

**A NOTE ON THE DRAWINGS IN THE
POSSESSION OF THE EARL OF
DARTMOUTH ILLUSTRATING THE BATTLE
OF SOLE BAY, MAY 28, 1672, AND THE
BATTLE OF THE TEXEL, AUGUST 11, 1673,
PP.5-42 (NOT COMPLETE)**

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A note on the drawings in the possession of the Earl of Dartmouth illustrating the Battle of Sole Bay, May 28, 1672, and the Battle of the Texel, August 11, 1673, pp.5-42 (not complete) by Julian S. Corbett

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THE EARL OF DARTMOUTH

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The Battle of Sole Bay

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BY

JULIAN S. CORBETT, LL.M.



PRINTED FOR THE NAVY RECORDS SOCIETY
MDCCCXVIII

PREFATORY NOTE

For the superintendence of the reproduction of the drawings the Society is indebted to Mr. W. Graham Greene, C.B., and Commander Herbert Richmond, R.N. In endeavouring to arrive at the origin and authenticity of the drawings the Editor has received invaluable assistance from Mr. Sidney Colvin, Keeper of the Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, and from Mr. Laurence Binyon of the same department, and from Dr. P. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk of the Boymans Museum at Rotterdam, who has been good enough to compare Lord Dartmouth's drawings with those in his keeping and to furnish some notes. Sir John Knox Laughton has kindly assisted with the proofs and with many suggestions.

M.F.M.

The chief authorities consulted are :

Official letters and papers in the Record Office, which are very fully given in the *Domestic Calendars*, vols. xii to xv.

Narratives and journals of officers engaged, amongst Lord Dartmouth's MSS., many of which are printed wholly or in part in the *Historical MSS. Commission Reports* thereon.

Copies of official naval papers in the Pepys *Naval Collections* in the *Admiralty Library*.

Gerard Brandt's *Vie de Michel de Reuter* (French Edition). Amsterdam, 1698.

J. C. de Jonge, Archivarius van het Rijk. *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen* (Hist. of the Dutch Navy). Amsterdam, 1837.

French official documents printed by Eugène Sue, *Histoire de la Marine Française*. Paris, 1835.

Dr. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk's articles on the Van de Veldes in *Oud Holland*, vol. xx.

I

ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY OF THE DRAWINGS

OF the origin of these drawings, which Lord Dartmouth has so generously placed at the disposal of the Society for reproduction, nothing is known definitely. Certain facts, however, have been ascertained which appear to connect them in some way with William Van de Velde the Elder, though all experts are agreed they cannot be actually by his hand. There is, indeed, in Lord Dartmouth's collection of naval actions a drawing of the same character as those of Sole Bay and the Texel, which puts the matter beyond dispute. It represents the destruction of the Spanish-Dutch fleet at Palermo by the French in 1676. It has all the marks of Van de Velde's work, and is clearly by a more masterly hand than the present drawings.

Still, there is strong evidence to show that, directly or indirectly, they originated in the Master's studio. The elder Van de Velde began life as a sailor, but having developed a high talent for marine drawing and made it his profession, he was employed by his Government during the Second Dutch War to accompany the fleet as a special artist. A whole series of monochrome sketches of the actions, which he made from his yacht, are in the British Museum. They are all actual sketches from nature, and not bird's-eye views like all but the first of the present drawings.

During the Third War he was similarly employed by the Dutch Government, was present at Sole Bay and at both the Schooneveld actions, and executed of each a series of sketches from the Dutch point of view. Of each of the Schooneveld actions he did six drawings, and all these are in the Boymans Museum at Rotterdam. How many he did of the Sole Bay campaign is uncertain. Four are in the British Museum, all done from the

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Dutch side. No. 1 represents the fleet sailing from the Schooneveld. No. 2, the period of the action about 9.30, when Sandwich got clear of Brakel. No. 3, 'from 10 to 12,' when the Duke of York's flag was in the St. Michael. It is covered with notes in Van de Velde's hand, and has been corrected under the eye of the Duke of York. His flag has been changed from the London, where Van de Velde had originally drawn it, to the St. Michael. The Joshua has been sketched in, sinking under Jordan's fire, and the correct time is noted in another hand, 'This view about noon.' No. 4 is shortly after noon. Upon this Van de Velde has noted, 'I was cut off by the blue squadron, so that I had to draw from a distance De Ruyter and what was happening round him.' He also notes, 'The Staveren [which was captured] here gets deep into the game.' No. 5 is from 2 to 5 o'clock. Both fleets are coming down upon Van de Velde's galliot in the foreground. This drawing also has been corrected, and the Duke's flag shown in the London instead of the St. Michael, 'as the Duke of York himself instructed me.'

There also exists in the Boymans Museum a second set of four done by Van de Velde from the English point of view, the first three corresponding to the first three of the British Museum set. The time of the fourth is not given, but in the background the French are seen in action with the Zealand squadron. Later there has been written upon it, 'about 2 P.M.,' and Van de Velde notes, it was 'marked by the Duke of York with his own hand on Saturday, two weeks after the first Saturday, and I, standing by him, wrote under his instruction beside each ship its name.' Another sketch exactly corresponding with this one is in the Print Collection at Leyden, but it is a bird's-eye view, and upon it Van de Velde has noted, 'This is in itself correct and historical, but arranged with a higher horizon to oblige the King and Duke, and in a manner suitable for tapestry.'¹

Here, then, we get the fact that Van de Velde did prepare for the English Court at least one bird's-eye view from his original sketches of Sole Bay for the tapestry makers to work from.

