

Troublesome and Peculiar  
THE RECEPTION IN THE NETHERLANDS OF  
*UN SOUVENIR DE SOLFERINO*  
and the setting up of a Dutch Red Cross Organisation

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Introduction

Without any hesitation the setting up of the Dutch Red Cross organisation can be called troublesome and peculiar. The troublesome nature, for instance, can be exemplified by pointing out that if I had restricted myself to the reception of Dunant's *Un souvenir de Solferino*, I could make this perhaps the shortest article ever, simply by stating: with the exception of some private gratifications, such as the Royal family,<sup>2</sup> there wasn't any, at least not in public newspapers. Furthermore the troublesome and above all certainly the peculiar nature is seen in the fact that the Dutch Red Cross (DRC) was not a result of private initiative, but of a Royal Decision by the conservative, militaristic King William III – nicknamed King Gorilla and not because of his looks – after a whisper of his minister of War J. A. van den Bosch.

This, however, does not mean that the Netherlands played a minor role in the first years of Red Cross-history, for Dunant had two dear Dutch friends, military health officer Johan Hendrik Christiaan Basting

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<sup>2</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 306, dossier 3: Min. of war Blanken to Basting 24-3-1864; Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, 22-6-1863, Dag.

and his friend Charles William Meredith van de Velde, member of the first local, Geneva committee. Together with Dunant they strove to make his idea of voluntary aid to sick and wounded soldiers a success. It is even said that Basting should be called the father – or at least the co-father – of Red Cross neutrality for as well medical personnel as the wounded.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless it took four years before in the Netherlands a Red Cross organisation came into being, officially called Dutch Society for the Lending of Aid to Sick and Wounded Warriors in Times Of War. In spite of different attempts, Basting nor Van de Velde had anything to do with this, although even nowadays Basting is often called the founder of the DRC. This, however, is anything but strange, for few subjects are so riddled with myth as exactly the first years of the Red Cross-society.

By the way, the words 'in times of war' would bring the Dutch organisation in big trouble, because it, with the short time exceptions of the Franco-Prussian and the Boer-war to which ambulances were sent, it meant invisibility in the decades of peace, at least in Europe, up until 1914.

### Solferino. The voice of humanity on the field of battle

Soon after Dunant had written his *Un souvenir de Solferino* Basting set himself to translating it, probably on request of Dunant himself.<sup>4</sup> Although the original French language could hardly have anything to do with the poor reception, being a familiar language for almost all Dutch having had some education, it was Basting's translation that did cause some reaction, although all in all it was but a stone in a vast sea.

Basting immediately was enthusiastic after reading Dunant's book. He wrote him a letter dripping with Christian faith and Samaritanism. Were he and Dunant not soul brothers, children of Calvin, servants of the Lord? No wonder he set himself to translating Dunant's book, after another protagonist, Lodewijk Mulder, had said he could not find the

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part II, 302; A.A.J. Quanjer, 'Feestrede (t.g.v. 40 jaar NRK)' in: *Militair Geneeskundig Tijdschrift*, 11 (1907), 150-165, especially 154-156; H. Beelaerts van Blokland, *Dr. Johan Hendrik Christiaan Basting*, The Hague without year (1942), 3, 12-14; Idem, 'Toen het Roode Kruis werd opgericht', in: *Het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis 1867-1942*, The Hague 1942, 15; J.H. Rombach, *Dr. Johan Hendrik Christiaan Basting (1817-1870)*, in: *Universeel. Tijdschrift van het Belgische Rode Kruis in Vlaanderen*, 3, 3 (May-June 1978), 64-69; Idem, *Nederland en het Rode Kruis*, Amsterdam 1992, 8; C.M. Schulten, '175 Jaar militair geneeskundige dienst', in: *Nederlands Militair Geneeskundig Tijdschrift*, 1990, 5-11, especially 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 22-6-1863, Dag.



time.<sup>5</sup> He finished the job rather quickly although it soon dawned upon him not all his military health colleagues shared his enthusiasm. He was told his translating efforts were not supposed to hinder his regular job in whatever way imaginable.<sup>6</sup>

