

Security and Insecurity, Spies and Informers in Holland During the Guelders War (1506–1515)

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The Guelders Wars

The origin of the Guelders wars lay in a loan of 300,000 gold guilders that Arnold, duke of Guelders, borrowed from Charles the Bold of Burgundy in 1471, and for which he pledged the title to his duchy as security. Arnold failed to repay the loan and so, when he died in 1473, Charles the Bold foreclosed and assumed the title and rights to the duchy. First Arnold's son Adolf, and then his grandson Charles of Guelders (1467–1538) took up the cause of recovering the duchy by military means from Charles the Bold's Burgundian-Habsburg heirs, Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519) and his son Philip (1478–1506), called Philip the Fair.

On 25 September 1506 Philip the Fair, uncrowned king of Spain, who among his many other titles was count of Holland, died unexpectedly. He was twenty-eight years old, and he left as his heir a six-year-old boy, the future emperor Charles V of Habsburg. Emperor Maximilian, in a secret letter, informed the Council of Holland of his son's death, and within a few days further letters were sent from the Council at The Hague to members of the government throughout the Habsburg Low Countries informing them too of the "dolorous report." A seaman or ship's captain (*skipper*) who arrived at Zierikzee about that time, perhaps incredulous of the rumors he heard, told listeners he had seen the king in Spain only shortly before. He was detained for questioning by the magistrates at Zierikzee, who were then ordered to report the man's testimony to the stadholder personally in writing.¹

The news of Philip's death led at once to heightened tension in Holland, and to intensification of the war. In October 1506 the government at The Hague reminded citizens by a public announcement (*plakkaat*) that their personal

¹ National Archives, The Hague (NA), Rek.Rek. inv. 340, ff. 256–256v (8 Oct. 1506), f. 259 (11 Oct. 1506); J.W.J. Burgers, J.P. Ward and J.G. Smit (eds.), *Bronnen voor de geschiedenis der dagvaarten van de Staten en steden van Holland voor 1544, Deel VI, 1506–1515* (The Hague, 2006), pp. 1–3 (hereafter cited as *Bronnen*). These sources describe the Guelders war from Holland's point of view; more particularly as seen by the city magistrates. References are to the page numbers. In my translations the spelling of proper names has been modernized.

weapons had to be put and kept in order.² In June 1507 Philip's father, Emperor Maximilian, took by proxy an oath, among the provisions of which he swore to be a good guardian, protector and governor for his grandson, the future Charles V of Habsburg. In 1508 Maximilian spent several months in the Low Countries, and during that visit he affirmed that it was his task to defend Holland from the Guelders enemy.³ Thereafter Emperor Maximilian used his role as defender of Holland to pay for the war by extraordinary *aides* demanded of his subjects.

The Guelders wars were small in scale compared with the late sixteenth-century Wars of Religion.⁴ Writing before the Second World War, Charles Oman described earlier wars in the Low Countries as scuffles on dykes,⁵ but they were destructive, bloody and long lasting nonetheless. The Guelders wars appear now as akin to the wars fought in the Balkans in the 1990s, where bitterly divided communities were ranged along long and convoluted borders. Significantly, sources in Holland refer to the Guelders enemy as robbers, murderers and arsonists (*moertbranders*).⁶ A monk, Brother Paulus Rodolphi, who was an eyewitness to the war in the north, described how prisoners were condemned to death.⁷

² NA, Rek.Rek., inv. 340, f. 222v (15 Oct. 1506); James P. Ward, "The Military Role of the Magistrates in Holland during the Guelders War," *The Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006), 91–118.

³ *Bronnen*, pp. 28 and 110–112; J.G. Smit, *Vorst en Onderdaan. Studies over Holland en Zeeland in de Late Middeleeuwen* (Leuven, 1995), pp. 245–47.

⁴ On the Guelders wars: James D. Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg Rule, 1506–1566: the Formation of a Body Politic* (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 64–89; Herman Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I: das Reich, Österreich und Europa an der Wende zur Neuzeit*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1971–86), 4:320–329, 606–9. The website, "World History at KMLA," lists many European wars chronologically; e.g. <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/military/15cen/15cenindex.html> The tables are incomplete, however. For the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they name 50 and 118 wars respectively, and provide links to encyclopedic information. But the Guelders wars are not listed, nor is the maritime war of 1510–1514 fought between Amsterdam and Lübeck for access to trade in the Baltic.

⁵ "The fights that it [Holland] has seen have been narrow-fronted scuffles along the tops of dykes, or desperate attempts to cross difficult water-barriers": Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1937), p. 541. See also J.P.C.M. van Hoof, "Met een vijand als bondgenoot. De rol van het water bij de verdediging van het Nederlandse grondgebied tegen een aanval over land," *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen betr. het Geschiedenis van Nederland [BMGN]* 103 (1988), 622–651.

⁶ E.g. Gemeente Archief (GA) Leiden, SA I inv. 387, f. 13, 27 May 1508: "dat hij [Charles of Guelders] opstelt ende uuytmaict enige moertbranders omme in den steden ende dorpen moertbrant te stichten"; GA Leiden, SA I inv. 592, f. 36v (20 April, 1513): "alsoe die Geldersche in den laende waeren ende roefden, branden, etc.": *Bronnen*, p. 392.

⁷ J.G. Ottema, trans. and ed., *Proeliarius of Strijdboek, bevattende de jongste oorlogen in Friesland, in het jaar 1518, beschreven door Broeder Paulus Rodolphi, etc.* (Leeuwarden, 1855), pp. 81–84 and 250–253. Remarkably, in one instance the government at The Hague ordered the magistrates at Enkhuizen *not* to execute their prisoners; NA, inv. 2193, f. 26v (1513, undated). This may have been related to an impending peace treaty (July 1513). For an example of clemency before a treaty in 1517, see Ottema, *Proeliarius*, p. 253.

But, the monk writes, a joke now and then can relieve the horrors of war.⁸ One of his jokes was to remark on how prisoners were treated to a present of “half a cart.” This was a reference to their slow death by hunger, thirst and exposure, tied to a cart wheel on high.⁹

In this article, I describe the ways and means by which the government of Holland and the magistrates of cities and towns sought to defend themselves from attacks by Charles of Guelders. The topics are: physical defenses like weapons, walls and towers; the introduction of security measures to curb the movements of travelers and strangers; military intelligence, espionage and counter-espionage; and diplomacy, together with the help of open and secret friends and allies.

Charles of Guelders (1467–1538) has his admirers and his detractors.¹⁰ The inscription on his burial monument in St. Eusebius’ church in Arnhem compares him to Achilles, but Hannibal seems a more appropriate picture of him. Like Hannibal he fought cleverly and won victories. Like Hannibal he used cunning and duplicity to gain them. But like Hannibal he failed to draw political advantage from them.¹¹ Conrad Busken Huet (1826–1886), in a character sketch first published in the 1880s, described Charles of Guelders as “a prime example of a pocket-sized Northern European medieval despot ... concerned only to preserve the dubious fame of his unimportant ancestors by shedding streams of blood of innocent citizens.” But Busken Huet’s bias is clearly revealed in his remark that in Charles’ person the “Dutch provincialism of the Middle Ages fought a fight to the death against the incipient national unity of the future.”¹²

⁸ Humor in wartime is a topos; see e.g. Wendy Doniger, *Holocaust, terreur, galgenhumor*, ed. Marc Chavannes, trans. Barbara de Lange (Amsterdam, 2001); based on Doniger’s “Huizinga Lecture” at Leiden, 2001, entitled “*Homo ludens* and Gallows Humor about the Holocaust and Terrorism.” For a rejoinder to critics, see Wendy Doniger, “Terror and Gallows Humor: After September 11?” at <http://web.archive.org/web/20090131234336/http://www.pres.uchicago.edu/News/911doniger.html/>

⁹ For an illustration of executions on cart wheels, see the painting by Pieter Breughel the Elder called “The Triumph of Death.”

