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MA Dissertation

The Siege of Flushing

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The siege of Flushing, 1809: a success within the failure of the Walcheren expedition?

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28 August 2008

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Abstract

The invasion of Holland on 31 July 1809 was the largest military action ever mounted by Britain. Its object was the destruction of Napoleon's naval shipbuilding in the yards at Antwerp, Flushing and Terneuse. The force landed on Walcheren Island in the estuary of the River Scheldt. Within three days the army had taken control of Walcheren, bar Flushing, and the adjacent island of South Beveland. Antwerp was in sight fifteen miles away. A successful siege was mounted against Flushing and it surrendered on the 14 August. This was the limit of the progress of the expedition. Fever broke out on South Beveland and swept through the army. Napoleon's generals mustered all the troops they could find to make a grand show of resistance. The Earl of Chatham, the commander in chief, vacillated and then abandoned further progress. Eventually the army left Walcheren after wrecking the facilities of Flushing harbour. By February 1810 3,960 men had died from illness and around 11,000 were still registered sick.

This paper examines the successful conduct of the siege and contrasts it with the key failures of the expedition. It does this within a narrative of the main elements of the expedition.

The conclusions that are drawn find that the expedition was muddled in its purpose between a surprise raid and a regular invasion and this was one of the keys to its failure. The siege of Flushing was in the care of the Royal Engineers, the Royal Artillery and the Royal Navy, each having an ethos of professionalism, and this was a reason why the siege was well done. The expedition, for all its endemic faults, was redeemable if it had been pressed forward with vigour, and Chatham was chiefly responsible for this failure.

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Preface

The Walcheren expedition was a failure and a fiasco, and yet within it was the siege of Flushing which seems to have been conducted according to plan and achieved the objectives set for it in a timely and effective fashion. The capture of Flushing was largely ignored; the ignominy of the general disaster of the invasion overshadowed any redeeming aspect of the operation. This work looks at the siege itself, why was the result so diametrically different from the rest of the expedition. It also considers whether the siege was beneficial to the campaign.

Gordon C Bond has written the only full scholarly history of the Walcheren expedition "The Grand Expedition; the British invasion of Holland in 1809" published in Athens, Georgia in 1979. Bond was an associate professor of history at Auburn University, Alabama; he researched his book in Britain France and Holland. The book set out "to present a thorough examination of the reasons behind this British effort, a documented account of the campaign, and an analysis of the factors responsible for its dismal failure". He concludes that the expedition accomplished very little at great cost to Great Britain in money, men and national reputation[1]. His diligence is impressive; he has left little undone in his research of the events surrounding the expedition, and has not left enough to tempt another author in the nearly thirty years since he published it. In my own researches I found, in the main, that Bond had cited the records before me. For all that, it is a short volume and passes over some of the naval detail.

A precursor to Bond's book was his paper called "The siege of Flushing" published in the *Irish Sword* in 1974. It contains his own translation of a part of the French General Osten's report to the French government in 1810 plus numerous footnotes; Osten had

a battalion of Irish volunteers under his command, perhaps accounting for the publication in this specialised periodical. This paper was a limited incursion into the Walcheren story but it gave a perspective of the defenders. I have found Bond's work accurate and trustworthy.

The only other published scholarly work since Bond specifically concerned with the Walcheren Expedition is Carl Christie's article "The Royal Navy and the Walcheren Expedition of 1809", published in *New aspects of naval history; selected papers presented at the fourth naval history symposium, United States Naval Academy, 25-26 October 1979,* completed very shortly after Bond, but independently researched, it was published in 1981.Christie was then a historian at the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa. In this essay he surveys the Royal Navy's involvement in this "Conjunct operation" and questions the wisdom of undertaking the operation in the first place. His final words are that "The expedition was a fiasco, but one that could and should have been avoided"[2]. The direction of his argument was that the fault lay in London at the planning stage. He considers that if the available knowledge about Walcheren had been considered they would not have sent an expeditionary force of that size at that unhealthy time of the year, but above that he considers that neither a surprise attack nor an attack in great force was feasible.

Martin R Howard, a consultant haematologist, wrote "Walcheren 1809, a medical catastrophe" published in the *British Medical Journal*. It is a short history of the disease at Walcheren, well researched and with adequate footnotes. He attempts a modern diagnosis of the sickness based on the descriptions of the time. This seems a valid activity, the doctors of the nineteenth century did not have today's knowledge but they were skilled observers and there is a large amount of such evidence to examine.

Many participants in the invasion have left memoirs, published and unpublished. They range from private soldiers to senior generals. The most germane to this paper are the officers directly concerned with the direction of the siege and a selection of influential critics. Colonel Fyers was the senior officer of the Royal Engineers; his journal was presented to the Parliamentary enquiry which followed the expedition, he also left maps which many authors have drawn on to illustrate the siege. Captain John

T Jones was the brigade major of the engineers at the siege; his book[3] includes a daily account of the events of the encirclement. It is strong on facts but he keeps his opinions to himself. Richard Henegan was in charge of the Engineer park; his memoir[4] with its frank and lively style brings out the flavour of the times. Major General Picton's collected papers[5] record his scathing criticism of the conduct of the officers in charge the siege; although Picton was on the staff of the commander in chief it appears that he did not understand all the reasons for the unorthodox layout of the siege-works or the logistical difficulties preventing their prompt execution. William Maynard Gomm was a junior staff officer who was present at the surrender negotiations[6]. George Hargrove Junior was an assistant surgeon with the Royal Horse Artillery; he was on South Beveland during the siege but he later visited Flushing and gave a graphic account of its destruction. Hargrove's account of the expedition was written while building up his private practice in Ireland, looking to make friends rather than enemies; nevertheless it was contemporaneous and adds colour to the more prosaic words of the blunt soldiery[7]. A feature of these personal recollections is that they often contain a mix of what they have witnessed themselves and an expansion clearly based on what they have heard from others; for example, officers on warships describe the effect of their bombardment. I have tried to use only the observations possible from the writer's position at the time.

The Chatham papers in the National Archive include "The journal of the army", an account written up day by day in different hands. This gives a rough but immediate record of the view from army headquarters.

In response to the Parliamentary enquiry the Admiralty collected together its correspondence on the Walcheren expedition and these are still kept in a single file, making a convenient source. These papers are much cited by Bond and Christie. The evidence given at the Parliamentary enquiry was published in Parliamentary papers. The enquiry stretched over a long period of time and verbatim transcripts of the evidence form a prime source of the justification or otherwise of the leading participants.

Army unit histories include The Royal Engineers by Whitworth Porter, a surprisingly frank account of the shortcomings as well as the triumphs of the Corps. At the time of

its writing J.T. Jones, by then Sir John, had risen to the top of the Royal Engineers and his opinions will have had a strong effect on Whitworth Porter, indeed he quotes him at length.

Naval Log books in the National Archives provide basic, sometimes very basic, details of ships movements and sea actions. The log book of the Sloop *Kangaroo* 18 guns, a scribbled and barely legible exercise book, failed to mention the presence on board of the Naval Commander-in-Chief. The frigate flotilla was led by Lord William Stewart in *Lavinia*. They ran the gauntlet between the batteries at Flushing and Breskens but in the ships log he does not mention either the enemy's fire or his own response: the only use of the log to the researcher was the unwitting testimony to the stiffness of His Lordship's upper lip.

The National Maritime Museum has several collections of papers from the naval participants. Some documents are clearly derived from other sources rather than their own experience; for example, the description of Flushing as "That devoted town" (meaning doomed) has cropped up three times in my own research, an unlikely coincidence. Other collections are credible. These include the papers of Rear Admiral Keats, who was one of the two junior admirals in Sir Richard Strachan's fleet. Captain Cockburn left a personal journal; he was a gunboat flotilla commander. The Owen papers, E.C.R. Owen was captain of the *Clyde* and a squadron commander positioned in the Eastern Scheldt.

The internet has proved a curate's egg. It has been a most useful source for maps and illustrations but its un-refereed articles are to be used with extreme care. One fine quote "During the British siege of Flushing the town's garrison used empty howitzer shells to communicate with French troops on the other side of the Scheldt Channel"[8] was proved false when a copy of the supposed source was brought to my attention. Another website gave a detailed analysis of the ammunition supply during the siege of Flushing but it proved to be based on another siege (Batz); it also calculated the number of horses needed to pull the wagons but it discounts the fact that the same team of horses could be used for more than one journey. Google digitised books and periodicals give a true facsimile of the original and so are reliable.

Chapter 1

The expedition to Walcheren

The invasion of Holland on 31 July 1809 was the largest military action ever mounted by Britain; it was commonly referred to as the Walcheren expedition and in the press as The Grand Expedition. It was a response to circumstances that flowed from the European political situation as well as intending to destroy French ship-building on the Scheldt. In 1809 Napoleon was the master of the European mainland but England was the master at sea. His war against Britain took the form of his 'continental' policy; a war against Britain's trade by excluding British goods from European markets. His alliance with Russia had dropped the countries between their two states into French hegemony. The only remaining European power opposing him was the Austrian Empire; and that war on the Danube was one of the motives for launching the Walcheren expedition. It was to be a diversion on the other side of Europe designed to draw off part of his army to defend against an incursion near the border of France,

Napoleon's continental policy had unwanted consequences. In Portugal his incursion to enforce the ban on trade with Britain had given Britain the opportunity to intervene. In Spain he had replaced the Spanish king with Joseph, his own brother, and in doing so had converted a strong military and naval ally into a rebellious enemy. Napoleon's policies in Iberia had provided Britain with two active European allies and created the platform for Britain's peninsular campaign.

The Royal Navy was supreme on the seas. Even in the Baltic, surrounded by enemies, either active or notional, the summer months saw the sea full of British trading vessels convoyed by strong naval forces. Britain had returned to the Mediterranean Sea. All the coasts of Europe, and especially French naval bases, were closely blockaded. Britain was able to continue its colonial trade and to circumvent the ban on continental trade. Its economy prospered and its tax base underpinned the huge borrowings that financed its armed forces and the subsidies that supported its allies.

The French Fleet had been destroyed by the actions at Trafalgar and later smaller actions; there was no prospect of invading the British Isles until the French ships had been replaced. Bonaparte had instituted massive ship construction at various places around his Empire; one of the largest of these was on the Scheldt, using Antwerp, Terneuse and Flushing. The Scheldt was just a day's sailing from the Thames and was considered by Napoleon as "a cocked pistol pointed at the head of England". In March 1809 the Admiralty learned that 10 new ships of the line were at Flushing awaiting armament. This prompted the Minister for War, Lord Castlereagh, to press for an attack. It coincided with requests from Austria to open a second front in North Europe to ease the pressure on the Austrian army facing the French on the Danube.

By the end of May 1809 plans had been laid for an expedition of some 40,000 men to invade Holland. The commander of these forces was John Pitt, second Earl of Chatham; he was the older brother of William Pitt and a former First Lord of the Admiralty. Chatham was ominously nicknamed "the late Earl" because of his tardiness. The naval commander was Rear Admiral Sir Richard Strachan, a hard driving officer but one that had no experience of amphibious operations. Sir Richard Strachan had distinguished himself after the battle of Trafalgar. Roger Knight writes "Two weeks later four ships of the line under Admiral Dumanoir, the remnants of the van, battered by the weather and leaky, were ruthlessly chased and caught in the Bay of Biscay by Sir Richard Strachan. In a brilliant postscript to the main battle … all four ships struck"[9] The action brought every seaman £10.13s in prize money[10] Nicholas Rodger quotes seaman William Richardson "Yet the sailors liked him for all that, as they knew he had a kind heart; and thought no more of it when his passion was over. They gave him the name of 'Mad Dick' and said that when he swore he meant no harm and when he prayed he meant no good. However he was a brave and active officer, and was always very lenient to a prisoner when tried by court-martial"[11]

The appointment of Sir Richard Strachan was not a good one; he had no experience of amphibious operations and this showed in his advice and opinions voiced during the campaign. However, it was a choice positively made. Strachan was only a Rear Admiral but he was put in command of the greatest armada that England had ever sent

to sea. Promotion in the navy was by seniority beyond the rank of post captain; but it was not as confining as it might sound. The navy had a way of coping with the problem, a captain could be promoted to admiral, but never to work again, a yellow admiral. An outstanding captain could be given an admiral's command using the rank of commodore

On 16 June the King issued the operational order which instructed Chatham to destroy the ships being built or afloat on the Scheldt, to destroy the dockyards at Antwerp, Flushing and Terneuse and to render the Scheldt no longer navigable by ships of war.

