

“The Dutch Experience and Memory of the Campaign of 1812: a Final Feat of Arms of the Dutch Imperial Contingent, or: the Resurrection of an Independent Dutch Armed Forces?*

By Mark Edward Hay
King's College London

The history of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée starts on 9 July 1810. On this day, Napoleon decided to annex the untrustworthy Kingdom of Holland.¹ Although the Netherlands would only remain inside the French Empire for slightly over three years, the period had a significant impact on Dutch history, and not in the least on the history of the Dutch Armed Forces. For the Dutch Armed Forces annexation meant two things. First, per decree of 18 August 1810 the army of the Kingdom of the Holland would be purged of foreign nationals, and incorporated into the French-Imperial Army.² The Dutch infantry was renumbered the 123rd-126th and 131st Infantry Regiments of the Line, and the 33rd Regiment of Light Infantry.³ The cavalry became the 11th

Hussars and the 14th Regiment of Cuirassiers.⁴ The artillery was merged into the Seventh Regiment of Horse Artillery and the Ninth Regiment of Foot Artillery. The bridging train became the 11th Company of the First Battalion of *Pontonniers*.⁵ Louis Bonaparte's Royal Guard – “*La gloire de la Hollande*” according to Napoleon – became the Third Regiment of Foot Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard and the Second Regiment of Lancers of the Imperial Guard (commonly known as the Red Lancers).⁶ The second consequence of the annexation of the Netherlands was that the Dutch elements of the French-Imperial Army came under French operational command, and as such the Dutch units were ordered to participate in the Russian campaign of 1812. The Dutch contingent did not participate in the campaign as an independent corps, but it was split up amongst the army corps of the Grande Armée. The 33rd Light Infantry was assigned to the First Corps, and the 123rd and 124th Infantry and 14th Cuirassiers were placed in the Second Corps. The Third Corps of the Grande Armée had only one Dutch regiment: the 11th Hussars, whilst the Ninth Corps had two Dutch regiments: the 125th and 126th Infantry. The

¹ H.T. Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand* (Amsterdam, 1941), 1-5.

² J.W. Sypesteijn, *Geschiedenis van het Regiment Nederlandse Rijdende Artillerie* (Zaltbommel, 1852), 163. For the purging of foreign nationals from Dutch units: F.H.A. Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 124ste regiment infanterie van linie onder keizer Napoleon I* (Breda, 1910), 124.

³ H. Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie* (Bussum: C.A.J. van Dishoeck, 1968), 51-53; Marco van der Hoeven, *Van de Weser tot de Weichsel. Het leger van het Koninkrijk Holland en de Duitse veldtochten van Napoleon 1806, 1807 en 1809*. (Amsterdam, 1994), 21; Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 124ste*, 6-7; F.H.A. Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 33ste Regiment Lichte Infanterie (Het Oud-Hollandsche 3de Regiment Jagers) onder Keizer Napoleon I* (Breda, 1910; C. D. H. Schneider, *Het 126ste [honderd zesentwintigste] Regiment Hollandsche Infanterie in Rusland in 1812* (P.N. Van Kampen & Zoon, 1898). The 131st Infantry Regiment of the Line was made up of a variety of units stationed on the islands of the province of Zeeland. The regiment was incorporated into the French army before 18 August 1810. As consequence, this unit was not purged of foreign nationals, and had a less distinctive Dutch character. The 131st Regiment will therefore not be dealt with in this article.

⁴ J.W. Sypesteijn, *Geschiedenis van het regiment Hollandsche hussaren, vroeger regiment Hussaren van Van Heeckeren, vervolgens regiment Bataafsche hussaren en daar daarna 2de en 11de regiment Hussaren: een bijdrage voor de Nederlandsche krijgsgeschiedenis van het belangrijk tijdvak van 1784-1814* (De Gebroeders van Cleef, 1849).

⁵ Sypesteijn, *Nederlandse Rijdende Artillerie*, 163; G.A. Geerts, “De veldtocht naar Rusland in 1812 onder keizer Napoleon 1,” *Militaire Spectator*, (1983), 52; J.P.C.M. van Hooff, “George Diederich Benthien: een bruggenbouwer pur sang,” *Armamentaria*, (1998-1999), 83.