¹⁰ Debate and controversy about Guelders (Gelderland in modern Dutch; Geldern in German), and on Charles of Guelders’ place in Dutch and German history continues along regional lines; Gerard Arie Noordzij, “Gelre: Dynastie, land en identiteit in de late middeleeuwen” (doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden, 2008), available online with a summary in English at <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/dspace/handle/1667/13095>; Johannes Stinner, Karl-Heinz Tekath, and Diète Oudesluis, *Gelre, Geldern, Gelderland: Geschichte und Kultur des Herzogtums Geldern* (Geldern, 2001), with a companion volume in Dutch; F. Keverling Buisman et al. (eds.), *Verdrag en tractaat van Venlo. Herdenkingsbundel (1543–1993)* (Hilversum, 1993); C.A. Rutgers, “Gelre: een deel van Nederland?” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 88 (1975), 27–38.

¹¹ “Dolo erat pugnandum cum par non esset armis,” Cornelius Nepos, *Hannibal*, 10; “vincere scis, Hannibal, sed victoria uti nescis,” Livy, 22.51.4.

¹² Conrad Busken Huet, *Het Land van Rembrand. Studien over de Noordnederlandsche Beschaving in de Zeventiende Eeuw* (Haarlem, 4th impression), pp. 251–253. He refers there to Charles of Guelders by his family name, Charles of Egmond. While editor of a newspaper in the Dutch East Indies Busken Huet was a secret political agent for the government at The Hague; Olf Praamstra, *Busken Huet: Een Biografie* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 432–37.

On the other hand, no less a historian than Pieter Geyl, in describing Charles of Guelders as a born leader, thought it impossible not to admire him for his “bold enterprise” in trying to recover the duchy.¹³ In a similar vein, Bernard Vlekke, writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, presented an even more sympathetic view of Charles of Guelders, portraying him as a resolute leader of his people fighting against overwhelming odds: “Besides mobilizing against the Habsburgs all discontented elements in Utrecht and Friesland, and assuming the leadership over the powerful city of Groningen, he turned constantly to the east to secure the support of Low German powers.” But ultimately Charles of Guelders failed against the Burgundian-Habsburg might of three generations, first of Philip the Fair, then of Emperor Maximilian I and finally of Charles V. Vlekke continued: “*Post factum*, this gave the conquests of Charles V the appearance of a final unification of the Netherlands.” With unconscious irony in view of his depiction of Charles of Guelders as a quasi World War II resistance fighter, Vlekke then added: “The latter expression, found in every textbook of Dutch history, is a perfect example of the interpretation of the past through the present.”¹⁴ Venlo was the last Guelders stronghold to fall to Charles V, Charles the Bold’s great-grandson, in 1543.¹⁵ The intermittent wars for Guelders, fought most actively in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, had by then gone on for half a century.

One of the reasons why Charles of Guelders was able to persevere so long was that he was aided by successive kings of France; Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francis I. The Valois monarchs provided him at various times with money, men, ships and materials of war. Charles of Guelders’ close relative, King James IV of Scotland, who was also an ally of the French, provided him with diplomatic advice and help.¹⁶ A consequence of the French help is that the Guelders wars have been treated by historians as an episode in the larger and longer lasting confrontation between the houses of Valois and Habsburg. But in the Low Countries they formed, in retrospect, a testing ground for what was still to come during the latter part of the sixteenth century.¹⁷ As a consequence of

¹³ Pieter Geyl, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Stam*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam and Antwerp, 1961), 1: 201. “Desniettemin is het onmogelijk geen bewondering te gevoelen bij het beschouwen van dat vermetel bedrijf.”

¹⁴ Bernard H.M. Vlekke, *Evolution of the Dutch Nation* (New York, 1945), p. 102. The use of the word “nation” in the title is unusual; in emulation of Geyl perhaps? The Dutch usually refer to themselves collectively as a people (*Volk*), but there are marked regional differences. Vlekke, in the Foreword, presents his book as a personal view.

¹⁵ G. Brom, “Een italiaansche bericht over den laatsten Gelderschen oorlog,” *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap (BMHG)* 35 (1914), 135–51.

¹⁶ James P. Ward, “King James IV, Continental Diplomacy and the Guelders War,” *The Scottish Historical Review* 83 (2004), 70–81; G. Kalsbeek, *De betrekkingen tussen Frankrijk en Gelre tijdens Karel van Egmond* (Wageningen, 1932) pp. 32, 37, 50, 77, etc. Arnold, duke of Guelders (see above) was grandfather to Charles of Guelders and great-grandfather to James IV of Scotland.

¹⁷ It has been argued that the military reforms of Emperor Maximilian I (standardization of pay and the introduction of regular military drills) were the inspiration for later innovations by

the foreign assistance, Charles of Guelders had at his disposal men, diplomatic services, military supplies and military intelligence which were as good as those of his adversaries.

The War from 1506 to 1515

Using the device of extraordinary *aides*, Charles the Bold of Burgundy had taxed his subjects for money to pay for his wars and to advance his claim to the duchy of Guelders. His Habsburg successors taxed Holland in the same way in order to maintain and defend that claim.¹⁸ The magistrates of Holland in their local council meetings and in the diets of the States of Holland denounced the war repeatedly and unequivocally. The war for possession of Guelders was the Habsburgs' war. It should not become Holland's war, they said openly.¹⁹

Major protagonists on the Burgundian-Habsburg side were Floris van Ysselstein and Jan van Wassenaar, and on the Guelders side Charles of Guelders himself together with his commanders and allies Maarten van Rossum, Hendrik Ense (called "Snijde-wind") and Robert de la Marck. Major events were sieges to recover Weesp and Muiden in Holland, which had been captured by Charles of Guelders in 1508. Two sieges of Poederoyen in Guelders were conducted by the Burgundian-Habsburgers in 1507 and 1508. In Holland forces of Charles of Guelders burned and destroyed Bodegraven in 1506, they captured and occupied Tienen in 1507, Weesp and Muiden in 1508, and Tiel in 1512. In a lightning attack in March 1514 they recovered Arnhem, the main city of southern Guelders, despite the cease-fire and treaty agreed at Brussels in July 1513. Charles of Guelders's justification for this was "because his master, the king of France, was at war with Holland."²⁰ Major victims in all of this fighting and destruction were the ordinary citizens of Holland. Writing of the Hundred Years War in France, Clifford Rogers described how attacking non-combatants

Maurice of Nassau and others; Harald Kleinschmidt, "Disziplinierung zum Kampf. Neue Forschungen zum Wandel militärischer Verhaltensweisen im 15., 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," *Blätter für Deutsche Landesgeschichte* 132 (1996), 173–200. Charles Oman was of the opinion that Maximilian's victory over the French at Guinegate (1479) was one of the first decisive battles in the history of early modern warfare, and that the period was influenced by the emperor's innovations in military organization, techniques and technology; Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (New York, 1898), 2:74–88; 83.

¹⁸ Based on estimated taxable wealth (the *schiltalen*) of about four million pounds in 1512, Holland paid 270,000 pounds in extraordinary *aides* in less than one year (October 1512–August 1513) to meet costs of the war, most of it in pay to mercenary soldiers; James P. Ward, "Hostage-taking (Gijzeling) in early sixteenth century Holland, and the Guelders war" in *Bourgondië voorbij. De Nederlanden 1250–1650. Liber alumnorum Wim Blockmans*, ed. Mario Damen and Louis Sicking (Hilversum, 2010), pp. 363–74; p. 367. The calculation of the *schiltalen* is based on: *Bronnen*, p. 275.

¹⁹ "If Her Grace [the regent Margaret of Austria] has any enemies she should ..."; "that the war of Guelders should not become the war of Holland ...": *Bronnen*, pp. 223 and 327.

²⁰ Ward, "Military role," p. 102; *Bronnen*, p. 442.

“could facilitate the conquest of a fortified region, compel an enemy to do battle in the field, or hamstring him economically or politically.”²¹ Charles of Guelders succeeded in all three of these objectives.

