

Hello and welcome to the FDW, episode 20. We're nearly there guys! We've come a long way since we began our coverage in the midst of a returning king, a Franco-Spanish peace and a cautiously optimistic republic that characterised 1660. Since then we've seen some of the sneakiest displays of diplomacy this side of podcasting, and we've also delved deeper into some incredible figures, some shocking and profoundly tragic incidents and some defining moments. All the while I've been privileged and honoured to bring this story to life and unwrap its significance to you guys – it's been a whole load of fun and it's been amazing to see you guys talk about the era together as though it was only yesterday. Such is the importance of history podcasting, I feel, as well as of course you guys, for demanding such entertainment, and making it all possible. Today we jump on from 1675 and examine another heady year of the FDW – 1676, which saw stalemate ensue on all sides, and a level of intransigence set in amongst the French, as Louis became determined to hold all that he had gained, and the allies became convinced that only through rupturing the carefully crafted French defensive belt could peace be brought to bear. In the meantime, we will bid a tragic farewell to yet another war horse, and witness the war spread to pastures new. Let's see how all involved got on, as I take you all to 1676.

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*I do wish from the bottom of my heart that we might soon have a good peace, for I am as tired of this war as if, by your leave, I had been stuffed with it by the spoonful, as the saying goes.* Elizabeth Charlotte, wife of Philip Duke of Orleans, writing to a friend in the Court of Hannover, May 1676.<sup>1</sup>

For the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the war, Louis would expand his forces to unprecedented levels, a total of 250k men by some counts, which was made possible only through the sheer will of his absolutist command, and the immense talents of his administrators.<sup>2</sup> Once again, the main thrust would consist of incursions into the SN, while the further theatres between the Sambre and Meuse Rivers, along the Rhine and Alsace, in the Pyrenees and Roussillon and finally, in Sicily took the additional troops. Louis continued to see the SN as the major front, and would view the other theatres as distractions designed to reduce the amount of support Madrid could muster. It was thus in many senses an endurance test, to see how long the Spanish and their

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Elberg Forster, *A Woman's Life*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> The figures are debated in John A Lynn, 'Recalculating French Army Growth During the Grand Siecle, 1610-1715', *French Historical Studies* vol. 18, no. 4 (fall, 1994), pp. 881-906, and 280,000 on paper, with a practical amount of 250,000 able bodied men, is the figure Lynn eventually arrives at.

allies would hold out before the united fronts of the war became too much. Louis hoped to take advantage of any perceived weaknesses by acquiring further bases in the SN, which he could hand to Vauban so that that engineering genius could form the Fence of Iron to his own expectations, reinforcing French security on its border with the SN in the process. One could argue without much difficulty that the SN was the mainstay of French attention throughout Louis' reign – if he wasn't trying to conjure up new ways to invade it, he was busying his officials with schemes that would guard against it – the region was simply too important for the French to ignore, and as a result French borders would advance tantalisingly close to their modern measurements, while comparatively little progress would be made elsewhere.

For his first act, a siege of the settlement of Bouchain was on the cards. This fortress town was located some ways south of the Meuse, between Valenciennes and Cambrai, which again you don't need to know the location of to really get the gist of the story, but for the record it resided in Spanish Hainault, as part of the SN, but Louis successes obviously echoed through to the modern day, as the region – known mostly for its champagnes according to Google – is currently a commune in the Nord department of France. I always find it interesting to measure what fortresses remained in French hands and which ones were handed back to the Spanish after these wars. Since being handed back to the Spanish generally meant that it would remain a part of the Southern Netherlands and eventually Belgium, these military campaigns often had a great amount of significance attached to them. Since we have to bear in mind that SN didn't always mean modern-day Belgium, and since Louis' campaigns against fortresses and settlements outside of his domains would now be taken for granted as French territory, you can perhaps begin to appreciate why Louis came to be known as the Sun King. The key point was that even while he was plainly expanding French borders, he pushed them to the point that they were acceptable to the allies, or at the very least not as outrageous as some of the later rulers of France that would aim to subsume all neighbouring states. As Napoleon found out, the powers of Europe could only be pushed so far.

Yet, at this stage in his life, it would be wrong to present Louis as holding himself back from aggrandisement, and as the Xtra episode on his foreign policy assessed, his tendency to take more than was appropriate at the time and with very little grace hurt France in the end, but overall he just restrained enough for peace to not be unpalatable to the allies. It was of course a fine line, and Louis was immensely fortunate, as we've also come to appreciate, to be surrounded by immensely capable men – essentially France was de facto ruled by a triumvirate for much of the period in three key areas. In the realm of finance, and even the

navy as you lovely Patrons will soon discover, Jean Baptiste Colbert was the towering figure ensuring that the monies got to where they were needed, which essentially meant that he cut back other sectors of the budget enough to be able to spend as much as 90 million livres on the army by the early 1680s.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Louis did not orchestrate the administrative masterclass which enabled French soldiers to consume as they marched by way of magazine storage in the varied fortresses along their path – this was the work of Francois Michel Le Tellier, but we know him as the Marquis de Louvois.