The siege of Copenhagen in 1807 had an effect on the siege of Flushing in an unexpected way. At Copenhagen the British had made off with every warship in the harbour and all the naval stores, valued in England at four million pounds. As Denmark was neutral state prize money was not awarded, instead an award of £800,000 was divided between the fleet and the army; this was a disappointment to the participants but the bounty was enough to have an effect on those volunteering for Walcheren expedition "the honours and pensions bestowed on the captors of Copenhagen two years previously drew forth from their snug abodes many of the heads of the military departments under the expectation of obtaining similar recompenses. Thus a veteran who had held a snug and lucrative post at Woolwich for more than thirty years and had never served in the field except as a subaltern, now appeared on the stage as Commanding Officer of Artillery; and an equally old officer precisely on an equality with the last described with respect to experience and service came forth from an office in London as Commanding Engineer."[12] Lord Chatham had financial problems "the reason for his being selected in preference to the many more able and distinguished officers was unfortunately too apparent: his fortune was embarrassed, and this lucrative command would improve it."[13]

The naval force amounted to 266 ships of war. The fleet comprised

Ships of the line	37
Frigates and fourth rates	27
Sloops, bombs and brigs	60
Hired armed ships	31
Tenders and lighters	29

Gunboats	82
Total	266[14]

The principal vessels are listed in Appendix 1.

The fleet was a combination of a line of battle larger than Nelson's force at Trafalgar and a huge flotilla of smaller vessels; it needed a few adjustments to make a force suited to the purpose of an invasion. The fleet assembled for Walcheren was not scientifically assembled and yet it contained a balance of vessels, fit for the purpose of the expedition. Guns were taken from the lower decks of the ships of the line so that they became troop carriers. Frigates were to give fire support to the landings. Congreve's rockets were taken to use during the siege; the sloop *Galqo* was fitted out as a rocket ship. J.P.Wrangle records in his journal "We had received 42 men of the Royal Marine Artillery on board who were intended to discharge the rockets both on the sea and land service."[15]

The fleet had bomb ketches to attack stationary shore targets, this was a weapons system designed to carry one or, more usually, two mortars, one of 13 inch diameter, the other of 10 inches. The mortars were on the fore deck on the centre line (the two masted ketch design had a long fore deck with no foremast). The bomb vessel was anchored and the mortar was aimed by pointing the ship, using a spring line on the anchor cable, the range was found by altering the powder charge. The 13 inch shell weighed 200 pounds, it was a round iron case filled with 32 pounds of gunpowder. The fuse was lit when the mortar was fired so it left a trail of smoke and sparks in the sky. There were five bomb vessels with the fleet, *Hound, Etna, Vesuvius, Thunder* and *Devastation*; the names bear witness to the destructive power of their weapons.

The sloops and brigs were augmented by hired vessels, to work in the shallow waters of the Scheldt. Cutters from the Excise Service were taken from the Treasury; they were issued with Letters of Marque, so that they could legally make war upon the enemy. The gunboats had the shallowest draught being large rowing boats with two 18 pound cannon in the bow. They were effective as guard ships against similar sized river craft as well as having offensive use when collected into flotillas. The larger vessels carried specially built flat bottomed boats to land troops and supplies. The

gun-boats, with little storage space, needed provisions from the larger ships; *Amethyst* transferred rations to two gun-boats[16].

The great expedition was marshalled in the Downs, which is an anchorage at the South-East point of England offshore from Dover, Deal and Ramsgate. Some transports came laden from the Thames and some warships had embarked troops at Portsmouth. The bulk of the troops were marched down to board their transports in the Downs. There were 352 hired transports, with the naval ships it was the largest force ever assembled by Britain. The size of the fleet was a reflection of what they were taking with them. There were some 70,000 soldiers and sailors, over six thousand horses and 200 artillery pieces, all with ammunition and stores to match[17]. From the signing of the operational order it took six weeks to assemble the transports and load them ready for departure. Before the expedition sailed the news of the defeat of the Austrian Army had been received and Napoleon was negotiating with the Austrians from a position of strength.

At that point the strategic plan was to make a surprise descent on the Western Scheldt estuary, take Walcheren and land the army on the mainland at Sandvliet, 15 miles march from Antwerp. Thus the main force would land on the mainland at the inland end of the estuary. Any action against Walcheren and South Beveland on the left bank of the West Scheldt estuary and on Cadsand on the right bank was in preparation for this. Bond quotes Spencer Percival as saying "you might… just as well talk of a *coup-de-main* in the Court of Chancery as a surprise attack on Antwerp under Chatham"[18]. To aid secrecy all foreign vessels were embargoed in port, lest they give the game away. In fact the news of the preparations had been published in the press and its destination was obvious; even Napoleon's *Le Moniteur universel* had made defiant comment sourced from King Louis of Holland "The most effective measures have been taken by Holland to repel any attack on behalf of the English, if they dare make a descent on this country, in order to keep their agreement with Austria, to make a powerful diversion in her favour. It is nevertheless doubtful that, after the disaster which has befallen the Austrian Armies, the English will feel still obliged to keep their promises…But whether they keep their word or not, we have established at different points on our coast some detached Corps, which, in the case of necessity,

can be promptly brought together. A numerous reserve is equally disposed, if needed, to be transported to these same points"[19].

So the expedition sailed. It was a *coup de main* that was equipped as a full scale invasion, and a surprise that had been reported in the French newspapers. It had been delayed by the difficulty in finding sufficient transports to carry the huge force that Chatham had deemed necessary. Its commander was notorious for his idleness and the naval commander had no experience of combined operations. Things did not auger well.

Chapter 2

The expedition sails

The fleet sailed on 28 July 1809. They arrived later that day in stormy weather and anchored in the Stone Deep, an exposed position to the North East of Walcheren Island. Hugh Popham wrote in his biography of his ancestor "by 28th they were on a lee shore and deadly danger, Popham shifted to a smaller vessel, the *Sabrina* and with great skill piloted the armada into the comparative shelter of the Roompot"[20]. This manoeuvre moved the main fleet further up the Eastern arm of the Scheldt estuary and further out of touch with the other wing of the fleet. That part of the fleet under Commodore Owen anchored in the Western estuary off Cadsand. It was planned that a force would land on Cadsand and advance up the coast. They had 2,000 troops aboard but only enough boats to land 600 at a time. The brigade commander refused to land piecemeal and the landing was first delayed and eventually abandoned.

At this point the entire direction of the expedition was changed. The line of approach was altered from the Western Scheldt to the Eastern branch of the estuary. The army was re-organised by Chatham on 31 July. The former West Wing under Sir Eyre Coote plus the third division became the force allocated to Walcheren Island; a total of 14,000 officers and men. The rest, 33,000 officers and men, were allocated to South Beveland. The commanders and units are detailed in Appendix 2. Both Islands were to be secured at the same time. The invasion force was split into two, a division under Sir John Hope sailed down the Western estuary past Walcheren to land on South Beveland, the adjacent Island. The Earl of Chatham and a force under the command of Sir Eyre Coote invaded Walcheren Island.

On Sunday and Monday 30 and 31 July Coote's force made a beach landing at Breesand on the North East coast. The troops arrived in transports and in ships of the line; they had to be landed in ships boats and the special flat boats. The process of doing this meant many of the frigates and smaller warships provided their own boats and crews as well as crews for the flat boats; these then were allocated to transports to collect soldiers. The loaded boats then landed the men on the sand, weather

permitting. The stormy conditions continued from the previous night and sometimes boats were left clinging to the larger ships awaiting calmer conditions[21]. When the fleet was sighted by the Dutch, their General, Stuart Bruce announced that the force was too strong to oppose their landing: that in consequence, if he were attacked he would destroy the batteries of the fort and retire to Ter Veere[22], but the landing was contested, the French General Osten had placed 1200 French infantry behind the sand dunes with four pieces of field artillery. The British troops were greeted by "heavy cannon and musketry"[23]. The landing force was covered close to the shore by gunboats, which could scatter formations of soldiers, further out to sea there were bomb vessels which could drop their shells on fortifications and embrasures and finally frigates added their fire. The troops forced their way along the coast, accompanied by the bombs and gun boats; on 30 July the troops invested the town of Compere. Robert Clover on the bomb *Thunderer* wrote that next day "bombarded Compere with other bombs and gunboats continued the bombardment till pm Tuesday 1 August when the town surrendered"[24]. The army then marched to Middelburg, the main town in the centre of the Island, and it surrendered with no resistance.

In two days the British had taken the towns of Middelburg and Ter Veere and had encircled the Island as far as Fort Breskens. This fort was out of range of bomb vessels and gunboats and its Dutch defenders did not surrender immediately; the British engineers under Colonel Fyers, the senior sapper, began the construction of a battery and at this point the fort surrendered. By August 2 the British were in possession of the whole island except for Flushing.

A second landing was made on the Island of South Beveland with Sir John Hope in command. The bad weather delayed this landing until Tuesday1 August. The logistics were more complex than the Bree Sand landing because of the difficult waters, for example the frigate *Lavinia* acted as an intermediate troop carrier, collecting the 28th Regiment on board and reloading them on to smaller vessels to land on South Beveland. They found that the Dutch had evacuated the Island and they were able to take possession of it without opposition. They took over the fort at Batz, which the Dutch had newly abandoned; this covered the juncture of the East and West Scheldt and faced the mainland. The only military action which took place on the Island was to repel advances by enemy gunboats coming down from Lillo. Captain Kincaid, then

a new recruit to the Rifle Brigade, records spending three weeks "playing at soldiers, smoking *Mynheers* long clay pipes and drinking *vrows* buttermilk, for which I paid for with my precious blood to their infernal mosquitoes"[25]

In the initial planning of the expedition a landing on Cadsand, opposite Flushing, played an important part; it was designed firstly to cover the transportation of the army up the West Scheldt and secondly to prevent stores and reinforcements reaching Flushing. With the realisation that when the wind was from the South-West reinforcements could not be prevented by sailing vessels on the water, then the Cadsand landing was upgraded to a full brigade. Commodore Owen commanded thirteen ships to carry Lord Huntley's division. In addition, Lord Gardner's squadron was to blockade the mouth of the West Scheldt, protecting the landing further up the river. A series of errors and misunderstandings led to the failure of the landing. Lord Huntley had been told that 2000 men were needed for the landing and he interpreted this to mean that they should be landed all at once; Owen had boats to land only 600 men at a time; Gardner had been ordered to have his boats ready to assist the landing but he never got the order. The bad weather and high winds prevented communication and co-operation between the two squadrons, so Gardner's boats could not be brought up. As a result the landing was postponed and the chance of attacking was lost.

Was Gardner right to stick to his understanding of his orders? He was the man on the spot, he could not see over the dyke to assess what welcome awaited his troops; his only intelligence was the muddled set of instructions he had received. It would seem that he made the safer choice.

The effect on the whole operation is harder to assess; the plan to make the main approach through the Western Scheldt was already unravelling. If Huntley had made a successful landing and advanced up the coast to silence the batteries at Breskens he would not have facilitated the English main force to pass up the Western Scheldt to Sandvliet. The main fleet had moved out of position into the Roompot and the direction of attack was changing. The winds remained to the South West preventing the fleet from advancing up the estuary anyway; also enabling the reinforcement of Flushing to take place.

The Grand Expedition may have been an open secret but only as far as the suspected destination being the Scheldt; the specific objectives were still closely held. Britain had always had an option that, if all went well, the expedition could continue into France, but Antwerp was the prime target. The French had to defend against the threats as they saw them, and an attack against the naval bases on the French coast might well have been the first priority. The French anticipation of the invasion covered the two possible routes of advance, up the Scheldt or down the coast to France. Napoleon included in his military projections of 13 March 1809 110,000 francs for the additional fortification of Antwerp, 300,000 francs for new lunettes at Flushing and 500,000 francs for batteries on Cadsand; at the same time King Louis had been instructed by his brother to raise 20,000 troops for the defence of Holland since "all my troops are employed and you will surely be attacked by June or September"[26].

