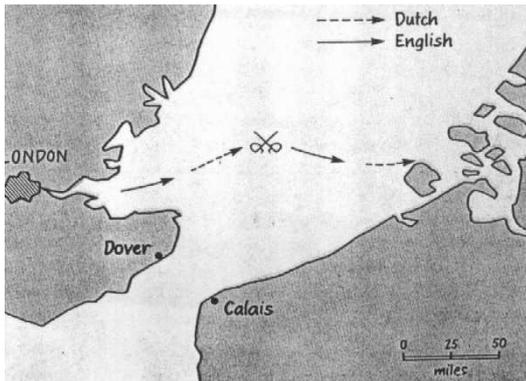


St James's Day Fight, 25-26/7-1666. (Twee-daagse Zeeslag. 4-5/8-1666)

This account is by 'Peter Le Fevre' and appeared in "The Great Battles of the Royal Navy", A publication from the Britannia Royal Navy College at Dartmoor.

The dates in the text are those of the, English, Julian, Calender, which is known as the "Old Calendar) the dates between brackerts aree the corresponding dates used by the Dutch (Gregorian Calender).



St James's Day Fight.

"If a man faint under the burden of such tediousness as usually attendeth upon warlike designments, he is no way fit for enterprise"

George Monck, Duke of Albemarle, 1608-1670.

English declared war on Holland in 1665, partly for economic reasons, partly because of a factional struggle in Charles II court and partly because of political ideology. The first naval engagement, fought after the declaration of war, the battle of Lowestoft in June 1665, was a clear victory for the English. This gave the English fleet control of the sea, and they were quick to capitalise on it by capturing a homeward bound Dutch merchant fleet. Despite some later reverses, 1665 still ended on a high note

In the following year, 1666, the command of the English fleet was shared by Prince Rupert, the dashing nephew of Charles II, and George Monck (Duke of Albemarle since 1660), who had been responsible for engineering the restoration of Charles II to the English throne in 1660.

Hearing that a French fleet, commanded by the Duke of Beaufort, was supposed to have been sighted sailing out of the Mediterranean, and believing that it was intended to join with the Dutch fleet under command of the Dutch Admiral Michael de Ruyter, Rupert was ordered to sail to the westward to intercept them. Albemarle's scouts spotted the Dutch about 0600 on Friday 1st June (11e juni).



The " Four-days Battle"

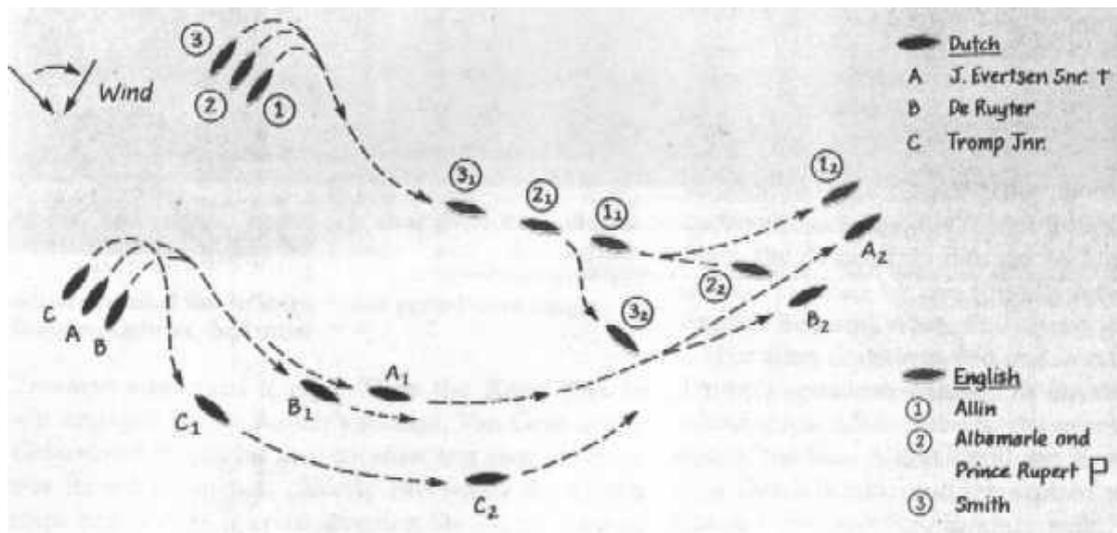
1-4 June 1666 (11-14 juni 1666).

