-war were found at the East end of St Mary’s Creek, with her guns embedded in the mud around her. This wreck may have been either the **“Sancta Maria”** or the **“Charles V”** in a survey of the Medway made on 10 and 11 October 1667 both these ships were reported as lying sunk on the South-east side of Cockham Wood Reach.

After the **“Unity”** the chain broken, and the **“Matthias”** and **“Charles V”** were set on fire, the **“Monmouth”** lying above the chain had judged it prudent to withdraw higher up the river, she

managed to effect this rather inglorious retreat, though she had to be towed by longboats around the bend of the Medway into Upnor Reach, where she was finally brought to a halt by grounding just above the castle. After some desperate efforts she was got off again, and taken still higher up the river to a position opposite the Old Dockyard.

Though the “*Monmouth*” had escaped, a much more tempting prize lay still in the river a little above the “*Monmouth’s*” original position. This was the “*Royal Charles*”, half rigged, and with only thirty-two of her guns still on board. Sir Edward Spragge, foreseeing that the Dutch would try to take her, had ordered the crews of several pinnaces and long-boats to go aboard her as reinforcement. and he issued his order “*on pain of death*”, as was afterwards recorded. Some of the boat’s crew were able to escape the unpopular assignment by towing the “*Monmouth*” into Upnor Reach, the others, who unwillingly boarded the “*Royal Charles*” left her promptly soon afterwards when they saw the Dutch drawing near. As they had few if any arms, these men could hardly be blamed for their dereliction of duty, and in fact, Spragge’s threat of death for any who refused to go on board and fight does not appear to have been carried out.

There is a story, recounted by Clarendon, that at about this time, when the Dutch broke through the chain, the Duke of Albemarle planned to make a heroic last stand in one of the vessels lying above the chain (perhaps the “*Monmouth*” or the “*Royal Charles*” itself) but was dissuaded from doing so.

Clarendon’s account was as follows.:

The General [Albemarle] was of a constitution and temper so void of fear, that there could appear no signs of distraction in him, yet it was plain enough, that he knew not what orders to give. There were two or three ships of the Royal Navy negligently, if not treacherously, left in the river which might have been very easily drawn into safety, and could be of no imaginable use in the place where they were. Into one of those the General put himself, and invited the young gentlemen who were volunteers, to accompany him, which they readily did in great numbers, only with pikes in their hands. But some of his friends whispered to him how unadvised that resolution was, and how desperate, without the possibility of success, the whole fleet of the enemy approaching as the incoming tide would enable them. And so he prevailed with to put himself again on shore, which except he had done, both himself and two or three hundred gentlemen of the nobility and prime gentry of the Kingdom had inevitably perished

During the action at the chain, Lord Brouncker, Sir John Mennes, and Peter Pett assembled as many long-boats and pinnaces as could be gathered together, and stationed them so, that they might at least be able to rescue men from the water. As for the three officials themselves, they watched events from a small barge positioned at a safe distance from the conflict. The sight which they must have seen has been described by a historian of the Royal Navy, in words, though picturesque, probably give a fairly accurate picture of what took place.

The scene at that moment to be witnessed below Chatham, has not often been paralleled in naval history..... The river was full of moving craft and burning

wreckage; the roar of guns was almost continuous; the shrieks of the wounded could be heard even above the noise of battle, the clangor of trumpets, the roll of drums, and the cheers of the Dutch as success after success was won; and above all hang a pall of smoke, illumined only, as night closed in, by the gleam of flames on all sides and the flashes of guns and muskets.

The culmination of this action at Gillingham Reach, and the crowning success for the Dutch, was the capture of the **“Royal Charles”** yet this was accomplished without any drama because of the failure of the men aboard to put up any fight. The only dispute, in fact, after the ship had been taken, was between the Dutch themselves, as to who had actually captured the ship. From all the available evidence it appears that Captain Thomas Tobiasz was the first aboard the **“Royal Charles”**, followed by a few men from his sloop, and, shortly afterwards, by others from a sloop under command of Lieutenant B. Jacob’s, one of the officers of Vice-Admiral de Liefde.

Pepys related in his diary on 22 June 1667 that a Captain Hart and a Captain Hayward had told him that the Dutch took the **“Royal Charles”** *“with a boat of about nine men and found not a man aboard her..... and presently a man went up and struck the flag and jacke, and a trumpeter sounded upon her “Joan’s placket is torn””*

Among the men who had deserted the **“Royal Charles”** were the boatswain and gunner; they tried afterwards to justify their conduct by affirming that seeing that all was lost, they had tried twice, unsuccessfully, to set the ship on fire before the Dutch reached her. In his report to the House of Commons Albemarle later commented unfavourably on the two men, accusing them of failure to *“do their duties in firing her”*

Beyond the **“Royal Charles”**, in Cockham Wood Reach, lay the grounded **“Sancta Maria”**, and she proved to be the final objective of the Dutch on Wednesday 12 June. The crew of a sloop, commanded by Captain Jacob Philipsz, of the armed yacht **“De Brak”** sailed up river and boarded her, but afterwards, in circumstances which were never cleared up, she was set on fire and destroyed by the Dutch themselves. It seems that they did this after all efforts to get the vessel afloat again had failed, but that the decision was taken without reference to Cornelis de Witt.