Many of the diets of the States of Holland from 1506 to 1515 were devoted to the question of how the frontiers with Guelders were to be defended against incursions and attacks.²² At the local level, business meetings of the city and town councils (*vroedschappen*) were occupied to a large extent, and at times dominated entirely, by questions of defense. The burgomasters and burgesses of Holland expressed the hope in their local councils that defense would be the main effort of the government. At diets of the cities and States of Holland, most of which were held at The Hague, they insisted that money for the war should be spent on defense. Their viewpoints are presented at length in the local private and confidential reports of their discussions. The government at The Hague, on the other hand, propagated the aggressive attitude of Emperor Maximilian, and later of his grandson Charles (V), that the war had to be carried to the enemy. This resulted in a dichotomy of local defenses made up mainly of civilians who wished only to defend their towns and cities of Holland, and professional armies of mercenaries (*landsknechts*) who had to carry the fight to Charles of Guelders. As a consequence, the government and the city representatives were sharply divided on how the war was to be conducted, and especially on how it was to be paid for.

Because of the one-sided nature of the sources used for this study it is impossible on the evidence to give a balanced account of the thoughts and ideas that lay behind the strategies of the parties in Holland, the large cities and the government. Even within those parties there were strains and fissures. The six cities were not one uniform block opposing the government in matters of taxation. Of the cities, Dordrecht and Gouda usually supported the government while Haarlem, Leiden, Delft and Amsterdam frequently opposed it. Nor was the

²¹ Clifford J. Rogers, *Essays on Medieval Military History. Strategy, Military Revolutions and the Hundred Years War* (Burlington, VT, 2010), VIII, p. 62. I refer here to this work as Rogers, *Essays*, in particular to the Introduction, pp. ix-xiv, and to the essays numbered III, “The Vegetian ‘Science of Warfare’ in the Middle Ages,” and VIII, “By Fire and Sword. *Bellum Hostile* and ‘Civilians’ in the Hundred Years War,” both first published in 2002. “To understand the role of ravaging in medieval strategy it is necessary to appreciate the scale and intensity of the damage that medieval soldiers could do ...” Rogers, *Essays*, Introduction p. xii; and VIII, p. 56. On the role of fire in warfare and its effects: Rogers, *Essays*, VIII, p. 38. Rogers writes too of the explicit linkage between tax revenues and soldiers’ wages: *Essays*, III, p. 6.

²² James P. Ward, “The Cities and States of Holland. A Participative System of Government under Strain” (doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden, 2001). The main sources for the period are the financial accounts of Haarlem, Leiden and Gouda, and the resolutions of the local councils (*vroedschappen*) now in their municipal archives (Gemeente Archief (GA)). Financial accounts of the government are in the National Archives (NA) at The Hague. Besides the costs of the Guelders war, two further areas of political strain and dissension in Holland were the losses caused by an unprecedented series of dyke failures and floods in those years, and long drawn-out arguments about the method of taxing the individual major cities of Holland. They are not referred to further in this article.

regent, Margaret of Austria, as belligerent as her father, Emperor Maximilian, for she strove, fruitlessly, for many years towards conciliation with Charles of Guelders. It is more difficult still to presume what thoughts and ideas motivated Charles of Guelders, apart from the obvious one, his overriding ambition to recover the duchy which his grandfather had gambled away.²³ The sources used do not describe details of military strategy. Only the general lines, as indicated above, are clear. Defense predominated in the minds of Holland's magistrates, attack in the minds of Emperor Maximilian and later of Charles V.

Primary sources reveal how all-pervading were the effects of the Guelders war. The costs incurred and the disruptions to Holland's international trade caused by the wars were discussed at 153 out of 211 diets of the cities and States of Holland in the years 1506–1515.²⁴ At Leiden in 1512 members of the *vroedschap* were reminded that their deliberations had to be kept secret, even from the government, because it had become apparent "that their opinions and resolutions were known to the gentlemen at The Hague."²⁵ Nor could Leiden's city fathers be sure of concord within their own city walls. When prolonged rioting broke out involving citizens and soldiers in May 1513 the magistrates empowered two of their members to hire and lead thirty-two armed stalwarts to help restore order, but on condition that all the men had to be burghers (*poorters*) or the sons of burghers.²⁶

In this period even pro-active warfare, as required by the government, was largely a matter of siege warfare. Well defended towns and cities, especially in the Low Countries, with their moats, rivers and access over waterways, could hold out for long periods. An eyewitness has left a detailed account of a failed attack by Charles of Guelders on Oudewater, including remarks about questioning a prisoner and tracking the enemy's withdrawal.²⁷ The role of professional Burgundian-Habsburg armies was limited to besieging enemy strongholds near the borders, and to frustrating the enemy's attempts to hold towns within Holland which they in turn had captured by stealth. Pitched battles were a rarity. The battle fought in December 1512 near Amsterdam between a Burgundian-Habsburg army of landsknechts, led by Count Jan van Wassenaar and marauding forces of Charles of Guelders (who were trying to escape from

²³ Charles of Guelders, writing to his kinsman James IV of Scotland in 1509: "nec [nos] spe destituti quin ipsam [patriam] iusticia dictante recuperabimus." Ward, "James IV," p. 76, n. 27.

²⁴ Cf. "Among the miseries [of the 100 Years War in France] was the virtual destruction of long-distance trade," Rogers, *Essays*, VIII, "Fire and Sword," p. 51.

²⁵ "Als dat men in den Haag onder den heeren weet te verclaeren die opinien ende tgheen dat bij den gerecht ende vroescip gesloten is": GA Leiden, SA I inv. 383, f. 112v (2 March 1512); *Bronnen*, p. 288; the numbers given here for the diets are minimal: Ward, "Cities and States," p. 135.

²⁶ GA Leiden, SA I inv. 383, f. 156v (28 May 1513).

²⁷ James P. Ward, "A Selection of Letters from the Guelders War," *Lias: Sources and Documents Relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas*, 29 (2002), 125–151, pp. 144–45.

Holland after a successful foray) ended in victory for Guelders and the defeat and capture of Wassenaar.²⁸

City Fortifications

City defense was in the hands of the magistrates and the citizens themselves, but they were frequently warned and advised by the government about measures they needed to take. One of the dilemmas facing early sixteenth-century architects and fortress builders was expressed by Albrecht Dürer as the need to build a fortress strong enough to be held but not so strong that if it fell into the hands of the enemy by subterfuge, treachery, or otherwise it could not be recovered.²⁹ At the beginning of the sixteenth century, city fortifications in Holland were not even at a transitional stage between the thin, high curtain walls of medieval towns and castles and the angular low lying peripheries with wide trenches and redoubts which later came to be called the *trace italienne*. A map of Leiden made by Jacob van Deventer about the year 1560 still shows the continuous, more or less circular outline of the city walls and moats dating from earlier centuries. The map does not show the typical triangularly crenelated outline characteristic of the *trace italienne* which can still be seen in parts of Leiden today. Mid-sixteenth century maps of Haarlem, including one from 1550, are similar.³⁰

Defensive building work in the cities of Holland at this time was limited to repair and maintenance of the existing medieval city walls, their towers and gates, and to the construction of blockhouses in the neighboring countryside. References to repair work in the minutes of the local councils and in their financial accounts are numerous and formulaic. Examples are: “that the walls of the city of Leiden will be repaired and strengthened”; “that the city should be made safe and strong ... especially everywhere that it is necessary.” In the financial accounts of Haarlem and Leiden the dilapidated state of the city walls and fortifications is a recurrent theme. Some of the walls were reported so weak that they were in danger of collapse. At Leiden in April 1508, during the Guelders attack

²⁸ “Vegetius pointed out that battle was an extremely chancy business ...” Rogers, *Essays*, III, p. 2.

²⁹ Albrecht Dürer, *Etliche Underricht zu befestigung der Stett, Schloss und flecken* (Nuremberg, 1527; facsimile ed. 1969), in the dedication to Emperor Charles V, page unnumbered; Bernhard Robert Hubertus Roosens, “Habsburgse defensiepolitiek en vestingbouw in de Nederlanden (1520–1560)” (doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden, 2005) pp. 20–21; Hans L. Janssen, Tarquinius J. Hoekstra and Ben Olde Meierink, “Fortification of Castles in the Northern Netherlands during the Gelre-Habsburg Conflict (1492–1543),” *Château Gaillard XIX, Études de castellologie médiévale, Actes du Colloque International, Graz, Austria, 22–29 August 1998* (Caen, 2000), 123–47.