⁶ Initially the Guard Regiment became the 2nd *Régiment des grenadiers à pied de la Garde Impériale*, but on 11 May 1811 the regiment was “relegated” to the 3rd *Régiment des grenadiers à pied de la Garde Impériale*: Geerts, *De veldtocht naar Rusland*, 52.

former Dutch Imperial Guard regiments, of course, remained with the Imperial Guard Corps⁷.

There is some confusion concerning the number of Dutch troops that participated in the Russian campaign. Not in the least this is because astonishingly few historians have dared to put a figure on the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée. Those historians that have provided an estimate often seem utterly misinformed. Colenbrander, for instance, estimates that 15,000 Dutch troops participated in the Russian campaign. The number of 15,000 in fact refers to the numbers of Dutch recruits that were levied prior to the Russian campaign – the class of 1812.⁸ These recruits were not the Dutch contingent itself, they were merely designated to reinforce the Dutch regiments of the Grande Armée.

Since the entire Dutch field army participated in the Russian campaign, a better manner, then, to gain insight into the strength of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée, is to look at the strength of the Dutch army of 1810. Several days prior to the incorporation of the Dutch army, the French did a full inventory of the Dutch Armed Forces. According to this report, the Dutch Armed Forces numbered 28,262 men.⁹ However, this number includes home defences forces, and as these did not participate in the Russian campaign, these need to be deducted, giving a total of 21,866 men for the Dutch field army. From this number a further 1,641 men should be deducted. These troops were what remained from the Dutch contingent of the French army in the Peninsula.¹⁰ The strength of the Dutch field army in 1810 therefore can be established at 20,225 men. Obviously, in the years 1810-1812, the strength of the Dutch field army would change due to the influx of recruits, as well as desertion, disease and death. Nevertheless, the structure of the Dutch

⁷ Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 124ste*, 21 note 1.

⁸ The number of recruits of the class of 1812 was in fact between 10,000 and 15,000 men: Van der Hoeven, *Van de Weser tot de Weichsel*, 21.

⁹ "Corps d'Observation de la Hollande, 15 July 1810", Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, entry number C²690.

¹⁰ The primary Dutch work on the Dutch contingent in the Peninsula is: J.A. De Moor and H.Ph. Vogel, *Duizend Miljoen Maal Veroloeft Land. De Hollandse Brigade in Spanje, 1808-1813*. (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1991).

contingent of the Grande Armée remained unaltered during these years – no new unites were raised, and no unites were disbanded. Therefore the number of 20,225 men, as a general figure, seems accurate for the strength of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée in 1812.

Dutch units were in the thick of all major engagements.¹¹ Two feats of arms in particular, are much quoted by Dutch military historians. The first is the Battle of Krasnyi, which in fact was a series of skirmishes fought between 15 and 18 November 1812.¹² At this engagement, Dutch units put up a stiff fight but were decimated. The Dutch Imperial Guard Regiment, for example, lost 460 out of 500 men. The 33rd Light Regiment was down to 80 men, of whom only 25 were uninjured.¹³ The second much quoted Dutch feat of arms involved the Bridging Company. During the retreat from Moscow, with temperatures of minus 26 degrees Celsius, these troops laid two bridges across the River Berezina near Studianka. This allowed a large part of the Grande Armée to retreat to relative safety, but it came at a cost: of the 200 men, only forty survived the icy water.¹⁴

It is in part due to glorification and the "mythification" of heroic feats such as these that, in Dutch historiography and national memory, it is commonly accepted that the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée all but perished on the fields of Russia. Over the years, two interpretations of the destruction of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée have emerged. The first is that the Dutch contingent was all but annihilated, and only a lucky few survived to make their way back to the Netherlands.¹⁵ The second interpretation differs only from the first in that the Dutch survivors of the Russian campaign are believed to have been incorporated in the French army, instead of having

¹¹ 1812 campaign in Russia: Wilkomir, 27 June 1812; Polotsk, 18 August 1812; Borodino, 7 September 1812; Moscow, 15 September 1812; Polotsk, 10 October 1812; Chaznicki, 31 October 1812; Krasnoi, 17 November 1812; Borisov and Studianka, 28 November 1812: Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie*, 52.

¹² Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: the Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 267-268.

¹³ Geerts, *De veldtocht naar Rusland*, 60.