Long before the capture of the **“Sancta Maria”** the Dutch had dealt with the two improvised batteries which Albemarle had had constructed at each end of the chain. Concentrated fire was brought to bear on these, and the garrisons, overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught, abandoned their posts and fled. Since the chain had already been broken and the guardships silenced, the way was now clear for the rear ships of van Ghent’s squadron to advance further up Gillingham Reach, this they did, led by the **“Agatha”**, with Cornelis de Witt and van Ghent on board. For a time they transferred to the **“Vrede”**, to confer with, and to congratulate van Brakel, and then they moved on to the captured **“Royal Charles”**, to discuss on board her what the next phase in the operations should be.

During the attack in Gillingham Reach on Wednesday 12 June, when it seemed very probable that the Dutch would continue their advance without delay against Chatham Dockyard, and the ships lying higher up the river, Albemarle had ordered that all those ships should be sunk at their

moorings forthwith. On consideration, however, it was decided that this measure would be too drastic, and instead an order was given that the ships' cables should be cut, and then that they should then be maneuvered to the shore into shallow water and there sunk, so that the Dutch would be unable to remove them should they reach so far. Lord Brouckner, Sir John Mennes and Peter Pett, supervised the execution of this order, and as a result some sixteen men-of-war were cut loose. A few of these subsequently drifted in the river, and thus hindered defence measures against the Dutch, but others were sunk as ordered, for example the "**Katherine**" just below the New Dockyard, and the "**St George**" opposite the ropeyard, and the "**Victory**" opposite St Mary's Church.

The "**Royal James**" and other men-of-war which had been moved higher up the river near Upnor, were the obvious targets for a fresh attack; but the tide had ebbed, and it was not possible for the Dutch to follow up their great successes of the Wednesday immediately.

They resolved, however, to attack the ships at Upnor, as soon as possible the next morning, Thursday 13 June; Cornelis de Witt sent an urgent message to de Ruyter, who was waiting off the Isle of Sheppey, with the main body of the fleet, asking him to send more fireships and to come in person up the Medway to confer about the further attack which it was proposed to make.

The industrious Cornelis, remote from all the celebrations that were taking place in the Dutch ships in Gillingham Reach, sat down in the admiral's cabin at the "**Royal Charles**" and wrote to the States-General a detailed account of recent operations. He piously thanked God Almighty, Who, in His providence, had deigned to humble the pride of the English nation by means of the glorious arms of their High Mightinesses the States-General. Cornelis further wished their High Mightinesses much good fortune from the magnificent victory which had been won, and with pardonable pride he dated his letter at the foot of the last sheet, as follows: "*In the "**Royal Charles**", the 22 June [i.e. 12 June Old Style] 1667, about two in the afternoon, lying in the river of Chatham*"

At 10 a.m. on Wednesday 12 June, when the leading vessels of van Ghent's squadron were entering Gillingham Reach, the Duke of Albemarle watched from the shore, and he witnessed with a bitterness easily imagined, the subsequent debacle when the Dutch took the "**Unity**", broke through the chain, set the "**Matthias**" and the "**Charles V**" on fire, and captured the "**Royal Charles**" and "**Sancta Maria**". After chronicling this melancholy succession of disasters in his report, which he made afterwards to the House of Commons, Albemarle observed abruptly, "*This was all that I observed of the enemy's action on Wednesday*"

Indeed, he had had too much to do to spend further time in mere observation of the Dutch after they had been brought to a temporary halt by the ebb of the tide on Wednesday. It would be considered a certainty that, spurred on by their successes, they would, as soon as the tide turned, attempt to do further damage higher up the river, where other ships, including the "**Royal Oak**" "**Loyal London**" and "**Royal James**" lay, above Upnor Castle. There was also Chatham Dockyard with its storehouses and other installations, to tempt the Dutch on.

