

This page as well as the various is an exact copy (including background colour) of a site that used to appear on the British section of the 'Net'.

For unknown reasons it was discontinued and despite an extensive search at the municipalities of the Medway towns, among Navy institutions and at the former netserver, the source could not be traced. Fortunately the hard copies of all its pages were preserved and are now incorporated in this site. Where a link used to be a document has taken its place and is mentioned as (doc).

We regret that no prior permission for this publication could be obtained.

The account gives the English point of view of the event, without any editing on the part of our foundation. Wherever references are made to the movements of tide and wind, readers are recommended to study the Dutch version as well, where all tactical movements of the Dutch Fleet are seen in relation to these natural phenomena.

THE DUTCH IN THE MEDWAY - 1667.



One of the more unfortunate events in the British naval history happened on 12 – 14th June 1667, when a Dutch fleet sailed up the river Medway in Kent and destroyed several British ships laid up in Chatham Dockyard, capturing the "Royal Charles" – the pride of the navy, and sinking or burning three other great ships, - the "Royal James," "Royal Oake" and "Loyal London", (see picture above) and a number of others. Samuel Pepys wrote much about this unfortunate event in his Diary. The event was also commemorated more recently by Rudyard Kipling.

The Dutch in the Medway.

(1664-72)

By Rudyard Kipling.

*If wars were won by feasting,
Or victory by song,
Or safety found, by sleeping sound
How England would be strong!
But honour and dominion
Are not maintained so,
They're only got by sword and shot
And this the Dutchmen know!*

*The moneys that should feed us
you spend on your delight,
How can you then, have sailor-men
To aid you in your fight?
Our fish and cheese are rotten,
Which makes the scurvy grow –
We cannot serve you if we starve,
And this the Dutchmen know!*

*Our ships in every harbour
Be neither whole nor sound,
And when we seek to mend a leak,
No Oakum can be found,
Or, if it is, the caulkers,
and carpenters also,
For lack of pay have gone away,
And this the Dutch men know!*

*Mere powder, guns and bullets,
we scarce can get at all;
Their price was spent in merriment
and revel at Whitehall,
While we in tattered doublets
From ship to ship must row,
Beseeching friends for odds and ends –
And this the Dutchmen know!*

*No King will heed our warnings,
No Court will pay our claims –
Our King and Court for their disport
Do sell the very Thames!
For, now De Ruyter's topsails
Off naked Chatham show,
We dare not meet him with our fleet –
And this the Dutchmen know!*



The Dutch in the Medway, by P.C. van Soest. In the centre the "Royal Charles" as it is towed off.

The War With Holland 1665 – 1667.

In 1664 Parliament was pressing King Charles to make war, although his subjects were already waging it unofficially, beyond home waters. The conflict rages wherever Dutch and English ships shared the same waters in competition for the trade that was the lifeblood of both nations. The East and West Indies, The Mediterranean, the coasts of Africa, and the eastern seaboard of North America. In 1664 came news of a great English victory in Guinea and the capture of Cape Verde. and soon Pepys was writing to his sister, who lived in Holland, of a more important conquest



Samuel Pepys. At the outbreak of the war of 1665 – 1667, Samuel Pepys had held the post of Clerk of the Acts, in effect, the Secretary of the Navy Board since 1660.

His diary (doc) entries give us a good insight into what the effect of this raid had at court.

“You will have heard of our taking of New Amsterdam which lies just by New England. ‘t is a place of great importance to trade It did belong to England heretofore, but the Dutch by degrees drove our people out and built a very good town, but we have got the better of it, and ‘t is now called New York.”

That autumn Charles was proud and confident in his Navy. His fleet of 109 large and 30 smaller vessels carrying 21.000 men and 4.200 guns, represented a Nation secure in its naval supremacy.

In 1665 Charles II’s England went officially to war with Holland. A war which brought a whole series of humiliations to the English Crown and Armed Forces. The first proper engagement of the war was the battle of Lowestoft on 13th June 1665. The Dutch under admiral van Wassenaer van Obdam were resoundingly defeated by the English under James, the Duke of York (Later King James II), on board his flagship the "*Royal Charles*". Sixteen Dutch ships were sunk, 9 captured and over 2000 men, including the Dutch Admiral, were killed. But the position deteriorated rapidly. The daring Dutch admiral, de Ruyter, (who had not been present at Lowestoft) captured a rich merchant fleet in northern waters. During the winter of 1665/66 the French came into the war as allies of the Dutch. Hence the fleet was divided into two, the main body under the Duke of Albemarle and the rest patrolling the French coast under Prince Rupert. On 1 June Albemarle made contact with the Dutch under De Ruyter and “The Four-Days-Battle” began. The guns of the fleets sounded for four days. Albemarle, outnumbered and outgunned, fought doggedly on. On the third day Rupert joined in the carnage. The English ships then numbering 58 ships against the enemy’s 72. The two nations were steadily smashing each other to pieces and when they drew apart, it was only because neither had the strength nor the ammunition to continue any longer. The English had lost 10 ships and 2000 men including two admirals. Both sides claimed a victory, unfortunately, only the Dutch were right.