The Marquis of Louvois (left), who served Louis XIV as Secretary of State for War from around the period of the War of Devolution (1667/68) until his death in 1691 – a period of service which ensured that he outlasted his rival, Jean Baptiste Colbert (right), who died in 1683. Colbert was both First Minister, Controller General of Finances and Secretary of State for the navy. The position of First Minister, though it was technically the same post as that of Cardinal Mazarin and Cardinal Richelieu before him, had since waned in influence owing to Louis' increased control over state affairs in the absolutist model. Over August 2017 Patrons will be able to find out more about the incredible underrated French navy, so make sure you tune in!

Finally, and where this relates to us, Sebastien la Prestre, in time styled as Marshal Vauban, would command the bulk of French strategy in a defensive sense, while he would also direct a number of key sieges against the French border towns which are now considered purely French territory. Vauban was in communication with Louis while the king marched, at the head of an army, to block William of Orange in his efforts to relieve the siege. For a time it appeared as though some serious movie material was about to be made, and that the King of France was about to do battle with the CG and Stadtholder of the DR. It was a prospect which

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<sup>3</sup> See Lynn, *Wars*, p. 100.

appeared immensely attractive to Louis, though we can't have known how this royal director of sieges would have fared in his first pitched battle, as the scene was not to be.

Under advice from Louvois, who reminded Louis that he was there to protect his brother Philip as he besieged Bouchain, not go gallivanting in search of a costly battle, Louis eventually relented with a surprisingly humble expression 'As you have more experience than me', Louis said to his marshals, who also stood by to advise the king against the act of battle, 'I cede, but with regret.' Later entries in his memoirs for the Dauphin would make it plain that Louis always regretted listening to his marshals in this case – while sieges could wrest a sense of glory out of the situation, this was nothing compared to a glorious triumph on the battlefield. The fact that he might lose and jeopardise the entire course of French operations for the year, of course, did not cross the king's mind.<sup>4</sup>

Bouchain would fall to the French, and would receive such formidable reinforcement under Vauban's orders that the fortress frustrated the allies extensively during the heady days of the WSS. It was in May that Louis' brother Philip, often referred to simply as Monsieur, successfully forced the capitulation of Bouchain. We know this thanks to the litany of letters sent across Europe by Monsieur's wife – Elizabeth Charlotte, if you'll remember, a daughter of the Elector of the Palatinate. Liselotte wrote to Frau von Harling, a childhood friend of hers who had married into the Court of Hannover, and whose correspondence provided us with a series of incredibly quotable phrases, including the opening quote which declared that she was as full of the war as though someone had spoon-fed it to her. Liselotte wrote on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1676 that:

Monsieur has left for the army, where he has already made me suffer a thousand frights by exposing himself to terrible dangers, as I am told in letters from all sides, in Conde's two sieges and then in that of Bouchain. This last siege was started and, thanks be to God, brought to a speedy and successful conclusion by Monsieur himself. And now I have even more worried, for we are told that many people in the army are falling ill, and since Monsieur fatigues himself no less than the others, often staying on horseback for 24 hours and going without sleep, I am afraid that he will end up getting sick too, for they say that the campaign will not be over soon and that the King is not even thinking about returning. Oh what a wearisome, wretched business! It is enough to make me forget all thought of rustling and to bring on a disease of the spleen before my time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn, *Wars*, p. 146 paints this scene quite effectively.

<sup>5</sup> Liselotte to Frau von Harling, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1676, in Forster, *A Woman's Life*, pp. 14-15.

In the event, William would elect to besiege Maastricht in July rather than seek a battle himself, but owing to the large swell in French armies, Louis was able to ensure that the gradual chipping away of the SN continued with time to spare to force William back from his siege. Despite the intensity and duration of the conflict, it seemed as though France was by no means exhausted, and William wouldn't achieve many significant victories for the remainder of the year. On the other hand, he would be outmanoeuvred with little consequence for the DR, while the Rhine saw little action of consequence save for the Duke of Lorraine, Charles V, seizing Philipsburg from the French in a daring siege in early September 1676. Louis was evidently feeling the absence of the late Marshal Turenne, but Marshal Luxemburg was quite capable in his own right, and moved his troops across to the right bank of the Rhine in a region called the Breisgau, further down from Philipsburg, and followed this up by placing his troops in winter quarters in Alsace and Lorraine. The Rhine remained relatively static until 1677, with neither side apparently equipped to land any killer blow.

