

Gerrit Knaap, Henk den Heijer and Michiel de Jong, **Oorlogen overzee. Militair optreden door compagnie en staat buiten Europa 1595-1814** (*Militaire Geschiedenis van Nederland* 5; Amsterdam: Boom, 2015, 460 pp., ISBN 978 90 8953 358 6).

This hefty tome is a valuable addition to the new multi-volume *Militaire Geschiedenis van Nederland*, produced under the auspices of the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH). Though this is the second volume in the series to appear in print, it formally is the fifth volume of the series. Four other volumes deal with wars waged by Dutch state troops in Europe or post 1945 as part of coalition wars, and a final sixth volume will appear on the history of the Dutch state as a colonial power after 1814.

The first volume of the *Militaire Geschiedenis*, which came out in 2013, described the period of the Eighty Years' War from a European perspective. It showed how the Dutch armed forces on land and at sea were transformed from a more or less chaotic conglomerate of rebellious bands to a highly organized and disciplined army and navy, enabling the Dutch Republic to operate as a European great power. This volume traces the story of military actions by Dutch troops in the context of violent expansion along the West-African coast and in the East- and West-Indies, a process that also has its roots in the Dutch Wars of Independence. It does so in more or less comprehensive fashion. As in the previous volume, the text is supported by a copious amount of illustrations, and the layout of the book and reproduction quality of the images are spectacular. The nature of this type of book is such, that one should not expect long discussions of the most recent trends in international historiography. But given the great expertise of Gerrit Knaap and Henk den Heijer in the history of military actions in the East- and West-Indies respectively, readers will not be surprised to find clear and wide-ranging overviews covering all the major episodes of armed conflict.

The editors of the series have clearly chosen for a non-traditionalist approach to military history. The minutes of military tactics during sieges or battles, the personnel composition of regiments, or the exploits of particular commanders carry relatively little weight – especially when considering that these volumes are also meant to be used in the education program of the military academy. Ample attention is given to the economic aims of expansion (ultimately, profit for the companies and Dutch merchants) and how these aims were translated into military strategy. This is especially relevant since in the case of early modern warfare overseas, the prime instigator of violence was not the Dutch state but were the chartered companies that combined commercial and state-like functions. Furthermore, the book also contains

useful chapters on the recruitment, disciplining and daily life of soldiers and sailors. Given the conservative and militarist character of traditional military history, it is nice to find relatively sympathetic descriptions of resistance from the ranks. In the humble opinion of this decidedly anti-militarist reviewer, histories of warfare cannot contain enough on soldiers and sailors refusing orders or bravely running away from battle (offenses often punishable by death or mutilation). And while the authors have certainly not tried to write a 'black book' of Dutch expansion, they also do not hide the fact that the conquest of colonies, the enforcement of monopolies in the spice trade, or the suppression of slave revolts were littered with acts of cruelty.

It is not an easy task to write a coherent story about more than two centuries of warfare and expansion in such diverse geographical settings, literally oceans apart. This is even more so, since Dutch expansion was not organized by a state pursuing connected strategies on a global stage, but was delegated to separate companies each following its own agenda. Apart from a first chapter on the early (pre-company) ventures in the East and the West written by Henk den Heijer and Michiel de Jong, and a concluding section of a few pages, the entire book is divided in two parts that reflect the respective geographical domains of the VOC and WIC. This is a logical choice in terms of composition, but it does mean that the book does not provide much in terms of explicitly comparing and connecting the Dutch experience of expansion in the West and the East. The one question that the authors do promise to answer on the basis of a global comparison – whether or not the European 'Military Revolution' helped to give the Dutch a decisive edge over their non-European adversaries – is treated so summarily that it might as well have been left out. Furthermore, the possibility for global comparisons of course does not end with such a very general question. To name but one issue, for both the Indian Ocean area and the Atlantic, there are now fascinating studies that look at 'intercultural' relations in the context of military violence, such as Mark Meuwese's work on alliances between the Dutch and indigenous peoples in Africa and the Americas, or Matthias van Rossum's work on Asian soldiers and sailors in the service of the VOC. Such works could have been used to reflect more thoroughly on the fundamental similarities and differences between the nature of cooperation and conflict in the two hemispheres.

Despite its rather conventional approach to the divisions between East and West, this volume offers readers a useful summary of two centuries of global warfare. Based on their long careers of researching and writing about VOC and WIC violence, the authors do so both with a clear perspective on long-term developments and with eye for detail. If you need a brief description in Dutch of how VOC troops waged their bloody counter-guerilla in Mataram, or if you want a quick reminder of the course of Kieft's War in New Netherland, this will be your go-to book.