¹⁴ Van Hooff, *George Diederich Benthien*, 83-84.

¹⁵ For example: Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 151-152.

returned to the Netherlands.¹⁶ Of all historians researching the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée only Sabron remarks that it may not be true that the entire Dutch contingent perished in Russia. Due to his inability to disclose sufficient primary sources to prove otherwise, however, Sabron admits that he has little choice but to adhere to the opinion that the Dutch contingent was destroyed in Russia.¹⁷

Several accidental finds in the Dutch and French archives have convinced the author that this – almost apologetic – comment by Sabron may be more in line with historical reality than the conclusion of other historians. Follow-up research has revealed that the current opinion as regards to the fate of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée is most certainly not based on historical facts. The true aim of this article, then, is to rid Dutch historiography of this persistent falsehood.

So if the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée did not perish in Russia, what then happened to the Dutch regiments? In the first place, it is important to realise that although all the aforementioned Dutch regiments participated in the Russian campaign, the regiments did not participate as coherent units. At this time, Dutch infantry regiments consisted of four or five battalions, ideally consisting of around 600-700 men. With the expectance of the Guards and the 33rd Light Infantry, all infantry regiments were split up. The first two battalions of each regiment, and sometimes the third, were designated first line units. These units participated in the invasion proper; they were at the forefront of the fighting, and marched to Moscow and back. The remaining battalions of the Dutch regiments served as second line units. These units were held in reserve, acted as depot battalion, or performed second line duties such as the guarding and escorting of enemy prisoners of war, or the garrisoning of strategically located towns and fortresses.¹⁸

Historians of the Dutch contingent of the French-Imperial Army have concentrated their

¹⁶ To quote but the most obvious: Van der Hoeven, *Van de Weser tot de Weichsel*, 21 and 80; W.E.A. Wüpperman, *De vorming van het Nederlandsche leger na de omwenteling van 1813 en het aandeel van dat leger aan den veldtocht van 1815* (Breda: Koninklijke Militaire Academie, 1900), 1.

¹⁷ Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 33ste*, 113.

¹⁸ Geerts, *De veldtocht naar Rusland*, 54-55.

research on the first line units. And it is true that – like the Grande Armée in general – the Dutch first line units suffered heavy casualties; these units were practically destroyed during the campaign. Still to say that these military units were destroyed is not to say that all the troops perished on the fields of Russia. Many Dutch troops were in fact taken captive by Allied armies. The remnants of the 126th Regiment, for instance, were taken captive at Borisov on 27 August 1812. Approximately 100 men of the 33rd Light were taken captive at the Battle of Krasnyi on 17 November 1812.¹⁹ And as the Grande Armée retreated towards France, the number of engagements with the enemy increased, and with it did the number of Dutch prisoners of war that fell into Allied hands. Significant numbers of Dutch troops were taken at Großbeeren (23 August 1813), Katzbach (26 August), Dresden (27 August), Kulm (30 August), and Dennewitz (6 September).²⁰

The second line battalions of the Dutch contingent had remained far from the fighting. This changed when the French army retreated. Many of these units now became bottled up in the towns and fortresses, which they garrisoned. The fortress of Stettin contained the largest Dutch second line unit, approximately 1,400 men²¹ with battalions from the 123rd, 124th and 125th Regiments. Stettin fell to the Allies on 5 December, and the Dutch garrison was taken captive.²² Wittenberg, which was stormed by the Allies in the night of 13-14 January 1814, contained a Dutch garrison of 1,162 men.²³ In addition, Danzig, Kolberg²⁴, Löwenhain

¹⁹ Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie*, 51-52.

²⁰ “4 October 1813, London”, Nationaal Archief, The Hague (NL-NA), entry number 2.21.008.01, *Constant Rebecque, Collectie 066 De Constant Rebecque, supplement 4*, inv.no. 24, *Dagboek, deel 3, 1812 april 14 - 1813 oktober 9 [met reizen/campagnes Portugal, Spanje, Engeland]*.

²¹ Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 124ste*, 92-93. See also the muster books of the Dutch Legion of Orange: First Battalion: NL-NA, entry number 2.13.09, *Stamboeken Onderofficieren en Minderen na 1813*, inv.no. 10 and 10A, *Bataljon Infanterie van Linie nr. 7*; Second Battalion: NL-NA, 2.13.09, *Oorlog / Stamboeken Onderofficieren*, inv.no. 199, *Bataljon Infanterie van Linie nr. 8*; Third Battalion: NL-NA, 2.13.09, *Oorlog / Stamboeken Onderofficieren*, inv.no. 227, *Bataljon Infanterie van Linie nr. 9*.

²² Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 256.

²³ Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 124ste*, 95. Wilhelmina mentions a number of 565 men: “Dowager Princess to

and Hamburg contained significant Dutch garrisons, which were all marched into captivity once the towns were taken.²⁵

A last manner, which caused the numbers of the Dutch contingent to decline, of course, was desertion. It is difficult to establish the rate of desertion amongst Dutch units, but that it was significant can be concluded from the fact that on 12 July 1812, at Minsk, the French Marshal Davout²⁶ ordered the Voltiguer and Grenadier companies of the 33rd Light to parade with its muskets upside down, as punishment for the high levels of desertion.²⁷ Some of the deserters made their way home individually, many others were picked up by Allied armies, and joined their compatriots in prisoner of war camps.

At this moment in time, the House of Orange re-emerges onto the scene. In 1795 the House of Orange had fled the Netherlands before the advancing French Revolutionary armies. Since then the various members had either retreated to their private estates, or sought refuge at courts in Europe. In 1812, the principal members of the House of Orange, that is: the Hereditary Prince of Orange²⁸, the son of the late Stadtholder Willem

Constant Rebecque, Berlin, 2 December 1813", NL-NA, 2.21.008.01, inv.no. 34, *Brieven van de prinses douairière van Oranje*.

²⁴ Currently: Kołobrzeg in Poland.

²⁵ Hamburg: "Boreel to William I, Buxtehude, 25 January 1814", 2.21.008.01, entry number 2.02.01, *Algemene Staatssecretarie*, inv. no. 6566, *Ingekomen berichten bij de soevereine vorst van verschillende militaire autoriteiten*, January 1814, No. 35; "Benningsen to Willim I, Pinneberg, 30 January 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566, February 1814, No. 16; Jürgen Huck, *Das ende der Franzosenzeit in Hamburg. Quellen und Studien zur Belagerung und Befreiung von Hamburg 1813-1814* (Hamburg: Ernst Kabel, 1984), 12. For Danzig, Kolberg and Löwenhain see the muster books of the Dutch Legion of Orange at note 21.

²⁶ Louis-Nicolas d'Avout (10 May 1770 – 1 June 1823), 1st Duke of Auerstaedt, 1st Prince of Eckmühl

²⁷ Sabron, *Geschiedenis van het 33ste*, 42-45; Bruno Indekeu and Marco Bijl, "Van Vaandrig tot kolonel, vriend en vijand van Frankrijk. Wijbrand Adriaan de Jongh (1776-1821)", *Mars et Historia*, 46 (2012), 10.

²⁸ William Frederick (24 August 1772 – 12 December 1843). In 1806, after the death of his father, William became hereditary Prince of Orange. Later, after the restoration of the House of Orange, William became King William I.

V²⁹, and his mother the Dowager Princess Wilhelmina³⁰, had taken up residence in Berlin.³¹ Partially this was due to necessity, as Napoleon had stripped the House of Orange of all its estates save but a few private estates in Eastern Europe.³² Partially this was due to dynastic links: the Prussian monarch, Frederick William III³³, was the Prince of Orange's brother-in-law.³⁴

Emboldened by the apparent French defeat, the Prince of Orange and his mother had taken up the idea of raising a corps of troops consisting solely of Dutch nationals. With this military unit it was intended to invade the Netherlands, and liberate the country from French rule.³⁵ The Dutch troops, of course, which the Prince of Orange had in mind, were those taken prisoner by the Allied Armies.

Exiled, and without fortune or much supporters, the Prince of Orange was dependent on Allied assistance, and a genuine diplomatic offensive was started to gain their support. As early as 15 March 1813, the Prince of Orange approached Tsar Alexander³⁶, and presented him with his plans. Alexander, hoping to take the fight to Napoleon, and eager to play the first violin in an anti-French coalition, was quick to lend his support.³⁷ Prussia and Sweden, the other members of the soon-to-be Sixth Coalition, dutifully followed

²⁹ William V, Prince of Orange-Nassau (8 March 1748 – 9 April 1806).

