

# Dutch Orange Regimental Flags

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The Royal Netherlands Arms and Army Museum possesses a library with 300,000 books and documents and a collection of 160,000 objects. An important part of the collection consists of flags, banners, standards and fanions. Flags from the wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth century against Spain and France, captured flags from our colonial wars, German flags and flags of collaborating Dutch nationalist socialist organisations from the period of the Second World War. But also flags of subdivisions of the Army and the Royal Regimental colours and standards of the Army and the last Reserve of the Army, the BVL, a kind of yeomanry. The BVL was a para-military organisation which gave support to the government in periods of revolt. The device "*Als het moet*" (If it Must) was used "For God, Queen and Country", in the period between the two World Wars.

## That Orange Feeling

Regularly, several times a year, we Dutch lovers or supporters of the noble art of soccer or speed-skating, are confronted with the phenomenon of Orange. A national feeling among the Dutch population - a feeling like a fever. Not the red white and blue of our national flag or the official name of our country, The Netherlands, or our unofficial name, Holland, but only *orange*. The Queen's birthday on the 30th of April, the marriages of our royal princes and to a lesser degree the ceremonial opening of the two chambers of Parliament on the third Tuesday of September evoke that special traditional Orange-feeling.

Abroad often national feelings are represented by national flags. Army Colours in France, United States, Great Britain, Belgium and many more countries of the world consist of the national flag with additional names and numbers of regiments and battlefield honours, decorated with edgings and ribbons. But not in the Netherlands. Army, Navy, Air Force and The Royal Constabulary, covered by the Ministry of Defence and Parliament, do not carry the national tricolour but an Orange Regimental Colour.

There is one exception to all this orange: the Colours of the corps of midshipmen at the Royal Naval College in Den Helder: These Colours are red, probably because they were derived from the original flag of the college.

Within the Netherlands Armed Forces, what are the deeper thoughts about and around the Colours and Standards? Colours and Standards are significant signs of

commemoration, recognition, valuation and solidarity in need. They give form to ideals. In the Netherlands Armed Forces regimental Colours were and are not handled with overdone pomp and circumstances. They were and still are not surrounded with a haze of hovered mystic. In the past, Colours were always in battle front lines. In modern warfare or peacekeeping and enforcing operations the Colours stay in the barracks. The Colours are symbols of the highest values for Armed Forces units and regiments, corps and branches. Soldiers always get into action as a group not as individuals. There is always a chance the soldier does not survive the action. Therefore solidarity in fate plays a great role in a soldier's life.



A 19th Century Illustration of a Colour



A 19th Century Illustration of a Standard



The Colour of the Midshipmen's Corps

The personal historical grown link with members of the House of Orange-Nassau from the battlefields of the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th century via the development inside the parliamentary system came to be to what we know today. Typical modern no nonsense, just like daily life in the modern society of the Netherlands. Now and then we went orange-mad on fixed days or on sports events.

After the restoration of our independence in 1813, two years later the newly formed Royal Netherlands Army obtained the first battle honours at Quatre Bras and Waterloo. But our regiments fought the battle without Colours and Standards. Some units had some Fanions at their disposal.

The soldiers on the battlefield felt the lack of these symbols. The newly formed Kingdom of the Netherlands needed its own Colours. A defence committee deliberated about Colours for infantry regiments and Standards for cavalry regiments. The size of a Colour was fixed as one ell square, that is 87cm. The size of a Standard was to be five decimetres (50cm). In the years 1819 and 1820 the famous Dutch history-painter J.W. Pieneman (1779-1853) designed and painted on silk the first Colours and Standards. On the recommendation of aide de camp Captain Gambier in Brussels the sculptor from the southern part of the Netherlands, Gilles Lambert Godescharle (1750-1835), designed the ornamented ensign and the staff. The staffs were delivered by the government arms factory at Delft. The order was officially given by the Commissioner-General of War, General d' Aubréme. During September and October 1820 17 Colours and 19 Standards were handed over to the different commanders of the regiments of infantry and cavalry. We still use the Pieneman and Godescharle design.

First of all the Pieneman design: for the price of eighty guilders he in fact painted one Colour only. The orange silk was supplied by the firm of Blanchon of Lyon. The colour tassels and cords were made by Kraeutler Lace-

man. Only in 1925 was the Pieneman design laid down by Royal decree. The text of the decree gives us the following description:

*A bunting of orange coloured silk, 87cm long and wide, embroidered and fringed with gold. Parallel along the four sides an orange branch is embroidered. The Colour buntings of the Guards regiments are fringed with gold lace 11cm wide. On the front there is an embroidered golden crowned W. Under the W, the name of the regiment. In one or some corners of the Colour are embroidered battle honours in gold. The reverse shows us the coat of arms of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A black staff, of which a small part, comes out above the bunting, is fitted with a gilt wreath of oak leaves. Above the wreath there is a box shaped rectangular pedestal with a resting lion holding a sword in his paw. Attached to the staff on the inside of the wreath there is a pair of gilt tassels and cords with a horizontal connecting strap (this is the place for ribbons with campaign medals and distinction orders for bravery given by the sovereign). The length of the staff is two and a half metres. On both end faces of the pedestal is a relief "W", the monogram for our Kings William I, II III and Queen Wilhelmina. (Afterwards this "W" was replaced by the "J" of Juliana and the "B" for Beatrix.) On both long sides of the pedestal the mottoes: "For Queen (King) and Country". This slogan is encircled by a snake. The whole is made out of a gilt copper alloy. The Standard has the same design as the Colours, but it is smaller, the bunting is 50cm long and wide. The length of the staff measures two metres. Our Minister of War is charged with the enforcement of this decree.*

*Het Loo, The Second of August 1925  
Wilhelmina*



The Obverse and Reverse of a Colour

These Colours were totally embroidered instead of painted. A novelty was that they had the addition of battle honours, after a decision taken in 1896. King William the second



and King William the Third added many decorations and medals to several Colours. Our Queens continued this tradition. Godescharle designed the lion and the wreath. The ensign is an example of Napoleonic Empire style and so a close replica of an Ancient Roman Insignia or Ensign, the Roman eagle on its pedestal with SPQR; the wreath is the oak leaves version of the Corona Muralis. The lion as heraldic animal is very well known in the Netherlands and therefore often present on banners and coat of arms. The lying or resting lion with the sword and bundle of arrows, is on guard against danger. And the danger in Europe of those days was France. The snake, on the long sides of the pedestal, bites its own tail. It is the symbol for eternity. Henry Heyvaert, engraver, bronze founder and gilder at Brussels manufactured the ensigns.



The Obverse and Reverse of a Standard

In 1846 there was already the first large replacement. Not bullets and shrapnel had damaged the Colours but the wear and tear of time and the long row of successive reorganisations. In 1890, Wilhelmina succeeded her father King William the Third. But it was impossible to unroll the threadbare Colours for ceremonies. Despite the fact that between 1846 and 1890 there had already been unofficial replacements. On the twenty first of September 1893 nine embroidered Colours and three Standards were officially handed over by the Queen Mother Emma and the future Queen Wilhelmina to twelve commanders of regiments. The reorganisation of 1913 brought another thirteen new Colours. The firm Van Heysbergen delivered the Colours and Standards. The prices was 446 guilders each. A price list: the bunting cost f275, cords and tassels f45, staff and ensign f100, and the tinned iron flat box with lock and key, shoulder belt and sheath f26.

Colours are utensils. When regiments are founded, put together or abolished the Colours are always handed out or taken in by or on behalf of the sovereign. The sovereign is always the owner. The reorganisation of the army in 1994 caused the abolishment of four regiments of infantry. For three years one regiment was refounded. The old Colours were handed over again on behalf of the Queen by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. For four months two regiments, Transport and Army Service Corps

were put together to a new large Logistic regiment.

Colours are exposed to all sorts of weather. Stringent rules and close supervision by the Quartermaster General and the committees for tradition accompanied and guarded the production and quality. Nowadays the bunting is manufactured by the firm of Stadelmeier at Nimegen. They still used pure orange silk. Now a Colour would cost f35,000!

The Royal Netherlands Army and Arms Museum insists on preserving these relics and also beautiful painted and embroidered textiles for posterity. The combination of pure orange silk, a linen inner bunting, embroidery with fringes and lace cause the department of textile restorations a lot of attention and work in the passive as well as in the active field.

The museum, on behalf of the Queen possesses 61 Colours and Standards in storage or on display. The Rijksmuseum has 22 Colours and Standards in its collection. In various small regimental collections about 15 are still left.

During the last forty years there were two changes. A new type of Colour with different measurements was introduced for armoured car infantry regiments. The bunting is 60 cm square. The other change was the cravatte. This is an orange silk fringed ribbon, an additional item specially-designed to provisionally bear new texts which were eventually to be placed on a new Colour or Standard. The situation nowadays: for two years the standardisation committee for Colours and Standards of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Royal Constabulary was established. In the run of nearly two centuries, little differences on the original design were growing greater and greater. Mariska Pool and I are members of this inter-service committee. Our task is to give historical and technical advice in the production and repairing of the Colours and Standards. For instance a "new" design was made based on the the first Pieneman Colours and Standards and the embroidered ones of 1893. Definite choices are made. The first result was the Colours of the new logistic regiment, presented by our Queen Beatrix in March 2001.

To bear a regimental Colour is a very great honour and also a heavy job. I had the experience. I was for a long time ago the Colour bearer of the Regiment of the Army Reserve.



Colour Bearers at a Parade





Photograph of a Colour



Photograph of a Standard



An Exhibit at the Legermuseum Showing Relative Sizes of a Colour and Standard



Drawings of Two Colours from Queen Juliana's Reign