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# War Dummies: Structured Data on Organised Armed Confrontations with Dutch Involvement, 1566–1812

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## Abstract

The *War dummies* dataset offers structured data on Dutch-involved organised armed confrontations from 1566 to 1812. Comprising 1216 records detailing the participation of 95 entities in 548 encounters across 50 wars, it fills a crucial need for well-structured, accessible, and reusable pre-1815 historical warfare data. Based on the comprehensive *Military History of the Netherlands* book series, it aligns with post-1815 conflict datasets like the Inter-State War Database of the Correlates of War Project and the Georeferenced Event Dataset of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. This article outlines the data collection, structure, and potential research applications, and discusses data quality and potential biases. The *War dummies* codebook offers comprehensive variable descriptions.

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**Keywords**

war – armed confrontation – Netherlands – Dutch republic – quantitative data – early modern history – military history – economic and social history

– Related data set "War dummies: structured data on organized armed confrontations with Dutch involvement, 1566–1812" with DOI www.doi.org/10.17026/dans-2cn-smxt in repository "DANS"

## 1. Introduction

Wars have, throughout history, deeply impacted peoples, societies, economies, and cultures, and continue to do so in the present. The study of their causes, conduct, and consequences is central to a variety of disciplines. However, reliable quantitative data on organized violence before 1815 is scarce, posing challenges for large-scale analysis. Our dataset addresses this gap by providing reusable quantitative data on organised armed confrontations involving Dutch agents from 1566 to 1812.

Our approach differs from previous works, such as those by Brecke (1999), Bradbury (2004), Jacques (2007), and Clodfelter (2017), that have endeavoured to catalogue historical warfare events. Brecke's (1999) dataset offers a broad geographical and chronological coverage but lacks the granularity needed for in-depth analysis. The Dutch Wars of Independence (Eighty Years' War) are for instance depicted as two distinct violent conflicts, before and after the truce of 1609–1621. The first conflict is further divided into four phases. The dataset lacks detail on individual battles and sieges. While Bradbury, Jacques, and Clodfelter offer more detail in their encyclopaedic works, they fall short of providing comprehensive overviews, and their selection criteria remain opaque. Clodfelter provides the best overview of warfare in the early modern Low Countries. His focus is on wars rather than battles. He does, however, also include some major battles and sieges, yet the basis for including them and omitting others remains unclear. Additionally, the re-usability of data from these works is constrained as they are only available in book form.

Attempts to distil quantitative data from these books have been made, but these are limited in their accessibility and scope. Dincecco and Onorato (2016) utilised Bradbury and Clodfelter's work to study the relationship between war and urbanisation. Van Besouw and Curtis (2022) constructed a dataset to analyse war-related mortality in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. They extracted data 'on clearly identifiable military events' from literature on early

modern warfare and added geographic information for each event. Neither dataset, however, has been published.

While the publications of Dincecco and Onorato (2016) and van Besouw and Curtis (2022) demonstrate the growing interest in quantifying historical military events, the unpublished status of their datasets limits their utility in broader scholarly discourse. This situation highlights the need for more accessible, detailed, and comprehensive data. Recognising the limitations of existing overviews of historical warfare, our *War dummies* dataset represents a focused endeavour to enrich the field. Although its scope is confined to events linked to the Northern Netherlands from 1566 to 1812, it represents an important step forward in terms of data accessibility and usability. Sourced from the comprehensive and authoritative *Military History of the Netherlands* book series, our dataset comprises 1216 records of 548 armed confrontations across 50 wars, involving 95 entities. This curated collection is a rich resource for analysing early modern (military) history, and enhances the potential for comparative studies with modern warfare datasets.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. *Sources*

The *War dummies* data were manually extracted from the three volumes of the *Military History of the Netherlands* (*Militaire geschiedenis van Nederland*, published under the auspices of the Netherlands Institute for Military History – NIMH) that cover the early modern period (Groen et al., 2013; Knaap et al., 2015; van Alphen et al., 2019). This recent book series represents the most comprehensive survey of Dutch military history and involvement in global conflict. With the aim of making the information from these volumes readily reusable for quantitative analyses, the *War dummies* project team created structured data on organised armed confrontations. In defining 'organised armed confrontations' within the context of this dataset, we consider situations where armed force is utilised by an organised group against another or civilians, with at least one actor primarily representing Northern Netherlands interests, encompassing entities from the Dutch Revolt to the Kingdom of Holland under French annexation. In some cases, we have supplemented the information from the book volumes with information from other printed materials and (online) sources.