³⁰ Frederika Sophia *Wilhelmina* (7 August 1751 – 9 June 1820).

³¹ Johanna W.A. Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina, Gemalin van Willem V, Prins van Oranje*. (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1908), 259, 273.

³² N. Japikse, *De Geschiedenis van het Huis Oranje-Nassau*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Zuid-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1937-1938), II, 174-197.

³³ Frederick William III (3 August 1770 – 7 June 1840)

³⁴ Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, *König in Preussens grosser Zeit: Friedrich Wilhelm III. der Melancholiker auf dem Thron* (Berlin: Siedler, 1992), 165.

³⁵ "The Prince of Orange to Castlereagh, Breslau, 20 February 1813", H.T. Colenbrander (ed.), *Gedenkstukken der Algemeene Geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, 10 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1905-1922), VI, 1857-1858.

³⁶ Alexander I of Russia (23 December 1777 – 1 December 1825)

³⁷ "Princess Louise to Prince of Orange, 19 March 1813", Johanna W.A. Naber (ed.), *Correspondentie van de Stadhouderlijke Familie, 1777-1820*, 5 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931-1936), V, 194-195.

suit.³⁸ At this time, when the Sixth Coalition was coming together, diplomacy demanded that the Prince of Orange gain the support of another of Napoleon's adversaries, namely Britain.³⁹ This proved more problematic. The reason for this was that British interests greatly differed from the interests of the House of Orange, and many political issues between Britain and the House of Orange remained unresolved, such as the need to have a friendly power occupy the North Sea Coast, the return of Dutch colonies captured by Britain, and institutional issues, such as whether the a Prince of Orange should return to the Netherlands as Stadtholder, or King.⁴⁰ The hammering out of a compromise between Britain and the House of Orange was complex and took several months, which severely delayed the formation of a Dutch corps. In September of 1813, finally, the Prince of Orange was informed that Britain, on several conditions, no longer had political objections to him raising a Dutch contingent from deserters of the Grande Armée. The most important of these conditions were that the Prince of Orange would not command the unit, but stay in London and name a commanding officer in his stead, and that the force would be attached to the Russo-German Legion under the command of Wallmoden⁴¹, who was in British pay. Wallmoden's corps, in turn, was attached to the Army of the North under Bernadotte.⁴² The last of Napoleon's adversaries,

³⁸ Prussia: "Prince of Orange to Hardenberg, 19 March 1813", Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, VI, 1864; "Prince of Orange to Wilhelmina, 19 March 1813", Naber, *Correspondentie van de Stadhouderlijke Familie*, V, 198-199; Idem, V, 197-198, 277. Sweden: "Prince of Orange to Wilhelmina, Stockholm, 8 April 1813", Naber, *Correspondentie van de Stadhouderlijke Familie*, V, 200.

³⁹ Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 247.

⁴⁰ G.J. Renier, *Great Britain and the Establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 1813-1815. A Study in British Foreign Policy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1930), 57-58, 65; "Aantekeningen van B.P. van Lelyveld 25 April – 30 November 1813", Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, VI, 1874-1876.

⁴¹ Ludwig Georg Thedel, Count von Wallmoden (6 February 1769 - 22 March 1862).

⁴² "Prince of Orange to Wilhelmina, 27 September 1813", Naber, *Correspondentie van de Stadhouderlijke Familie*, V, 221-222; "Prince of Orange to princess Louise, 12 March 1813", Ibidem, V, 185; Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 256.

Austria, joined the coalition relatively late, and was left no choice but to accept the *acquis communautaire* regarding the raising of a Dutch corps.

Having finally received the backing of all Allies, the Prince of Orange quickly set about organizing his Dutch corps, which would be known as the *Legion Hollandaise d'Orange*, or the Dutch Legion of Orange. A recruitment centre, known as the *Rassemblement* or rallying point, was set up in Schwedt on the River Oder.⁴³ All Dutch prisoners of war were to be transported to this centre. In general this process proceeded smoothly. Allied authorities were quick to transport the Dutch prisoners of war to the *Rassemblement*. Admittedly, though, there were also difficulties. For example, approximately 1,200 Dutch prisoners of war had already been pressed into the second battalion of the Russo-German Legion.⁴⁴ The commanding officer blatantly refused to release such a large part of his force whilst military operations were still ongoing, which from his point of view is perhaps quite understandable.⁴⁵

Despite such setbacks, more than enough recruits poured into the *Rassemblement*. It remains challenging to determine exactly how many Dutch deserters and prisoners of war were assembled at the *Rassemblement*. Cator⁴⁶, a Dutch exile in Britain, who was intimately close to both the Prince of Orange, and members of the British political establishment mentions that 10,000 men saw their

⁴³ Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina*, 280.