"Then began the most terrible, obstinate and bloodiest battle that ever was fought on the seas"

The English were defeated, losing 10 ships of the line and 6 fireships,
The Dutch losses were 4 ships of the line and 5 fireships.

The English defeat also led to recriminations, with Albemarle accusing officers of not supporting him and demanding their removal. He ignored criticisms that he should not have fought with inferior numbers.

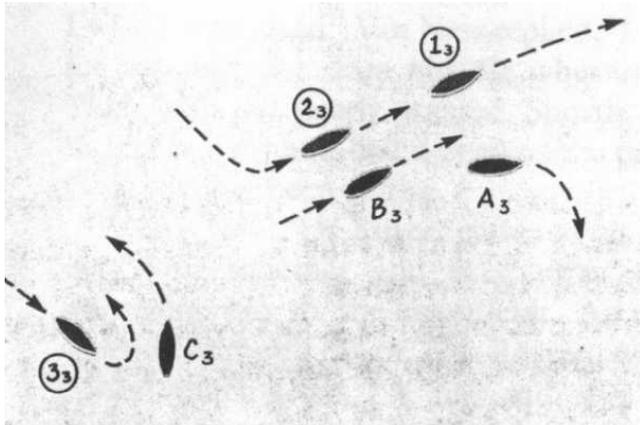
Over the next few weeks the two sides worked feverishly to get to sea again. The Dutch won the race, de Ruyter leaving port with 59 ships on 25th June (5e juli) followed shortly afterwards by other Dutch ships. Delays caused by head-winds and storms meant, however, that he did not arrive before the English coast until 3rd July (13e juli) The English sailed on the 22nd July (1 augustus) and anchored off Orfordness with the Dutch to the south-east of them. At 1600 on 24th July (3 augustus), the two fleets came in sight of each other.



The next day, 25th July (4 augustus) - St. James's Day - the two fleets were 36 miles off Orfordness with the wind at NNE. The English had 89 ships of war, 23 of them new, while the Dutch had 88 ships, including 8 new ships of war. The English van (or White Squadron) was commanded by Sir Thomas Allin; the centre (or Red Squadron) by Rupert and Albemarle in the Royal Charles, while the rear (or Blue Squadron) was under the command of Sir Jeremy Smith. The Dutch van was led by the Zeeland admiral John Evertsen; de Ruyter commanded the the centre; while the rear was under Cornelis Tromp. The Dutch line was badly formed; their rear and van were to windward of their centre and drawn into a half-moon shape, possibly to avoid the English fireships, - possibly - (so the English thought) to try and weather a large part of the English fleet by the Dutch van or rear.

Jeremy Roch on the 'Cambridge' wrote when he saw the Dutch,
'Here was a glorious prospect of 2 fleets, drawn up in such order as perhaps never observed on the sea before, for here every ship fought single so that valour was not oppressed, nor could cowards well avoid fighting. The English shouted for joy that they had.... the opportunity to try it out with the Hogens (the Dutch) on equal terms.'

The battle began about 0930 when the Dutch fired at the leading English ships. Half an hour later the English 'flag of defiance' was then spread and we all bore in. Some of Allin's captains never managed to get into the line and fired over their own ships. Sir Thomas Teddman, the vice admiral of the English White in the 'Royal Catherine', was the first ship fired at by the Dutch. The two squadrons engaged each other so closely that by 1300 the English had disabled two of the Dutch flags so badly that one of them, which had her main topsail yard shot to pieces, bore away, accompanied by five Dutch ships intending to render assistance. Evertsen died about the same time, and his death caused his flagship to run into five others.