The French reacted immediately to the invasion. The number of English ships in the Stone Deep had been building up between the 23 and 26 July, the alarm had been raised by telegraph to Paris on the 29 July[27]. The initial reaction of the French on learning of the presence of the invasion fleet was to concentrate on Cadsand. This would protect the route to France and could harass an advance up the Scheldt. By the evening of 30 July the French had accumulated between three and four thousand men on Cadsand and they continued to swarm in. Huntley's full division numbered five thousand. Bond quotes General Rousseau as saying his force would be sufficient to prevent a landing of up to twelve thousand British troops because of the exposed beaches of Cadsand[28]. By July 31 there were 5,744 men on Cadsand, 6,000 men of the National Guard from St Omer were on their way, so were eight companies of reserve from Ecloo: Lille sent 5,500 National guardsmen and so it went on. Antwerp, however, was not reinforced. General Chanmbarlhac, the commander on Cadsand reported "In its present state there is nothing to prevent them [the English] from becoming masters of the two branches of the Scheldt and turning the fleet and port of Antwerp"[29]. The French ships in the Scheldt were ordered to move up-river as soon as the British were sighted at sea. The defensive boom between the forts at Lillo and Liefkenshoek formed a barrier to any British seaborne attack.

On the whole it was a very successful operation. The huge fleet had crossed the North Sea in bad weather and found a safe anchorage without loss. The enemy forces defending Walcheren had been swept aside and the Dutch had retreated from South Beveland; by 2 August the two islands had been occupied except for the town of Flushing. The landing on Cadsand was abandoned, but it not obvious whether this was a good thing or a bad one. All the while Flushing was being reinforced Monnet continued to hope that he could withstand the siege and delayed the flooding of Walcheren, and in delaying he lost the race with the siege works; in the end the failure to land at Cadsand proved to be the key to the success of the siege of Flushing.

Chapter 3

The town of Flushing and its defence

Flushing had been one of the principal ports on the Scheldt and it had two large basins inside the town defences. In earlier times it had been the base for a herring fishing industry, the Dutch East Indies Company and the Dutch slave trade. The Dutch East India Company left a large legacy on the island; there were the dockyards and wharves in Flushing harbour, the prosperity the company brought had provided many fine brick buildings, both civic and private, and the island had warehouses to store the traded goods, both in the coastal towns and at Middelburg in the centre of the island. Following the invasion by French Revolutionary forces in 1795 the Netherlands became the Batavian Republic under French influence. From 1806 Holland had been ruled by Louis Napoleon, Bonaparte's younger brother. Flushing itself had been put under direct French rule as an enclave within Walcheren Island. The civilian population of Flushing during the siege were Dutch people who had been incorporated into French territory without their consent and were sharing their fate with an occupying army to whom they owed no loyalty or common cause. The enforced alignment with the French had brought ruin. On the other hand it was the British blockade that the town had suffered under. By 1809 the harbour at Flushing was in decline. However Flushing remained a major ship building and port facility, with space to hold a substantial fleet of warships. Now Napoleon had begun to use Flushing to rebuild his navy. It was for this reason that the town had been made a part of the French nation and garrisoned with troops in French pay.

The town of Flushing was fortified to withstand siege. It was surrounded by walls and a water-filled moat. Bastions spaced around the perimeter carried cannon which could fire into the flanks of troops storming the walls. The Duke of Alba embarked on the construction of fortified towns in the Netherlands to overawe the Dutch populace during the war of independence; he began the fortification of Flushing after his arrival in 1605.[30] The map from 1652, (see M1), shows the original layout of the fortifications of Flushing.[31]

The layout of the walls and bastions appear to be unaltered by the time of the British map of 1809 (see M3) and the style of construction, based on unrevetted earthworks, follows the early Dutch pattern. The bastions at the seaward end were revetted; they were not protected by the wide ditch and so were more vulnerable to cannon fire; the implication being that the ditch reduced the effectiveness of the siege cannon of the time. Vaubin is translated as writing "The effective range of seventeenth century guns was very short" and "accuracy was impossible at anything over point-blank range, about 200 yards". The guns referred to by Vaubin were the cannon (48 pounds) and the demi-cannon (24 pounds)[32] . The general "must not allow the inner side of the camp to lie within cannon range of the fortress …This distance should be at least 600 yards"[33]. By 1809 the effective range of the English 24 pounder was 1,980 yards[34]. It can be inferred that the fortification of Flushing had ceased to be an effective defence. The French corps of engineers drew up detailed plans in 1806 for the strengthening of the walls by further out-works; these are the two ravelines on the landward side and the two flêches on the dykes on either side of the town which are also shown on Fyers map (see M2).

The conduct of the siege of Flushing was fundamentally affected by the geography of the Island of Walcheren. It was mostly recovered land. It was previously just sand dunes and the rest was alternately a sandy marsh and a sheet of water as the tide rose and fell, "the general level of the Island was about 4 feet 6 inches below ordinary high water mark and many parts of the interior were 9 feet 6 inches below that point"[35] . The sea was kept out by two great dykes on the East and West sides fronting the River Scheldt. The enclosed land was drained by a network of canals flowing to sluices which could be opened at low tide to let the water out to the river. The island had different levels within it, and these had sluices to control the movement of water from the higher ground to the lower levels, for example Middelburg was nearly three feet lower than Flushing[36]. A breach in a dyke protecting high ground did not have the same power to flood the whole island because the tide reached the breach for a shorter period.

Nor was a dyke easy to breach. They were not elegant nicely engineered structures; rather they were huge projects, triangular in section fifty feet wide at the base, having a flattened top which could carry a road broad enough for two wagons to pass abreast.

The base was stone imported from as far as Brussels, "there was not so much as a pebble to be had locally". The rest was earth "covered with great care and ingenuity with a kind of thatch consisting of bean stubble and straw"[37]. The height was sufficient for more than the average tide; it had to hold back a spring tide or a storm surge so in normal times there were several feet of redundant earthwork to remove before the first trickle of a flood would be admitted. A breach in the top of the dyke could be made fairly quickly with regiments of men to call on and it would first admit seawater at high tide. The deeper the breach made in the dyke the larger the volume of earth, and eventually stone, that had to be dug out. The size of the dykes was also a measure of their price and the investment that the community had made in them, and this would also prove to be a factor in the siege.

It can be said that flooding was the whole of the plan to defend Flushing. It was sufficiently important for Napoleon himself to have given direct orders to General Monnet to put it into effect. There was no other defence against land bombardment. A maximum flood, should that be possible, would cover the land round Flushing to a depth of from 3 feet to 9 feet twice a day. The only dry approach would be along the dykes to the East and West of the town, facing the fire of the bastions head on. The planning did not follow the idea through; the action that should have been taken becomes clear with hindsight. When Flushing was rebuilt years later as many as five mines were incorporated into the dyke[38].

Walcheren Island was garrisoned by an international mixture of troops under French command together with Dutch troops. The Dutch troops retreated to South Beveland and from there to the mainland. The French troops retreated into the protection of Flushing as the English invasion forces engulfed the outlying strong-points on the island. The commander in chief at Flushing was Major General Louis-Claude Monnet. His second in command was Brigadier General Osten, and it was Osten who put the steel into the defence. The forces in the town at the beginning of the siege were listed as 114 Officers and 4637 men, detailed in Appendix 3, who had to defend a land perimeter of less than 3,000 yards. The quality of the troops was another matter. The garrison included a Colonial battalion which was effectively a punishment unit for conscripts who had failed to enlist when required. Another unit was a battalion of the Régiment Chasseurs Rentrés de l'Etranger which was made up of

foreign deserters who had enlisted with the French. Both these units were unreliable and responsible for rape and plunder in the town. The Prussians performed badly in the retreat into Flushing, for two whole companies had defected to the English. The other original troops performed well enough. The reinforcements, who were all French troops, increased the garrison to over 7,000 troops. There was plenty of artillery. The list of captured ordnance taken on the surrender of Flushing showed 366 guns, carronades, howitzers and mortars[39]. However there were only some 550 Artillery men, some of which were civilian recruits. This shortage was a serious weakness in an artillery battle. General Monnet had enough faith in the reliability of the local population to recruit 400 of them into armed "Burgerwacht" companies to maintain discipline inside the walls and restrain the depredations of the foreign troops in the town.

During the siege the town had continuous communication with the mainland. Boats carrying reinforcements and messages continued to cross the Scheldt until the navy cut them off. John T Jones records that two *Schuyts* full of men crossed the Scheldt from Cadsand in seventeen minutes[40]. There was a telegraph on top of the Hotel de Ville which continued to operate until the last day of the bombardment.

So the town of Flushing was fortified in the early years of the artillery age. Although Napoleon's engineers had extended and modernised the defence it was vulnerable to bombardment by the longer range cannon and mortars of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless it could resist a storming attack while the defenders could man the walls. The defence of flooding would be highly effective; it would leave just two lines of attack, along the dykes to the East and West of the town. The town was strongly garrisoned by troops of mixed quality but was short of artillerymen; it was well provisioned with food and ammunition. If its defences, including flooding, were properly managed and if its defenders were staunch and determined, it was a formidable objective.

Chapter 4

The conduct of the siege on land

The French troops retreated back to the town of Flushing and drove off the following English with the cannon mounted on the walls. Sir Eyre Coote deployed units to surround the town; other British troops moved on Ramakins, the only other source of resistance on the island. Construction of the siege-works began on 3 August under the command of Lieutenant Colonel D'Arcy, he was Eyre Coote's divisional head of Engineers. The timetable of progress of the siege-works is attached as appendix A4. The supplies for the siege-works were landed at Ter Veere on the North of the Island and transported by poor roads to the Engineers depot at West Souburg, situated to the North of the centre of Flushing and close to the first and second batteries.
The initial general plan was to have a strong force of artillery set up to fire from opposite the centre of the land side of the town, comprising six 10" mortars and ten 24 pound cannon. A smaller concentration of six 8" mortars was placed on the knoll, a dog-leg of the dyke to the West of the town. Two small batteries were set up on the East dyke to cover French outworks; they were made up of three 24 pound cannon and four 10" mortars. These batteries for 29 pieces were the plan put in place by Lt Col. D'Arcy between the 3rd and 7th August.

The defenders only made one major offensive move against the English. At 5 pm on 7 August Monnet sent a reconnaissance in strength. Three columns, each of about 300 men, set out to the West, one along the dyke, the others beside it, heading for the battery by the knoll and the redoubt beside it. The left hand column was made up of the deserters' battalion; they came under fire from the Royals and the Fifth Regiment and stopped almost immediately. The other two columns then had open flanks on both sides. A field artillery piece opened from the breastwork and reinforcements from the Kings German Legion put the middle column in a dangerous position; they had to pull back and retreat to Old Flushing, they lost 133 men killed or wounded and several men were captured, including the commander. The Third column, well to the right, on the Koudekirke road ran up to the fifth regiment with a howitzer in support, they also

had to pull back to avoid encirclement and fight their way back to the old town. The sortie cost the French and their allies 340 killed and wounded. English losses were 14 killed and 141 wounded[41]. The disparity of casualties is partly due to the French making a frontal support against superior numbers in prepared positions and partly by the cowardice of the reluctant troops in the punishment battalion who left their flank unguarded. Nevertheless it was a spirited attack by troops that had just found that they were cut off from the mainland and could expect no more help or reinforcement.

Monnet had been reluctant to obey Napoleon's order to flood the island; it would bring salt or at least brackish water on to the fertile fields and damage an economy where agriculture was the mainstay; he hoped that he could continue to reinforce the garrison. However, when the navy had finally ended the supply of reinforcement from Cadsand, he ordered the sluices in the counterscarp of the moat to be opened and began a cut in the dyke on the eastward side of Flushing in front of his new advanced battery. The cut in the dyke was initially only operative at high tide; it was gradually deepened over the next days. As discussed earlier the flooding was the key to the defence, Monnet made a fatal error in not making preparations for the breach in the dyke in advance and then in delaying the beginning of digging the cut in the dyke.

8 August represents a turning point in the progress of the siege. A major sortie against the siege lines had been repulsed the day before and a breach in the East dyke was begun. A race between the completion of the siege-works and the rising waters had started. The flooding was immediately apparent to the attacking English and new impetus was given to the construction of the siege lines[42].On 8 August Colonel Fyers, the Chief of the Army Engineers, took direct charge of the siege; Fyers was in his fifties, as a lieutenant he had served through the American War of Independence, he also spent 12 years supervising the fortifications at Gibraltar.[43]. The Colonel immediately ordered the addition of twelve 24 pdr cannon and two howitzers to the West Dyke; the centre was strengthened by four more of the heavy 10" mortars. Two days later a new battery was begun inland of the West dyke, it was to be manned by seamen and armed with six 24 pounders[44]. He had increased the artillery by 22 pieces, a numerical increase of some 70%. A communication trench was begun which would link the centre batteries to those on the West dyke by way of the new seamen's battery. The reinforcement of the centre was based on what was described as a

"relief" battery on slightly higher ground. These changes amount to a fundamental re-think of the strategy of the siege half way through its preparation.