That such tapestries were executed by Francis Poyntz at Mortlake we know, and three of the pieces are hanging at Hampton Court. The most important represents the approach of the Dutch at sunrise. The allied fleet is represented to the left at anchor in Sole Bay. At the top the Dutch fleet is appearing over the horizon, and midway to the right three cruisers are making the long-distance signal for an enemy's fleet as laid down in the Duke of York's Sailing Instructions. Another piece

¹ For the drawings in Holland see *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeevaren*, 1837; vol. iii. part I. p. 142, note, and the recent and exhaustive study by Dr. P. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk in *Oud Holland*, vol. xx.

AND THE POYNTZ TAPESTRIES 7

represents a stage of the action when the French are disappearing in the distance. A third piece is a replica of part of the first. All are from designs which correspond exactly both in character and colouring with those in Lord Dartmouth's possession.¹

The sudden change of Van de Velde's view-point is explained by the researches of Dr. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk. Though he was certainly with the Dutch at the Schooneveld action of June 4, he appears working in London very soon after Rupert returned on the 9th to the Thames to refit. About Midsummer he did a number of sketches on the river, and he accompanied the King when, on July 6, he went down to the Nore to visit the fleet and to give Rupert his final instructions. A large drawing which Van de Velde executed on that occasion, apparently representing the flag-officers assembling for the Council of War, is in the British Museum.

He does not appear to have accompanied the fleet to sea or to have been present at the battle of the Texel. Yet by the end of the year he had so far ingratiated himself with the King as to receive, in concert with his more famous son, a regular commission. On January 12, 1674, Charles the Second signified 'his pleasure that his Highness Prince Rupert and others the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty do forthwith give order for paying the sum of 100*l.* per annum during his Majesty's pleasure unto William van de Velde the elder for taking and making draughts of sea fights; and also for paying the like sum of 100*l.* per annum during his Majesty's pleasure unto William van de Velde the younger for putting the said draughts of sea fights into colours.'²

But here again is the difficulty that no expert hesitates to pronounce that the Texel designs cannot be by the hand of Van de Velde. It is true they approach nearer in character and merit to his bird's-eye view of the Palermo action than do the Sole Bay drawings, but certain technical details, and particularly the amateurish management of the light and shade, condemn them without possibility of appeal. The heavy emphasis of the spars and the purely decorative nature of the colouring point to their having been prepared for tapestry work; but the general arrangement and the way in which the perspective is managed, no less than the skill and precision with which the movement of the battle is represented, make it quite possible they were prepared from drawings such as that which Van de Velde made of the Palermo action.

¹ They were probably the same that Walpole mentions in his *Anecdotes of Painting* as having once been in 'Buckingham House,' now Buckingham Palace. The explanations of them in the 'Authorised Catalogue' at Hampton Court are wrong in every particular.

² *S. P. Dom.*, Car. II. 359, f. 18.

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A great effort was being made at this time to restore the fallen glories of the Mortlake tapestry works. They had ruined their director, Sir Sackville Crow, and in 1667 had been taken over by a patriotic syndicate with the Earl of Craven at its head. Poyntz, who styled himself 'the King's tapestry maker,' was appointed art director about 1670, though Crow, writing in that year from the Fleet Prison, says, 'he hath not one good piece of painting or design by him, besides a dear (expensive) prating fellow that knows not what good work is.' Perhaps Crow was right, for the works continued to languish under the new direction. The output was very small, and, so far as is known, these designs were never executed. Indeed, it will be observed they are all more or less unfinished.¹

With regard to the 'Texel' designs, there are indications that the drawings for them were possibly executed by Van de Velde at the order of the first Lord Dartmouth. In the first place, it will be observed that the only private ship marked upon them is the Royal Katherine, which he commanded. Then, amongst the Dartmouth Papers is a sheet of foolscap paper on which three rough sketches of the battle have been drawn, as though to illustrate a verbal explanation that someone was giving. The handwriting bears the closest resemblance to that in which the notes on the face of the drawings are written. The three diagrams, which are here reproduced, are marked '3rd part,' '4th part,' '5th part,' and they correspond roughly with the same 'parts' of the drawings, so far as they go. A point of peculiar interest about them, however, is that they do not extend to the whole field of action, but only to the action of the blue squadron, and that only during the stages of the battle when the red squadron was far away from it and the artist, who presumably followed the commander-in-chief with the red squadron, could not have seen for himself what was happening.

Finally, there is in the Dartmouth MSS. documentary evidence that Lord Dartmouth did commission the elder Van de Velde to execute drawings such as these—in separate pieces and of a panoramic character; at least the artist charged for them by the linear foot. It is a letter written on October 8, 1688, by William Van de Velde de Oude, (the Elder) to Lord Dartmouth, and runs as follows: 'This serves only to give your Lordship notice that according [to] my Lord's order I brought last Friday at my Lord's house the five pieces of pictures, as are known to my lord, and this day being Monday I have put them in their golden frames, which are extraordinary curious and precious. . . . Concerning

¹ For the above details see W. G. Thompson, *A History of Tapestry*, 1906, and the authorities he cites; cf. also Müntz, *Histoire générale de la Tapisserie*, ii. 24, and *Duke of Rutland MSS.* II. 18.