After the disasters on Gillingham Reach on Wednesday, Albemarle concentrated his energies on providing for the defence of the ships lying further up the Medway and the Dockyard itself. First he

inquired of Sir Edward Scott, whom he had put in charge of Upnor Castle, whether it was in a state of preparedness. He received in reply a request for provisions which Scott said he needed urgently, and sent as much as could be carried by the boats and crews still available for transport duties. He also took the precaution of sending an additional company of soldiers to reinforce the garrison, in case the Dutch should try to repeat their exploit at Sheerness by landing and attempting to take the castle by force. As for the three men-of-war, lying just above the castle, Albemarle had decided very early on Wednesday morning, that they should be moved to the Upnor bank of the Medway till they grounded in the shallow water. He then ordered that holes should be cut in their hulls so that it would be impossible for the Dutch, should they reach the ships, to move them.

The work of thus immobilizing the *“Royal Oak”*, *“Royal James”* and *“Loyal London”* had been carried out successfully before the Dutch ceased their operations on Wednesday.

Albemarle’s main care, however, was to try to provide some defences for the dockyard, and the other two, the New Dockyard further down the river towards St Mary’s Island. The ten large guns, comprising the train of artillery which had just arrived from the Tower of London by way of Gravesend were mounted in a field by the North Crane in the New Dockyard, and about fifty other guns were placed in various positions whence they could bring fire to bear on ships attempting to sail up the river.

Many of these guns, including eight that came from the *“Old James”*, were hastily removed from ships lying higher up the Medway between Rochester Bridge and the dockyard, the eight from the *“Old James”* were probably those installed in one or other of the former sconces (*“Bay”* and *“Warham”*) which lay just below Upnor Castle.

Albemarle spent the whole of Wednesday night making those dispositions, and it was a dispiriting experience, for he wrote later in his report.:

I stayed all night on the place by the men; and having no money to pay them, all I could do or say was little enough for their encouragement, for I had no assistance from Commissioner Pett nor no gunners or men, to draw on the guns, except the two Masters of Attendance.

Meanwhile the Dutch plans were going forward, in response to the letter written by Cornelis de Witt, Admiral de Ruyter had left the main body of the Dutch fleet lying off the Isle of Sheppey and had sailed up the Medway to Gillingham Reach, accompanied by Admiral van Aylua, who had joined the fleet with the Friesland squadron on 11 June, and by Admiral Aert Jan van Nes. He arrived in the late afternoon of Wednesday 12 June, after the action of the day had ended, and one of the first duties he set himself was to on board the captured *“Unity”* to congratulate van Brakel on his courage and initiative. Afterwards de Ruyter conferred with Cornelis de Witt and van Ghent about the attack on the ships lying above Upnor Castle which was planned for the next day.

It was decided that four men-of-Owar, and three armed yachts should sail up to Upnor Castle, and engage it with their guns, and that under this cover five fireships following them should place themselves alongside the *“Royal Oak”* *“Royal James”* and *“Loyal London”* and set them afire. The

commanders of the men-of-war, were expressly ordered not to venture higher up the river than Upnor, lest they should not be able to withdraw again because of the narrowness of the river there.

Early on Wednesday evening, van Aylua and van Nes sailed back down the Medway to Sheerness, with orders to send without delay all remaining fireships; but de Ruyter, who decided to take part in the forthcoming operation, slept during the night on board the "**Bescherming**", commanded by Captain Thomas Tobiasz, the conqueror of the "**Royal Charles**". Early on Thursday morning five additional fireships which had been sent at the request of Cornelis de Witt arrived in Gillingham Reach, so that the Dutch were now in a position to begin their attack on the ships at Upnor.

Thursday 13th June 1667.

On the morning of Thursday 13 June the Dutch were once again favoured with a north-east wind, and it was now merely a question of waiting for the tide to turn, so that they could make use of that also to advance towards Upnor Castle



"Upnor Castle"

During the time of waiting Cornelis de Witt and de Ruyter spoke to the commanders of the men-of-war and the fireships, exhorting them to do their duty and to render fearlessly to their country the services that it had a right to expect of them. The commanders, for their part, affirmed their loyalty and patriotism, and promised to do all that lay within their power to carry out their orders. They then dispersed to their ships to await the order to advance.

This came about midday but by this time the favourable north-east wind had abated somewhat, and this slowed down the progress of the Dutch towards Upnor. They did not in fact reach the castle before 2 p.m. an interval that gave the garrison time to prepare counter-measures for them.

The leading Dutch ships encountered heavy fire, not only from Upnor Castle itself, but also from the batteries on the opposite bank, especially from the heavy guns commanded by Sir Edward Spragge.