There was criticism of the method and progress of the siege. Picton said "It was observed that a total want of skill and energy marked the proceedings. The batteries and trenches were formed one after another without method or arrangement, and much confusion existed in consequence of neither the officers nor soldiers attached to the engineer department knowing their proper situations, by which the works were carried out very slowly."[45] His words were also quoted, and by implication endorsed, by Whitworth Porter in the Royal Engineer's official History. This may be the legacy of Copenhagen for Henegan speaks of departments headed by "elderly gentlemen of superior rank" issuing contradictory orders, one private soldier from the artillery is quoted as saying "I say Jack, here come the long feathers to undo our days work"[46].

Henegan remembers "During these operations a party of sailors commanded by Captain Richardson, made themselves conspicuously useful, and contributed not a little to the liveliness of the proceedings. The same day would see them cutting fascines for the batteries, dragging a heavy piece of ordnance out of a deep rut, rigging a gyn to fish up a twenty four pounder out of a the ditch; and if the outposts were engaged with those of the enemy, a dozen of these chaps would scamper off to partake in the fun"[47]

The work on the construction was hard. Henegan says "It entailed on the whole of the Corps duties almost too arduous for the human frame to bear. As I was going one night from the Engineer Park to one of the batteries in quest of the commanding officer, Colonel D'Arcy – well known for the appellation of "Old Blue Breeches" from the celestial hue of his nether garment – I met the object of my search preceded by a sapper bearing a dark lanthorn. After twice accosting him I ventured a closer inspection of his person, and found that he was fast asleep. The fatigue he had undergone had lulled his senses into forgetfulness, while his body still retained the walking action into which he had placed it; this somnambulism was to the lullaby of the whistling shells and roaring artillery from the enemy batteries"[48]

The engineers were working with major handicaps. The weather was atrocious; storms of wind and rain were an almost daily, and nightly, occurrence. The flooding compounded this. An artilleryman is quoted "August 10th the cross roads very deep and bad: great difficulty in drawing the guns from the park to the several batteries. August 11th a violent thunderstorm and incessant rains during the night precluded all work the greatest part of it. The water rose in the gun battery on the left about 6 inches. August 12th the roads much worse and the water rose very high in the trenches. The water gauge showed the rising of the water to be 4 inches. The magazine of no.1 battery on the right filled with water during the night from the heavy rains, and it was feared would not be ready to receive ammunition."[49]

There were ready supplies of sand and brushwood, and nothing else. All the other materials came from the transports, which were unloading at Ter Veere on the North Coast; they had to be carried in wagons several miles along narrow muddy roads to the base depot. Richard Henegan records "The engineer park in West Zooberg was placed under my direction, and I was charged with the details of getting up the ordinance stores for the prosecution of the siege of Flushing; this laborious duty was increased by the bad state of the roads off the Chausée. The twenty-four pounders being drawn by country horses unaccustomed to such heavy draft, often stuck fast for hours; and on two occasions a heavy gun was overturned into the deep broad ditch skirting the roadside"[50].The land on which they were to build the trenches was criss-crossed by drainage ditches and canals. The classic approach, which has an ordered formality, was not possible, the materials came piecemeal and the ground defied straight lines. The first parallel is normally the foundation for a siege; it is put in place in a single night and provides cover and communication to the defenders. D'Arcy had dispensed with a parallel leaving troops exposed to fire from the ramparts. Fyers later constructed a defensive communications trench which took the contour of the high ground.

How well executed were the siege-works? The centre batteries were well placed, as close as possible to the base at West Souburg, on chosen higher ground and able to pour fire on the town and the new outworks. The small batteries on the East dyke were more tactical in character; they did prove their worth when the French later chose to breach the dyke on that side. The original plan for one mortar battery on the

West dyke was poor use of a position which covered the main elevated approach to the town. Fyers massive increase in the firepower lined up on the knoll used the position to threaten enfilading fire on the town sea front and direct fire on to the outwork on the dyke. The efficacy of the 24 pound battery on the knoll was born out by the brief bombardment in support of the passing frigates on 11 August.

The nature of Fyers assault on the town became doubly clear when the batteries commenced fire on 13 August. When the French had retreated from their outworks on the West dyke he began yet another major battery, this time on the dry sand hills close outside the old town. This new work was for six short range 68 pound carronades, the largest cannon in the arsenal, it was a breaching battery designed to make a passage for an assault. The other batteries were not aimed or used to do this, they were to harass the artillery on the walls and to terrorise the people and troops in the town behind the walls; Fyers expected the town to surrender to the threat of continuing bombardment, a full assault on the town was a back-up plan. The final assessment of the plan is from the bombardment itself, the town surrendered after two days.

Chapter 5

Seaward operations against Flushing

Flushing was cut off by land on 1 August, but the seaward communication remained open. Strong winds from the South West made it impossible for English sailing vessels to move up the Scheldt, it was not practicable to tack in the narrow channels between the sandbanks.

On 2 August J.M.Hanchett, commander of the Sloop *Raven* anchored in the Western Scheldt writes that at 10 am two brigs full of men pass from Cadsand to Flushing[51] The next day at 5.33 pm he was ordered to act in support of British boats attempting to cut communications. His log records "got under weigh and stood into Flushing to cut off the gun-boats which were crossing from Cadsand to Flushing. Stood up about the town of Flushing under a heavy fire from both batteries on both sides, engaged the batteries as we passed." And at 6.25 "main mast wounded and two of the larboard shrouds cut away", and at 7.30 " main topmast and fore topmast carried away over the side, cut away wreckage and best bower anchor. Drove on shore on the Elleboeg, could not get off until next tide, hove overboard many barrels and water pumped out"[52]. Sir Richard Strachan said it "induced me to recommend him most warmly to their Lordships protection"[53]. This sharp action shows that the French batteries were effective and dangerous.

The seaward investment was not completed until shallow draft vessels circled the island from the Veere Gat channel into the narrow Slough channel between Walcheren and South Beveland past Breskens to arrive up-river from Flushing. Only then, on 7 August, could they close the door to vessels sailing between Cadsand and Flushing who had been using winds that were in their favour. Before moving vessels round the Island the channels had to be sounded and then marked by buoys; Home Popham led this flotilla which was comprised of bomb ketches, gunboats and gun brigs. A second flotilla of gun vessels entered the Western Scheldt and anchored short of Flushing.

Sir Richard Strachan ordered a flotilla of ten frigates to sail past Flushing[54]; it was carried out on 11th August.

The frigates were

Pearlen	38
Amethyst	38
Rota	38
L'Aigle	36
Dryad	36
Euryalus	36
Nymphen	36
Statira	38
Heroine	36

These were large frigates and they had between them 370 18 pounder long guns.

In the late afternoon, (accounts differ) the French batteries at Flushing and at Breskens on the opposite shore opened a heavy fire with shot and shell. Robert Clover in the bomb *Thunderer,* which was anchored in sight of Flushing, wrote "A squadron of 10 sail of frigates arrived from the Westward and in passing Flushing a general action commenced. The shot from the French batteries flying into and over the frigates, and the shot from the latter levelling to the ground those houses next the sea shore"[55]. The flotilla was led by Lord William Stewart in *Lavinia* frigate. In the ships log he does allow "in passing the battery we got our main mast wounded about eight feet under the main yard, the larboard brace block broke and the main brace cut"[56]. The log of the frigate *Rota* says "At 6 the enemy opened their fire with shot and shell from Flushing and Breskens batteries opened our fire on the enemy on both sides." *Rota* had damage to studding sails and running rigging[57]. The *Amethyst* was the most badly damaged frigate, a shell drove through the decks and exploded in the bread-room; at the time the log reports only that "Michael Patterson (s) (i.e. seaman) was killed and Joseph Ranfrew (s) wounded"[58].

The frigates were helped in their passage by fire from the battery of 24 pound cannon on the knoll. Enfilading fire was brought down on the French batteries on the seaward side of Flushing, this, together with the frigates own fire, dismounted guns and killed

and injured artillerymen who could not be spared. This was not a planned effort but rather a local initiative by Major General Picton; it was countermanded as soon as it was observed by headquarters[59].

Major General Osten later reported to Paris "On 11th at 4 pm ten frigates attempted to force the entrance to the West Scheldt between Flushing and Breskens. They fired against the town an extraordinary fire which continued until seven in the evening. Our batteries responded as vigorously as the few gunners allowed, being aided only by some auxiliaries of the Corps and from the National Guard; but we could not prevent the frigates from effecting their passage. We had on that occasion many gunners killed and wounded in the batteries[60].

The French were firing from fixed embrasures at a known range with "a hail of shot and shell", and yet only managed to achieve one solid hit on a hull in 90 minutes; this is consistent with aiming at the rigging, hoping to dismast and cripple the enemy so that it could be destroyed at leisure. The low casualty rate on the frigates may have had the benefit of an element of luck; another possibility is that the flotilla had the defensive value afforded to a shoal of fish which makes it difficult to achieve concentration on a single target.

Clearly the British fire did more damage than the French; there is no way of telling whether the land or the sea bombardments had the most effect. The frigates were firing from a moving platform at revetted batteries while the land based guns were firing in enfilade. However the land battery had only twelve 24 pound guns while the ten frigates could bring a nominal 185 guns on the broadside.

The wind and weather were a constant factor in operations by a sailing navy. With the wind dead against it a ship could only anchor and wait until the weather system brought the wind round to a favourable direction. This was the situation in the Scheldt in the first week in August; the navy could not close the door on the supplies to Flushing. The ad hoc nature of the co-operation between the British artillery and the frigates and its prompt cessation on the orders from Chatham is a poor example of the co-ordination of forces.

Chapter 6

The combined bombardment

When the bombardment was ordered the two flotillas of gun and mortar boats closed upon the town from the East and the West and added their fire to the land batteries. Jones records "Sunday 13th August … At 1 pm the … batteries, except no. 8 (the seamen's battery) opened by signal and at the same moment two divisions of gun and mortar boats, from stations to the S.E. and S.W. of the town commenced their fire, as did some batteries of rockets on the left of the trenches; and these united to pour a stream of fire on the buildings without a moments interruption until dark"[61]

"The garrison returned a good deal of fire towards evening, principally on the Knoll point battery, and disabled one gun and wounded another. They also struck the *Indignant*, mortar boat, two or three times between wind and water, and with difficulty she reached Zoutland Bay before she sunk"[62]

"Colonel Fyers, whilst making observations with his glass on this point [the attack on the enemy fleche] was struck on the chest by an enemy musket ball, fired by a picket posted in old Flushing, the distance being not more than a hundred yards, the blow must have been fatal had not the ball luckily passed through a few inches of sand forming the crest of the parapet"[63] Relationships were strained between D'Arcy and Fyers. Having been wounded Fyers ordered a written report to be sent to himself each morning. "The first morning Colonel [D'Arcy], an old man past sixty refused compliance saying he had other things to do and no solicitations could prevail upon him to write a single line" on further request "He denied the right of his superior to demand a report from him, because, some thirty or forty years previously he had been senior to Colonel [Fyers]" It was only after he had been put under arrest and court-martial procedures were put in hand that D'Arcy relented, and the affair blew over.[64]

On the second day of the bombardment Bond quotes Osten's report "On the 14th at nine in the morning seven ships of the line which were anchored by the knoll, approached to within half a cannon shot of the town and gave the signal for the

general bombardment to the ten frigates the bombs and the gun boats and all the land batteries and incendiary rockets, all these forces fired the most terrible fire without example. More than 1100 cannon rained death and destruction on the town. In the beginning our batteries responded rather vigorously although we did not have nearly enough gunners to service all the pieces… we had already lost many artillerymen when the frigates forced the passage. In very short time many of our pieces were dismounted; a number of the gun carriages were very old and shattered after one report from their pieces and several mortars from the Dutch foundries were *hors de combat* because of a malfunction in their vents. In less than an hour we lost half of our artillerymen. I visited the batteries often where I found several absolutely without gunners: many of them were not accustomed to war and had abandoned their pieces and were hiding to escape a service which terrified them so. The braver ones died uselessly at their posts since they were not supported. Finally our batteries were reduced almost to silence by the extraordinary fire of the enemy. The principal powder magazine was the prey of the flames and threatened the town with immediate and total destruction. It was only with the greatest difficulty that we succeeded in saving it. The building used to store provisions was consumed."