### 2.2. *Data Structure*

The *War dummies* dataset is structured to maximise its analytical potential and reusability, drawing inspiration from the post-1815 Inter-State War Database of the Correlates of War Project (CoW) (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010a, 2010b) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2021; Sundberg & Melander, 2013). We have incorporated coordinates and casualty estimates following the UCDP format and have structured the data at the event-actor level, as per the CoW dataset. This approach allows for a detailed account of each actor's involvement in an armed confrontation, including troop strength, casualties, alliances, and combat outcomes. For instance, the Siege of Haarlem (1572–1573) is represented by two separate records for Spain and the Dutch insurgents, highlighting divergent details like troop strength while sharing common information such as location and war context. This granularity enables precise alignment with either UCDP or CoW datasets, facilitating analyses that can span beyond their respective temporal scopes.

Additionally, we have published the *War dummies* data in a binary format, indicating for all 95 combatant actors whether they were involved in an organised armed confrontation in which a Dutch actor took part in each year between 1566 and 1812 (0 or 1). This format aligns with Brecke's Conflict Catalog, in the binary form as provided by Clio-Infra (Brecke, 1999; 2015a; 2015b).

### 2.3. *Quality, Completeness, and Potential Biases of the Data*

The *Military History of the Netherlands*, the basis of our dataset, sought to provide a comprehensive account of Dutch military engagements. While it describes many more events than previous literature, and in greater detail, some minor incidents may have been omitted or condensed. The series predominantly narrates Dutch military perspectives, often privileging European accounts. This Eurocentric view could lead to biases, especially in categorising and interpreting confrontations in non-European regions. Dutch sources, for example, often record a violent encounter with inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago as a mere 'skirmish' rather than a battle or part of a war, as their opponents were simply not recognised as belligerents and/or adherents of a legitimate polity. While the *War dummies* dataset reliably provides basic data like location, involved parties, and event type for all confrontations, information on troop/fleet strength and losses is more fragmented, reflecting the scarcity of such details in early modern sources. It is important for users to be aware of the potential for data bias and incompleteness and to exercise due diligence in their research applications. Despite these limitations, our

dataset presents a significant advancement in detailing Dutch involvement in organised armed confrontations, based on state-of-the-art scholarship. The structure of our dataset invites scholars to supplement it with additional information and perspectives, enhancing its overall value and scope.

The dataset was crafted by trained historians who extracted and structured data from the narrative and tables of the *Military History of the Netherlands* book volumes, sometimes supplemented by data from other secondary literature and online sources. Estimates of troop strength and casualty counts reflect variability in historical data. When the literature presents conflicting numbers, we provide ranges for these estimates and add an accuracy indicator to reflect confidence levels. Incomplete records are a result of gaps in the archival evidence base. The dataset, therefore, offers a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, overview of Dutch military involvement in armed confrontations.

Geographical coordinates in the dataset approximate the locations of confrontations, derived from the *Military History of the Netherlands* and manually determined using Google Maps. We also incorporated Wikidata URIs for entities with exact matches in our dataset, such as specific battles or wars. This integration aids in data linkage and further enrichment, allowing for a more interconnected and expansive exploration of historical events.

## 3. Data

- **War dummies deposited at DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities – DOI:**www.doi.org/10.17026/dans-2cn-smxt
- **Temporal coverage:** 1566–1812

The dataset consists of two data files (csv) and a codebook, which provides detailed information of all variables, including definitions of the event types used to categorise the data. The main data file (war_dummies_data.csv) contains 1216 records detailing the involvement of 95 actors (combatants) in 548 organised armed confrontations, which were part of 50 wars. Tables 1 and 2 list the conflicts and actors, respectively, with 10 or more recorded organised armed confrontations in the *War dummies* dataset.