In this unpleasant situation the Dutch found inspiration from the presence of their great leader de Ruyter. While the men-of-war and fireships were making their slow progress towards Upnor he had ordered a long-boat to be made ready for himself. When Cornelis de Witt asked him what purpose

he had in mind, de Ruyter replied simply: *"I am going to see what our people will do"* On hearing this de Witt declared that he would accompany de Ruyter, and so they both transferred to the long-boat. During the operation that ensued de Ruyter did not, however, merely sit in a long-boat and watch from a safe distance what happened. He went well forward, scorning all danger in the narrowing fairway, and took an active part in directing operations. Other superior officers, including van Ghent, and Vice-Admiral de Liefde, also transferred to sloops and bug-boats, and gave orders in the thick of the fire, encouraging particularly the crews of the fireships in their hazardous task.

While the men-of-war were engaging Upnor Castle and the batteries on the opposite bank, the first of the fireships, the **"Rotterdam"**, grappled the **"Loyal London"** and set it on fire. Though this ship and the **"Royal Oak"** and **"Royal James"** had been sunk in the shallow water near the river bank, enough of their upper works remained above water to enable a fireship to do its work. Two more of these quickly followed the **"Rotterdam"**, placed themselves alongside the **"Royal Oak"** and **"Royal James"**, and soon these vessels were also burning. The fires aboard the: **"Loyal London"** and the **"Royal James"** did not, spread as fast as the Dutch desired, and so they sent in their two remaining fireships, one against each of the English men-of-war, and soon, the **"Loyal London"** and **"Royal James"** were burning as furiously as the **"Royal Oak"**

Edward Gregory, Clerk of the Check at Chatham, who had survived the bombardment of Sheerness Fort, witnessed the burning of the three ships and he wrote later to Pepys, describing the scene.

The destruction of these three stately and glorious ships of ours [he said] was the most dismal spectacle my eyes ever beheld, and it certainly made the heart of every true Englishmen bleed, to see such three Argos' lost.

The noise and confusion of battle must have been more intense in the narrower corners of Upnor Reach, than in the broader waters of Gillingham, the day before. The din must have been tremendous, for apart of the guns from the Dutch, there was a continuous cannonade from Upnor Castle, from Sir Edward Spragge's heavy guns opposite and from other gun emplacements. In the river itself, the three large men-of-war lay blazing, sending clouds of smoke billowing upwards, whilst in the midst of the Medway Dutch bug-boats and sloops plied hazardously up and down, encouraging their men in the fireships, and evacuating them when their task was done.



Pieter Cornelisz van Soest.

Medway Raid.

Capture of the **"Royal Charles"**

The bravery of the Dutch in adventuring into these narrow waters under intense fire, was astounding, and was rewarded by the demoralizing which it had on the men who had been left on board the “*Royal James*” *Royal Oak*” and “*Loyal London*” to defend them. These put up hardly any fight, and the entire operation is redeemed, in English eyes, by the bravery of the men only. This was Captain Archibald Douglas who, with some of his Scots soldiers, had been sent on board the “*Royal Oak*”. When she took fire all aboard her left their posts with the exception of Douglas, who remained steadfast, till he died in the increasing conflagration.

The bravery of Douglas made a deep impression on contemporaries because of its contrast with the cowardice shown by so many other men, who instead of fighting the Dutch, took the first opportunity they could to escape from the scene of action. Sir William Temple, in a letter written to Lord Lisle from Brussels in August 1667, said:

I would have been glad to see Mr. Cowley before he died, celebrate Captain Douglas his death, who stood and burnt in one of our ships at Chatham, when his soldiers left him because it should never be said a Douglas quitted his post without order. Whether it be wise in men to such action or no, I’m sure it is so in States, to honour them.

The poet Cowley had died in July 1667, but the literary memorial of Douglas that he might otherwise have produced came instead from the pen of Andrew Marvell. He wrote an elegant eulogy of the gallant Captain entitled: “*The Loyal Scott*” a manuscript copy of which is preserved in the British Museum. In this Marvell depicted the last minutes of Douglas on board the burning “*Royal Oak*” as follows:

**Fixt on his Shipp, he fought the horrid day,
And wondred much at those who ran away
The fatall Barke him boards with grappling fire,
And softly through its Ports the Dutch retire.
That pretious life he still disdains to safe,
Or with known art to try the gentle wave.
Much him the Glories of his Ancient Race
Inspire, nor could he his own deedes deface.
And secret joy in his calme breast doth rise,
That Monck looks on to see how Douglas dies.
Like a glad lover the fierce flames he meets,
And tries their first embraces in their sheetts....
Downe on the deck he layd himself and dyed,
with his dear sword reposing by his side.
And on the flaming planks he rests his head,
As one whoe hugs himselfe on an warm bed.
The Shipp burns down and with hiss relicks sinks,
And the sadd streame beneath his ashes drinks.**

More prosaically, in August 1667 Captain Douglas' widow petitioned Charles II to be granted the ship "**Golden Hand**", which was employed at that time raising the sunken ships in the Medway, as compensation for her husband's death on active service.

