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in de achttiende eeuw aan de wal en op zee*'  
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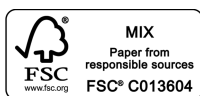
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## Enkhuizen

Enkhuizen had once been a busy herring port on the Zuiderzee, but in the eighteenth century it was only the shipping business of the VOC that left an indelible mark on the city. The town was thronged with sailors who lived in the city while they waited for the new crew musters of the Company, and many others left their families behind there when they sailed. Old VOC hands, among them commanders, also lived and worked in the town. Some were still hoping for a new command, while others had settled down and left their maritime careers behind them. Enkhuizen fitted out no more than one-sixteenth of all the Company ships, which meant that two or three a year were equipped and manned in the town for the long voyage to Asia. The shipping business of the Company had expanded enormously in the first half of the eighteenth century and Enkhuizen had profited from the growth. A century earlier it had often sent out only a single ship. Now far more crew members were required, and naturally more commanders and officers. The great majority of these officers lived in their own native town, as they also did in neighbouring Hoorn.<sup>1</sup>

Every Company ship had a ship's council of four: the commander and three other officers. When they returned, these men would have been away from Enkhuizen for approximately two years, often for far longer periods. Many never returned because they died on board during the voyage out or while they were participating in intra-Asia trade or on the return voyage. Malaria claimed the most victims. Often any time spent in Batavia was tantamount to running a fatal risk. A very small number of mariners actually chose to settle overseas. If men survived as commander or as an officer, they often signed on voyage after voyage. In the course of the eighteenth century, the number of ships annually fitted out by the VOC began to decline and, as a consequence, the need for commanders and officers also fell. Usually the Enkhuizen Chamber showed a preference for appointing Enkhuizen men. In the period 1725–1765, two times out of three it was an Enkhuizen man who was commissioned as commander.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.K. Beers and C. Bakker, *Westfriezen naar de Oost. De kamers der VOC te Hoorn en Enkhuizen en hun recruteringsgebied, 1700–1800* (Hoorn, 1990), pp. 57–9 and 79–80.

<sup>2</sup> Statement by Mr H. de Vos in Schoorl. De Vos generously placed his transcripts of VOC archivalia in the Westfries Archief at my disposal, and gave me the benefit of his insights

### The City

For Enkhuizen as a city it was of immeasurable importance that, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the VOC offered more people employment than it had in earlier years. Around 1700 the town was struggling with economic problems. The economic boom of the previous century had now faded to little more than a memory. Both the herring fishery and the carrying trades were facing severe problems. Commercial voyages from the town, even those to the Baltic, had virtually ceased. A modest coastal traffic to Hamburg did continue though. Fishing for herring – three of which were emblazoned on the town's coat-of-arms – was waning. In the period around 1670, about 100 Enkhuizen men worked as skippers of herring busses. By 1718 the number had dwindled to sixteen and a few years later they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In this climate, the growing VOC demand for seafaring men was welcomed.<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this precarious economic situation could be clearly seen throughout the town. Signs of stagnation and decline were inescapable. Houses and business premises stood vacant. The total number of houses dropped from 3,615 in 1632 to 2,605 in 1730. Within the confines of the walled town, which had been laid out on generous lines, there was an increasing number of vacant allotments where vegetables or other crops could be grown. In 1727, part of the oldest harbour area, the Noorderhavendijk, was filled in with debris from demolition work. By around 1730 the population had halved compared to a century earlier. There were only 9,000 to 10,000 people, compared to 19,000 earlier. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the annual death rate exceeded the birth rate by 100. In 1727 and 1728 an epidemic of dysentery doubled the death rate. This scenario was repeated in 1779 and again in 1780. One of the few positive changes in town life in Enkhuizen was the placing of lanterns along the canals and streets. However, for financial reasons these could only be lit in the seven darkest months of the year and even then not for the whole night.<sup>4</sup>

into the way Company business worked. People from outside Enkhuizen often settled in the town. One in five of the commanders appointed came from Scandinavia or Germany. The commanders who have been examined in greater detail are: Arie Pietersz Arkenbout (1721–1771), Jacobus Ariesz Arkenbout (1766–1834), Roelof Blok (1712–1776), Steven Booms (1734–1795), Gerrit Bruijn (1740–c.1807), Jakob Bruijn (1737–1807), Kornelis de Boer (c.1700–1736), Anthonie Chef (?–1725), Dirk Dol (c.1695–1738), Hero Dol (c.1669–1721), Jan Everwijn Drillingier (1748–1807), Ype Engelsman (1692–1730), Klaas Goedhoen (?), Kornelis van der Hoeven (1690–1741), Karel Lavia (?–1712), Pieter van Loosen (1690–1743), Willem van Mensburg (1704–1776), Dirk Pomp (1704–1741), Jan Pomp (?–1741), Simon Pomp (1701–1737), Adriaan Pool (1709–1759), Sieuwert Pool (1684–1732), Jan Russeplukker (1685–1762), Lucas Semeyns (?–1736), Jakob Sombeek (?–1767) and Jochem Aldertsz Tarncke (?–1760).