³⁰ Joris Wiersinga, *Lijnen in het landschap. De geschiedenis van het transport rond Leiden* (Leiden, 1995). Cf. illustration no. 11, p. 45, with illustrations from after 1560, pp. 88–89. For historical maps of cities in Holland see <http://www.historischeplattegrond.nl/>

on Weesp and Muiden, it was stated that “the city walls, towers and gates are very decrepit (*zeer cranck*) and in a poor state.” Measures were taken to repair and strengthen them then and later.³¹

The tower of the city hall in Leiden was an important lookout post, and in 1512 it too was in a poor state. After some discussion it was restored rather than being demolished. But the builder, Master Clement of Gouda, insisted on a guarantee of indemnity for any accident which might happen during the reconstruction. The tower of St. Peter’s church in Leiden was also used as an outlook post, and it indeed collapsed in early 1512.³² At Haarlem in September 1513, following the uncertain peace made with Charles of Guelders in July, new towers and walls were built on the Ship Makers Dyke,³³ but there is no indication that they were novel in design. Earlier (1511) Haarlem had requested permission from the government to cut down trees with which to strengthen the city’s defenses. In 1513 the magistrates were allowed to take mature trees growing in the ducal domain; five hundred piles were made from them, again to strengthen the city walls.³⁴

The construction of blockhouses and bulwarks outside the cities and towns took place in areas under threat of imminent attack. Their purpose was to signal and to block or hinder any advance the enemy might make. The blockhouses were made of earthen walls reinforced with timber, and they appear to have been built quickly. The financial accounts note blockhouses built at Slickkendam, Woerden, Gouda, Poelbroek and Poelbroekerdam, Haastrecht, Vlist and Oude-water. These communities close to the border with Utrecht were all under threat from Charles of Guelders and his sympathizers in Utrecht. In the case of the blockhouses built near Gouda the work was done in consultation between Jasper Beauvoir, a secretary of the Court of Holland, and the magistrates of Gouda together with inhabitants (*landsaten*) of the countryside.³⁵

But restoring dilapidated walls and fallen towers, and keeping sharp lookouts did not, by themselves, guarantee safety. It was true that strongly walled towns and cities in the Low Countries at that time, if bravely defended, were practically invincible. Some places were attacked repeatedly. Venlo in 1511 withstood the siege (paid for by Holland) of a Burgundian-Habsburg army of landsknechts who were aided by an English force of archers sent by Henry VIII. It was observed during the siege how the defenders were so unimpressed by their

³¹ GA Leiden SA I, inv. 387, f. 10v. (29 April 1508); inv. 383, f. 97 (10 June 1511); f. 145v (11 April 1513). Cf. “the need to improve defences of towns all over the realm [of France] led not only to very onerous duties of watch and ward, as well as heavy construction and repair costs, but also ...” Rogers, *Essays*, VIII, pp. 52 n. 88, 73.

³² GA Leiden, SA I inv. 383, f. 88v. (29 Jan. 1511); GA Leiden, SA I 387, f.32v (2 March 1512).

³³ GA Haarlem, Tres.Rek. 1512–13, ff. 95–95v (10 March 1513); Vroedschapsres. 1501–1516, f. 123 (13 Sept. 1513).

³⁴ GA Haarlem, Tres.rek. 1510–1511, f. 32 (3 Oct. 1511); GA Haarlem, Tres.rek. 1512–1513, f. 95–95v (10 March 1513).

³⁵ GA Leiden SAI inv. 592, f. 68 (3 Jan. 1513); NA, Rek. Rek. 3412, f. 18 (1512–13, undated); *Bronnen*, pp. 49, 121, 133, 309; cf. Janssen et al., “Fortifications,” pp. 127–28.

attackers that a wicket door in the walls, one of the few places where the enemy might force an entry by stealth, was left open the whole time. The siege was broken off at the approach of winter.³⁶

Security Measures in Holland

At Leiden, Haarlem, Dordrecht and Gouda (and by inference at other cities and towns in Holland) the magistrates spent large sums of money on military defense. They hired professional soldiers and guards in emergencies, they mustered and drilled and led their own burghers in local fighting, and they provided weapons and munitions for them at cost price.³⁷ In addition the magistrates took care that city walls, towers, gates, water defenses and bridges were guarded day and night at the height of emergencies. Byelaws were enforced by fines if necessary, in order to increase public safety. In winter the magistrates, warned in advance by government letters, frequently issued public proclamations reminding the citizens that they were obliged to break the ice in front of their homes in order to hinder enemy access to the city. Other measures were in force for deepening the city water courses in dry summers, as in August 1519.³⁸ The magistrates received many letters from the government at The Hague warning them of impending enemy attacks,³⁹ but despite that and despite scouting expeditions which they themselves carried out, material losses caused by the enemy to homes and property were many and severe.

An obvious step in countering the subversive actions of an enemy was to control and restrict the movements of strangers and foreigners. That was not an easy task in a maritime nation like Holland, but travel and transport on the waterways in Holland and the Low Countries were highly developed and regulated.⁴⁰ Repeatedly at intervals, announcements were made that innkeepers and boarding-house owners had to register strangers who lodged with them, and to bring to a magistrate “in writing before 9 o’clock in the evening” lists of their

³⁶ Edward Halle, *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York; the Triumphant Reign of King Henry VIII* (London, 1550; facsimile 1970), pp. 13–15; Ward, “Selection of Letters,” pp. 142–43.

³⁷ James P. Ward, “Prices of Weapons and Munitions in Early Sixteenth Century Holland During the Guelders War,” *The Journal of European Economic History* 33 (2004), 585–619; Ward, “Military Role,” pp. 104–9.

³⁸ E.g. NA, inv 343, f. 244 (Dec. 1509), letter from The Hague to Leiden ordering the citizens to break the ice so that the enemy might not stealthily (*steelswijs*) attack the city. In 1519 citizens were ordered to deepen the *grachten* (“canals”) in front of their houses because they contained too little water. The measure may also have had a sanitary purpose; GA Leiden, SA I inv. 387, f. 92v (6 Aug. 1519).

³⁹ For an example and translation, Ward, “Letters,” pp. 146–47.

⁴⁰ Smit, *Vorst en Onderdaan*, Ch. 5, pp. 437–76.

guests' names, and where they came from. In Holland, as elsewhere at that time, many names were toponyms.⁴¹

Boatsmen were warned not to bring into the city over the waterways travelers whose identity they did not know, without first informing the guards at the gates. Guests and clerics staying overnight at religious houses and institutions were perhaps at times exempted from the regulations.⁴² Concern for public health was an equally pressing reason for regulating the movements of strangers, because the pestilence could be carried by travelers arriving from infected towns and areas.⁴³ Regulations were enforced by fines.

In 1511 Floris van Ysselstein, acting stadholder in Holland for his uncle Jan van Egmond, engaged in a personal war against the city of Utrecht.⁴⁴ Floris, in his own justification, stated that he had attacked Utrecht because it was reported to him that large numbers of unemployed mercenary soldiers were congregating there in anticipation of an attack on Holland by Charles of Guelders.⁴⁵ Charles of Guelders did indeed give military assistance to the burghers of Utrecht in 1511 by besieging Ysselstein, the residence of Floris, and by attacking the castle of Oudewater near Dordrecht in May 1512. At Leiden during these emergencies in January 1511 two magistrates took turns to be on watch at night in the town hall when danger threatened. The night watch at Leiden already numbered forty men, but it was decided to double their number, and to post two watchmen on the tower of St. Peter's church. In addition, further afield two scouts (*acouters*) were stationed every day in the neighborhood of Oudewater or Woerden.⁴⁶ The watch was increased again in 1511 during negotiations with Charles of Guelders for yet another peace treaty which included for him an offer of marriage to the regent's niece Elizabeth. The magistrates decided that every night, in addition to a member of the court (*gerecht*) and of the council (*vroedschap*), another twenty-five men would stand guard.⁴⁷

At Leiden the city gates were guarded by armed men who were authorized to receive the keys from the burgomasters each morning, and required to return them each evening. But the magistrates complained about indiscipline and laxity among the guards, in particular about their poor time keeping, late arrivals, and early departures. In 1508 during the Guelders occupation of Weesp and Muiden the magistrates at Leiden recognized "that poor discipline is observed in the

⁴¹ Ward, "Military Role," p. 111.