"Monday 14th August the artillery and bomb vessels aided by six additional 24-pounders manned by seamen in battery no. 6 continued with the bombardment this morning with unabated vigour. The mortars were directed over the Western quarter of the town generally; but the batteries on the right of the attack were more particularly directed to enfilade and take *en esharpe* the rampart of the Western sea line, in order to silence the fire of its artillery on the fleet, now preparing to force the passage of the Scheldt."[65]

Captain Pasley of the Engineers was wounded in the attack on the outwork protecting the breech in the dyke, this description came second hand from the siege of Badajoz on September 17th, (it also shows the speed of the grapevine between engineer officers) " He was wounded leading a storming party under Colonel Pack. He stuck one Frenchman, disarmed a second, stabbed a third and was attacking a fourth when he fell. What a desperate dog!"[66]

Robert Clover in the Bomb *Thunderer* produced this account, "We got nearer the town and recommenced an incessant bombardment while preparation on the most extensive scale were carried on by the army on shore for the destruction of this *devoted* place. The interval until the 16th when the place surrendered was one continued scene of horror. The English batteries of guns and mortars on shore, the bombs and myriads of gunboats and vessels at sea kept up a fire by night and day which was only interrupted by our compassionate countrymen sending in 3 different flags of truce"[67].

The rocket vessel *Galqo* landed 25 Marine Artillery and 2 officers to assist in the bombardment of Flushing. Wrangle records that when the men were later returned to the *Galqo* "it was truly laughable to witness the impression they made. The practice of discharging the rock(ets) from machines on a ladder was a new invention and proved great injury to the men, burning their hands and faces. Some had no hair on their heads and their hands and shoulders severely scorched"[68]. The *Galqo* itself was stationed at Batz and never got to fire its own rockets. The rockets had other dangers, Henegan reports "During that night numerous flights of rockets were thrown from the sand hills, under the immediate superintendence of Colonel Congreve, who stood sponsor to this useful branch of flying artillery, but whether that officer was unacquainted with the properties of these children of his adoption or whether he had arrived too newly from the perfumed atmosphere of Carlton House to relish too close a proximity to the coarser smell of powder I know not; but certain it is that the first flight of these aerial sharp shooters fell in the midst of our own pickets, and did much damage."[69] This example of friendly fire does not seem to have had repercussions at the time.

On the second day of the bombardment seven sail of the line moved up the Scheldt and anchored before Flushing. The 74s that took part in the bombardment were,

	Date built
St. Domingo	1809
Venerable	1808
Blake	1808
Repulse	1803
Victorious	1808

Denmark/ Dannemark		Captured Copenhagen 1806
Audacious.	1785	

Four of these ships were brand new vessels; the Danish ship may have been chosen for its shallow draft; only the *Audacious* was a veteran in the service.[70]
They were led by Strachan himself in *St Domingo,* followed by *Blake* with Lord Garner aboard. These two leading ships ran aground, leaving themselves open to the fire of the batteries on the seaward side of the town. Strachan wrote to Keats "Lord Garner in *Blake* and myself in *St Domingo* have just got off from a three hour peppering under the walls of Flushing, having by mistake got on the inside of the Dogsand. Our loss is trifling owing to the steadiness of Johnny (?) who really smothered the lines with shot. The town has been fired in many places…I really expect we shall take it after all"[71]

Hargrove says "the wall fronting the river did not seem to have suffered much from the cannonading of our men of war, here it is of very considerable depth, and contained at its surrender a battery of uncommon strength, well constructed and judiciously mounted with guns and howitzers of various calibres"[72]. The question of the relative effectiveness of the land and sea gunnery again comes to mind. The enfilading fire from the land batteries was much increased over the short engagement when the frigates went past; the seamen's battery was added to the guns on the Knoll and the shooting was not prematurely cut short. The 74s conducted a more deliberate attack than the frigates, they did not merely sail past, they anchored in front of the battery and fired continually. The French artillerymen were driven from their position to seek shelter. The navy achieved this without much damage to the wall protecting the cannon; they would have to be passing lucky shots through the embrasures with the other shot bouncing off without leaving any damage, an unlikely scenario. There is also a question about the armament of the 74s; many of them had their lower deck thirty-two pounders removed, leaving a similar broadside to a frigate. It would seem likely on balance that the shore batteries cleared the sea defences together with mortar fire raining shrapnel among the crews and the sea offensive did its damage to the town and also to the suburb of the town that was outside the wall.

The race between the rising waters and the efforts of the besiegers continued to the last moments of the siege. Trenches were flooded and roads were submerged. The batteries already needed to be protected by sandbags by the beginning of the bombardment. During the first night of the bombardment the road from West Souburg, where the engineer and artillery stores were parked, was rendered almost impassable. The batteries themselves were threatened; more sand bags were brought up to protect the guns and ammunition.

At 4 pm on the 14 August the French guns were almost silenced. Chatham ordered a cease fire and had Eyre Coote summon the town to surrender. Monnet prevaricated and the firing started again at 8.45. The barrage continued throughout the night and the next day. Monnet finally surrendered at 2.30 am on the Tuesday morning.

Bond estimates the French losses during the siege were taken to be 2,100, the difference between the roll after the supply of reinforcements stopped and those in the town at the surrender[73], some sick and wounded were evacuated before the communications were cut off. This covers the killed, wounded captured and deserted, there were a further 618 sick or wounded in the hospitals of Flushing. British casualties were 50 killed and 208 wounded.

Captain William Maynard Gomm was an ADC at British Headquarters and he accompanied the team sent into Flushing to negotiate the surrender; they were blindfolded so he saw nothing but he spent time with Osten (he called him Austin) and got the enemy's concept of the state of the town at the time of the final cease fire. "Two hundred of the people have suffered within these two days … the town is described as being in a manner destroyed, at least in its buildings and everything it held valuable." He says that this is compatible with his own observations "for it was one sheet of flame the whole of the second night"[74].

George Hargrove witnessed the destruction, he records "On visiting the city of Flushing, I could not but sympathise with every feeling mind, on the destructive and melancholy appearance it presented, devastation and ruin marked every house, sorrow and dismay, the countenance of every inhabitant"[75]

General Picton was in command of Flushing after the siege; he wrote "The town is a perfect heap of ruins, exhibiting a state of misery not easily conceivable. Every house has been materially damaged and not one in twenty is in any degree habitable or capable of offering protection against either the rain or climate"[76]

The expenditure of ammunition during the siege by the land batteries, including the seamen's battery was

24 pr guns	6582
10 in mortars	1743
8 in mortars	1020
10 in howitzers	269
8 in howitzers	380
Total	9994[77]

The firing from the 24 pound guns amounts to more than 70 tons of iron shot and the mortars and howitzers expenditure can be estimated at 110 tons of explosive shells[78]. In addition the gun boats and bomb vessels fired throughout the daylight hours of two days and the 74s fired for about 15 hours.

The ending of the siege was achieved by the shock effect on the civilians. Although Osten had seen his artillerymen sent into hiding and his troops seeking shelter they were not defeated. The main walls were intact; the only progress was on the outworks on the dyke and on one of the new Ravelines. It was the piteous appeals of the civilians to Monnet that persuaded him to give up; Osten was made of sterner stuff and would have held on. The combined power of the naval and land bombardment was overwhelming.

Chapter 7

The Walcheren Fever

The true disaster of The Grand Expedition was the sickness which attacked the troops. Once the sickness had struck it swept through the army with a speed that astonished the army staff. Having first appeared in South Beveland in early August it spread to Walcheren just prior to the fall of Flushing[79]. In early August there were 700 men sick, and by 3 September over 8,000 were in hospital. By February 1810 3,960 men had died from illness and around 11,000 were still registered sick.

A soldier described that sickness: "The disease comes on with a cold shivering, so great that the patient feels no benefit from the clothes piled on the bed, but continues to shivers till, as if enclosed in ice, the teeth chattering and cheeks blanched. This lasts some time, and is followed by opposite extremes of heat, so that the pulse rises to over 100 in a small space. The face is then flushed and the eyes dilated, but with little thirst. It subsides and then is succeeded with another paroxysm, and so on until the patients strength is quite reduced and he sinks into the arms of death." [80]

Martin Howard presents a modern diagnosis "Taken as a whole the available sources suggest that Walcheren fever was not a newly discovered killer disease but a lethal combination of old diseases- malaria, typhus, typhoid and dysentery- acting together on a group of men already debilitated by previous campaigning and a life of poverty and drunkenness in the lower reaches of society. The reduced mortality of officers compared with the troops (only 3% compared with over 10%) was probably due to their better general health and to the more attentive care they undoubtedly received."[81]

The effect on one corps gives an idea of the impact on the army. "The sickness which is in the Artillery may be gathered from a return which is extant. On the 27th September there had been left in Walcheren a total strength of 1089 men belonging to the Royal Artillery and the Royal Artillery Drivers Corps. Before the 16th October – less than three weeks- 255 had been sent sick to England, 396 were sick at Walcheren and 109 were in their graves."[82]

The question is, how well did the English cope with Walcheren fever? The aspects which should have been addressed seem to be the prevention of infection, attempts to cure the disease and the care and accommodation of the sick

In considering prevention of the disease it must first be said that the English had been to Walcheren Island before. England had troops based on Walcheren and South Beveland in the Seven Years War some fifty years earlier. Their experience was a direct precursor of the 1809 expedition. The fever struck with the same ferocity and proportional (but smaller) loss of life. There were four battalions in camp or cantonments at South Beveland "at the height of the epidemic some of these corps had but 100 men fit for duty, which was less than a seventh part of a complete battalion."[83] John Pringle was an army surgeon/ physician who served in South Beveland fifty years before this invasion; he set down his observations in great detail; Pringle identified the worst season as during the latter part of summer and autumn; he also noted that "Commodore Mitchell's squadron, which lay all the time at anchor in the channel between South Beveland and the Island of Walcheren enjoyed perfect health." His book was re-printed 3 times and was quoted in the parliamentary enquiry in 1810. The means of prevention are thus spelt out in Pringle's book; Walcheren was best avoided, or if not avoided then not visited in the fever season of late summer and autumn, or if an August invasion was unavoidable then to keep the reserves on board ship and only expose the necessary minimum of troops to the dangers on shore. The seven years war was as close in the folk memory of the Napoleonic era as the Second World War, and its disasters and triumphs, are to us.

There was awareness that the Island was an unhealthy place, but who had that knowledge is not so clear. Every battalion and every major warship had a literate surgeon; the officer class would have had grandfathers serving in that previous war; one Jeremiah would have been sufficient to spread the word, but it did not happen. In several accounts of the early days of the landing there is no presentiment of danger from sickness; on the contrary, the land was presented as fertile and pleasant, bar the mosquitoes. One of the earliest mentions of the sickness was a letter from Middelburg on 12 August "we begin to suffer much in our health… there is a kind of pestilence which is said to prevail here in the autumn"[84]. There is no indication of prior

knowledge in this statement. Perhaps the conclusion must be that the knowledge of that earlier epidemic was too esoteric and limited. Sir Lucas Pepys, Physician General to the forces testified that he and the other members of the medical board were fully aware of the health problems associated with the Islands of Zeeland; but they contended that an epidemic of such proportions was totally unexpected[85]. However the recommendations that they would have made were they aware of the destination of the invasion are cited below, and they would not have included preventative measures.

There was a cure for the disease, or rather; there was an effective treatment for malaria. Normal army medical supplies contained Peruvian bark; it was the bark of the cinchona tree which contains quinine. However, only small quantities were carried. The medical board was not informed of the destination of the expedition in advance, but its members testified that had they known they would have recommended more medical supplies, especially bark[86]. There were shortages of bark but the supplies muddled through, even though at one stage there was only one days consumption in store.

Malaria was not of itself a lethal element; it was endemic in other areas, including the Kentish marshes and took a milder form than the fatal tropical version. However, there was no effective treatment for the other elements, typhus, typhoid and dysentery. Doctors were treating the condition by administering laxatives and emetics as well as such abuses as blistering and dousing with cold water. The effect of this on a patient who was in poor health before he caught the infection must have been to make the situation much worse. It can be said that the physicians used their skill to the best of their knowledge.