The operation against the three ships at Upnor cost the Dutch about fifty men killed and a number (unknown) wounded. These casualties, which much exceeded those of the previous day, was due to the sustained fire from Upnor Castle and the heavy guns mounted on the opposite shore which were under the direction of Sir Edward Spragge. These could hardly have failed to do considerable damage to the Dutch because of the shortness of the range, the river being much narrower at Upnor than at Gillingham. The unexpectedly fierce opposition, the first real counterattack that they had experienced, caused the Dutch, once the Upnor operation had been concluded, to abandon any further design that they might have had of venturing still further up the river to attack the dockyard installations and the men-of-war lying below Rochester Bridge. They were also, however, deterred by the fact that they had used all their fireships, and that the river above Upnor was obstructed by a number of vessels, which had been sunk or had run aground the day before. They feared, in short, and not without reason, that if they ventured too far they might find themselves trapped in the river with no possibility of escape.

The sight of the ships that had been sunk in Dockyard Reach the day before was a major factor in deciding the Dutch not to risk any of their ships or men above Upnor, and so the dockyard and the remaining English men-of-war escaped.

On Thursday 13 June, after the Upnor engagement was over and the decision had been taken to go no further, Cornelis de Witt sat down in his cabin on board the "**Agatha**" and wrote another letter to the States-General. He recapitulated the events of Wednesday, correcting some of the information he had given in his previous letter, and he then reported on the action off Upnor. He mentioned de Ruyter's arrival on Wednesday and his part in the operations on Thursday. In these, de Witt said, the Dutch had lost no more than fifty men. He then excused himself for not venturing higher up the river. He said that this was considered unwise because of sunken vessels lying in various places. and because English reinforcements were arriving. After commending the officers who had had charge of the Upnor operation for the special zeal and vigilance, which they had shown in carrying out their orders. Cornelis ended his letter thus: "*In the ship "Agatha", lying at anchor in the river of Chatham, before the village of Gillingham, the 23 June [13 June Old Style] 1667.*"

Friday 14th June 1667.



Engel de Ruyter.

While Cornelis de Witt was writing his letter, Engel de Ruyter, a son of de Ruyter by his second wife, was sailing up the Medway from Sheerness to join his father off Gillingham. Engel, who was only 18, was serving in the *"Hollandia"* but he left his ship in the Thames Estuary and sailed up the Medway in a small vessel. He arrived at Gillingham Reach late at night and as the *"Royal Oak"* *"Royal James"* and *"Loyal London"* were still burning off Upnor he ventured higher up the river to take a closer look. Later in his diary he recorded his impression and noted down: *"It was a joy to see"* At four o'clock the next morning he went aboard the *"Royal Charles"* and after inspecting her with great interest he wrote down in his diary that she was a mighty ship, with three decks, and thirty-two guns still in position.

Later in the morning Engel boarded the *"Harderwijck"* commanded by Jan Pauwelsz. van Gelder, his step-brother and there he met his father, Admiral de Ruyter. The latter, with his two sons, joined a landing-party who went ashore during the afternoon in three sloops. During this trip, so Engel later recounted in his diary, planks were removed from a battery which the Dutch had previously destroyed; so it seems probable that the party landed at Gillingham and took the planks from the battery at that end of the chain. Engel de Ruyter also recorded that it was during the late afternoon of Friday 14 June that the Dutch left the scene of their victory and began to withdraw down the Medway, assisted by the ebbing tide and taking with them the *"Royal Charles"* and the *"Unity"*. Engel himself sailed in the *"Harderwijck"*, and then, later, in a sloop in the company of his father and Cornelis de Witt; and during their journey to the mouth of the Medway they met with a Dutch vessel which brought letters for the fleet commanders from the States-General.

The withdrawal from the Medway was not carried out without incident. At various places along the

shore detachments of English horse and foot gathered and these fired on the Dutch ships whenever they could. This intermittent fire made the navigation of the river even more difficult, and just before she reached the Mussel Bank, the **“Harderwijck”** with de Ruyter himself aboard, went aground. She stuck so hard, that despite all the efforts of the Dutch she could not be got off, and it was then, that de Ruyter, with Cornelis de Witt and Engel, transferred to a sloop in which they continued their voyage. Some other vessels in addition to the **“Harderwijck”** also grounded, but were got off without difficulty, and the **“Harderwijck”** herself was later able to resume her withdrawal when the tide turned and floated her again.

The feat of navigation involved in bringing the captured **“Royal Charles”** down the river Medway in such difficult circumstances won for the Dutch a tribute from the English themselves. In his diary on 22 June 1667 Pepys recounted that two naval officers had informed him that the Dutch carried the **“Royal Charles”** down the river:



“The Royal Charles”
The Dutch Flag at the main,
is sailing from Chatham, towards Holland.