Under the title *Solferino. The voice of humanity on the field of battle*, extended by Basting himself in the form of a preface and an afterword, the translation appeared on 19 June 1863. The next day, for instance, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* (General Trade Journal) wrote it had no doubt their fellow countrymen would join our Royal family in their recognition of the great work of Dunant. Even those 'who regard the idea as a utopia, will not withhold him their approval. We even think that amongst those who will join him in September this year to speak on this subject at the great conference of Societies for General Use, will be many a Dutchman'.<sup>7</sup> Two days later the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (New Rotterdam Journal) was a bit more chary with its words. Because the Royal family apparently had given its approval 'we think we may put the attentions of those interested in the subject on this booklet'.<sup>8</sup>

After this it was silent for some weeks in Dutch newspapers, although on 6 June 1863 the General Trade Journal broke the silence a bit with the publication of an article by one of its readers on the question if and how the ideas of Dunant could be made applicable for the sea-forces.<sup>9</sup> But in fact it was not before the statistical conference at Berlin that the Dutch would again hear of Dunant, of course especially pointing at the fact that Dutchman Basting, one of two Dutch representatives, was invited to cooperate in section four in which Dunant's ideas on an international voluntary organisation to assist wounded soldiers, would be discussed. And so the Dutch readers were informed that this proposition was received 'very favourably and with applause, and that therefore the protagonists of this really humanistic plan, could be very satisfied'.<sup>10</sup>

Two weeks later the General Trade Journal made known the setting up of the Committee of Five, strangely enough only naming four of them. Gustave Moynier, of all people, was forgotten, an omission set

<sup>5</sup> Mart van Lieburg, *Bronovo 1865-1990*, Kampen 1990, 13-15, 18-19; Ellen Hart, *Man Born to Live*, London 1953, 118; Rombach, Basting, 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Historische Fragmente und Essays über die Entstehung der Genfer Konvention und des Roten Kreuzes*, Munich 1896, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad* 20-6-1863, Dag.

<sup>8</sup> NRC, 22-6-1863, Dag (ital. added).

<sup>9</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 6-7-1863, Dag.

<sup>10</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17-9-1863, Dag; NRC, 17-9-1863, Dag; *Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en Effectenblad*, 19-9-1863, Dag.



straight two weeks later. Its task was to prepare statutory regulations for an international committee designed to alleviate the sufferings of soldiers if war was to raise its head once more, and to prepare a conference on behalf of this at the end of October.<sup>11</sup> The four intentions of the committee for the conference were mentioned, such as governmental recognition of the voluntary aid-organisations, and the names of the countries who had already pledged they would send representatives. The Netherlands were not amongst them.<sup>12</sup> This proved to be a writing on the wall. For almost a year the newspapers again went silent on Dunant and his plans.

It was not before the end of August 1864 that several newspapers reported 15 governments had already officially joined the Geneva organisation, explicitly calling it 'Dunant's organisation'. Amongst them sadly enough not the Dutch one, so Basting, who, as Dunant and as nearly all Dutch Red Cross-protagonists, was an adherent of the protestant Reveil-movement, again set himself to work.<sup>13</sup> He wrote the propaganda-booklet *A call to my fatherland. The aid organisations for helping the sick and wounded*. He hoped it would contribute to founding a Dutch Red Cross-organisation, but he hoped in vain.

On this terrain Holland remained dead. I was said to be a stargazer, a philanthropic extremist and whatever more. So I decided to pull myself away from the matter and try to persuade others to take over my job.<sup>14</sup>

### Johan Hendrik Christiaan Basting, 1817-1870

Coming from The Hague, Basting was the founder of the Red Cross-branch of his new hometown Bergen op Zoom – to which he was banned soon after translating Dunant's book, probably because of his liberal mind. Also he played a role in setting up the branches at Utrecht and The Hague, at least if we are willing to believe an anonymous In Memoriam, written after his untimely death in 1870, for which, according to Ch. F. Haje, one of the Dutchmen who around 1900 were striving for Dunant's Nobel Peace Prize, the DRC main board should be blamed. Also according to Basting's wife it had completely ignored all

<sup>11</sup> Algemeen Handelsblad, 1-10-1863, Dag; Algemeen Handelsblad, 10-10-1863, Dag; Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en Effectenblad, 10-10-1863, Dag; Algemeen Handelsblad, 12-10-1863, Dag.