<sup>3</sup> R. Willemsen, *Enkhuizen tijdens de Republiek. Een economisch-historisch onderzoek naar stad en samenleving van de 16<sup>e</sup> tot de 19<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Hilversum, 1988), pp. 57, 65, 80–1, 93–5 and 171.

<sup>4</sup> Willemsen, *Enkhuizen*, pp. 32–4, 114–18 and 177–81. See also R.J. de Vries, *Enkhuizen 1650–1850, bloei en achteruitgang van een Zuiderzeestad* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 72–5.

In 1732, the retired commander Jan Russeplukker was still able to profit from the darkness which enshrouded the town at night. One winter evening he stole into the house of First Mate Kornelis de Boer on the Breedstraat. The head of the household was then in the East but his wife, Bregje Schaap, was at home. That afternoon, Russeplukker and a merchant from Amsterdam had visited her to view a collection of Japanese porcelain. On the second visit the commander did not leave until the middle of the night, and it may not have been his first nocturnal call on the lady. Both Bregje and Russeplukker enjoyed a dubious reputation in the town. Bregje, who was the daughter of the late town physician and chairman of the town's council of aldermen, Michiel Schaap, had been married in 1728. It was a marriage at the highest tariff paid for a marriage licence. Bregje was plagued by loneliness when her husband was at sea. Matters had grown steadily more difficult for her, especially since Kornelis' latest departure to the East in July, 1731. She now behaved in an 'exasperating, scandalous and argumentative' fashion. She began to drink heavily and on many nights she received male visitors, one of whom was Jan Russeplukker. These visits were often accompanied by plenty of 'noise, cursing and swearing, and hubbub'. This disturbed the nocturnal peace of the Breedstraat. Neighbours and acquaintances discussed the problem with one another. One said that Bregje had told her that she 'had made a bad marriage and that she needed a husband who could be with her constantly, because she was unable to manage without a husband'. Another said that she had asked him 'to make a baby with her' and she had promised him 'a guilder for every night'. In the spring of 1732, Bregje's behaviour had become so scandalous that a small group of acquaintances and neighbours went to a notary. At the request of her mother and one of her husband's cousins, they had a record compiled of what had happened. This was the usual procedure to permit further steps or action to be taken, and notaries were frequently asked to assist in such matters. At that time there were no fewer than fourteen of them in the town.<sup>5</sup> What happened in Bregje's case is unknown. After his return, First Mate De Boer was promoted to commander, but died during his first command. His death occurred in July 1736 when he was sailing in Asian waters.<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of street lighting did not alleviate the sort of problems with which Bregje wrestled. Mariners were often away from home for a long time, especially those who worked for the VOC. They were often absent for years at a time.

<sup>5</sup> C.M. Lesger, *Hoorn als stedelijk knooppunt. Stedensystemen tijdens de late middeleeuwen en vroegmoderne tijd* (Hilversum, 1990), p. 226.

<sup>6</sup> To set up a practice, notaries had to have permission from the States of Holland and from the municipal council. If their offices were in their own homes, they hung out signboards. They also held sessions in inns. When a notary died or closed down his practice, the local authorities preserved the records of his deeds. For more, see Hoorn, Westfries archief (WA), Notarieel Archief (Not. Arch.) 1263, akte 19, 5 and 7.4.1732. See also D. Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw. Processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Assen, 1982), pp. 59–62; and A. Verburg, 'De Vlaardingse notarissen vóór 1811 en hun archieven', *Historisch Jaarboek Vlaardingen*, 2004, pp. 36–61.

Those they left behind did not know whether they were dead or alive or when they would return. As a general rule, officers married after their twenty-fifth birthday when they had made the rank of third or second mate. De Boer had been twenty-eight when he married Bregje, who was twenty-four. Jan Russeplukker had been born in 1685 and was divorced. Usually the families of commanders and officers did not cause the people in their vicinity any trouble, and probably First Mate De Boer's wife was an exception. Notaries were not often required to record such goings-on in such detail.