.....quote.

' At a time, both for tides and wind, when the best pilot in Chatham would not have undertaken it, they heeling her on one side to make her draw little water, and so carried her away safe '

.....unquote.

Despite the difficulties which they were meeting in taking their ships down the Medway, the Dutch remained fully masters of the situation, and this they showed when they readied the sunken ships at the Mussel Bank. With remarkable coolness they detached some boats' crews with orders to burn as much of the upper works of the ships as possible, and this final Parthian manoeuvre was duly carried out. Shortly afterwards the entire Dutch squadron, with their two prizes, entered the broader and safer waters of the Thames Estuary; and there with justifiable satisfaction they fired off their cannon to celebrate the successful conclusion of a difficult and dangerous withdrawal.

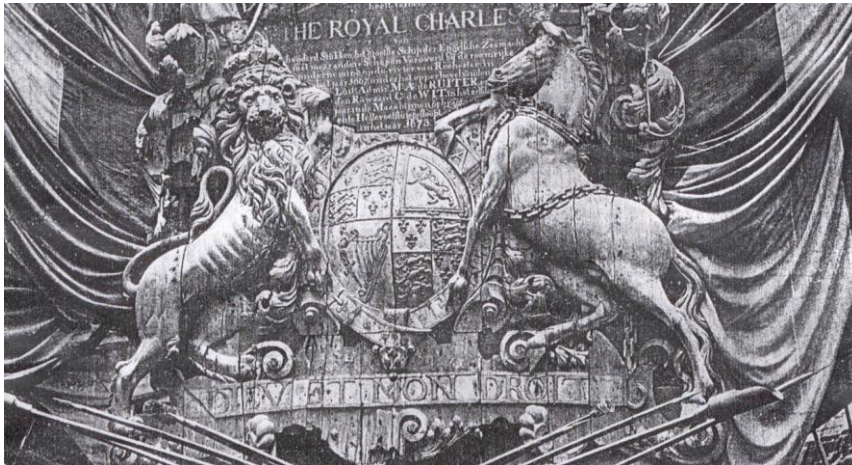


The Dutch government presented de Ruyter with this golden goblet, in recognition of his victory of "**The Medway Raid**".

Aftermath, June 1667.

The account of the Dutch raid in the Medway, from the taking of Sheerness Fort tot the withdrawal on Friday 14 June, as reported in the official *London Gazette* (Nr. 165 dated 'Whitehall, June 16') must certainly rank as a classic of deliberate understatement. It was as follows:

The Dutch Fleet having the tenth instant in the evening made themselves masters of Sheerness, on the eleventh they advanced up the River Medway, and though with much difficulty, passed by several vessels which had been sunk about Musclebank, which was the narrowest part of it the better to put some stop to them in their passage; and with 22 sail came up upon the Chain. where the Lord General [i.e. Albemarle] was in person with a considerable force to oppose them; but the Enemy, taking advantage of an easterly Wind and the Tide which both served them, pressed on, and though their first ship struck upon the Chain, the second broke through it; and not withstanding a stout resistance in which our Men showed infinite courage, with considerable loss to the enemy, yet they clapped their fireships aboard the "**Matthias**" and the "**Unity**", that lay at anchor as a Guard to the Chain, and upon the "**Charles the Fifth**" all three of them Dutch ships, that had formerly been taken from them. The same they possess themselves of the "**Royal Charles**" which was twice fired by our Men, and as often quenched by the Enemy.



The transom of the "Royal Charles" as it is now displayed at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

On Thursday the 13 Instant, About One of the Clock, taking again their advantage of the Wind and the Tide, the advanced with six men-of-war and five Fire-ships and came up towards Upnor-Castle, but were so warmly entertained by Major Scot, who commanded there, and on the other side by Sir Edward Spragg from the Battery at the Shoare, that after very much Dammage received by them in the shattering of their Ships, in sinking several of their Long Boats manned out of them, in the great Number of their Men kill'd and some Prisoners taken, they were at the last forced to retire, having in this attempt spent in vain two of their Fire-Ships which were attempted the "**Royall Oake**" but were forced off and burnt down without any effect; but a third had its effect, the two others coming also aboard the "**Royall James**" and the "**Loyall London**", which are much injured by the fire but in probability made be again made serviceable, having been sunk before their coming up, and the greater part of them laid under water

Since then they have not made any considerable Attempt, and by some Prisoners we have taken we finde that the loss we have received has been hitherto so fully returned upon them, that they can have but little reason to Bragg of their Success, and less encouragement to make any farther Attempts on these parts.

Part of the Enemies Fleet hath since this Action continued about Muscle-Bank, where on Friday were seen 24 Sail, on Saturday only 14, which 'tis believed stay there only to get off the "**Royall Charles**," which is on shoare.

