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Forgotten IN TIME:

The Scots Brigade in Service of the Dutch Republic

Article and illustrations by Marc Geerdink-Schaftenaar



The Scottish regiment in French service:

Following Culloden, when the Jacobites fled the British Isles, the French never succeeded in recruiting more Scots¹. However, the not-so-famous Scots Brigade in service of the Dutch Republic numbered no less than 8-10 battalions of 660 officers and men each, organized into three regiments.

The Scots Brigade in Service of the Dutch Republic:

During the War of Spanish Succession (1704-1713), the Dutch had hired several Scottish regiments (as well as English, Swiss, Danish, Prussian and scores of German regiments from several principalities). After the war, the three oldest regiments remained, organized into a separate "Scots Brigade" ["Schotse Brigade"]. Unlike the French "Royal Ecossois" Regiment, which was a regiment of the line and numbered as such, the regiments of the Scots Brigade were British, hired by the Dutch Republic and separate from the Dutch line regiments.

The regiments remained British in every aspect: the uniforms were red, contrary to the dark blue uniforms of the Dutch "National Regiments", the German regiments and even the Swiss regiments²; they carried British colours, the officers wore British gorgets and sashes³ and they had their own "Scottish March" [Schotsche Marsch]. The exercise was in English, probably one written by a zealous young officer, as was the case with most exercises of the period. Officers of the Scots Brigade were permitted by Britain to recruit throughout Scotland without restraint.

The regiments were mostly stationed in garrisons throughout the southern provinces of the Republic, Brabant and Zeeland, or the "Barrier-cities" in the Austrian Netherlands, now present day Belgium. The Dutch Republic, Britain and Austria had formed a North Sea Alliance, which would counter any French threat against the

Austrian Netherlands: whilst Austrian and Dutch troops would man the garrisons, the combined fleets of Britain and the Republic would guard the North Sea and the Atlantic. In times of war, a British expeditionary force would be sent across the channel. Thus, the Republic had a protective barrier which would keep conflict outside of Dutch territory.

The uniforms of the Scots Brigade:

Although hired from Britain, the regiments were dressed, armed, and equipped by the Dutch Republic; the fabrics and buttons needed to make the uniforms were delivered by Britain, as was the lace and mitre caps for the grenadiers. Several documents about those deliveries still exist and give a glimpse of what the uniforms looked like. The fabrics – wool broadcloth, kersey and linen – were made into uniforms in the Republic. It is therefore safe to conclude that the uniforms were made like the Dutch Uniforms. The Republic, being a Protestant nation, closely followed the example of neighbouring Protestant German states: the infantry was organized like most German armies, with regiments named after the "inhaber", the colonel who owned the regiment; the grenadier companies were detached into separate grenadier battalions, named after the battalion commander⁴.

The uniforms also followed the German fashion: the Dutch soldier was dressed in a coat with full cuffs and a collar, in some cases with lapels. These were all in the regimental colour, with white or yellow smallclothes (breeches and vests). After 1750, the Prussian example became dominant, making the coats shorter and tighter. The regimental distinctions changed in the course of the century, adding or removing lapels, collars or lace. In the 1740s, the Scottish regiments, numbered as "Regiments of Scots nrs. 1, 2 and 3", but better known by the names of their respective commanders, – 'Marjoribanks',

THE FRENCH TROOPS ENTERED THE CITY... AND AFTER FIERCE FIGHTING IN THE STREETS, IN WHICH THE SCOTS SOLDIERS COUNTERATTACKED SEVERAL TIMES, THE DUTCH AND ALLIES WERE FORCED TO FLEE THE CITY. ONLY 200 MEN OF THE SCOTS BRIGADE MANAGED TO ESCAPE...

'Colyear' and 'Stuart' – were dressed in red uniforms with white regimentals and smallclothes for the 1st Regiment,⁴ and yellow for the 2nd and 3rd Regiments. The 1st and 3rd Regiments had white metal buttons, and the 2nd yellow; so every regiment had a distinctive uniform.