Two month's later, much to the surprise of the Dutch, The English fleet were back at sea again and on St James Day (doc) won a victory off the North Foreland, which for the remainder of the year gave them command of the seas. So much so, that Sir Robert Holmes was able to sail into the port of Vlies and burn two warships and a large number of merchantmen and even put ashore landing parties, Led by the Marine regiments recently formed by the Duke of York, they pillaged the neat and prosperous town of Terschelling Houses, public buildings and richly stocked warehouses were burnt. Atrocity stories circulated It seems that the orders given by Prince Rupert and the Duke of Albemarle, to spare the persons of all civilians and all women and children, were not observed. It was this incident, known as "Holmes Bonfire" that probably prompted de Witt's plan to raid the Medway in the following year. The Dutch saw the Great Fire of London, which broke out three weeks later as God's retribution for this attack, and a punishment for English pride and Charles II's obduracy in continuing the war.

As England's fortunes at sea slowly improved, in 1665 the signs of plague began to be found in London, following the Great Fire of London in 1666. One effect of the fire was to cripple the yield of the taxes, so that the King was unable to pay his Army and Navy. And still the war, the greatest source of poverty, dragged on. Taxation was high, unemployment was rife, there were riots in many parts of the country and in the Naval towns seamen and dockyard workers were cold and hungry. In the late 20th century it is almost beyond belief, that the dockyardmen's wages for the quarter ending December 1667 were not paid until January 1672!! It was against this dreary background that the Dutch carried out their daring raid on the Medway in June 1667.

The shortage of money is best indicated by the:

Navy Board's despairing letter to the Duke of York, on 31st March 1667. (doc)

In the winter of 1666 the Government made a decision, unprecedented in times of war, To lay up the main fleet in the principal dockyards and to rely upon two small squadrons only. This decision was strongly opposed by General Monk,- Duke of Albemarle – since he knew best the situation at the coastal defenses, but he was overruled..

The Campaign of 1667.

At the root of the disastrous developments in 1667 were of course the increasing difficulties of the English Crown in raising money, but the fact that they were up against one of the greatest sea commanders in history – Michiel de Ruyter – turned what might have been an honourable defeat into a humiliating disgrace.



The Dutch in the Medway, by the Dutch seapainter DE QUELERY (2006)

The defences of the Medway in 1666 were almost non-existent. The few fortifications, some dating as far back as 1559, had fallen into decay, as it was believed that the tortuous channels of the river itself were protection enough. It was said, that even an experienced crew needed at least eight days for the passage from Sheerness to Chatham.

On the 27th February the king and the Duke of York visited Sheerness and plans were made to strengthen the defences of the Medway. A chain was to be placed across the Medway at Gillingham (to stop enemy ships!) the The "*Charles II*" and the "*Matthias*", were moored inside the chain so that their broadsides would bear upon it. "*Unity*" and two fireships were placed at Sheerness in readiness; thirty pinnaces equipped with oars, were to be provided (to combat fireships). Unfortunately little or nothing had been done when in early June the Dutch Fleet, under the much dreaded Admiral de Ruyter, appeared at the Thames estuary.



Michiel Adriaenszoon DE RUYTER
Luitenant-Admiraal-Generaal van
Hollandt en West-Frieslandt
1607 -- 1676.

A more detailed account of the events of Early June 1667. (doc)

The events of 1666 will have already indicated that the Dutch were anxious to carry the war into the enemy's camp. De Ruyter, with instructions to do just that, left the Texel on 26th May.

On June 7, hearing of a fleet from the West Indies at anchor in the Hope, just below Gravesend, Lieutenant-Admiral Joseph van Ghent, was sent after them with a squadron of lighter ships. The English merchant ships managed to escape, and the Dutch turned their attention to the Medway. Meanwhile panic had seized England and a disorderly evacuation began.

With the aid (it is sad to relate) of two renegade English pilots, the fort of Sheerness was captured on the 10th of June and Dutch troops were landed on Sheppey and the Isle of Grain. Meanwhile the defenses for Chatham dockyard were strengthened.

On the 11th of June the dockyard defenses were further strengthened and ships were sunk in the river in a vain attempt to stop the Dutch advance.

On the 12th June the Dutch continued their advance and the chain at Gillingham was broken, The "Unity" was captured, and the "Charles V" and "Matthias" destroyed. And, worst of all, the "Royal Charles" – the pride of the Navy – was captured and brought to Holland. The stern of the "Royal Charles" is displayed in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

The crew was put ashore in Gillingham where they promptly started to pillage and plunder, something which the more disciplined Dutch members of their landing parties never did..

It says a lot of the mentality of the Dutch sailor who behaved admirably towards the civilian population, even though the Raid was in retaliation of "Holmes Bonfire" on the island of Terschelling, where most of the local people were killed and the town ransacked

On June 13th the English fleet was further ravaged and three other great ships, the "Royal James", the "Loyal London", and the "Royal Oake", were sunk or burned.

