

GEORGE MONCK Duke of Albemarle (1608–1670)

(source: british-civil-wars. Commonwealth and Protectorate. By David Plant, 2001-6)



Monck began his military career at the age of 16 when he volunteered to join the English expedition against Cadiz (1625), during which he may have served under his cousin Sir Richard Grenville. After his return to England, Monck and his elder brother beat up an under-sheriff who had arrested their father for debt. Monck pursued and stabbed the under-sheriff, who later died of his wounds. To escape prosecution, Monck joined the expedition for the relief of La Rochelle (1627) where he greatly distinguished himself.

About 1629, Monck joined the English volunteers fighting for the Prince of Orange against the Spanish in the Thirty Years' War. He spent nine years in the Dutch service, and rose to the rank of captain-lieutenant in Colonel Goring's regiment. Monck was a hero of the siege of Breda in 1637, during which he led the storming of the breach that resulted in the city's surrender. However, he resigned his commission in a fit of rage following an argument with the Dutch authorities at Dordrecht, where some of his troops had been accused of misconduct. He returned to England and joined King Charles' army.

Following the defeat of the Royalists in England, Monck took an oath of loyalty to Parliament.

He was given command of a regiment of foot in Cromwell's army for the invasion of Scotland in July 1650. When Cromwell advanced into Fife in July 1651, Monck secured the English position. However, Monck's health had declined. He was obliged to resign his commission in February 1652 and return to England to recuperate.

In December 1652, Monck joined Blake and Deane as a General-at-Sea in the First Anglo-Dutch War. Although he had no previous naval experience, Monck's powers of leadership and his expertise as an artillery officer qualified him for command at sea. Relying upon the seamanship of his officers, Monck played a decisive role in the battle of Portland in February 1653. After Deane was killed at the battle of North Foreland and Blake was forced to return to England to recover from his wounds, Monck took command of the English fleet, imposing a total blockade on Dutch ports and bringing Dutch commerce to a standstill. When the Dutch attempted to break the blockade in July 1653, Monck was victorious at the battle of Scheveningen (Terheide) the deciding battle of the war, during which the Dutch admiral Maarten Tromp was killed.

On 1 May 1653, he recommended that Parliament should invite Charles II to return. When the restored King landed at Dover on 25 May, Monck was the first to greet him as he came ashore.

Amongst other honours for his part in the Restoration, Monck was appointed Captain-General of the Army, Master of the King's Horse and created Duke of Albemarle.

Monck's regiment of foot — originally formed by Cromwell in 1650 — was the only New Model Army regiment to be incorporated into Charles II's standing army, where it became known as the Coldstream Guards.

Monck played an active naval role in the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667) but generally kept out of politics. During the emergencies of the Great Plague of 1665 and the Great Fire of 1666, Monck took charge of governing London. As one of the Lords Proprietor of Carolina, Albemarle Sound was named in his honour, as was Albemarle County, Virginia.

He died on 3 January 1670, receiving a state funeral at the King's expense, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