⁴² GA Leiden SAI, inv. 387, f. 14 (27 May 1508); f. 32v (2 March 1512); at f. 38 (anno 1513) an entry on a gummed slip of paper includes religious houses but has been crossed out; f. 63 (23 May 1517), etc.

⁴³ J.C. Overvoorde, "Maatregelen ter bestrijding van het pest gevaar te Leiden in de 16de en de eerste helft der 17de eeuw," *Jaarboekje voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde van Leiden en Rijnland* 19 (1923–1924), 68–82.

⁴⁴ C.A. van Kalveen, *Het Bestuur van bisschop en Staten in het Nedersticht, Oversticht en Drenthe, 1483–1520* (Groningen, 1974), pp. 168–71.

⁴⁵ GA Haarlem, Vroedschapsres. 1501–1516, ff. 66v–67 (7 Jan. 1511); *Bronnen*, pp. 212–14.

⁴⁶ GA Leiden SAI, inv. 383, f. 88v (29 Jan. 1511).

⁴⁷ GA Leiden, inv. 383, f. 94 (10 May 1511).

watch every night” and that measures would have to be taken.⁴⁸ In June 1513, at a time of heightened tension and uncertainty just before the signing of a peace treaty with Charles of Guelders in July (which became merely another short-lived cease-fire), Leiden’s delegates attending the court of the regent Margaret of Austria at Mechelen sent a warning letter to their colleagues in the *vroedschap* at home. The minutes of the *vroedschap* continue: “For reasons contained in the letter the keys [to the city] were to be handed over to the burgomasters who will keep them at night. And the burgomasters will give the keys every day to the armed men (*scutten*) on watch at the gates or they can appoint two or three other good men who will go with the *scutten* to open and shut the city gates.” This warning was issued by the regent herself. By implication, she was concerned that earlier warnings were not being enforced sufficiently. Later that month the magistrates took an essential step; they made financial arrangements to pay for the extra watchmen.⁴⁹

Espionage and Counter-espionage

Warnings which were sent by the government to the cities of Holland and by the cities to the government were based on military information provided to them by their anonymous agents and by “secret friends” (regarding whom, see below). In the sources described here, military intelligence was of two kinds. It was mostly tactical intelligence by which commanders, including the city magistrates, might hope to discover the locations and strengths of the enemy’s forces in order to gain an advantage in the battlefield. Only few indications were found of strategic intelligence derived from within the enemy’s higher circles of government or military command.

From antiquity to the present day the underlying methods, means, successes, failures and consequences of spying in the military and political spheres, apart from the electronic gadgetry now available, have changed but little.⁵⁰ Extracts from early sixteenth-century primary sources in Holland during the Guelders war demonstrate that. For reconnaissance work Caesar used *exploratores* and *speculators*, translated variously as “patrols,” “scouts” and “spies,”⁵¹ to gather information of a military kind. Other sources of information which he used included prisoners and deserters (*transfugae*) from the other side, and passing merchants. Caesar remarked that Germans, having few personal needs for their own comfort, sometimes sought access to merchants in order to sell them their

⁴⁸ GA Leiden SAI, inv. 383, f. 66 (10 Nov. 1508).

⁴⁹ GA Leiden SAI, inv. 383, f. 157v (2 June 1513); f. 163v (30 June 1513).

⁵⁰ Amiram Ezov, “‘The Missing Dimension’ of C. Julius Caesar,” *Historia, Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 45 (1996), 64–94; J.R. Alban and C.T. Allmand, “Spies and Spying in the Fourteenth Century,” in *War, Literature and Politics in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Christopher T. Allmand (Liverpool, 1976), pp. 73–101.

⁵¹ But see Ezov, “Missing Dimension,” p. 72, n. 16.

plunder.⁵² Caesar also received logistical information from ambassadors who were seeking mutual help against their neighbors who were also enemies of the Romans. Nowadays, other such “friends” include traitors; fellow travelers; technical experts who have been suborned or who, disguised with false identities, have been insinuated into the enemy’s councils; secretaries; eavesdroppers; a host of loose talkers and other incautious informants; finally and more recently, electronic devices and satellites, the so-called “spies in the skies.”

Although Phillipe de Mézières (c. 1327–1405) might still allude critically to the legitimacy and morality of spying,⁵³ from earliest times rulers and military commanders had no compunction about using it. By the time of the Middle Ages “the Venetians had long understood the importance of spying, which they used for commercial reasons. But the need to have information of an enemy’s military intentions was seen as equally pressing.”⁵⁴ Despite an aura of virtual sanctity and immunity which once surrounded heralds and still surrounds ambassadors and their diplomatic staff, their reputation, legalized spies according to Philippe de Commynes (1447–1511), was doubted then as now; and “ambassadors came to be regarded as being potentially among the best spies.”⁵⁵

In 1510 the Venetian ambassador to London, Andrea Badour, communicated with Andrew Forman, a bishop, courtier and agent abroad of King James IV of Scotland, who was a close kinsman and political adviser of Charles of Guelders. Their discussions (which were fruitless) dealt with James IV’s wish to command the Venetian armed forces, ostensibly in a crusade against the Turks. That was politically and militarily a sensitive proposal in view of the strained relationship between the English and the Scottish kings, both of whom were trying to increase their military and naval strengths. Badour even proposed in a coded letter to the Signoria that he might make a journey to near the Scottish border for a secret meeting.⁵⁶

Postal Communications

Ambassadors are clearly recognizable as such, and they are protected when abroad by international rules of diplomacy. But rulers and governments have

⁵² Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* II. 4 (ambassadors); IV. 2 (merchants). Alban and Allmand mention spies among Lombard merchants and strangers; “Spies,” p. 93.

⁵³ Alban and Allmand “Spies,” p. 76.

⁵⁴ Alban and Allmand, “Spies,” p. 73.

⁵⁵ Alban and Allmand, “Spies,” pp. 77–78; William J. Bouwsma, “The Politics of Commynes,” *The Journal of Modern History* 23 (1951), 315–28, p. 328.

⁵⁶ Ward, “King James IV,” pp. 76–81. In the early sixteenth century substitution codes and ciphers of the kind used by Julius Caesar were still commonly used in confidential or secret letters, but the sources in Holland described here contain no references to them. Two letters in French from Charles of Guelders to his ambassador in Paris in 1528 written using a substitution code, one in facsimile and both decoded, are published in: Gideon Busken Huet and J.S. van Veen, eds., *Verslag van Onderzoekingen naar Archivalia te Parijs, etc.* (The Hague, 1899), pp. 132–33 and Appendix there.

other informants of lower status. Couriers and messengers who carried the mails are a group identifiable as such.⁵⁷ The mails which the couriers carried covered every aspect of national and municipal government, including military security. The couriers' duties can be traced in primary sources of the government and of the cities of Holland, the most common of which are financial accounts recording costs and monies paid to them. The financial accounts sometimes record monies paid to other persons, men mostly, whose identities and whose functions largely remain undisclosed. Examples of this vagueness, this reticence about certain people and their service in early sixteenth-century Holland are described below.

Diplomatic relations were maintained during the fighting. From time to time parleys were arranged between the parties, cease-fires took effect for short periods, and prisoners were exchanged or ransomed. Following Jan van Wasseenaar's defeat and capture by Guelders in December 1512 a letter from an anonymous officer to The Hague announced that an unnamed "great personage" of Guelders had been captured, and it was hoped to exchange him for Wassenaar.⁵⁸ Some time later Wassenaar was indeed ransomed for 2,000 pounds. Charles of Guelders took part in peace negotiations with the regent Margaret of Austria and her Privy Councilors, much of the detail of which is contained in secret and confidential correspondence between the parties.⁵⁹ Some of this becomes apparent in sources describing certain letters carried by couriers. From the beginning the aims of the parties were clear. Charles of Guelders wished to assert his claim to the duchy of Guelders, and Emperor Maximilian as heir to Mary of Burgundy wished to maintain the claims of her father, Charles the Bold. Charles of Guelders' means were war fought with guile. In Holland the government's preferred means were by negotiations. Overall, neither side trusted the other. There is ample evidence that Charles of Guelders used the negotiations and the truces to win breathing spaces for himself. Glimpses of this mistrust can be seen in the records in the city archives of Holland. The regent, Margaret of Austria, when reminded on one occasion that it was her duty to maintain peace, responded by saying "that she had always worked to that end, despite the duke of Guelders failing to observe any agreements or peace treaties."⁶⁰

Nationally and internationally couriers carried mails between correspondents, and the costs of the postal services were recorded. Many of the entries are formulaic, and contain little or no information about what the letters themselves contained. But there are exceptions. In July 1507 a courier brought a

⁵⁷ Harm von Seggern, *Herrschaftsmedien im Spätmittelalter. Studien zur Informationsübermittlung im Burgundischen Staat unter Karl dem Kühnen* (Ostfildern, 2003), pp. 146–53.