Unlike their countrymen serving in British Regiments or in the French Regiment "Royal Eccossais", the Scots in Dutch service had a very plain uniform: the red coats had no lace, except for the grenadiers and drummers, for whom a small amount was sent, enough to add some small stripes to the sleeves of their coats. This type of decoration was unique, even for the Dutch army, and was never copied by any other unit or army. Except for this lace, the drummers seemed to have had no distinctive uniform, being dressed similar to the men. To add some attraction to the uniform, all hats had fake silver lace along the edge⁵.

The War of Austrian Succession:

In 1740, the new, young Prussian king Friedrich II decided to use the vast, superbly trained army he had inherited from his father to expand his kingdom, by taking Silesia from Austria, under the pretence of some vague historical claim on the territory and the excuse that Maria Theresia as a woman could not claim the throne of the Austrian Empire. Due to the diplomatic relations between the European states, war erupted across Europe. France decided it was a good time to try and capture the Austrian Netherlands and subsequently invaded them.

The war in what is now present day Belgium dragged on for years, with the French laying siege to one barrier city after another, and the opposing armies facing each other in battle, trying to force the other one out. Although the Republic could afford to fund a huge army, it became apparent that its forces were in a sorry state, being ill-led and ill-trained. Besides that, the Allied army was soon known as the "Army of Babylon", since in the combined Dutch-Austro-British force, commands were given to the various regiments in Dutch, Walloon-French, Croatian, Hungarian, English, Gaelic and every possible German dialect. To make things worse, the British commanders (led by the Duke of Cumberland) and the Austrian commanders were under direct orders from London and Vienna respectively; both allies had their own interests in mind first, and told their generals not to put their armies to risk. Frustration between Dutch, British and Austrian commanders led more than once to ill-planned actions and several defeats.

A new French offensive under Marshal De Saxe gave the French the upper hand; by 1747, all the Austrian Netherlands had been captured by the French, and the Allied armies were driven back. In July the French marched towards Maastricht, and as a diversion laid siege to the city of Bergen-op-Zoom. This city was considered to be impregnable: it was nicknamed "La Pucelle", the Virgin, because she was never 'taken'. It had a garrison of 800 men of the Scots Brigade, strengthened in time by more Dutch and some British troops. After a siege of two months, which had

cost the French thousands of men, the French commander decided on one last gamble and ordered the city to be stormed. The French troops entered the city on 16th September and after fierce fighting in the streets, in which the Scots soldiers counterattacked several times, the Dutch and Allies were forced to flee the city. Only 200 men of the Scots Brigade managed to escape, heading for the besieged town of Steenberg, where they drove off a French attack a few days later.

The fall of Bergen-op-Zoom sent a shock throughout the Republic and its Allies⁶. The Dutch revolted and called for the Prince of Orange to become Stadhouder once again. With the war now on Dutch territory, the Dutch opted for peace as soon as possible. In 1748, the war ended. The French gave the Austrians their territories in the Netherlands back, and the Dutch Republic again sent troops to man the Barrier cities. But, relations between the two sea-powers and Austria had deteriorated.

The end of the Dutch Republic as a major European Power:

The War of Austrian Succession had shown that of the powers involved in the North Sea Alliance, the Dutch Republic was the weakest link. With the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756, which allied Austria with France, there was no need for the Republic to defend the Austrian Netherlands against a possible threat. Britain supported Prussia and funded the war against France on mainland Europe, whilst capturing French colonies in North America and India. During that great struggle, now known as the Seven Years War and the French and Indian Wars, the Republic remained neutral. The Republic finally was no longer a major European power.