The dataset's records detail the start and end dates of confrontations, and the locations where they took place (see Figures 1 and 2 for visualisations of the geographic and temporal distributions of the data). Additionally, they indicate which party, according to the sources at our disposal, initiated the conflict, and the outcome of the confrontation. It distinguishes event types, such as sieges

TABLE 1 Conflicts with 10 or more recorded organised armed confrontations in the *War dummies* dataset, sorted by the number of confrontations per conflict

| Name of conflict | Number of confrontations |
|---|---|
| Dutch Revolt / Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) | 189 |
| Dutch-Portuguese War (1601–1661) | 35 |
| Franco-Dutch War (1672–1678) | 25 |
| War of the First Coalition (1792–1797) | 24 |
| War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713) | 22 |
| Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667) | 16 |
| Nine Years' War (1688–1697) | 13 |
| War of the Second Coalition (1798–1802) | 11 |
| War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) | 10 |
| Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–1784) | 10 |

TABLE 2 Actors (combatants) with 10 or more recorded organised armed confrontations in the *War dummies* dataset, sorted by number of confrontations per actor

| Actor (combatant) | Number of confrontations |
|---|---|
| Dutch Republic | 201 |
| Spain | 184 |
| VOC | 170 |
| Dutch Rebels | 96 |
| Kingdom of France | 64 |
| England | 59 |
| Great Britain | 51 |
| Portugal | 50 |
| Holy Roman Empire | 30 |
| French Republic | 28 |
| WIC | 21 |
| French Empire | 15 |
| Batavian Republic | 14 |
| Kingdom of Holland | 11 |

FIGURE 1 Geographic distribution of the organised armed confrontations in the *War dummies* dataset
CREATED WITH LEAFLET (WWW.LEAFLETJS.COM); MAP: © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, ODBL LICENCE

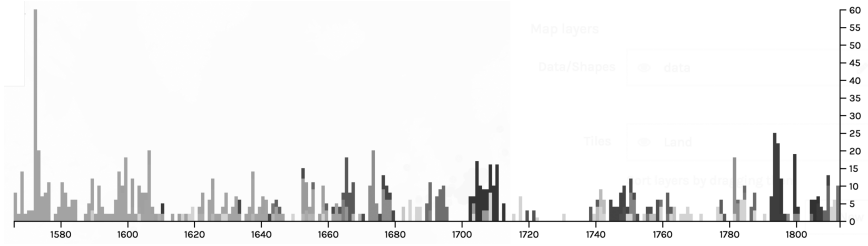


FIGURE 2 Timeline of organised armed confrontations in the *War dummies* dataset, showing the start date of each event. Shades of grey differentiate the various wars associated with these confrontations.
CREATED WITH PALLADIO (HTTP://HDLAB.STANFORD.EDU/PALLADIO)

or naval battles (see Table 3), and includes estimates on troop/fleet strength and losses where available. Finally, based on the narrative of *Military History of the Netherlands*, we provide indicators of the quality of the troops involved in organised violence, and which war, if any, the confrontation is part of. The primary and secondary sources for this information are also indicated in the dataset.

The second data file (war_dummies_data_binary.csv) is structured differently. Each of its 95 records – one for each of the actors (combatants) in the *War dummies* data – contains binary values (0 or 1), showing whether the actor was involved in a conflict with a Dutch party each year (247 years

TABLE 3 Event types and their occurrences in the *War dummies* dataset

| Event type | Number of confrontations |
|---|---|
| battle | 136 |
| siege | 134 |
| naval battle | 86 |
| looting / hijacking / raid | 70 |
| capture | 85 |
| siege relief | 13 |
| riot | 4 |
| blockade | 6 |
| intervention | 1 |
| battle / naval battle | 2 |
| naval battle / looting / hijacking / raid | 3 |
| not assigned (i.e. unknown) | 1 |

between 1566 and 1812). All other information available was excluded from this file. This format is especially suitable for integration in statistical analyses.

The CC BY 4.0 licence applies to the *War dummies* data. This means the data are free to use, share and adapt, as long as appropriate credit is given to the creators of the dataset.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

In compiling the *War dummies* dataset, we have significantly expanded the pool of raw data on historical wars and violence with Dutch involvement in the early modern period. The structured and FAIR format enhances the usability for a wide range of (statistical) analyses of the impact of war on various aspects of society and state and is a valuable tool for researchers. Although focused on Dutch encounters, its approach may inspire similar efforts for other regions and time periods.

This dataset may in particular contribute to two pivotal debates in historical scholarship. It provides empirical data crucial for discussions around the 'military revolution', a concept attributed to Michael Roberts (1956) signifying

key changes in warfare during the early modern period and their profound effects on state development, as explored by authors like 't Hart (2014) and Hoffman (2015). Additionally, it informs debates regarding trends in interstate warfare, as debated by Pinker (2011) and Braumoeller (2019), by offering empirical observations crucial for understanding patterns and changes in organised violence. We believe our dataset's focus, despite its limitations, offers a valuable resource for these extensive historical analyses.

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