⁵⁸ NA, inv. 2195, f. 36v (after Dec. 1512, undated).

⁵⁹ E.A.J. Le Glay, ed., *Correspondance de l'Empereur Maximilien Ier et de Marguerite d'Autriche, de 1507 à 1519*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1839); idem, ed., *Negociations diplomatiques entre la France et l'Autriche durant les trente premières années du XVIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1845).

⁶⁰ "Niet jegenstaende die heere van Gelre gheen voirwairde, pays noch tractaet en onderhoudt": GA Leiden, SA I inv. 383, f. 99 (29 July 1511); *Bronnen*, p. 250.

letter from Jan van Nyevelt, a member of Utrecht's civil governing council, to Leiden containing the announcement "that duke [*heer*] Charles of Guelders had demanded the right to pass through Utrecht, just as the count of Buuren had done."⁶¹ Jan van Nyevelt was a member of a political party (the "Hoeks") which was sympathetic to Charles of Guelders and inimical to the Burgundian-Habsburg rulers, and which formed the majority in Utrecht's city government. The count of Buuren was the father of Floris van Ysselstein who was acting stadholder in Holland. Both father and son were personal and political enemies of Charles of Guelders, and of the ruling civil council in Utrecht. Shortly afterwards, Charles of Guelders passed through Utrecht unmolested, and the government at The Hague received complaints to that effect in September 1507.⁶² Mediation between the two sides sometimes took place, which involved city representatives. A burgomaster, Dirck Dircxzoon, was sent by Gouda to Utrecht in 1513 to commissioners convened there "to hear about the complaints and excesses which the Guelders and the Burgundian forces on both sides had committed against each other." Dircxzoon was gone for ten days.⁶³

Charles of Guelders himself communicated by letter not only with his friends and allies abroad but also with the government in Holland and with the cities and towns. His letters to the Hollanders were of several kinds, but mainly they contained threats, or justification for his own deeds and critical remarks about the deeds of others. In a document dated 15 January 1509, which he signed personally, Charles of Guelders informed the magistrates in his coastal town of Elburg on the Zuyderzee that he accepted the peace treaty of Cambrai, and that hostilities against Holland were to cease.⁶⁴ But the peace or rather cease-fire had lasted only a few months when Charles of Guelders in a letter to the government at The Hague revoked it and announced to the cities and towns of Holland that he would not observe the peace treaty.⁶⁵

In August 1509 he complained in a letter to Leiden that Floris van Ysselstein had attacked Nieuwkerck and Barneveld. His letter and Leiden's undisclosed reply were read out in the local council (*vroedschap*). To the members the inference was obvious; "and because we should take care, it was resolved that if any one notices anything suspicious (*enighe onraet*) that each one will inform the others."⁶⁶

In letters sent in 1509 to the magistrates of Goyland and in 1512 to Alphen on the Rhine, both of which are well inside the borders of Holland, Charles of Guelders blackmailed them for the so-called *brandschatting*.⁶⁷ This "fire

⁶¹ GA Leiden, SA I inv. 587, f. 52v (7 July 1507).

⁶² NA Rek.Rek. inv. 3404, f. 116v (Sept. 1507, undated).

⁶³ "Om te hoeren de beclachten ende overgrepen die de Geldersche ende de Boergoensche an beyden zijden malcander gedaen hadden": GA Gouda Oud-archief no. 1172, f. 13 (1513–1514, undated).

⁶⁴ GA Elburg, Old Archive inv. 91. The original letter is reproduced in <http://www.inghist.nl>

⁶⁵ NA, Rek.Rek., inv. 343, f. 209 (March 1509); Ward, "Military role," pp. 97–98.

⁶⁶ GA Leiden SA I, inv. 383, f. 75 (13 Aug. 1509).

⁶⁷ NA Rek.Rek. inv. 343, f. 235 (1509, undated); cf. Ward, "Military Role," p. 100.

premium” was protection money, a regular source of his income, and the demand implied a threat to burn the town down if the magistrates did not pay it.⁶⁸ In July 1513 yet another solemn peace agreement was signed at Brussels, but it was again only a brief cease-fire in effect.

Couriers as Scouts

Most of the work of tactical intelligence gathering which the cities of Holland commissioned in their own or neighboring quarters was carried out by couriers (*boden*) who normally carried the post. While engaged in their usual work of delivering letters and verbal messages, the couriers were instructed as a matter of course to gather military information when it presented itself. On other occasions when the Guelders forces invaded Holland couriers were sent on scouting missions and with warnings to neighboring towns and communities. In 1506, when Bodegraven was burnt down by the enemy, Haarlem sent a courier on horseback at night to Leiden to make enquiries. At the same time they stationed six men in boats on the nearby lakes “in order to listen if there were any noises.”⁶⁹

Entries in the city accounts are numerous, and the wording is formulaic. In May 1507 “Cornelis Ghijbrechtsz, courier, was sent on horseback outside Leiden to gather news of the Guelders forces; paid 6 stuivers.”⁷⁰ Haarlem, which is close to Amsterdam, thought it appropriate on one occasion to thank the magistrates of Amsterdam for “a letter of warning which they had sent in the night, reporting that the Guelders forces were on the march.” The courier, Frans de Witte, who carried the thanks to Amsterdam was also instructed to find out where the enemy was.⁷¹ This was perhaps the main purpose of his ride. In 1512 Luyt Henricxzoon, a Haarlem courier in the rank of one entrusted with the dispatch box (*busdrager*⁷²), was out on patrol for four days, gathering information about “the troops who were stationed near Utrecht, and what their intentions were.”⁷³

Not surprisingly, work of this kind was not only varied but it could be dangerous. In 1509 on one occasion it was reported that a courier had been robbed. In 1510 Hendrik Faes carried letters to Brielle, and shortly afterwards other letters to Brussels. Not long after that his *widow* was paid three pounds for the last ten days in which he was employed as courier. What befell her husband is unknown. In January 1513, in addition to a sealed letter a courier conveyed to Delft a barrel of gunpowder; uneventfully it appears. But in May 1513 Leiden’s

⁶⁸ On *brandschatting*, cf. Rogers, *Essays*, VIII, p. 60: “... *appatis* or *truages* – in which the local people agreed to supply cash or goods in kind in exchange for being spared by the soldiers.”

⁶⁹ GA Haarlem Tres.rek. 1506–1507, ff. 46v–47 (undated).

⁷⁰ GA Leiden SAI, inv. 585, f. 35 (16 May 1507).

⁷¹ GA Haarlem, Tres.rek. 1510–1511, ff. 31v–32 (15 Dec. 1510).

⁷² See for *busdrager* Von Seggern, *Herrschaftsmedien*, pp. 101–3.

⁷³ GA Haarlem, Tres.rek. 1511–1512, f. 78v (1 June 1512).

pensionary while attending a diet at The Hague reported that a Leiden courier had been killed by soldiers at Alphen on the Rhine, near the border with Utrecht.⁷⁴ In each of these cases the circumstances are unknown.

Spies

Given the geography of the Low Countries, with the density and relative uniformity of the population in language and customs, and with ease of travel overland or by boat, it is not surprising that the authorities on both sides of the military divide were concerned about spies and espionage. Besides sending their couriers out on patrol, the magistrates of Holland themselves went into action during emergencies when attacks by Guelders forces were imminent or in progress, or when strangers were signaled. At Leiden in 1507 concern for the safety of the city with its gates and wicket doors (cf. Venlo; above) led to the following incident.