<sup>12</sup> Algemeen Handelsblad, 12-10-1863, Dag; NRC, 12-10-1863, Dag.

<sup>13</sup> Algemeen Handelsblad, 25-8-1864, Dag; NRC, 26-8-1864, Dag.

<sup>14</sup> Rombach, *Basting*, 67.



the work he had done on behalf of the Red Cross in the Netherlands, had ignored him when important posts had to be filled and it had played a major role in his unwanted resettlement to Bergen op Zoom.<sup>15</sup> However, in this same In Memoriam he was also called the one and only founder of the DRC.<sup>16</sup> As said, this could hardly be further away from the truth.

Together with his wife Basting had travelled to Berlin to visit the now famous statistical conference. It is unclear if this happened on request or against the will of minister of War J. W. Blanken. According to Haje Blanken had advised against the trip. It is said he tried to convince Basting's wife to tell her husband all this talk about Solferino and protecting doctors and wounded should finish. And he probably told Basting himself Dunant's ideas were a regrettable utopia, more probable to hinder than to reach the neutrality wished for, by the way without explaining what in his eyes neutrality encapsulated.<sup>17</sup> However, Basting himself wrote that Blanken told him 'to go and find out what one had to say about Dunant's propositions'.<sup>18</sup> But some question marks are at place. Did Basting know that the charity conference in which Dunant originally would unfold his ideas, was cancelled? In any case Basting did not know when travelling to Berlin, that Dunant would now talk about his plans at the same statistical conference to which he went. It even is questionable if he knew he was to meet Dunant in the Prussian capital. The only thing that is certain is that his voyage to the Geneva conference later that same year, was undertaken on request of his commanding officer and with consent of Blanken.<sup>19</sup>

After this conference Basting got side-tracked which became obvious at the Convention talks in 1864. Dunant at any rate was allowed to take care of catering and fireworks, Basting was not even one of the Dutch representatives, again a consequence of the opposition he encountered within his own military health world.<sup>20</sup> It inspired Martin Gumpert in his Dunant-biography to write down the sentence: 'The rebels were put

<sup>15</sup> Chr. F. Haje, 'De Stichter van het Roode Kruis', in: *Elseviers Geïllustreerd Maandschrift*, mei 1897, 439-474, especially 460; Willy J. Heudtlass, *J. Henry Dunant. Gründer des Roten Kreuzes, Urheber der Genfer Konvention*, Stuttgart/Berlin 1984 (4th print), 155.

<sup>16</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 306, dossier 17.

<sup>17</sup> Haje, *De Stichter*, 448.

<sup>18</sup> Rombach, *Basting*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 306, dossier 2: Snabilié to Basting 16-10-1863.

<sup>20</sup> Rombach, *Basting*, 67-68; Rombach, *Nederland en het RK* (1992), 14.

aside'.<sup>21</sup> Basting's role in the international as in the setting up of a national Red Cross organisation, was over, which by the way did not keep him from writing a book on the Dutch Red Cross-branches one year after the DRC was set up.<sup>22</sup>

### Hendrik Christiaan Van de Velde

As Dunant and Basting, Van de Velde, former military navy-officer and according to Dutch Red Cross-historian J. H. Rombach 'the second Dutchman at the Red Cross-cradle', was inspired by the Reveil, a movement also involved in other initiatives for improving the nursing of sick and wounded.<sup>23</sup> The difficulties in getting off ground a Dutch organisation, will have surprised him. This at least can be the conclusion drawn from a letter he wrote to Basting shortly before the 1863 Geneva conference. He proposed, if Basting would not be able to come to Geneva himself, to quickly set up a main committee. That could appoint him representative, for he already was in Geneva, staying at Dunant's place.<sup>24</sup> He nevertheless would not play any role in setting up the DRC some years later, which by the way did not hinder the main board making him an honorary member. He did, however, take part in the ambulances for the Prussian-Franco war. Although he was not a physician he was in charge of one of four ambulances the DRC send towards the battlefields.<sup>25</sup>

### Disappointment and explanation

The disappointment the Netherlands not seemed to be able to quickly follow the footsteps of for instance Prussia in setting up a national organisation, was great amongst such diverse protagonists as politicians J. Bosscha, G. Groen van Prinsterer (again a Reveil-adept), and J. de Bosch Kemper (one of the few liberals); the physicians professor A. Pruys van der Hoeven, L. H. Verwey, who would become the main board's first secretary, or the inspector of the land forces' military health

<sup>21</sup> Martin Gumpert, *Dunant. Der Roman des Roten Kreuzes*, Zürich, 1938, 160.