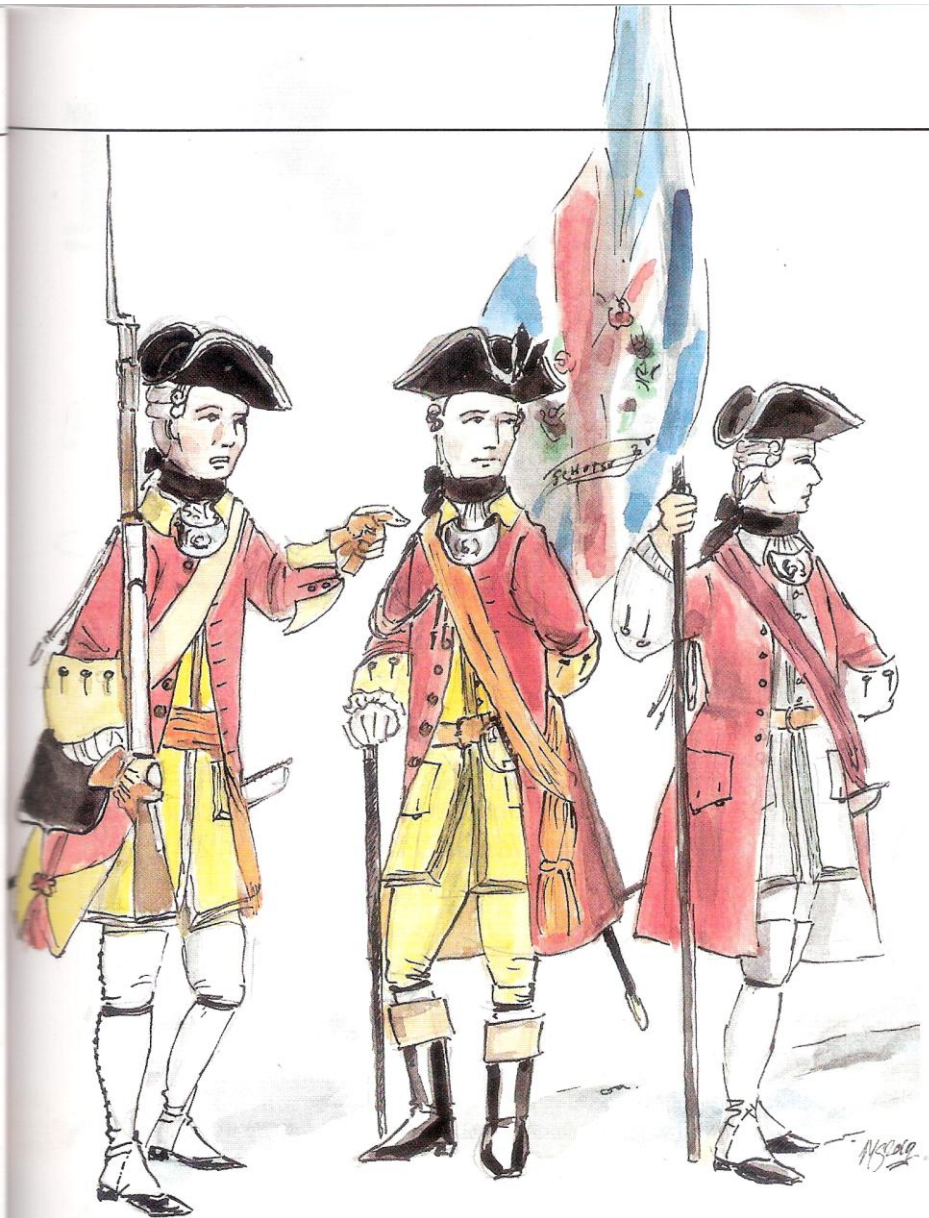
Recruiting Scotsmen for the Scots Brigade became increasingly difficult, and came to a halt in the 1760s. In the years to follow, the ranks were filled with German, Dutch and Flemish recruits, and even the officer corps was no longer exclusively Scottish.

Britain, one of the undoubted winners of the Seven Years War, emerged as a strong colonial power, which slowly but surely rekindled the old rivalry between the Dutch Republic and Britain. This rivalry evolved into a series of diplomatic conflicts when the American Colonies rebelled: not only had the governor of Sint Eustatius had the audacity to have greeted the American vessel "Andrew Doria" with a gun salute – thereby acknowledging the rebel colonies as an independent state – the Dutch supported the rebels with shipments of arms.

The Scots Brigade was caught in between the conflict: an appeal by the British government to have the Scots regiments returned in 1776 was denied after a heated debate in the States General. The Patriotic opposition under its leader, Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, argued that the Scots Brigade should not be sent home in order to "be used to oppress a people, struggling for its freedom", and this led to the Dutch Revolution of 1787.