[The vessel was almost certainly the "**Harderwijck**" and not the "**Royal Charles**" which appeared to have been brought down the river without any serious difficulty]

An even more ludicrous attempt to play down the disaster came from the pen of the Earl of Castlemaine, the cuckolded Husband of one of the mistresses of Charles II. After asserting that the Medway enterprise had cost the Dutch "*an infinite number of Men and Ten Ships, according to our estimate although they will not acknowledge so many*, the indignant Earl considered the loss of the "**Royall Charles**"

I confess I was troubled when I heard a ship fell into their hands which his Highness

[i.e. the Duke of York] once made use of and Had thereby the Honour to wear his Flag but I was soon again satisfied, when I call'd it to mind, that Sampson himself might be taken by surprize, and that this vessel could not choose but have an ill end , seeing it had Cromwell for its Founder.

Though the *London Gazette* tried to minimize the magnitude of the humiliating reverse which the Nation had just suffered, the panic which gripped London and the home countries as the news of the Dutch advance spread, revealed that what had occurred was not a mere incident in a war, but a disaster which was bound to have momentous consequences.

Clarendon wrote.:

The Distraction and Consternation was so great in Court and City, as if the Dutch had not been only Masters of the River, but had really landed an Army of one hundred thousand Men..... If the King's and Duke's personal composure had not restrained Men from expressing their Fears, there wanted not some who would have advised them to leave the City.

The stages in the panic are vividly related by Pepys in his diary, and his account is corroborated by other contemporary chroniclers. On 11 June Pepys remarked that he was kept up late trying to provide fireships in response to Sir William Coventry's insistent and despairing demands. Then, wrote Pepys, he went home; he continued:

Where [I had] a great deal of serious talk with my wife about the sad state we are in, and especially from the beating of drums this night for the train-bands upon pain of death, to appear in arms tomorrow morning, with bullet and powder and money to supply themselves with victuals for the fortnight; which considering the soldiers drawn out to Chatham and elsewhere, looks as if they had a design to ruin the City and give it up to be undone; which; I hear, makes the sober citizens to think very sadly of things.

On 12 June Pepys wrote:

When I come to Sir W. Coventry's chamber, I find him abroad; but his clerk, Powell, do tell me that ill news is come to Court, of the Dutch breaking the Chaine at Chatham; which struck me to the heart. And to White Hall to hear the truth of it; and there going up the Park-stairs I did hear some lacquies speaking of sad news come to Court, saying there is hardly anybody in the Court but to look as if he cried. Home, where all our hearts do now ake, for the news is true that the Dutch have broke the chaine and burned our ships, and particularly the "**Royall Charles**"..... And the truth is I do fear so much that the whole Kingdom is undone, that I do this night resolve to study with my father and wife what to do with the little that I have in money by me.

Next day, 13 June, Pepys heard 'the sad news confirmed' of the disaster at Chatham, and he wrote:

In the evening comes Mr Pelling and several others to the office, and tell me that never were people so dejected as they are in the City all over at this day; and do talk most

loudly, even treason, as that we are bought and sold, that we are betrayed by the Papists and others about the King..... They look upon us as lost, and remove their families and rich goods in the City.

Pepys concluded a lengthy and dramatic day's entry in his diary by recording:

'I made my will also this day, and did give all I had equally between my father and wife'

In his entry for the following day, Friday 14 June, Pepys recorded that he had spoken with a Mr Wilson and an employee of Gauden, the Navy's victualler:

who are come from Chatham last night, and saw the three ships burnt, they lying all dry, and boats going from the men-of-war to fire them. But that he telles me of worst consequence is, that he himself (I think he said) did hear many Englishmen on board the Dutch ships speaking to one another in English; and that they did cry and say "We did heretofore fight for tickets, now we fight for dollars" and did ask how such and such a one did, and would commend themselves to them; which is a sad consideration. Another informant who had been at Chatham, a Mr Lewes, told Pepys that when the "**Royal Charles**" was taken some of these renegade English men were heard to say that they had had their tickets countersigned, held them up while saying this to prove it, and then declared that they had now come to have them paid, and intended to have them paid before they left [Because of the lack of ready money and for other reasons it had become customary, when a ship was paid off, to give men certificates from which the wages due them could be reckoned. On presenting these "tickets" the men entitled to be paid in cash, but because of the lack of money delays occurred, and unscrupulous speculators took advantage of the sailor's necessity to cash the tickets at a discount which sometimes amounted to 5s in the £.