The Pyrenees was another relatively quiet front, as 1676 seemed to be a year of relative inactivity as both sides consolidated their positions. Furthermore, Louis had elected to focus more men on the campaign in Sicily, where it was planned to capitalise on the revolt the Spanish were facing there. Although Louis seemed interested in making governing the region problematic for Madrid, and although men were landed there, Paris never committed enough men to actually hold onto the region. Sicily was not a war aim in Louis' mind, instead it was a pawn with which he could distract and drain the Spanish, as he seized the true prizes in the SN. That's not to say that the French didn't take the theatre seriously though.

In fact the region did host another terminally tragic event when on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1676 the French and Dutch fleets met in the Battle of Augusta. On paper the encounter was relatively inconsequential. Neither side lost any vessels, with neither side losing more than a few hundred. As ever in the circumstances of the era, sometimes the most trivial of battles hosted the most terrible of consequences. While orchestrating his Dutch vessels and Spanish allies on board his flagship, Admiral Michiel de Ruyter was struck in the right leg with a stray cannonball, which brutally tore his limb off and caused a terribly disturbing scene for all on board. So long used to the presence of the Admiral as their grandfather figure, since he was nearing 70 after all, de Ruyter's wound shocked the Dutch into a retreat. A week later, after catastrophic blood loss, the great and glorious admiral died from his wounds. Just like that, it seemed, a relic from the Republic's finest hours had left the scene. By the end of the summer

the Dutch had left the Mediterranean altogether, signally perhaps their negative connotations towards the theatre, after it claimed their favourite seadog.



I'm beginning to feel like this war is becoming more and more like a Tarantino film with every major character that passes away. At the very least, de Ruyter's death in battle was more glamorous than the unfortunate de Witts.

As it happened, de Ruyter's death would prove to be the most noteworthy event of 1676. Louis contented himself with continuing the grind on the SN border regions, while William did not possess the numbers required to attack in force, especially after the failure at Maastricht and the absence of forage forced him back home. The Germans were gathering once more, but Philipsburg had been their major goal for the year. With this taken, French strategy was somewhat compromised, or at least inconvenienced, but Louis was already instructing his Marshals to locate alternative routes across the Rhine, which would soon bear fruit. To a degree, 1676 can be seen as a year of successes for the French, and the frustration of William at Maastricht was in fact an anomaly in an era when the attacker generally had the advantage. Vauban, promoted to Major General at the beginning of the year, was tasked with inspecting the King's new possessions at the end of it, and remarked on the turn in the weather, calling it 'the vilest and coldest weather imaginable. Everything was ice bound, and I came near to breaking my neck a score of times on the road...if this weather goes on, the King will get very little out of any work undertaken this winter, and I, for my part, will be glad enough to come through it without getting my nose and ears frostbitten.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in James Faulkner, *Marshal Vauban*, p. 87.

With the campaigns of 1676 somewhat uneventful, I feel it'd be wise to examine some of the other issues on-going in Europe, specifically in Britain, where a king had only relatively recently been forced into abandoning the war he had placed so much of his hopes upon. We would be underestimating Charles II somewhat if noted his capitulation to Parliament and moved on, assuming him to have become irrelevant once he bowed out of the conflict. Yet, as Antonia Fraser provides us with a running analysis of Charles II's life in her biography of the man, we are provided with a valuable account both of Charles and Britain itself. For his part, Charles remained convinced of the need to maintain the French friendship, and he insisted to his advisors, in particular the rising star of the court, Thomas Osbourne, the Earl of Danby, who had taken the reins from Arlington after the latter's fall from favour in late 1673. With Arlington gone, the Cabal we've come to follow in Britain for the last decade or so began to break apart. By 1676, only Lauderdale in Scotland remained in his old vestiges of power, and as a firm friend of Thomas Osborne, hereafter referred to in this pod as Danby, both men seemed secured for success. In the event, to give you a feel for context, Danby was a statesman of the old school, and would live until 1712, reaching the apogee of his influence here, before falling out of favour, and then providing a key basis of support for William III's claim on the throne in 1688, whereupon he rose to prominence yet again.