<sup>22</sup> J. H. C. Basting, *De Nederlandsche Hulpcomité's onder het Roode Kruis*, Den Haag, 1868.

<sup>23</sup> Cora Bakker-van der Kooy, 'De maatschappelijke positie van verpleegsters in de periode 1880-1940', in: *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, jrg. 96 (1983), 454-475.

<sup>24</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 306, dossier 2: letter from Van de Velde to Basting, 3-9-1863.

<sup>25</sup> Rombach, *Nederland en het RK*, 12; Idem, 'Nederlanders en het Rode Kruis', in: *Spiegel Historiae*, 2, 9 (Oct. 1967), 466-474, especially 469-470.



service (MHS), general L. P. J. Snabilié, who died two years before the DRC would come of ground, and military men such as G. van der Duyn van Maasdam and W. J. Knoop. This last one was editor of the critical military magazine *De Nieuwe Spectator* (The New Spectator), one of the few Dutch magazines shortly after the appearance of *Un souvenir de Solferino* wholeheartedly supporting activities and ideas of Dunant and Basting.<sup>26</sup>

Knoop was a critical, liberal general who for instance very much admired J. R. Thorbecke, the Dutch liberal politician who drew up the constitution in 1848, reshaping the Netherlands into a parliamentary democracy.<sup>27</sup> He became an honorary member of the DRC for writing the brochure *The Geneva Conference 1863*. Furthermore, he was appointed ICRC-correspondent in 1865.<sup>28</sup> Knoop, who would never stop striving towards a strong and offensive Dutch army,<sup>29</sup> was requested to do so by Dunant himself, and he accepted in the assumption that a Dutch organisation was soon to come. To speed up the process he wrote a letter to a couple of people, such as Basting and Mulder, to form a preparatory committee. In this letter his motives to support Dunant became clear. Humanity was one, 'well understood self-interest', another.

Our country too can be struck by war, our brothers and fellow countrymen can also be hit by its misery. Who has a heart for humanity and love for his fatherland, has to propagate Dunant's insights.<sup>30</sup>

But as Basting he did not get lucky. July 1866 he disappointed gave up his attempts and his job as ICRC-correspondent.<sup>31</sup>

In later writings he further elaborated on the national interest of a Red Cross-organisation. War would never seize to be, so wounded

<sup>26</sup> 'Een beroep op de menselijkheid', in: *De nieuwe spectator*, 1862-1863, 724-725; G. M. Verspijck, *Het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis 1867-1967*, The Hague, 1967, 67; Beelaerts van Blokland, Basting, 15-16; Idem, *Enkele Hoofdpunten uit de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, Without place, 1947, 4; For Verweys attempts see: Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 309, archivan piece 20a, L. H. Verwey, *Rapport over het Oprichten van een Comité tot Verpleging van Zieke en Gewonde Krijgslieden in Oorlogstijd*, december 1866; For the positive response of the Red Cross by the *De Nieuwe (Militaire) Spectator*, see also: J. Koster, 'Het Roode Kruis', in: *De Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, 1868, 84-86.

<sup>27</sup> W. Bevaart, *De Nederlandse Defensie (1839-1874)*, The Hague, 1993, 56-59.

<sup>28</sup> Rombach, *Nederland en het RK*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Wim Klinkert, *Het Vaderland Verdedigd. Plannen en opvattingen over de verdediging van Nederland 1874-1914* [The Fatherland Defended. Plans and ideas on the defence of the Netherlands] (The Hague: SMG, 1992), 77-79.