On 14 July [1507] the burgomaster Heynrick Florijsz went with two wagons full of people in pursuit of two cavalry soldiers (*ruiterknechten*) who, it was said, had examined the city gates, the wicket doors, fortifications and walls from outside and inside, and it was believed they had come to spy. The cavalymen were followed to Alphen [on the Rhine] and they were taken prisoner there and brought back to Leiden, where they have now been two days in prison.⁷⁵

This incident indicates that the guards at Leiden's gates were alert to strangers at least during the daytime. The fate of the two men is unknown, but it is possible that they were indeed spying or reconnoitering at Leiden. Alphen on the Rhine where they were arrested is not far from the border with Utrecht, which may have been their destination, and the secular government there was sympathetic to Charles of Guelders.

In 1513 another suspected spy was arrested: Willem Jacobszoon, a merchant from Utrecht. Despite strained relations between Utrecht and Holland, in April 1508 the regent Margaret of Austria had relaxed restrictions on merchants from Utrecht trading and traveling into Holland.⁷⁶ Two Leiden burgomasters

⁷⁴ The robbery in: NA, Rek.Rek., inv. 3404, ff. 86–86v (1507–1508, undated); Faes in: NA, Rek. Rek. inv. 343, ff. 195, 198v, 208 (1510, all undated); gunpowder transport in: GA Leiden, SA I, inv. 592, f. 44v (31 Jan. 1513); ff. 39v–40 (31 May 1513); *Bronnen*, p. 416.

⁷⁵ “Item upten XIII/en dach in julio [1507] reysde Heynrick Florijsz, burgermeester, mit twee wagenen mit volck om te vervolgen twee ruyterknechten, die men seyde dat der stede poirten, clinquetten, vesten ende muyren van buyten ende van binnen deursien hadden, ende men meynde dat zij gecomen waeren omme te verspijen, welcke knechten hij vervolchde tot Alphen ende aldair gevangen heeft ende gebrocht tot Leyden, ende hebben gevangen gelegen II/e dagen”: GA Leiden, SA I nr 586, f. 28v.

⁷⁶ NA, Rek.Rek., inv. 342, f. 172 (3 April 1508). A trade blockade was imposed by the Council of Holland in 1506 as a reprisal for Utrecht's trading with Guelders; Van Kalveen, *Bestuur*, p. 122.

who were attending a diet of the cities and States of Holland at The Hague in February 1513 wrote to the *vroedschap* at Leiden that “the patrol of Captain Jan van Delft [a Burgundian-Habsburg officer] had arrested a merchant called Willem Jacobszoon from Utrecht who, they were convinced, was a spy, and they would prove that.”⁷⁷

The two deputies were clearly alarmed by this. They raised the matter officially (*staetsgewys*) at the diet, and requested help to get the merchant released. From their obvious concern it seems possible that they knew Willem Jacobszoon personally. A detail in their letter was that Jan van Delft’s men who arrested the merchant had not been paid for six weeks, “and they were threatening to leave.” Was that innuendo? Were the troopers threatening to take the merchant with them as a hostage to be ransomed?

The city magistrates were not above using spies of their own to observe and inform on the Guelders forces. One such agent was a little old woman (*vroukin*) who, it might have been thought, would arouse little or no suspicion. The accounts at Gouda contain the item: “Given to a *vroukin* who was sent to Gelderland to gather news of the cavalry men there, and who was out for eight days.” She may have been a country woman who was sent to Gelderland by the magistrates at Gouda specifically to spy for them there. For the eight days she was gone they paid her the equivalent of twenty-five stuivers or one Philips guilder, about the sum a soldier would have earned in the same time.⁷⁸

In early 1511, as the crisis was building up between Holland and Utrecht, the magistrates of Haarlem sent five men on a sledge over the ice of the frozen Lake Haarlem to Uithorn on the border with Utrecht “to watch for soldiers near there, and to warn if they were coming in this direction.” A little later a Haarlem courier took twenty-one stuivers in payment to a “secret friend,” described only as living near the border with Utrecht, for “certain secret warnings” which he had provided.⁷⁹

Secret Friends and Highly Placed Personages

There were also persons of much higher social standing inside Gelderland and Utrecht who spied on behalf of Holland. They too are described as “secret

⁷⁷ “Dat denselven Willem de cramer aldair gecomen is, ende hebben hem die van de schaerwaeck van Jan van Delft gevangen voir een verspyer, ende meent wel te bewysen dat hij voir sulcx bevonden sal worden”: GA Leiden, SA I inv. 383, letter dated 19 Feb. 1513, inserted at f. 144; *Bronnen*, p. 377.

⁷⁸ “Gegeven een vroukin die gesonden was in Gelderlant om tiedinghe te vernemen van de ruyters ende was uwt acht dagen, f[acit] 4 s 2 d,” GA Gouda, Old Archive inv. 1169, f. 13v (1507–1508, undated). Women in Holland (if fit and able) were required to assist as fire-fighters during attacks. The sources also reveal that some women were engaged in the weapons and munitions trade; cf. Ward, “Prices of weapons,” p. 600.

⁷⁹ GA Haarlem, Tres.Rek. 1510–1511, f. 63v–64 (early winter 1511, undated); f. 48 (after 4 Feb. 1511, undated).

friends,” and some were “highly placed.” At a meeting of the *vroedschap* at Leiden

on 9 September 1512 it was announced by our deputies to the diet at The Hague, Cornelis Mast and Heynrick Florisz, that the governor and Council there had revealed to them that the regions of Arkel and South Holland in view of the capture of Tiel [by Charles of Guelders] lay completely open ... and that they [the Council] furthermore had been warned reliably by trustworthy letters and friends that a meeting had taken place in the city of Utrecht between the lord of Montfoort, the cathedral dean Apeltern, Evert van Zoudenbalch and two deputies of the duke of Guelders, together with some others, to discuss how they could best carry out an attack on Holland. Some of them advised that they should attack Naarden, because a long stretch of the wall there was in a very bad condition, and there they could fire into the town and then take it by assault. Others said that there would be more profit with Weesp, because that lies further inland. Their conclusion was that they should attack Weesp because there were few inhabitants (*boeren*) there, and the soldiers had the keys, and it was known that they had not been paid, and so they hoped that it was feasible to gain the town.⁸⁰

This was information provided to the city magistrates by the highest government officials at The Hague, who in turn had obtained it from “trustworthy friends.” The three men named in the report were prominent, active supporters of the political faction called the Hoeks, opponents of Burgundian-Habsburg influence in Utrecht and Holland. Jan III of Montfoort (c. 1448–1522) had a ministerial function in Utrecht. Jacob van Apeltern was a cathedral canon. Evert van Zoudenbalch was also a canon of Utrecht cathedral, a very rich and influential man, and founder of St Elizabeth’s Hospital there. The entry in the minutes concludes with an appeal from the government at The Hague for money and men to defend Holland. Details about the weak walls at Naarden and the unpaid soldiers at Weesp show that the conspirators at Utrecht too were well informed. About the same time (12 September) mercenary soldiers in the service of Holland, called the Four Banners, who were stationed at Delfshaven, mutinied and marched on The Hague because they had not been paid for eight months.⁸¹

These entries in the government’s financial accounts are veiled and discreet. That is in the nature of espionage and secret military intelligence. The main plotters at Utrecht in September 1512 were named by the officials at The Hague. But of course the trustworthy friends who provided the information were not. In the government’s financial accounts the identity of another secret friend, “a personage of Guelders,” was also not revealed, but payments to him are remarkable. An entry in the accounts at The Hague, under the heading of debts left over from the war, shows that he received sixteen gold guilders per month for his services over seven months “since the last payment which was made to the same personage.” By implication, his work and the payments had continued for some time. This one sum alone (112 gold guilders) was equivalent to nearly

⁸⁰ GA Leiden, SA I no. 383, f. 127–127v (9 Sept. 1512); *Bronnen*, 324.