Thomas Osbourne, Earl of Danby

At this point, Danby was the de facto PM of Britain as Arlington had been, though of course that title was not yet in motion, with the role of premier been viewed as too French to have an equivalent in London. Chancellor was often used, though this was often used interchangeably with Danby's designation as the first minister, and sometimes even simply favourite. In the absence of an actual legal title or job security, since the constitutional makeup of Britain was

still developing, figures like Danby tended to hold power for a time before being pushed off due to some scandal or power play. The lack of security in their position explains why the Cabal came to exist – strength in numbers made up for the fact that the British governing apparatus was flying by the seat of its pants in this era. Since Charles technically had the authority and power to lump his favour behind those he most admired, and since the King's mood could wax and wane, it made sense to build up a power base independent of the king, but still politely reliant upon him. The most effective relationships were those that inferred a dependence upon the king, even while the king could deduce that his favourite had additional sources of support. A kind of unwritten rule, in other words, was for the newly minted Chancellor to ensure that he was not politically weak – for he also needed to be able to push through the measures that his king wanted in Parliament, and to do this he needed friends amongst his peers. Failure to perform in the parliamentary sphere could lead to a fall from grace, as had been experienced by the late Earl of Clarendon when that statesman had seen his allies abandon him in droves, making him thus vulnerable to intrigues from the opposition, to which he eventually fell victim. Although Clarendon had been dead for nearly two years by the time Danby succeeded Arlington, his example remained fresh in any ambitious Englishman's mind.

Danby for his part was certain of the importance of a reapproachment with the Dutch, since he believed a return to the principles of the TA would ingratiate the king towards his troublesome parliament, which he had again prorogued in autumn 1675. Charles, the MPs suspected, had been forced into a peace against his will, but still schemed with Louis XIV against their express wishes. To Charles this scheming with Louis remained necessary – he retained a large fleet after the recent war which Parliament's pathetic grants would not pay for, and since he didn't want to lose this important military arm, he planned a scheme with Louis whereby he committed to dissolve Parliament if it became too anti-French, in return for a French subsidy of roughly £100k a year. This would pay for Charles' beloved navy, but in Louis' mind it would also keep his cousin dependent on Paris and mindful of the French influence. The last thing Louis wanted was for the loud currents of anti-French opinion, which had played a large part in taking Britain out of the war, to lead London into an alliance with the Dutch and the popular William III. To prevent that eventuality Louis seemed willing to give up much – in the end Danby through his contacts and negotiation was able to secure the French subsidy even without fulfilling Louis' conditions. Parliament would remain



turbulent, and as if emboldened by its repeated proroguing, when it did return in early 1677 there would be one major development on its agenda – a Dutch marriage.

For 1676 the resident MPs developed their cliques and divisions into coherent policy lines and distinct parties. Freed from parliamentary concerns, as the business of parliament had been prorogued since late 1675, these MPs had more time to scheme together, and this period of 15 months would prove vital for the establishment of party identities and structures. When they returned to sit in early 1677, it was no longer adequate to allude simply to an opposition, nor was it accurate to single out figures such as the ailing Buckingham as the personification of that opposition. The cabal had split, but British politics seemed to have moved on from its limitations, and would, in the space of another generation or so, come to reflect the party system we find easier to recognise – the court and country party; the Tories and the Whigs.<sup>7</sup>

Charles for his part had not changed greatly from the man once imbued with the hopes of a nation a generation earlier, when he had arrived at Dover in 1660. In terms of appearance, Charles black locks had first greyed, and then by the early 1670s virtually disappeared. The film examining the life and career of the late de Ruyter, *Admiral*, perhaps makes him out to be too wizened and old in appearance, since he was only in his mid-forties after all. At the same time though, the wrinkles in his forehead, the stress lines in his face and the tiredness and disappointment in his eyes were all palpable if one looked hard enough. Portraits of Charles II from 1675 onwards display a man who seemed to have aged too quickly, though if one considers the intensely stressful nature of his youth, and the tensions of his adult life, this trend is hardly surprising. Although Charles continued to have some public affairs, proving his lustre hadn't much declined, his old image had notably dimmed. As Antonia Fraser perceptively noted, the fact that many of the young citizens in the realm would not have known or remembered Charles played a role in this change in how the king was seen. Though he retained a measure of his affability, his walks around St James' Park became faster, he tended to fall asleep after dinner for fear of being engaged in too trying a political conversation, and he developed a new habit of producing a watch to indicate when his patience had run out.<sup>8</sup>

Danby was tasked with resuscitating the image of the court, though Charles would scarcely have admitted that much was needed to be done. As the quintessential leader the government,

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<sup>7</sup> This process is examined by Antonia Fraser, *Charles II* (London, 2002), pp. 435-454.

<sup>8</sup> Fraser, *Charles II*, pp. 441-442.