<sup>30</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK 1867-1945, inv. nr. 306, dossier 6, Knoop to Basting 14-10-1865.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, inv. nr. 309, Knoop to min. of War 25-7-1866.



soldiers had to be looked after. But to make this a success one should not dwell too much on the side of humanity. If the DRC was to be effective, it should be completely subordinated to the national military health service.<sup>32</sup>

### An explanation of Dutch Red Cross-scepticism

That the Netherlands in general not overenthusiastically welcomed Dunant's views, is partly caused by the fact that nearly all Red Cross enthusiasts were protestant Reveil-protagonists. The Netherlands were a religiously and ideologically divided country, and for differing reasons liberals, socialists and Catholics, and non-Reveil-protestants for that matter, were anything but enthusiastic about Dunant's ideas. Amongst those reasons something often described as a typical Dutch characteristic: we'll see what to do when time comes; a characteristic that was, concerning medical care to soldiers, fed by the spontaneous, extensive aid delivered during the war against Belgium in 1830-1831. Many, so was said, did not see the necessity of preparation in times of peace to medical aid in times of war. Also it allegedly was typically Dutch to import or back up innovations only after they fully had proven their worth. Besides Dunant's plan was considered a utopia (and not always a utopia worth living in). And furthermore some adhered to Florence Nightingale's views that it was not a task of private organizations to assist sick or wounded soldiers. Medical care to men fighting for the Fatherland should not be an act of charity but a state concern. Amongst them also quite a number of military medical men who anything but longed for a neutral status. They were part of the Dutch army and wished to remain an active part of that army. Not the healing of the wounded, but the victory of the Dutch armed forces was their main concern. Scalpel and bandage were not at first medical instruments, but medical weaponry. To all this should, as Nightingale also had done, brought to the fore that healing the wounds of war – and especially voluntary, and therefore cheap healing of wounds – could heighten the change of getting wounded. An organisation like the Red Cross lowered the threshold of war.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> W. J. Knoop, *Over onze verdediging. Een woord aan mijne landgenooten* [On our defence. A word to my fellow countrymen] (Amsterdam 1871) 2-3; H.A. Zegers, *De geneeskundige dienst in de Amsterdamsche linie* [The medical service in the Amsterdam defence line] (Amsterdam 1873) 118.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, inv. nr. 18, Kort overzicht van de geschiedenis van het Roode Kruis in Nederland, without date (1884), 1-2; 'Het Roode Kruis en de Amsterdamsche linie', in: *De Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, 1874, 188-205, especially 188; Rombach, *Nederland en het RK*, 14-15; Pierre Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, Genève, 1985, 89; Verspijck, *Het*



Finally, at least according to Bosscha, it should be added, that on one side the Dutch had an MHS fully living up to its task, and on the other side believed this service would never again be needed because of everlasting peace, at least in Europe. This last plea was strengthened when in the midst of the eighteen sixties at last a territorial disagreement with Luxembourg on the Dutch province of Limburg was settled, although shortly before it had almost made the Dutch go to war with Prussia.<sup>34</sup> However, on the other side, the near war with Prussia may have put the attention on the MHS-weakness strengthening the call for a Red Cross-organisation.

It is not to be wondered that a number of military, military medical and Red Cross men repeatedly would emphasize that the thought the Netherlands would not get involved in warfare, was erroneous. This thought was, as said, widely spread and not only in governmental circles, eager to save every penny possible even if it concerned medical care to wounded soldiers. Between 1850 and 1861, expenses on military medical personnel were lowered with thirty percent, in spite of equal costs of healthcare and in spite of the fact that the rise of budget of the ministry of War in these years was almost entirely spent on extending army personnel. The costs of healthcare stayed between 215 000 and 240 000 guilders, while the costs of personnel continuously decreased from 254 500 to 175 566 guilders.<sup>35</sup>

Also many of those active within Red Cross and army themselves, including the military medical corps, did not dwell often and long on their possible tasks at a possible field of battle. The balance of power, Dutch neutrality and the supposed impregnability of the fortress-Holland, guaranteed Dutch safety. No wonder the MHS was anything but prepared for its task if nevertheless the Dutch would go to war. First of all it was said there was not enough money to keep the service on full war capacity, and secondly it probably would not have a task to fulfil in

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NRK, 68; André Durand, 'L'évolution de l'idée de paix dans la pensée d'Henry Dunant', in: *De l'utopie à la réalité*, Genève, 1988, 353-395, especially 368; Leo van Bergen, *Waarde generaal, voelt u zich wel goed. Geneeskunde, leger, oorlog en vrede*, Nijmegen 1991, 38-42; C. Tazelaar, 'Stemmen uit den eersten tijd van de Nederlandsche Roode-Kruisbeweging', in: *Het boek van de Prinses voor het Roode Kruis*, Amsterdam 1940, 235-245, especially 235.