Pepys continued sadly:

Indeed the hearts as well as affections of the seamen are turned away; and in the open streets of Wapping, and up and down, the wives have cried publicly "*This comes of your not paying our husbands.....*"

Most people that I speak are in doubt how we shall do to secure our seamen from running over to the Dutch; which is a sad but very true consideration at this day.

At the scene of the disaster, Chatham, the spirit prevailing can be gauged from a letter sent on Friday 14 June, by Lord Brouncker and Peter Pett to the Navy Board:

"So heavy is the hand of God now upon this place," they wrote "" that we fear it as well as the hand of men now apparently fights against us" and the went on to declare that after the arrival of the Dutch off Gillingham everybody had believed that "The whole navy, dock and stores would have burnt up on Wednesday"

Pepys' friend and fellow diarist John Evelyn has also left a record of the general feeling of chaos and disaster which spread as news of the Dutch victories became known, On Tuesday 11 June he wrote:

To Lond: alarmed by the Dutch, who were falling over our Fleete, at Chatham, by a most audicious enterprise, entering the very river with part of their fleete..... This alarme caused me (fearing the ennemie might adverture up the Thames even to Lond, which with ease they might have don, and fired all the vessels in the river too) to send away my best goods, plate etc. from my house to another place; for this alarme was so greate, as put both County and Citty into a panique feare and consternation, such as I hope I shall never see more,; for everybody went flying none knew why or whither.

The state of panic in London was so great that people were ready, on the slenderest evidence, to believe that the Dutch had managed to sail up the Thames to the capital. Thus Evelyn recorded in his diary on Monday 17 June:

The greatest damage was to England's pride and someone had to be found to answer for it. The chief culprits were certainly the council who had made the decision to lay up the fleet and rely on the coastal defences (which it was their business to know the state of) Their job now was to find a scapegoat to avert any talk that may be put about them. They acted quickly and on the 17th June Peter Pett was arrested and committed to the Tower of London.

Pett was charged on eight counts.

--- The first three dealt with his neglect to secure the "**Royal Charles**".

--- The fourth with neglecting to sink the "**Sancta Maria**" in the place ordered (which was actually the responsibility of the Master Attendant, Captain Brooke)

--- The fifth charge was that he allowed thirty small boats ordered for the defence of the river, to be used in carrying away his and other people's goods. Pett admitted to this charge in at least one respect He had used to carry away his private collection of model ships, which, he argued, were valuable because of their technical details and on no account should fall into enemy hands. This was the Master Shipwright speaking but as his accusers were non-technical they could not understand nor appreciate his reasoning.

--- The sixth charge accused him if being responsible for there being only a handful of men in the Dockyard when Albemarle arrived, instead of eight hundred.

--- The seventh accusation was that he failed to provide tools for building the batteries when asked to do so, and

--- The eighth was that he had supplied deal boards for the battery floors instead of oak.

All these charges were framed upon a report made by the Duke of Albemarle and read in the House of Commons on 31st Oktober. A Parliamentary committee was also set up to enquire into the reason for the lack of fortifications at Sheerness. All this took many months by which time the excitement had died down. After a reasonable lapse of time Pett was released on a £ 5.000 bail and the charges against him dropped. It was obvious to all involved, that, had he been found guilty, then a number of important people in higher places were equally guilty Nevertheless, Pett was deprived of his office and the scapegoat was found.

After the raid it was necessary to clear up the debris of battle. A survey showed that the **"Royal James"** and the **"Loyal London"** could be salvaged. Having been scuttled they had burnt down to approximately the lower gun-ports. With half of each hull remaining it was decided to rebuilt them. At this time the facilities were not available at Chatham and it was necessary to move them, one to Deptford and the other to Woolwich. Even this was not accomplished without incident and drama.

In September, when the hulks had been jury-rigged and were ready to start, the crews mutinied and refused to trust themselves "on board two burnt-out wrecks" The Navy Commissioner reported to Whitehall "The **"Royal James"** and the **"Loyal London"** being ready to sail, we sent a warrant to Thos. Stretton to take charge of the **"London"**
He came and threw it at us and refused to go, and Robert Sansum who had a warrant for the **"James"** will not go either.

Eventually fresh crews were found by drafting sixty seamen from ships just come in from sea and together with thirty-three dockyard ropemakers the remains of the **"Royal James"** and the **"Loyal London"** set off for the Thames on the 13th September. The burnt-out shell of the **"Loyal London"** took nearly three years to rebuilt and cost £ 20,470. King Charles himself came all the way to Deptford to see the launching in June 1670. He had hoped to persuade the City of London to bear some of the cost of rebuilding as they had done when the ship was first launched in June 1666, But this time, the City, impoverished by the Plague, the Great Fire and the war were not so accomodating and Charles, in a fit of temper, put a line through the word **"Loyal"** and henceforth the ship was known simply as **"London"**.