About 1500, the Dutch van bore away and fled back towards their coast followed by Allin's squadron **'so close upon the rear that the Dutch could only fire their rear guns.'**

The two centre squadrons meanwhile engaged at 1100. Rupert and Albemarle in the *Royal Charles* made towards de Ruyter in the *'Zeven Provinciën'*. as De Ruyter fired at them, Albemarle (*'chewing of tobacco the while'*) said, *'Now will this fellow come and give me two broadsides, and then he will run'* Soon afterwards the two English admirals fired their first broadsides at De Ruyter and continued firing *'without intermission'* as they edged closer and closer to each other. At last *'we came within half a musket shot or rather more'* and fired small shot at each other for over half an hour. The *'Royal Charles'* was disabled in her yards, masts and rigging and about 1330 was *'forced to give out to repair which held us almost an hour.'* At the same time, Sir Robert Holmes, the rear admiral of the Red, in the *'Henry'* pulled out of the line to replace his fore topmast, which had been shot away. After it was replaced, Holmes was so far away from the main body that he joined the Blue Squadron.

The *'Royal Charles'* completed her repairs and *'bore in again'* to De Ruyter. 'One in the ship saying to the Duke

"Sir, methinks De Ruyter hath given us more than two broadsides" "well" says the Duke, "but you shall find him run by and by" The firing produced thick smoke, which enveloped the ships and one of De Ruyter's fireships took the opportunity to try and burn the English ship. The design was stopped by an English fireship, which was in turn prevented from burning De Ruyter's ship. A sloop, the *'Fan Fan'* lying under the *'Royal Charles'* stern, made *'very bold sallies'* on De Ruyter *'by the continuous firing of her two small guns'* The *'Fan Fan's'* part in De Ruyter's defeat was to inspire a song that included the lines:

*'The Mermaids laughed and shouted,
and still De Ruyter ran,
his honour lost and routed,
by the Fan Fan'*

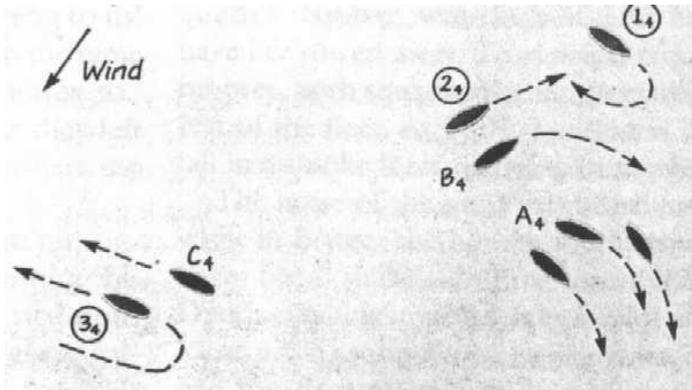
De Ruyter's main-topmast was shot down at 1500. Rupert called to the captain of the *'Triumph'* to board the disabled ship, but *'the gale, being very small the 'Triumph' attempted it not.'*

Then the *'Royal Charles'* was engaged by De Ruyter's second, Van Gent, in the *'Gelderland'* When his fore-topmast was shot down he was forced to anchor.

Shortly afterward the Dutch ships began to bear away, ignoring De Ruyter's signal shots. Calling to admiral van Ness to come aboard, De Ruyter took him down to his cabin. During their conversation he told van Ness, *"What is coming to us! I wish I were dead"* Van Ness replied, *"I wish the same for me, but one does not die when one wants to"* Their wish was nearly granted. Shortly after they left the cabin a cannon-ball destroyed the table where the two men had been sitting.

About 1600, De Ruyter gathered his seven remaining ships together and bore away, following his retreating van to the south-east. As the victorious English followed them De Ruyter *'with great gallantry'* endangered himself and his ship to help his maimed ships. Seeing an English fireship approaching his disabled second, De Ruyter's boats towed a Dutch fireship, which cut off the similar English vessel. At the same time De Ruyter's second, *'like a hare'* anchored causing the English fireship to pass by. Then the Dutchman cut his anchor and joined the retreat, pursued by the English centre.