⁸¹ Ward, in *The Journal of European Economic History*, forthcoming.

two years' wages for a master tradesman. The payments were for warnings of impending attacks by Charles of Guelders, which the informant had passed on to the stadholder. The money was handed over by an intermediary, Roelof van der Haltert, "so he said and affirmed," who was a personal servant (*kamerknecht*) of the stadholder in Holland, Jan van Egmond. Van der Haltert was obviously a trusted man. Where the hand-over took place is unknown, but the prominent family of Van der Haltert or Hautert possessed land and property near Nijmegen in Gelderland.⁸²

Another secret friend lived at Amersfoort, between Utrecht and the border with Gelderland. In July 1509 Charles of Guelders and his troops were reportedly preparing to attack Holland. A courier, at the behest of the regent herself, took letters from the Court of Holland at The Hague to "a secret friend" in Amersfoort containing news, and warning him that Charles of Guelders was on the march again. The entry in the accounts ends with the formulaic phrase: "together with other matters which it is not necessary to explain here more fully."⁸³ This phrase is found at intervals throughout the government's account books, as is also a sentence indicating that certain messengers themselves were sometimes entrusted to transmit verbal messages to the recipients of letters.⁸⁴

Conclusion

In the Low Countries during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, two weak opponents faced each other in a territorial dispute, egged on and supported by two stronger powers, Habsburg and Valois, in a kind of guerrilla war. The militarily weak and openly pacific citizens of Holland⁸⁵ were exposed time and again to hit-and-run attacks from a military adept, Charles of Guelders, who failed repeatedly to respect the treaties he made with them. Standing in the wings, the two greater protagonists, Habsburg and Valois, each aimed to check the power and influence of the other.

⁸² "Teyckende up voir zekere wairschuwinge die hij gedaen heeft geduerende de oirloge mijnen voirs. Heere van Egmondt ... voir zeven gehele maenden gevallen sedert de leste betalinge gedaen denzelven personaige ...": NA, Rek. Rek. inv. 3414, f. 36 v (1514, undated). In 1532 one Roelof van Hatert owned Castle Hatert in Gelderland; www.kasteleninnederland.nl

⁸³ "Binnen der stede van Amersfoirt aen eenen heymlicken vrunt mit zekere brieven van den voirs. Hove uuyt beveil van mijner genadige vrouwe, inhoudende van den heere van Gelre ende zijne knechten die up te been waeren om eenige aenslach te maicken, mit van anderen dat van geen en is hier breeder te verclairen": NA, Rek. Rek. inv. 343, f. 220 (6 July 1509).

⁸⁴ Ward, "Letters," pp. 140–43.

⁸⁵ In December 1511 the magistrates of Leiden proposed petitioning the regent, Margaret of Austria, "if she were unable to get peace for the country ...," to allow Holland and Zeeland to negotiate a separate peace treaty with Charles of Guelders, but nothing more is known of the proposal; *Bronnen*, p. 274.

In war the security and survival of a weak defender depends not only on whatever weapons and fortifications he can provide for himself, but also on material, logistic and diplomatic support from a stronger friend or friends. The aim of Holland's magistrates was first and foremost to defend their cities and towns against attacks by Charles of Guelders with the men and the means at their disposal. By custom and by law, all citizens of military age who were fit and able were required to serve. But for effective security there were other requirements too: economic resources; military, diplomatic and political support inherent in the power of friends; and, thirdly, military intelligence. How these powers were used is described above in examples which are documented in contemporary sources in Holland.

The first and most obvious step required of the magistrates was to use their considerable economic power to provide conventional defenses against Charles of Guelders. Despite the occupation and destruction of some smaller towns at that time (notably Bodegraven in 1506) by the forces of Guelders, the magistrates of Holland's main cities, Haarlem, Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht and Gouda, achieved a large degree of security by subsidizing the sale of arms to their citizens, by providing artillery and munitions, by maintaining and repairing the walls, moats and towers of their towns and cities, by posting guards on them day and night, and by organizing scouting expeditions against the enemy, some of which were officered by individual magistrates themselves. All of this required large sums of money, but it was organized and paid for locally, using the manpower and resources of the magistrates and the citizens themselves.

Internal security was also a concern of the magistrates of Holland. Theirs was a nation that lived by international trade,⁸⁶ and as a consequence travelers, traders, Florentine merchant bankers, and other foreigners including ambassadors were active throughout the country, but especially in the seaports and the cities. This meant that the magistrates had to know the identities of foreigners, and their business, and to register and impose some restrictions on their movements. Travelers and merchants especially were subject to control and some harassment on the ground that they were potential spies.

The second line of defense lay in diplomacy. The cities of Holland, for reasons of diplomacy and trade, maintained relations and corresponded directly with foreign powers like Denmark and the Baltic states, but the magistrates recognized, for their own safety and wellbeing, that diplomatic power in military and naval matters lay largely in the hands of the emperor and his Privy Council. Equally, they recognized that the government's diplomatic power could work to their economic advantage. Diplomacy was an important factor in Holland's overseas trade ventures with its close neighbors, England, France,

⁸⁶ *Bronnen*; see e.g. under alum, beer, grain, herring, salt, textiles, etc. in the index ("van Zaken") following p. 569.

Denmark and the Baltic city states.⁸⁷ What the magistrates of Holland objected to was the government's tax demands in order to hire mercenary soldiers to carry the war to Guelders. The government's pretext for this was the defense of Holland, while the popular perception was that it was entirely a dynastic affair of the ruling house. The overall result of this difference of views was that the magistrates' efforts to defend the large cities of Holland at this time were essentially successful, but the professional armies were ineffectual in suppressing Charles of Guelders. Only his death from natural causes in 1538 brought about political changes which ultimately led to the end of the war. In 1543 Guelders was incorporated finally into the Habsburg dominions by the treaty of Venlo. Close to home the immediate enemy, Charles of Guelders, also corresponded directly with the cities of Holland, but his real enemy was Emperor Maximilian I and his successors, Philip I and Charles V of Habsburg. The cities of Holland did not act independently of the government in their relationship with Charles of Guelders, but rather they reported to and forwarded to The Hague the letters which they received from him.

The third facility that Holland required for its security was that of military intelligence. At the local level the ways and means for this were simple. Official couriers whose job in quieter times was to carry letters and dispatches from the cities to the government at The Hague or Brussels were recruited in times of war to reconnoiter the enemy's movements. Some of the couriers' names are known from the account books. Occasional remarks there show that their task was dangerous. It must have been equally dangerous for other travelers in Holland, like the merchant Willem Jacobszoon from Utrecht who was suspected of spying. Conversely, the safety and defense of Holland were aided by sympathizers and "secret friends" in Utrecht and Guelders, spies in other words, to whom payments were made in some cases by the city administrations, and in others by the government. The existence of these people is barely revealed in the city archives and in the government's accounts at The Hague. But a distinction can be made between people living along the borders of Holland, who were paid small sums of money for their information, and at least one, "a personage of Guelders," who was paid a large sum of money over a longer period for the information he provided.

In conclusion, the evidence here shows that in the early sixteenth century during the Guelders war the magistrates of Holland accepted that in order to be secure from attack by Charles of Guelders their economic strength was best used by being allied to the political advice, diplomatic help and military intel-

⁸⁷ Besides a number of diets in Holland and Zeeland attended by delegates from the Baltic and Wendic cities (cf. *Bronnen*, p. 565) there were at least two other international meetings, one at Copenhagen in July 1513 and one at Bremen in October 1514, convened to discuss political and trade relationships between the nations; *Bronnen*, pp. 417–19 (Copenhagen) and 464–487 (Bremen). Emperor Maximilian appointed members of his Privy Council together with the Advocate of Holland to represent Holland and Antwerp at the well documented diet held at Bremen.

ligence provided by the government. That required a high level of taxation on their cities in the form of extraordinary *aides* to pay for the war, but it was a sacrifice which they felt they had to make. Two expressions which the magistrates of Leiden used (at different moments) in the context of paying for the war expressed their feelings graphically. The “least evil” was to bite into that “sour apple.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ “Ende dat men van veele quaden tminste quaet behoirt te kiezen” (20 Sept. 1512), *Bronnen*, p. 329; “dat de stede van Leyden in eenen zueren appel bijten moet ende consenteren” (20 April 1513), *Bronnen*, p. 392.