The end of the Scots Brigade:

In the meantime, the Scots regiments were "nationalized" and



incorporated into the line in 1782 as the “National Regiments” nrs 22, 23 and 24: the officers and men, who previously took an oath to the King of Britain, now had to take an oath to the ‘Stadhouder’; the Scottish March was not to be played anymore, and the colours were to be sent back to Britain and replaced with a stand of colours of the Dutch pattern. Most officers decided to resign their commissions and follow the colours back to Britain. Needless to say, the rank and file did not have this option and were faced with hours of learning the drill manual in Dutch from then on.

The officers, upon their return to Britain, formed the cadre of the 94th regiment of Foot. They opted for a guard status for their regiment, claiming that by continuing the traditions of the Scots Brigade in Dutch service, the regiment was older than any British regiment; also, the regiments had taken the position of honour during parades of the Dutch army, which they saw as recognition of their claim to guard status. It was, however, to no avail. To add insult to injury, the 94th was later amalgamated into the 88th Foot (the Connaught Rangers) as its 2nd Battalion, thereby ending the traditions of the Scots Brigade.

Today:

After 1782, there never again was a Scots unit in the Dutch army, and the German and Swiss regiments disappeared during the Napoleonic period⁷. However, Scots officers and men had settled in the Netherlands during the 18th century, marrying local girls and picking up a trade after leaving the ranks. Scottish military families continued to play a part in the Dutch Army: a lieutenant-general J. A. Stedman commanded the 1st Netherlands Division during the Waterloo campaign.

Many Dutch families have Scottish ancestors, as can be derived from their family names. Mackaay (from MacKay), Makkenze, Makkinje (both from MacKenzie), Brus (from Bruce) and Aberkrom (from Abercrombie) are quite common names today, to name but a few. Besides that, there’s little to be found about the Scots Brigade. In Fortress Loevestein, there is a chamber that has murals of Scots soldiers and people in Highland dress dancing, dating from after 1752. One can only imagine how the soldiers back then tried to bring back the memories of home during one of those long days of garrison duty in service of the Dutch Republic.

Footnotes:

1) Some other Scottish regiments were raised in France in the 18th century, but were disbanded soon after or amalgamated due to a lack of sufficient recruits. This contradicts the story that the Scots Brigade in service of the Dutch Republic was for most Scots a mere stepping stone towards enlisting into the French army.

2) The Swiss regiments were traditionally dressed in red, like the Swiss regiments in France and Spain. German regiments (from Protestant nations) traditionally wore blue. The Waldeck regiment in service of the Republic, which – like the Scots Regiments – was only hired from the Catholic principality Waldeck and was not part of the Dutch line regiments, kept its own white uniforms (white being the traditional uniform colour for Catholic nations).

3) There were a few exceptions: a gorget in a private collection, probably from the third quarter of the 18th century, bears the coat of arms and motto of the ‘Stadhouder’; and the officers of the 1st Regiment wore orange sashes in 1759.

4) This almost feudal system was becoming outdated in the second half of the 18th century, but the Republic, a European superpower in decline, held on to these traditions until its collapse in 1795. Few centralized orders on uniforms and equipment from the States General exist, leaving the decision to the separate provinces, and even to the separate Regimental commanders, regarding how to cloth and equip the officers and men. Most of these orders are repeated urges to the Regimental commanders not to waste the funds on elaborately dressed musicians and useless decorations on the uniforms.

5) One soldier tells in his memoirs that he tore it off his hat and sold it.

6) Not only was it shocking that Bergen-op-Zoom was actually captured, it was also the scene of one of the 18th century’s most awful war crimes. The French soldiers, furious because of the terrible hardships they suffered in the trenches and the many hopeless attacks, were allowed by their commander, Count Löwendal, to plunder the town for three days. Within moments, the situation got out of control, with civilians being molested, raped and murdered. The city was laid to waste. The situation was so shocking, that Marshal De Saxe wrote to King Louis XV that he had only two options: either to reward Löwendal for capturing the town, or hang him for war crimes. Löwendal was promoted to Marshal that same year.

7) One Nassau Regiment and four Swiss regiments were raised for the new army in 1814, but after the Waterloo campaign, the Nassau troops were the first to go. The Swiss regiments, being too expensive and having too much trouble recruiting enough men, were disbanded in 1829.