Danby based his policy going forward on a number of principles. The first and most obvious one was to garner allegiance from his peers so that success in Parliament would be made easier. This was done by the tactical application of pressure points, of the use of important political arguments and, often in tandem, a sprinkling of money. Through such methods would the court party develop; Danby hoped to create several capable young men as the future of his grouping, while the old hands would offer the experience and stability to beat the opposition back. The second point Danby worked on was a solution which would enable him to put to practical use the anti-French bias of the nation, ideally by formulating a Dutch agreement. This Dutch agreement was made that much easier by William of Orange's feelers, sent out since late 1675, of the nature of a marriage with Mary, his first cousin and the daughter of James, Duke of York. James also factored into Danby's third point since Danby, a staunch Protestant, essentially aimed to ride to wave of religious dissent by forcing through the anti-Catholic penal laws on priests and dissenters as much as the innocuous secret Catholics. Many MPs remained shaken by Charles untimely attempts to pass the Declaration of Indulgences on the eve of war with the Dutch in 1672, and they cooperated with Danby to see French sympathy and 'popery' as two peas in a pod. By applying some opportunistic weed-killer to such peas, Danby hoped to capitalise on the public mood and increase public satisfaction with Charles after some difficult years, while he also followed suit out of his own beliefs regarding Catholics, not to mention the expectation that he could potentially build much of his power around such measures, particularly when the opposition country party tended to host some men of questionable religious persuasion, whom Danby could slyly accuse thus of questionable political motives.

In Danby's mind, the best way to bring about the improvement in Anglo-Dutch relations was to bring about in turn an improvement in King-Parliament relations. In short, if Charles could get the money he needed from his MPs, he would feel less of a need to bind himself to Louis' promises of subsidies. Then it was a matter of turning this increased reliance of the king on Parliament into a positive message, which could in turn be used for political gain in the DR. Added to the religious elements of his policy, Danby hoped that such measures would persuade the Dutch, as much as the British people, that Charles II had their best interests at heart, but tensions remained high. Charles did appeal in person to Parliament in April 1675, a year after being forced into making peace. The topic, as ever, was Charles' beloved navy, which Danby promised would be the beneficiary of an improvement in relations with the

Parliament, who had the power to authorise greater spending on it. ‘I must needs recommend to you the condition of the fleet’, Charles began...

Which I am not able to put into that state it ought to be, and which will require so much time to repair and build, that I should be sorry to see this summer (and consequently a whole year) lost without providing for it.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Parliament remained intransigent despite Charles’ pleas – their biggest gripe remained the correct perception that Charles had not abandoned his dependence on France, nor had he ceased aiding Louis through the lending of soldiers to French service. Since Charles refused to offer a solution to the issue of Englishmen unpopularly serving in French armies, the MPs refused to grant Charles the money he wanted for the upkeep of the navy, and thus Charles felt forced to continue to rely on Louis for those monies. A standoff then ensued, because through their deliberate stubbornness it was believed, quite correctly as it turned out, that the MPs hoped for a total dissolution of the parliamentary system rather than a mere proroguing as had been done before. A dissolution would warrant fresh elections, which the opposition believed would favour their position considering the mood of the day. Ironically, while Charles bemoaned the idea that Parliament would be filled with yet more men opposed to his designs, he had secretly planned to dissolve parliament himself, as we saw, should it become too anti-French and upset his cousin Louis. In the event, Danby’s tact ensured that he both acquired the secret subsidies from Louis, and that he prevented Parliament’s dissolution.

The February 1676 agreement with Louis provided Charles with annual subsidies and compelled the British King to maintain a pro-French stance for another three years. Though Charles had got the monies he desired and did not need to replace his MPs, he still burned against them for their recalcitrance, and had by that point prorogued Parliament either way in late 1675. In summary, although Danby had proven his worth, Charles not done much to heal the rift between himself and his parliament, while the months leading up to the return of parliament were particularly stormy. When they sat again amidst a furore stoked by the likes of Ashley and Buckingham – two former cabal members turned firm political allies – it seemed unlikely that Charles would be able to resist them again. In return for their demands they would give Charles the monies for the navy which he so desired. Their demands revolved around the latent anti-French feeling in the realm by early 1677, as the Dutch faced a further military onslaught from France. This anti-French feeling manifested itself into a

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Fraser, p. 434.

policy of incredible significance. William of Orange's marriage proposal was receiving much attention from a number of prominent MPs, and determined to carry it forward to success was William Temple, architect of the TA and a determined advocate of an anti-French policy. Upon him did the future political course of Britain, and perhaps even its succession, depend.