In Evelyn's words:

"A dreadful spectacle as ever Englishmen saw and a dishonour never to be wiped off"

Then, on the 14th of June, the Dutch calmly sailed back up the river, towing their prizes the "Royal Charles" and the "Unity" behind them, leaving much of the English fleet burning, and made their way back to the sea and safety. The captured ships were taken back to Amsterdam, Where, to this day, the stern of the "Royal Charles" with the Royal Arms is displayed in the Rijksmuseum.

The hundred gun "Royal Charles", was built as Blake's flagship during the Commonwealth, and was originally named the "Naseby", to celebrate Cromwell's victory over the Royalists, in the Battle of Naseby. She was designed by Peter Pett who was Commissioner of Chatham at the time of the raid, but was also a Master Shipwright. In 1666 the ship was renamed the "Royal Charles", because she carried Charles II back from exile. She became the Duke of York's flagship and was the pride of the British Fleet.

The result exceeded the Dutch' wildest expectations. There was panic in the capital, ruled over by an uncertain King with an uncertain Government.

One rumour suggested that the King had abdicated and escaped. Peace was essential and as Lord Clarendon wrote:

*"Although peace can be bought at too high a price,
it would suit us highly in the circumstances and
we are not in a position to decline"*

Thus the Peace of Breda between the two countries was officially brought about at the end of July 1667.

Contemporary comments:

- Samuel Pepys Diary Entries for 10th – 30th June 1667. (doc)
- Duke of Albemarle's account of the Raid. (doc)
- Contemporary Dutch Account of the Raid. (doc)

The Dutch Harass the English Coast.

After their withdrawal from the Medway, the Dutch Fleet continued to dominate the South-East coast of England. A squadron was sent northwards, and another foray was made into the Thames, while the main fleet lay off Sheppey, landing men to obtain provisions. On July 2nd a unsuccessful attack was made on Landguard Fort on the entrance to Harwich Harbour. A blockade was also maintained on Harwich, the Thames and the Medway. Early in July de Ruyter himself decided to make a cruise down the English Channel, leaving Luitenant-Admiral van Nes to close the Thames. Although de Ruyter failed to catch the English Barbados and Smyrna fleets, he roused further widespread alarm by the time he reached Plymouth, where he was informed of the peace.

van Nes continued to maintain the pressure on the Thames. On July 24th he attacked a squadron under Sir Edward Spragge lying below Gravesend, and compelled it to retire towards Tilbury. Next day however the English took the offensive and van Nes withdrew. Sir Joseph Jordan with a squadron from Harwich came to support Spragge and another encounter took place on the 27th. As in the first several fireships of both sides were expended with little effect. Despite these efforts the Dutch Fleet was still in the Gunfleet when news of the peace came.

The Treaty of Breda (July 31st 1667) changed very little. The English had captured New Amsterdam in the early days of the war, and they renamed it under its new name of New York. Likewise the Dutch retained their capture of Surinam. Some modifications were made in the Navigation Act in favour of the Dutch. No concession was made by the English on the saluting question. In most directions, therefore, the treaty marked only an interlude. Even by the following year, events had made it of little importance, and Anglo-Dutch hostilities were again to break out in 1672.

The hopes of the war party in 1664 thus ended (for those that survived Lowestoft and the Four-Days-Battle) in the shame of the Medway and the national near bankruptcy foreseen by Coventry and Pepys,.

For the Dutch too, the war had been exhausting in money and men. Though the struggle proved therefore inconclusive, its events were on a heroic scale and deserve remembering.

- The death of Obdam in the hour of defeat,
- The intensity of the Four-Days-Battle
- and the anticlimax, the towing away of the Royal Charles.

This unfortunate incident led (eventually) to a “beefing-up” of the Dockyard defences until by the time of the Napoleonic Wars, the Dockyard was protected by a formidable ring of forts, chains and coastal batteries.

1967 Commemoration

In 1967, the tercenary of the Medway Raid, the English (one might almost say typically) commemorated this notorious naval defeat which they had suffered. In June 1967 a “River Medway Dutch Week” was held and of course the Dutch were invited to attend which they did with alacrity and without inhibitions. In this, second but peaceful, invasion of the Medway The Dutch sent over three vessels, while the Royal Navy was represented by the destroyer "Carysford" which berthed amicably along side the Dutch "Holland".

A descendant of Admiral Michiel de Ruyter, a banker, Mr F.P.J. de Ruyter de Wildt, was the guest of the organising committee. When asked in a television interview on the forecastle of the Dutch Man-of-War if he was not afraid to show his face where his ancestor had not made many friends, he replied, patting one of the large guns that loomed overhead: “I have no fear when these Dutch guns are behind me, but I have come as a friend, to commemorate, not to celebrate the events of the 17th century”

Commemoration of the Raid in 1967. (doc)