"General, Monnet, who had held the command at Flushing for seven years, had acquired knowledge of this fact [that immunity from the disease came with long exposure], and endeavoured to turn it to practical account. He recommended that troops should not be frequently changed; for when it was the custom to send battalions from Bergen op Zoom every fourth night in succession, to work on the lines of Flushing, these men never failed, on their return, to be taken ill in great numbers. General Monnet therefore advised, however displeasing it might be to the officers,

that a stationary garrison should be retained at Walcheren, in order that the men might be habituated or seasoned to the air, and he adduced the instance of a French regiment which suffered in the second year of its being stationed there only one half the sickness and mortality which it suffered during the first year; and hardly suffered at all in the third year" [87]

The soldiers fell ill where they were stationed. The lucky ones were in billets or farm buildings, the others bivouacked in open camps in atrocious weather. The really unfortunate were in fields which had been flooded by the French. Emergency hospitals were set up. There were large warehouses built to handle the trade of the Dutch East India Company located not just at Flushing on the shore, but also at Middelburg in the centre of the island. These now disused buildings provided good accommodation for the sick until the numbers mounted and the patients overflowed into any other buildings that could be found, and then were further cramped by overcrowding. The medical services were overwhelmed by the number of cases. Men were left neglected in their filth and misery. Eyre Coote sent repeated requests for hospital ships to transport the sick home; he employed local civilians as orderlies and asked the government to send 300 veterans to act in this capacity[88]. The most important positive action was the decision to evacuate South Beveland. Any troops, who had not been landed, mainly cavalry, were sent back without stepping ashore. The evacuation took the remaining healthy troops directly back to England and away from the source of the disease. The sick on South Beveland were taken to hospitals on Walcheren, except where disorganisation mistakenly sent the sick directly home with the rest of their unit. Transports were converted to hospital ships and moved the sick back to England. The progress of the sickness outstripped the organisation for evacuation of the transport. On 29 August there were 3,000 sick reported[89], and on 6 September 8,000[90]. The requisition for transport at first covered the number of sick extant, but by the time the ships arrived the numbers had grown so much that it made this plan inadequate. Sir Eyre Coote began to build contingency figures into his returns to account for the cases which would occur between the requisition and the arrival of the transport; but even this did not meet the need.

In England hospitals were opened to receive the sick at Harwich, Ipswich, Yarmouth, Deal and Portsmouth. The numbers of sick repatriated to England by month were:

August 200; September 1,953; October 5,561; November 4,813; December 381, making a total of 12,683 of which 533 were wounded men. The total number of troops that died from the fever was 3,960[91]. The numbers of the dead and of the sick together give the sum of the tragedies which were the result of Walcheren, with the effects spreading to the wives, children and other dependents of the breadwinners.

The damage to the army was a corporate disaster on a huge scale. Those who died on Walcheren and afterwards from the sickness, as well as those discharged never to be fit to serve again, were lost to the service. The Walcheren battalions affected by illness were wrecked; they contained the recovered sick as well as those who were lucky enough to escape the contagion. Christie quotes the House of Commons papers, "On 1 February 1810 there were 11,296 still reported sick", and later "5,000 special flannel waistcoats were ordered for issue to Walcheren veterans suffering from a recurrence of 'Walcheren fever, on 7 July 1810 the number of waistcoats was doubled to 10,000"[92]. The fever was liable to recur, especially in circumstances of stress and privation, and active campaigning was just that. The Duke of Wellington wrote "I am concerned to add … an increased degree of sickness has appeared in the 3rd Batt. of the Royals and the 4th and 9th regiments, all of whom have been at Walcheren"[93] Any serious level of sickness in a battalion made the whole unit ineffective. Indeed the unit was less than useless; the fever imposed an additional burden on the commissariat, in terms of wagons, horses, medical supplies and sea transport, all being the most costly of military assets.

Picton caught the sickness. His editor records "a strong constitution and medical skill enabled him to survive the shock; but its rapid progress and deadly violence in a few hours reduced him to the brink of the grave. So soon as the immediate danger was past, he was ordered to return to England and, in a ship like a lazar-house, he was brought home."[94]

Bond quotes from General Dyott's diary "I don't suppose it ever fell to the lot of a British officer to visit in the course of three days the sick chambers of nearly 8,000 men in fever; and the miserable dirty, stinking holes some of the troops were of necessity crammed into, was more shocking than it is possible to express.[95] In

Flushing there was a shortage of undamaged buildings and, in many instances, damaged and unheated buildings were forced into use.[96]

How to draw some comment on Walcheren fever? There is a quality of hopeless inevitability in the story. The only real prevention would be not to go to Walcheren Island in late summer. There are clearly military arguments which could have been advanced for not sending the expedition and if those arguments had won the day then the fleet would not have sailed. It is difficult to think of a purely medical argument that might have prevailed against the strategy of the State, the relief of Austria, the pistol pointed at the head of Britain. Who might put up such an argument? Sir John Pringle, who witnessed the previous epidemic, left his book about it but it did not find its audience. The medical powers that be were kept in the dark, and were unlikely to be effective even if they were aware of the destination of the expedition. Two men who might have made a case were General Monnet, whose brutal survival of the fittest policy was his only contribution; and Napoleon, who left most of Walcheren and South Beveland ungarrisoned because of its unhealthy climate.

Chapter 8

Failure to advance after South Beveland was taken

On 2 August the English took Fort Batz on the Western point of South Beveland. At this point they were less than 15 miles from Antwerp, the goal of the expedition. They were separated from the mainland by the narrow channel of the Eastern Scheldt; the Dutch soldiers had forded there in the previous days as they retreated from the invading forces. At this point General Jean-Louis-Françoise Fauconnet, the commandant at Antwerp had less than 1,000 men to defend the route up to that city[97].

On 1 August Chatham and Strachan met at Middelburg to plan future operations. The new plan was to pass the troops and their supplies through the Veere Gat and the Slough, between Walcheren and South Beveland to Ramakins; from there the force would go up the West Scheldt, as previously intended, to Sandvliet. The option of landing on South Beveland and marching the 30 odd miles to Batz, advocated by Strachan, was rejected as too time consuming[98]. While the route was a matter of debate between Chatham and Strachan, the size and make-up of the force was not; there was no mention of a flying column, or even a reconnaissance in force, attributes of the *coup de main* which the expedition was sent to bring about.

Ramakins was captured on August 3 and Rosslyn's division together with cavalry and artillery was dispatched to make their way in boats to Batz. When Flushing had been neutralised English troops in Walcheren were marched towards Batz, either across South Beveland or by transport from Ramakins. The movement of troops to Batz was completed on 24 August.

Chatham was at his headquarters in Middelburg on 1 August; he remained there supervising the army for the siege. At the end of the siege he stayed at Middelburg dealing with the surrender and administrative matters until 21 August. Headquarters was then moved to Goes on South Beveland; it advanced to Crabbendyke on 23 August, and finally arrived at Batz on the 24 August.

The French had not been idle; by 13 August they had taken energetic measures to block an English advance on the North bank of the Scheldt to Antwerp; old abandoned forts had been rebuilt on the banks, the large forts of Lillo and Liefkenshoek, on opposite banks of the river, were strengthened. The land had been flooded. 46,000 French and Dutch troops had been aggregated on the Scheldt, some on Cadsand and others on the North bank; the troops were taken from garrisons of frontier towns, not the best of men but led by experienced generals; on 13 August Marshall Bernadotte was given overall command. On 15 August 30,000 national guards were mobilised to increase the force. By August 25 the French had over 100,000 men under orders for service in the Scheldt[99].

Bond quotes Jean Dejean, Inspector General of Engineers now serving under Bernadotte saying if they had moved with the forces available at Batz on 19 August, "They could have forced the imperfect and incomplete defences we had here … and could have burned the city and docks of Antwerp" but by 23 August he considered that the real danger had passed[100].

On 26 and 27 August there was a meeting between Chatham, Strachan, Keats and the Lieutenant Generals; they considered a report by General Brownrigg who had made a reconnaissance with Home Popham of the Scheldt above Batz. The next day a meeting between Chatham and his Lieutenant Generals discussed proposals for future expeditions, one based on an advance up the two banks of the river with the navy participating, the other an army thrust on the Antwerp side of the river, with the naval role limited to landing below Sandvliet. Both of these schemes were deemed impracticable. The growing strength of the French and the accelerating progress of the sickness meant that the army did not have the might to win through. The next day the decision was made to suspend operations.

The English would get no further towards Antwerp. This is the strategic failure of the expedition. Any chance of reward for the cost, the effort and the lives expended was gone. It was delay that took away any possibility of success. The British had watched the French from Fort Batz for more than four weeks. The Lieutenant Generals had no orders which would allow them initiative or independent action. The subsidiary divisions of the army had waited for their Commander-in-Chief to lead them. Even

after the surrender of Flushing it took Chatham took two weeks to make an appearance at Batz. The dilatory failings of the "late Earl" were the downfall of the thrust to Antwerp.

Chapter 9

The end of the expedition

With the decision on 27 August that it was not possible to advance from South Beveland to Antwerp the invasion moved into its final phase. At first there was no policy, no plan except Chatham's decision to evacuate South Beveland. The sole success of the expedition was the capture of Flushing, and with it the mastery of the Scheldt and the enclosure of Napoleons shipbuilding further up that river, but in summer only; when the ice came then the Navy would have to withdraw. It was decided in London that the British would remain on Walcheren Island for the time being. Austria had been beaten but the peace negotiations were continuing, Walcheren might have value as a bargaining counter and something might be salvaged from the wreck of the expedition.

By 6 September South Beveland had been cleared of troops; they had been moved either to Walcheren or on board ships ready to be transported. Chatham, anticipating orders from Castlereagh, sent the ships off immediately. On 10 September Chatham received orders to return home with his army after garrisoning Walcheren. Sir Eyre Coote was to command and he recommended a garrison of over 20,000 men but Chatham settled on 16,766 men, arguing that the navy and its command of the waters round the island compensated for this. Chatham sailed for England on 14 September[101]. By 16th September the sickness had reduced Eyre Coote's garrison by nearly half. Of his 17,000 men there were 7,853 sick and 309 dead[102].

Napoleon's strategy for the defence of Zeeland was to put up a formidable show but not to engage in hostilities; as Bond summarised "by concentrating superior numbers of troops and avoiding confrontation with the English long enough for the unhealthful climate of the islands of Zeeland to take its toll among the British troops."[103] He ordered his own troops which were stationed between South Beveland and Antwerp to bivouac several miles away from the marshy areas along the banks of the river[104] The huge force that he gathered so quickly on Cadsand was made up mostly of poorly trained reserves, and troops too old or too young to be of use, but this could not be seen through a telescope.

On 24 September General Don arrived to relieve Sir Eyre Coote. He reported "The rank and file for duty this day amount to 4,534 and from this number must be deducted the attendants on the sick … besides, as I have already observed, one third is incapable of considerable exertions"[105].

Napoleon stuck to his passive policy even after the British retreated from South Beveland. As time passed and the British remained on Walcheren he became impatient and began to plan an attack but, finding that the navy was too much of an obstacle, he waited again. On November 11 he ordered that mortars and cannon be mounted along the Veere Gat and the Slough in order to drive the British naval vessels from their defensive positions. [106]

On 4 November Don was given orders to prepare for withdrawal and to destroy the defences and facilities at Flushing, 100 civil artificers were sent from England to assist in the demolition. They wrecked the lock gates that gave entry to the harbour within the walls of Flushing and destroyed the batteries and parapets on the seaward side of the town. A frigate and a brig under construction on the slips in the harbour were launched and taken back to England; an uncompleted ship of the line was dismantled and also sent back together with many naval stores, the only tangible gains of the expedition. On December 23 the last ships left the Scheldt with the garrison aboard. The expedition was ended.

Chapter 10

The Enquiry and the aftermath

The expedition had been criticised in the press from as early as August 13 with the siege still under way. The now famous doggerel sums it up:

Lord Chatham with his sword undrawn,
Kept waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;
Sir Richard, eager to be at' em
Kept waiting too- for whom? Lord Chatham!

The end of the expedition was the cue for renewed outcry in the newspapers for a court-martial or an enquiry. At its first regular session in 1810 Parliament voted to hold an investigation and appointed a committee to hear testimony. The enquiry was to be comprehensive and orderly, its hearings to cover the operation chronologically with five phases, the concept and finance, operational plans, medical preparations, the conduct of naval and military affairs and the retention of Walcheren.