⁴⁴ Gabriele Venzky, *Die Russisch-Deutsche Legion in den Jahren 1811-1815* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966), 86; Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina*, 280-281.

⁴⁵ Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 256; Venzky, *Die Russisch-Deutsche Legion*, 81. Eventually, these troops would be released towards the middle of 1814, when the Russo-German Legion was incorporated into the Prussian Army: Venzky, *Die Russisch-Deutsche Legion*, 110-113.

⁴⁶ Thomas Cator was born in the Netherlands to English parents. In 1813 he fled to Britain with the intention of travelling to the West Indies. In November 1813, the Prince of Orange offered him a position at the Department of Foreign Affairs: J. Steur, "November 1813, een handschrift van mr. Hendrik baron Collot d'Escury, heer van Heinenoord", *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, vol. 77 (1963), 208, note 5.

way to the Rassemblement.⁴⁷ At first this figure seems high, but when one adds up all the references in archives of numbers of Dutch prisoners transported to the rallying one comes to a figure of 9,355 men.⁴⁸ So, if one allows for a margin of error, the number of 10,000 seems about right. This, thus, means that out of the 20,225 Dutchmen that participated in the 1812 Russian campaign, 10,000, or approximately half of the contingent, survived and were eventually organized into a Dutch corps.

So manpower was not a problem for the staff of the Dutch Legion of Orange. The real difficulty facing them was of a different kind. Firstly, the physical condition of many of the recruits was poor, and, despite Frederick William's generous offer of feeding the Dutch troops for as long as necessary, many remained hospitalized for long periods.⁴⁹ There were also considerable difficulties in arming and equipping the troops. Like so many of the soldiers of the Grande Armée, the retreat from Russia had taken its toll; the Dutch deserters and prisoners of war arrived at the Rassemblement

⁴⁷ "Cator to Van Hogendorp, Yarmouth, 2 December 1813", NL-NA, entry number 2.02.01, *Algemene Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6084, *Brieven, memories enz. ingekomen bij het Algemeen Bestuur der Verenigde Nederlanden*.

⁴⁸ 189 (3 a day for 4 October 1813 – 5 December 1813, unknown thereafter) + 500 (received by Wilhelmina at Berlin) + 1,200 (Russo-German Legion, released toward the middle of 1814) + 1,400 (Stettin) + 1,162 (Wittenberg) + 2,000 (Hamburg-Harburg area) + 1,000 (Benningsen on 26 January). To this number, one should add a further 1,800 troops. These 1,800 troops had been assembled at the Rassemblement, but were shipped, via Gothenburg, to Yarmouth where they were organized into a battalion under the Dutch exile, Colonel Panhuys: Panhuys's request to raise the Yarmouth Battalion: G.B. van Panhuys to Prince of Orange, Clifton Hotwells, 13 November 1813", NL-NA, entry number 2.20.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6082, *Correspondentie van de prins van Oranje tijdens zijn verblijf in Engeland met het 'Foreign Office' enz.*, No. 13. Permission by the Prince of Orange: "Prince of Orange to Panhuys, 16 Harley Street, 15 November 1813", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6082. Transport of troops: "Cator to Van Hogendorp, Yarmouth, 2 December 1813", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6084.