In Enkhuizen, commanders, and certainly retired commanders, belonged to the upper crust and lived scattered throughout the town. The streets in which they lived were those considered the most fashionable and were the most sought after.<sup>7</sup> Their houses, like all the best houses in Enkhuizen, had high but narrow façades and were deep, extending a long way back from the street. Commanders were apparently comfortable enough financially to be able to afford prestigious addresses. Life at sea may have lost its charm for the retired but it had provided them with a good income.

### Some Commanders' Families

By the first decade of the eighteenth century, sailing with the Company had become an established pattern in several families. The men had already sailed to the East as boys. The same pattern was regularly reproduced in the world of herring fishing as well. The Pools, father and son, were by no means an exception. Dirk Dol's uncle, Hero, had also been a commander. Two sons and a son-in-law of the seafaring man Jan Pomp had also earned their keep with the VOC. The pattern was repeated with Ype Engelsman and with the children of Master Surgeon Maarten Ramas. Disentangling the networks of work and close family ties is an interesting exercise. Engelsman (1692) was the oldest. In 1716 he had married Grietje Ramas, the surgeon's daughter. From 1723 Engelsman made three voyages as commander and during those voyages he welcomed two Pomp brothers and a brother-in-law on board as officers: Simon (1701) and Dirk (1704) Pomp and Jan Ramas (1700). Dirk Pomp became Engelsman's brother-in-law in 1729 when he married another of the surgeon's daughters. In 1731, the Pomp brothers saw their sister, Jeltje, marry the officer, later commander, Willem van Mensburg (1704). Life on board in the tropics wrought havoc among these men. Engelsman died in 1730, Simon Pomp and Jan Ramas in 1737 and Dirk Pomp in 1741. Van Mensburg survived his brothers-in-law. Like the others, he had only one child who survived to adulthood. Engelsman never knew that his wife had predeceased him. Years later the Pomp widows remarried.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I am very grateful to Mr P.J. de Vries in Schellinkhout for his information about Enkhuizen in the eighteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> Data about the dates of commanders and their relatives are based on research done on

Van Mensburg was the only one to enjoy the life of a retired commander, but their work with the VOC made it possible for all of them to advance financially and socially. They exchanged tiny, one-room houses for larger ones closer to the centre of town. The monthly salaries and the extra income which could be earned made such moves possible. The change was not as great for Ramas' daughters because before they had married they had already lived in fashionable streets. In those days a surgeon was considered an artisan and a member of the bourgeoisie and was not categorized among the people who worked for wages, which is why when Suzanna married Dirk Pomp she had the security of a pre-nuptial agreement. After all, she brought bonds and obligations worth 3,000 guilders and some expensive pieces of jewellery into the marriage.<sup>9</sup>

For many sailors' families it was extremely important that the VOC also offered them two possible ways to earn an income during the absence of the male bread-winner. These provisions were what were known as monthly letters (*maandbrieven*) and transfer letters (*transportbrieven*), which functioned more or less like letters of credit. Commanders and officers also made regular use of these facilities, which meant they did not have to leave their families behind penniless. By means of a monthly letter, to a maximum of three months' salary each year, the family of each man on board could claim a month's salary, but no third party had access to the funds – a limitation on distribution that was introduced in 1682. Once every year, three months' wages could be collected at the pay office of one of the Chambers upon presentation of the monthly letter. To make financial matters on the home front even easier, there was also the transfer letter. This was a pre-printed bond form on which the seaman concerned, 'at the present moment on the point of departure ... to sail to the East-Indies on the ship the ...', declared that he owed a particular sum to the person whom he named by name. The total sum could range from 150 to 300 guilders. Commanders and officers could choose the highest sum. When family members were the beneficiaries of the sum required, the pay office did not deduct any administrative costs, from 1671 on. And the sum could be taken out in instalments. Commanders also made use of these facilities, especially during their maiden voyages. These letters occasionally appear in the inventories of the estates of deceased wives of commanders who were overseas. The Company pay offices administered these withdrawals of money scrupulously and, when the accounts were closed, any amount that had been paid out was deducted from the total sum earned. All the transactions for every single crew member from the time he was mustered on each ship to the time he was signed off were recorded in the ship's pay books, and nearly all are there for the researcher to find.<sup>10</sup>

the baptismal, marriage and burial registers (in Dutch abbreviated DTB) in the towns and villages concerned.

<sup>9</sup> Hoorn, WA, Not. Arch. 1282, akte 112, 2.3.1729.

<sup>10</sup> D. van den Heuvel, 'Bij uijtlandigheijt van haer man'. *Echtgenotes van VOC-zeelieden, aange-monsterd voor de kamer Enkhuizen (1700–1750)* (Amsterdam, 2005), pp. 20–8 and 65–6; J.R.

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