An early focus was the disparity between the concept of a *coup de main* and the huge quantity of supplies. The amount of army stores were a double negative for a surprise attack, they would slow the army on the march and it took time to assemble the transports to carry it across the sea to Holland. It was want of transports that delayed the expedition so that it could not sail until July. Castlereagh said that the stores were demanded by Chatham, and Chatham defended his decision as necessary to accomplish the tasks assigned to him.[107] General Robert Brownrigg testified that given good weather and possession of one bank of the Scheldt Estuary the plan to take Antwerp was viable. He thought that 20,000 men landed at Sandvliet had "a very fair prospect of success"[108]

The enquiry into the medical preparations brought no new insights. The only difference if the medical board had been consulted would have been for a greater quantity of medical supplies, especially bark to be carried. However, supplies of bark were never actually exhausted, thanks to the purchase of bark from a visiting

American ship. More beds and bedding had been requested as soon as it was learned that the troops would remain on the island.

The failure to land at Cadsand rehashed the confusion between Huntley's interpretation of his orders, being a simultaneous landing of 2,000 men and the provision that was actually made, which would land 700 men. The missing orders to Admiral Gardner to supplement the boats meant that Gardner was not in close support. Gardner's station was down river and to leeward of the landing place; also, he had no pilots to navigate up the channel. Together these factors rendered any assistance impossible[109]

The conflicting accounts of Chatham and Strachan were the most controversial part of the proceedings. Chatham's evidence covered two central points. He said that the reason that he had not invaded once the expedition had arrived at Batz on 23 August was the size of the army had been reducing daily because of the sickness combined with the overwhelming force that the French and Dutch had marshalled to oppose any British advance. Chatham's explanation for the delay, the reason why it took four weeks to assemble at Batz was to blame Strachan, "it was purely a naval consideration … and the delay in no shape rests with me, or depends upon any arrangements which the army was concerned."[110]. Strachan put the delay down to Chatham. The core of the dispute was whether the navy should carry the army down the Slough to Batz or whether the army should march across South Beveland so the navy would need to navigate fewer transports through that narrow channel. The two men showed little understanding of the professional concerns and constraints that weighed upon the other. The soldier and the sailor each had the backing of their fellows, so there was probably some justification on both sides.

Bond says that the British Expedition made Napoleon more aware of the potentials of the Scheldt and as a result he re-fortified its naval establishments during 1810/11 by restoring Flushing's docks and arsenal, enlarging the dockyards at Antwerp and increasing the size of his fleet.

General Monnet was taken to England as a prisoner of war; he did not return to France until the fall of the Empire. He came back to France in May 1814 and resumed

army service. He eventually gained a Barony from King Louis XVIII[111]. General Osten was also taken to England but he escaped back to France. After a frosty reception, for he had been posted as a parole breaker, he convinced the French judiciary that he had not, in fact, given his parole and returned to army service. Osten's reports, together with that of the Mayor of Flushing survive in French archives. Osten was injured in battle at Hamburg in 1814 and died of his wounds.[112]

The Commander in Chief, the second Earl of Chatham, was withdrawn and required to resign; he re-surfaced in public life in 1820, when he became Governor of Gibraltar; he died in 1835. Rear Admiral Sir Richard Strachan was never given another command; seniority saw him advance to full admiral before his death in 1828. William Fyers did not serve in the field again, but he continued his army career in Britain and Ireland; after 46 years service he was appointed Brevet Lieutenant General in 1819[113], his staff officers, Jones, Henegan and Pasley all had long and successful careers in the army; an indication of the quality of these officers.

Chapter11

Analysis and conclusion

How did the siege of Flushing compare with similar actions? The siege of Copenhagen offers similarities. Britain invaded neutral Denmark in 1806 and laid siege to Copenhagen. The aim was to capture the Danish fleet before Napoleon could invade with the same objective in mind. It was a combined operation, the navy blockading by sea and the army laying siege by land. The major difference with the siege of Flushing is that the invasion of Denmark had a single objective; the capture of the fleet in the harbour of the town being besieged; once the siege was over there were no other objectives. It was a tidy and limited war. Troops landed on 16th August, it was "comparatively open ground" and "the besiegers were able to complete their batteries and commence bombardment without the delay usually necessary in the attack on a fortified place. On September 2 the fire commenced from twenty 24 pounder guns and forty eight mortars and, howitzers. Rockets were also used on this occasion for the first time"[114]. Copenhagen surrendered after 3 days. The Copenhagen siege was an acclaimed success; it took about the same time to prepare the batteries and siege lines as Flushing and the bombardment took a similar course to a successful conclusion. Copenhagen and Flushing were both devised to be surprise attacks. Copenhagen succeeded; the British invaded a neutral country, the Danes were not expecting it and the preparations had not been trumpeted across Europe. The invasion was a pre-emptive strike to forestall Napoleon's own projected demand to take the Danish fleet. In strategic terms there was an enormous difference between the sieges of Flushing and Copenhagen; Copenhagen was the only target of the expedition, there was no second objective which could receive reinforcements while the first was going on; by contrast Walcheren was competing for resources with the Peninsular Campaign.

The siege of Badojos in March 1812 was a purely military matter, but it was beset by storms, flooded rivers and boggy ground just as the forces at Flushing had to contend with. The siege began on 16 March 1812 and 6 batteries were completed and armed

by the 25 March; again the preparation took a similar time to organise in similar adverse conditions.

So was the siege by land a success? The answer must be affirmative; it bears comparison with other sieges of comparable magnitude and the result was a devastating attack with relatively few casualties. There was certainly muddle and the initial planning seems incompetent, but this was balanced by Monnet's delay in starting the flooding. Nevertheless the floodwater was held back for long enough, the magazines kept the powder dry, the ammunition supply was adequate and the guns fired from sound platforms with devastating effect

Was the siege the downfall of the expedition? The alternative would have been to contain the garrison of the town and press on to Antwerp. To contain over 7,000 men would require a superior force, and that judgement had already been made to protect the siege-works, which was Sir Eyre Coote's division of 14,000 men. The flooding could not be prevented, but the purpose of the flooding was to inundate the batteries. If the town was merely to be contained to prevent the garrison from attacking the British then the flooding would make this restriction easier. In the end an attack or a containment made no difference; Chatham could have pressed on to Antwerp with the rest of his forces on South Beveland siege or no siege.

The army appears to have benefited greatly from the presence of the navy on land. Parties of seamen dragged guns and supplies where horses found the conditions too difficult. The seamen's battery kept up an amazing rate of fire from their land guns. The navy at sea brought the great power of their bomb ketches to play as well as the fleet of gunboats and the vast firepower of the seven 74 gun ships.

The failure to progress after capturing South Beveland was where the campaign was finally lost. It was not so much a missed opportunity as a daily missed opportunity. On 2 August there were but a thousand Dutch troops between the British and the run down walls of Antwerp; and those soldiers had already run away from South Beveland. Even on 19 August General Jean Dejean the Inspector General of Engineers thought that the British army could have captured Antwerp with the forces they could

see across the river[115]. Chatham's personal progress in the four weeks from the Army reaching Batz and the final decision not to go further than Batz was beyond dereliction of duty. Chatham's conduct had all the hallmarks of a man overcome by the pressure of his situation and incapable of action, a nervous breakdown in other words. But Chatham was not showing these symptoms due to stress, it was simply indolence, the fatal flaw in his character; he had always been like that and the politicians who appointed him knew he lacked the basic military qualities of energy and decisiveness. The cabinet was made up of weak men who fell back from the difficult decision to appoint a vigorous commander against the wishes of the King and instead took the safe option of the senior man.

The Walcheren expedition carried the seeds of its own destruction from the early planning stage. It was described as a *coup de main* but it was equipped as a regular invasion. If it had been designed for a surprise raid it might well have carried out the original landing plan because the raid would not have needed as much transport so it could have left earlier, before the fever season and in the better summer weather. As it was the expedition was still redeemable, wanting only a sense of urgency. The siege of Flushing was a success within the Walcheren expedition mainly because it was conducted by the Royal Engineers, the Royal Artillery and the Royal Navy. In each of these three services commissions were not purchased, promotion was based on merit. The conduct of the siege depended on the three units doing the job that they had trained for and they had no need for external leadership. Colonel Fyers put in place a battery well sufficient to achieve surrender by terrorising the garrison and the civilians within the walls of Flushing. The siege may have suffered from elderly officers whose experience was based on field days and exercises but on the whole Fyers got the barrage in place in time. The Earl of Chatham was responsible for both the over equipping of the army and the lack of progress towards a landing on the mainland. He must bear the responsibility for the failure and the tragedy which was the outcome.

Peter Blake
28th August 2008

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[102] Bond, p 134
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Appendix 1
Commissioned Ships under the command of Sir Richard Strachan
1 August 1809

Ceasar	80	Third rate
Belleisle	74	Third rate
Impetueuse	74	Third rate
Revenge	74	Third rate
Centaur	74	Third rate
Superb	74	Third rate
Achille	74	Third rate
Venerable	74	Third rate
Monarch	74	Third rate
Orion	74	Third rate
Resolution	74	Third rate
Bellona	74	Third rate
Eagle	74	Third rate
Hero	74	Third rate
Valiant	74	Third rate
Illustrious	74	Third rate
Aboukir	74	Third rate
Dannemark	74	Third rate
Ganges	74	Third rate
Marlborough	74	Third rate
Audacious	74	Third rate
Victorious	74	Third rate
Royal Oak	74	Third rate
Sceptre	74	Third rate
Powerful	74	Third rate
Blake	74	Third rate
Coragious	74	Third rate
Theseus	74	Third rate
York	74	Third rate
Repulse	74	Third rate
St Domingo	74	Third rate
Alfred	74	Third rate
Princess of Orange	74	Third rate
Leyden	64	Third rate
Isis	50	Fourth rate
Ulyses	44	Frigate
Fisgard	38	Frigate
Rota	38	Frigate
Pearlen	38	Frigate
Clyde	38	Frigate
Statera	38	Frigate
Amethyst	38	Frigate
Lavinia	38	Frigate
Hussar	38	Frigate
St Florenzo	38	Frigate
Euryalis	36	Frigate
Salsette	36	Frigate
L'Aigle	36	Frigate
Dryad	36	Frigate
Heroine	36	Frigate
Beucephalus	36	Frigate
Thalia	36	Frigate
Nymphen	36	Frigate
Amiable	32	Frigate
Pallas	32	Frigate
Circe	32	Frigate
Camilla	20	Sloop
Pandora	18	Sloop
Thais	18	Sloop
Plover	18	Sloop
Peacock	18	Sloop
Kangaroo	18	Sloop
Royalist	18	Sloop
Zenobia	18	Sloop
Beagle	18	Sloop
Pilot	18	Sloop
Happy	18	Sloop
Raleigh	18	Sloop
Mosquito	18	Sloop
Sabrina	18	Sloop
Reindeer	18	Sloop

The National Archives ADM 8/98 Ships list
I August 1809
Off the Texel and in the Scheldt
Rear Admiral Sir Richard Strachan Bart KB

Appendix 1 continued
Commissioned Ships under the command of Sir Richard Strachan
1 August 1809

Skylark	16	Sloop
Challenger	16	Sloop
Trompeuse	16	Sloop
Fly	16	Sloop
Raven	16	Sloop
Magnet	16	Sloop
Crocus	16	Sloop
Fleche	16	Sloop
Cherokee	14	Sloop
Appelled	14	Sloop
Breseise	14	Sloop
Sarpen	14	Sloop
Ephira	12	Sloop
Parthian	12	Sloop
Britmart	10	Sloop
Redpole	10	Sloop
Calliope	10	Sloop
Hope	10	Sloop
Badger	10	Sloop
Cordelia	10	Sloop
Onyx	10	Sloop
Drake	10	Sloop
Hound	12	Bomb
Etne	10	Bomb
Thunder	10	Bomb
Devastation	10	Bomb
Vesuvius	10	Bomb
Encounter	10	Brig
Charger	12	Brig
Safeguard	12	Brig
Desperate	12	Brig
Indignant	12	Brig
Rebuff	12	Brig
Pincher	10	Brig
Paz	10	Brig
Bloodhound	10	Brig
Cracker	10	Brig
Bold	10	Brig
Furious	10	Brig
Fearless	10	Brig
Gallant	10	Brig

Richmond	10	Brig
Bruizer	10	Brig
mariner	10	Brig
daring	10	Brig
Linnet	10	Brig
Sprightly	10	Brig
Protector	10	Brig
Exertion	10	Brig
Pendragon	10	Brig
Blazer	10	Brig
Censor	10	Brig
Basilisk	10	Brig
Redbreast	10	Brig
Attack	10	Brig
Martial	10	Brig
Porgey	4	
Cuckoo	4	
Pilchard	4	
Agincourt		Depot ship
Adamant		Receiving ship
Namur		Receiving ship
Monmouth		Receiving ship

The National Archives ADM 8/98 Ships list
I August 1809
Off the Texel and in the Scheldt
Rear Admiral Sir Richard Strachan Bart KB

Appendix 2

British Expeditionary Force allocated to Walcheren Island

Right Wing: Major General Graham
Colonel Day's Brigade
3/1st, 1/5th, 2/35th, 30 men of the Staff Corps
Light Infantry
2 companies of 68th, 31 men from the 95th
Artillery: Webber-Smith's Brigade of light 6 pounders.