⁴⁹ "28 October 1813, London", *Ibidem*; "Schwartz to William I, Schwedt, 2 January 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566, January 1814, No. 3.

unarmed and with barely the clothes on their backs.⁵⁰ These difficulties were expected. The House of Orange had taken out huge loan – known as the *hypothèque générale* – and used this capital to cloth and equip the recruits.⁵¹

Arming the troops remained a difficulty until the last for the simple reason that, at this point in the campaign, many nations were raising military units, and there was a true lack of arms. This too had been anticipated. The staff of the Dutch Legion was well aware that the Dutch garrison of Stettin carried a large quantity of arms in its baggage train, but before they could lay their hands on them, the arms were confiscated by Prussia.⁵² Several requests for arms were also directed to the British government, but these were declined because the Britain gave priority to arming the Hanoverian Army.⁵³ Seeing no hope of receiving sufficient arms any time soon, it was decided to go ahead with the formation of the legion. In total three infantry battalions were formed, plus a detachment of artillery. Those troops who remained hospitalized in the Rassemblement would be marched to the Netherlands in groups of several hundreds.⁵⁴

The First Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange and the artillery detachment were the first

⁵⁰ Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina*, 281.

⁵¹ The House of Orange put up the family estates in Poland and Silesia, the family capital that had been invested in British loans, the family jewels, and all other valuables as collateral for a loan that was provided by the banking houses Aarons, from Berlin, and Olden, from Amsterdam: Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina*, 281.

⁵² "Dowager Princess to Constant Rebecque, Berlin, 2 December 1813", NL-NA, *Constant Rebecque*, 2.21.008.01, inv.no. 34

⁵³ "Copy of a Dispatch from Charles Stewart to Clancarty, 29 December 1813", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566; "Stewart to William I, Kiel, 29 December 1813", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566, December 1813, No. 3.

⁵⁴ "Koninklijk Besluit, 6 January 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6577, *Kopieboeken van besluiten van de soevereine vorst betreffende militaire zaken, met register*; "Bovié to William I, s.l., 20 January 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566, January 1814, No. 32. Specifically in regards to prisoners of war in Russia: "Nota", NL-NA 2.13.67 *Inventaris van het archief van het Ministerie van Oorlog/Defensie. Geheim Verbaalarchief en Gedeponeerde Archieven*, inv.no. 1, *Verzameling kabinetsorders van de Souvereine Vorst en nota's van kol. Van der Wijck, adjudant van Z.K.M.*, inv.no. 1., no. 7.

to set off to the Netherlands, where they arrived on 11 January 1814. Both units were directly moved to the front line; the First Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange and the artillery participated in the besieging of the fortress of Gorinchem, and later joined the advance into the Southern Netherlands.⁵⁵ The Second and the Third Battalions of the Dutch Legion of Orange, due to the aforementioned difficulties, arrived in the Netherlands considerably later, though still in time to participate in the siege of several key fortresses in the Netherlands.⁵⁶

The fall of the city of Delfzijl, in which the Third Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange participated, marks the definitive end of French rule in the Netherlands, and brings us to an assessment of the role of the Dutch Legion of Orange in the liberation of the Netherlands. Whilst referring to the formation of the Dutch Legion of

⁵⁵ F.H.A. Sabron, *De Vesting Gorinchem van November 1813 tot Maart 1814*. (Breda: Koninklijke Militaire Academie, 1902), 98-99, 102; Fall of Gorinchem: Sabron, *De Vesting Gorinchem*, 107; Battalion "in the field": "Wekelijksche Sterkte Lijsten der Verschillende Corpsen der Staande Armée en der reeds georganiseerde Battalions Landmilitie volgens ingekomene Rapporten der verscheidene Commandanten op den 28e February 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6620, *Staten van de sterkte van het leger en het emplacement der troepen*; Seventh Infantry Battalion of the Line attached to Dutch Brigade under Perponcher, and placed under General Graham: "William I to Bentinck tot Buckhorst, The Hague, 28 February 1814", NL-NA, 2.13.67, *Ministerie van Oorlog*, inv.no. 1.

⁵⁶ The Second Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange participated in the siege of Deventer: L.W. van Hoek, "Deventer," in *Historische Gedenkboek der Herstelling van Neêrlands Onafhankelijkheid in 1813* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1912-1913), 36; "Generale Staat Zijner Koninklijke Hoogheids Troupen in de Verenigde Nederlanden op den 29e April 1814", NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6620; F.K. van Ommen Kloeke, "Overijssel en Zwolle," in *Historische Gedenkboek der Herstelling van Neêrlands Onafhankelijkheid in 1813* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1912-1913), 605, and in the siege of Coevorden: F.H.A. Sabron, *In en Om Coevorden in 1813-'14*. (Breda: Koninklijke Militaire Academie, 1913), 74. The Third Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange participated in the siege of Delfzijl: F.H.A. Sabron, *De Blokkade van Delfzijl in 1813-14*. (Breda: Koninklijke Militaire Academie, 1906.), 101-102, note 3.

