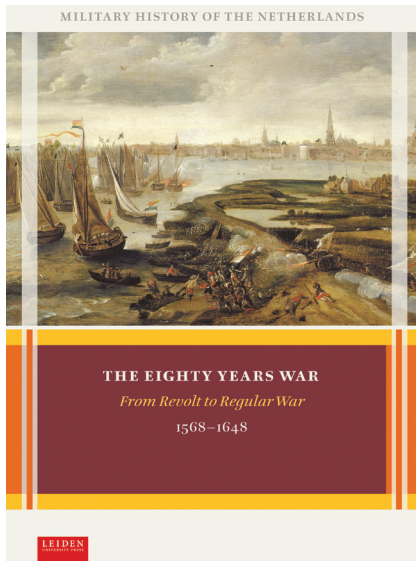


Review

Petra Groen, Olaf van Nimwegen, Ronald Prud'homme van Reine, Louis Sicking, and Adri van Vliet, *The Eighty Years War. From Revolt to Regular War 1568-1648*, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2019, 499 pp. ISBN 9789078283339.



In 2013 the Netherlands Institute for Military History (NIMH) published the first volume of a series that aims to constitute a comprehensive guide on Dutch military history, stretching from the birth of the Republic of the United Provinces until the current peace-keeping missions, and covering a wide range of related aspects and subjects. The idea to carry out such an ambitious project was the product of Dutch military historiography since the seventies, and its execution was facilitated by the merger of the originally separate historical research institutes of the army, navy, and air force, as well as the military and border police. Aiding the research staff of the NIMH are the historians of the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Netherlands Defence Academy, as well as specialists from various research institutes and Dutch universities.

While the first volumes were published in Dutch, the volume reviewed here is the result of the effort to make this series on the military history of the Netherlands available for an international audience.

The Eighty Years War. From Revolt to Regular War 1568-1648 covers the period between the outbreak of the Revolt in 1568 until the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The book is divided into two parts, the first of which is dedicated to the period of the Revolt until 1588, and the second to the years 1588-1648, when the revolt had turned into a war between states. To provide additional historical context, the volume is preceded by a general account of the political integration of the Low Countries into the Habsburg monarchy, which would eventually provide the spark to ignite the conflict between the Spanish monarchy and their Dutch subjects. Both parts of the book are each divided into one chronological chapter and several thematic chapters. The latter are dedicated to the

technological, financial, logistical, operational, and strategic aspects of the conflict, and deal with the Dutch armed forces as a whole, rather than providing the more common historiographical distinction between land-based and naval operations. The penultimate chapter contains an analysis on the nature of the conflict (1568-1648), dealing with such topics as the relationship between war and law, terror and the people, and prisoners of war. In the last chapter, the authors offer concluding observations that highlight some of the reasons for the eventual success of the Revolt and the failure of the Spanish monarchy to suppress it.

In contrast to the so-called *histoire de bataille* which, the authors assert, 'gave military history such a bad name in academic circles' in the past, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the entire course of the Eighty Years' War. The various authors and supporting specialists have succeeded admirably in this task. Despite the complicated nature of the conflict, they have been able to provide a clear and concise account of the fascinating and multi-faceted subject of the Dutch Revolt. They have certainly succeeded in fulfilling the need for a comprehensive account that offers a plausible explanation for the remarkable success of the insurgents to hold their own against the mighty Spanish monarchy, eventually gaining their independence. The road toward independence was long and arduous, and the outcome by no means the result of careful planning; it was mainly determined by the balance of military power between the combatants, both on land and at sea. The treatment of land-based and naval operations in unison is refreshing, and adds greatly to the value of the work.

One minor drawback of this study is that it still relies on a host of (in)famous characters and 'great men', while the actual effects of the struggle on ordinary citizens, soldiers, and sailors remain largely out of sight. This is a problem the authors themselves acknowledge though, and one that they – at various points throughout the narrative – have attempted to address, for instance regarding ordinary seamen (207-208). Although this is in part due to the availability of source material, the book could have benefited from the addition of some appropriate personal accounts. This minor criticism, however, does not detract from the overall value of the work.

Apart from the well-written and coherent general narrative, the chapters are enlivened with a host of compelling images, some of which will be familiar to students and more seasoned researchers of the period, but many will not. In addition, a number of clear and well-designed maps provide the reader with the occasional much-needed overview of the political and military situations during the conflict. As a result, the story of this book is truly one that is 'conveyed in images as well as words' (9). Due to this translation into English, *The Eighty Years War* also contributes greatly to closing a gap in international historiography. In short, the authors have truly succeeded in providing us with a clear and comprehensive history of this fascinating conflict, one that will likely serve as a solid reference work to both Dutch and international students and researchers for many years to come.