Centre: Lieutenant General Lord Paget
Brigadier General Browne's Brigade
2/23rd, 1/26th, 1/32nd, 2/81st
Brigadier General Rottenburg's Light Infantry Brigade
8 companies of the 68th, 85th, Captains Cadoux's & Jenkins' Companies from the 2/95th
Artillery: Massey's Brigade of light 6 pounders

Left Wing: Lieutenant General Fraser
Major General Picton's Brigade
50 men from the 2/95th, 1/36th, 2/63rd, 1/71st, 77th, a Battalion of Detachments, and 20 men of the Staff Corps
Artillery: March's Brigade of light 6 pounders

Reserve:
Brigadier Houston's Brigade
2/14th, 51st, 1/82nd

3rd Division: Lieutenant General T. Grosvenor
Major General Leith's Brigade
2/11th, 2/59th, 1/79th
Brigadier General Acland's Brigade
2nd, 76th, 2/84th
Artillery: Adye's Heavy 9 pounders
Total 595 Officer 13,666 men

Appendix 2 continued

British Expeditionary Force allocated to South Beveland Island

Light Division: Lieutenant General the Earl of Rosslyn
Major General William Stewart's Brigade
2/43rd, 2/52nd, 8 companies of the 2/95th
Major General von Linsingen's Brigade
3rd Dragoons, 12th Light Dragoons, 2nd KGL Hussars
Major General von Alten's Brigade
1st KGL Light Battalion, 2nd KGL Light Battalion

2nd Division: Lieutenant General Marquis of Huntly
Major General Dyott's Brigade
1/6h, 1/50th, 1/91st
Brigadier General Montresor's Brigade
1/9th, 1/38th, 1/42nd
One company of the 2/95th

Reserve Division: Lieutenant General John Hope
Brigadier General Disney's Brigade
1/1st Guards, 3rd/1st Guards, Flank Companies of the 2/Coldstream Guards & the 2/3rd Guards
Major General William Erskine's Brigade
20th, 1/92nd
Major General Earl of Dalhousie's Brigade
1/4th, 2/4th, 1/28th
Captain Miller's Company of the 2/95th
Artillery: Wilmot's Brigade of light six pounders
Total South Beveland and reserve Officers 1,293 officers, 33,546 men

Total Force1, 888 Officers 47,212 men

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Bond got this list from the Parliamentary papers vol 7, plus the number of officers and men for each unit.

Appendix 3

The forces defending the town of Flushing 1809

	Officer's	men
1er Régiment de Prusse (in French service) (Colonel Bockmann?)	49	1,540
- 1er Bataillon Irlandais (also known as 'Légion Irlandaise')		15
449		
- 1er Bataillon Colonial	14	768
- Battalion of the Régiment Chasseurs Rentrés de l'étranger	15	996
- 6me Comp. 1er Régiment d'Artillerie	4	116
- Vétérans	4	41
- Vétérans d'Artillerie	4	42
- 5de, 6de, and 7de Kompagnie Hollandsche Kanonniers (Dutch gunners)	7	150
- Gardes-Côtes ('Kompagnie Kustbewaarders', artillerymen)	2	125
- French military labourers ('Militaire Werklieden')		30
- Kompagnie Burger-Kanonniers (Civilian gunners)		110
Total	**114**	**4637**
Reinforcements received after the beginning of the siege		
- 8me Régiment Provisoire	21	1112
- 48me Régiment de Ligne (1 battalion)	12	629
- 65me Régiment de Ligne (1 battalion)	16	639
- 72me Régiment de Ligne (detachment)	3	266
Total reinforcements	52	2646
Total	**166**	**7013**
Of the above, assorted artillerymen	17	543

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Appendix 4

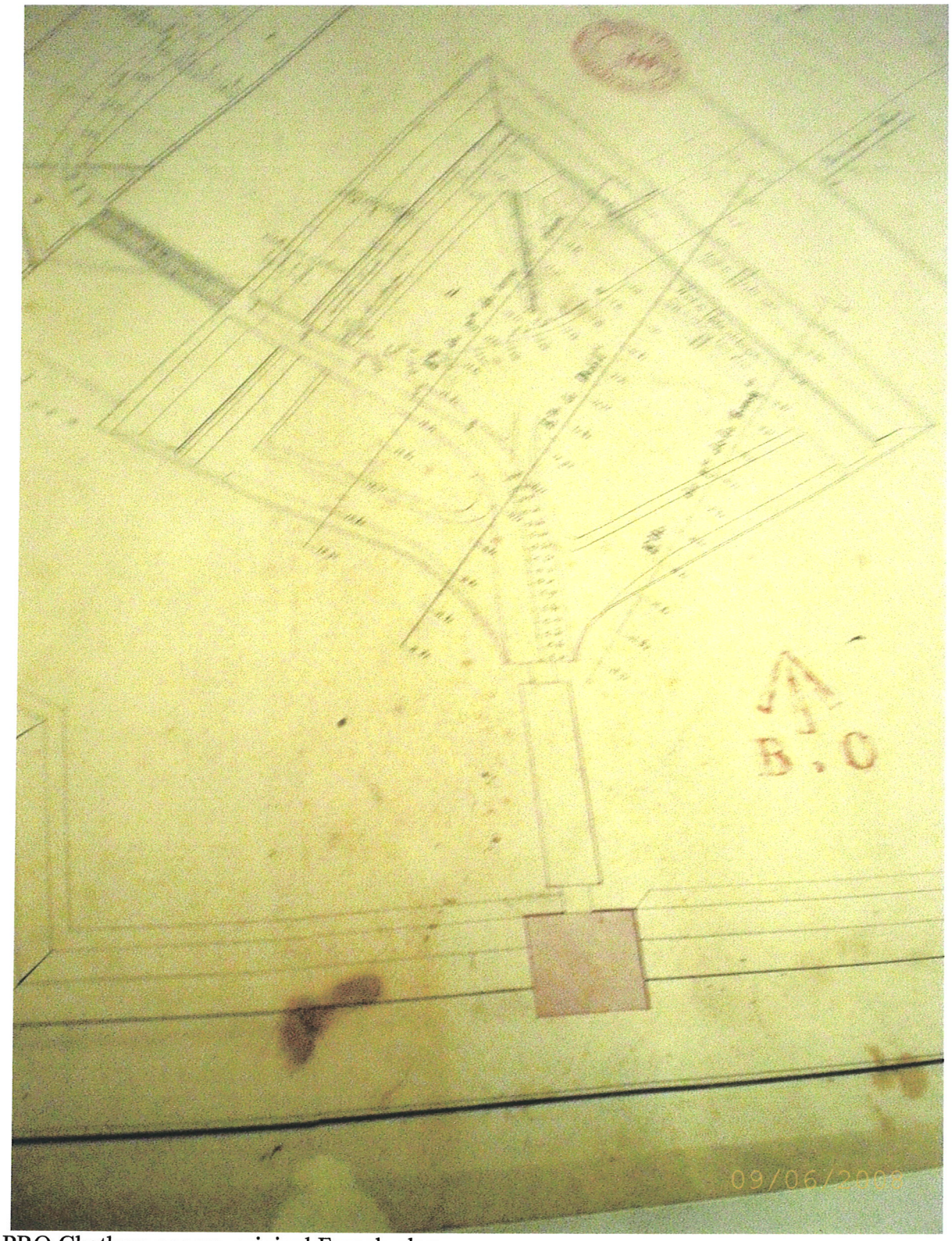
A timeline of the construction of batteries for the Siege of Flushing

3rd August	Commenced work on Battery 1, 6 10'' mortars, with equipment brought from Ramakins,
4th August	Continued, with an extra 150 men making fascines and gabions
5rh. August	Commenced battery no.2 10 24 pdr. 86 wagons of supplies arrived
6th August	commenced battery no 5 behind Western dyke, and a battery on the dyke.
7th August	commenced batteries 3 and 4 on Eastern dyke
8th August	Battery no 5 enlarged, on orders from Fyers
	Parallel connecting the two Flanks begun
9th August	Work continued
10th August	the seamen's battery begun
11th August	"Little done to forward the attack" due to gales and rain
	Battery no 3 fired in support of passing Frigates
12th August	Relief battery, no. 7, begun on higher ground
	It was completed in 28 hours by using only the royal military artificers
	Seamen's battery construction was assisted by the sailors who were to man it.
13th August	All batteries completed and armed except the seamen's battery
	General action begun at 1 pm and continued until dark, using all other Batteries and aided by two divisions of bomb vessels and gunships and by rockets launched from the dyke.
	Mortar and rocket fire continued through the night
	Began battery no.10 with 6 68 pdr. Carronades on Western sand hills
14th August	Bombardment continued, including the seamen's battery
	Seven ships of the line opened fire at 11 am.
	"maintaining an incessant fire from both batteries" until 2 pm.

extracted from Jones memoirs, (the missing no. 6 was a redoubt not a battery)
Jones Maj. Gen John T. *Sieges carried out by the Army under the Duke of Wellington in Spain* (London, 1846)

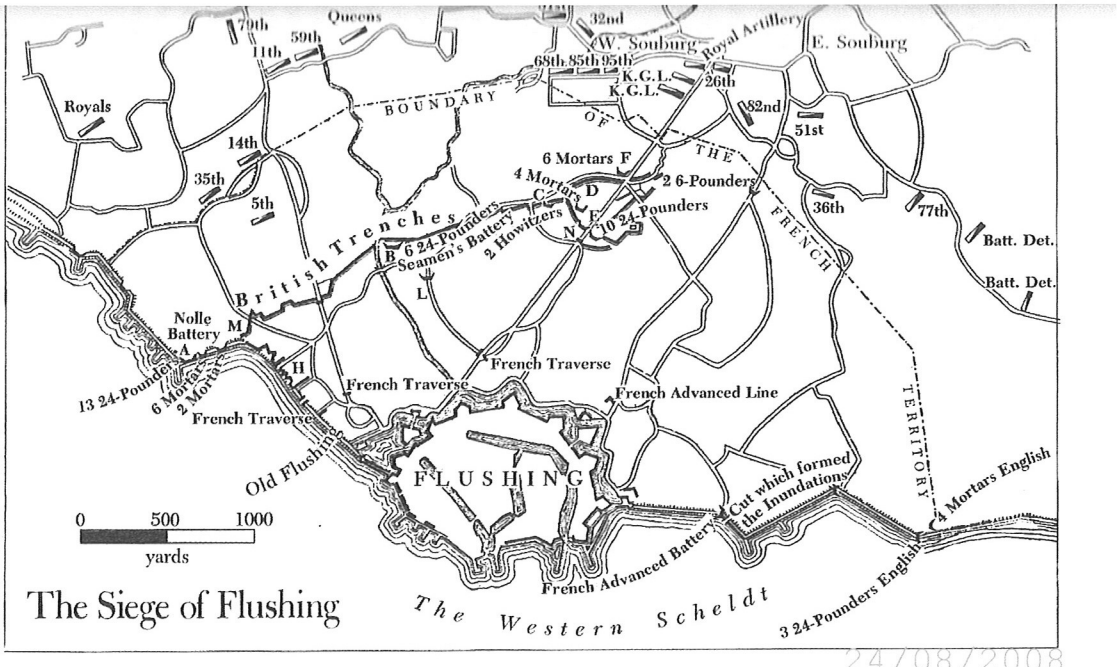
M1 The town of Flushing 1652

This map of Flushing is scanned from a facsimile publication of the Blaeu's Toonneel der Steden from 1652 www.let.rug.nl/~maps/nadiavdvlies/pages/blaeu.htm, accessed 26th April 2008.



PRO Chatham papers, original French plan

M3 The siege works round Flushing 1809



Bond, p 87

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