Orange, a well-known Dutch historian Colenbrander remarked that: "This whole initiative of the Prince of Orange did not contribute to the provoking of the revolt [against France, MH]."⁵⁷ This is quite true. The Dutch Legion of Orange was not raised in the Netherlands, but on the other side of Europe, in eastern Prussia. Still, provoking a revolution is but one side of the story. The securing of the gains of the revolution is another. And it is in this last respect that I would argue that the Dutch Legion of Orange did have an impact.

I suppose one could argue that the battalions of the Dutch Legion of Orange arrived in the Netherlands rather late, and after much of the hard fighting had been done. On the other hand, little hard fighting actually took place in the Netherlands. The confrontation between French and Allied forces in the Netherlands was more a case of siege warfare. At this point in the campaign, this style of warfare suited the French just fine. For the Allies, who wished to march on Paris as quick as possible, siege warfare meant detaching battle hardened first line troops from the main army to lay siege to French occupied fortresses and towns. When the Dutch Legion of Orange arrived in the Netherlands, it took over these second line duties from Prussian troops, thereby relieving Bülow⁵⁸ of strategic consumption and allowing the Prussian general to concentrate his forces for a march on Paris. The reason why, until now, the military contribution of the Dutch Legion of Orange is overlooked is quite simple. As soon as the battalions of the Dutch Legion of Orange crossed the Dutch frontier, they were merged into the new Dutch army, and renumbered the Seventh, Eight and Ninth Infantry Battalion of the Line.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁷ Colenbrander, *Inlijving en Opstand*, 256.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bülow, Graf von Dennewitz (February 16, 1755 – February 25, 1816)

⁵⁹ First Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange to the Seventh Battalion of Infantry of the Line: "Willhardt to William I, Coesfeld, 8 January 1814" NL-NA, 2.02.01, *Staatssecretarie*, inv.no. 6566, January 1814, No. 15; "11 January 1814, London", NL-NA, 2.21.008.01, *Constant Rebecque*, inv.no. 25; Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie*, 97; Naber, *Prinses Wilhelmina*, 288-289; "Nota", NL-NA, 2.21.008.66, *Constant Rebecque*, inv.no. 3; Second Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange to the Eighth Battalion of Infantry of the Line: Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie*, 107; Third Battalion of the Dutch Legion of Orange to

Dutch Legion of Orange also did much to restore the credit of the House of Orange in the eyes of Dutchmen. Whatever its inadequacies – such as a lack of arms – the Dutch Legion of Orange came to encapsulate the Dutch struggle against France, and as such it became a true rallying point for Dutchmen. The formation of the Dutch Legion of Orange, finally, also helped to strengthen the position of the House of Orange vis-à-vis the Allies of the Sixth Coalition. Having militarily contributed to the campaign allowed the House of Orange to claim their position among the victors of the War of the Sixth Coalition.

By means of final conclusion, then, the misunderstanding in Dutch historiography regarding the fate of the Dutch contingent of the Grande Armée is the result of a misinterpretation of the destruction of the Dutch contingent. That the Dutch contingent was destroyed is not to say that all troops perished on the fields of Russia. It simply means that the contingent ceased to function as a military unit. Accepting this fact may perhaps rid Dutch historiography of a persistent falsehood. At the same time, what then must we conclude if we introduce this argument into the historiography of the War of the Sixth Coalition? Did so many Dutch troops survive because they were experts in survival? Or was the Prince of Orange simply a more cunning diplomat than other heads of state? Or perhaps is it time to evaluate current historiography as regards to the destruction of the Grande Armée?

* In the first place I would like to thank the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian State University for the Humanities, the Association Dialogue Franco-Russe, the International Napoleonic Society, and the State Borodino War and History Museum and Reserve for allowing me the opportunity to present my research conclusions at the conference: “Napoleon’s 1812 Russian Campaign in the World History: A Retrospective View”. Also, I would like to thank Michael Rowe, my doctoral supervisor, for his valuable criticism and helpful comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

the Ninth Battalion of Infantry of the Line: Ringoir, *De Nederlandse Infanterie*, 110.