At 1900 the English Red and White Squadrons joined together. The Blue Squadron had got into action at midday. Tromp's squadron was slightly stronger than Smith's, whose ships, unlike the Dutch, were strung out at the end of the line. At 1400 the '*Resolution*' was burned by a Dutch fireship and the captain and his crew were rescued by another English ship, while Sir John Kempthorne in the '*Defiance*' narrowly escaped being burnt by an English fireship! The '*Loyal London*' Smith's flagship, was disabled and he was forced to have her towed away. Tromp also tacked and followed his prey,



both squadrons sailing westerly away from the rest of the fleet.

At 1800, Smith and his division '**were all in a smoke intermixed with the Dutch colours**'

The noise of the guns was heard in London all day, while in Bruges the houses and beds were reported to have been shaken by the cannons' thunder. The Dutch casualties were nearly 7000 while the English losses were estimated to be as low as 300. The Dutch had five flag officers and several captains killed while the English lost only one. The slaughter was appalling: *"You might see the heads of some, the arms, legs or thighs of others shot off, and others.....cut off by the middle with a chain-shot breathing out their last anguish and pain; some burning in ships fired, and others exposed to the mercy of the liquid Element, some of them sinking, whilst others who have learnt the art of swimming, lift up their heads above water and implore pity from their very enemies, entreating them to save their lives"*

During the chase on 25th July (4e augustus) Allin captured a Dutch 66-gun ship, the '*Snake*' which he burnt as he could not spare the men to bring her in, and continued the pursuit. Vice Admiral Banckert's flagship '*Tholen*' was boarded by Allin, but Banckert, leaving his officers and men behind, shifted his flag before the English arrived. Like the '*Snake*' the ship was burnt.

The English continued the chase on 26th July (5e augustus) but no general action took place. Allin received three painful wounds in his arm and faced from splinters when De Ruyter fired upon him during the pursuit. The '*Fan Fan*' harried De Ruyter. Rowing up to the Dutch admiral, the '*Fan Fan*' brought her two little guns on one side' and for nearly an hour fired broadsides at him - '*which was so pleasant a sight when no ship of either side could come near*' as there was very little wind. The '*Fan Fan*'s behaviour provided amusement for the English, but enraged De Ruyter, as he could not depress the '*Zeven Provinciën*'s guns low enough to fire at the sloop. Before dark the Dutch van and centre got into Flushing. Tromp was still 30 miles away near the Galloper Sands. A series of mishaps and also confusion on Smith's part prevented the English capturing him, and Tromp joined De Ruyter on 27th July (6e augustus).

There were recriminations after the battle, De Ruyter accused Tromp of dereliction of duty, and in return Tromp accused De Ruyter of trying to shelter him and then deserting him. Each refused to serve with the other, and Tromp was dismissed. In England, Holmes blamed Smith for letting Tromp escape and also accused him of cowardice. Albemarle wrote Charles about Smith, *"to clear a gallant man's reputation.... I can assure Your Majesty that he had more men killed and hurt than in any of the fleet"* After investigating the matter Charles exonerated Smith.

Sir Robert Holmes rubbed salt into the Dutch wounds on 8th August (18e augustus) when he burnt the Dutch shipping lying in the Vlie before Texel. (Holmes' Bonfire). The English fleet was back in harbour on 15th August (25e augustus) and sailed again on 28th August (7e September) to prevent the Dutch linking up with the French. Despite spying each other, gales forced the two fleets to make for safe harbours.

Rejoicing in England over the victory did not last. Because of a money shortage, and the possibility of peace with the Dutch, the decision was taken not to send out a battle fleet in 1667. As a result, De Ruyter and 70 ships sailed up the river Medway on 10th June (19 juni 1667), storming Sheerness, burning five ships in Chatham two days later and capturing the 'Royal Charles', Albemarle's flagship at the St James's Day Fight. The Dutch fleet continued in the English Channel until 31st July 1667 (10 augustus 1667) when peace was signed at Breda.