<sup>34</sup> Bevaart, *Nederlandse defensie*, 394.

<sup>35</sup> Idem, 160; H. Hardenberg, *Overzicht der voornaamste bepalingen betreffende de sterkte, zamenstelling, betaling, verzorging en verpleging van het Nederlandsche leger, sedert den Vrede van Utrecht in 1713 tot den tegenwoordigen tijd*, deel 2, Den Haag, 1861, 442-443. 'De Geneesheer op het Slagveld', in: *Onze Tijd*, 5 (1870), second part, 310-323, especially 315-316.



wartime anyway. Some of the military health officers even not dwelled on problems in wartime at all. They focused on problems in peacetime – for instance coming from an epidemic – and how to face them in cooperation with civil healthcare. The reason for this is that they had not enlisted searching battle and glory. They were not eager at all to show their worth near the fields of honour. Their choice had been economical rather than ideological. The army was a way to escape poverty, no matter how poor the salary and slim the possibilities of a fine career.<sup>36</sup>

Although most military health officers were proud to be part of the Dutch armed forces, and although the strength of these forces was first on their mind as well, the hope or even the expectation this strength would ever be tested, was all but absent. They mostly were part of low societal classes and tried to climb the ladder through the non-academical medical study at the so called 'Rijksweekschool' (Royal medical teaching school). Medically – and often also politically – spoken their views often were progressive. Some of them are found in the lists of men introducing social medicine.

All in all it is no wonder the judgment on the MHS must be negative,<sup>37</sup> if we are guided by the thought that the service should be prepared for its task in wartime at all times, as was uttered by a health officer in the midst of the nineteenth century in the magazine *De Nieuwe Spectator* (The New Spectator), by the way contradicting the opinion of the editors.<sup>38</sup> The opinion that there was no need for a Red Cross in the Netherlands because the MHS was fully prepared to do its job, could therefore only be the result of wishful thinking; an underestimation of what this job would encompass, or the thought there would be no job in wartime to fulfil. It only strengthened the will of Red Cross-protagonists to establish

<sup>36</sup> 'Hoe zal men onze toekomstige officier van gezondheid voor de militaire dienst kunnen behouden', in: *De Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, 1867, 290-294; 'Hoe een toekomstig officier van gezondheid nu reeds over zijne betrekking denkt', in: *De Nieuwe Spectator*, 1863-1864, 102-105. The closing sentences of this last article are: 'O! If only I was allowed to speak, I could tell you everything about it. But the minister has forbidden it, and when in service one has to obey. So therefore I keep silent.'

<sup>37</sup> A. H. M. Kerkhoff, 'De militair-geneeskundige dienst en de medische hervormingen in de negentiende eeuw', in: D. de Moulin (red.), *'s-Rijksweekschool voor Militair Geneeskundigen te Utrecht (1822-1865)*, Amsterdam, 1988, 3-16, especially 4-8; *Grieven der Geneeskundige Dienst in Nederlandsch-Indië*, Batavia, 1867, passim, but especially 3-5, 50-51; 'Open brief over de geneeskundige dienst in Nederlandsch-Indië', in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 23 (1861), part I, nr. 3, 172-186, passim, but especially 173; E. S. Houwaart, *De Hygiënisten. Artsen, staat en volksgezondheid in Nederland 1840-1890*, Groningen, 1991, 341-350.

<sup>38</sup> 'Geneeskundige dienst', in: *De Nieuwe Spectator*, 1855-1856, 463-471, especially 464, 467-471.



a Dutch organisation for it would fill the, in their eyes, all too real shortcomings of the service and on top, being an organisation of volunteers, keep expenses limited.

### Finally a Dutch Red Cross

So, despite the role men like Basting and Van de Velde played in setting up the International Red Cross, a Dutch Red Cross-organisation was anything but easily established, and when it finally came of ground it was not the result of private enterprise, but, as said, by a Royal Decision of King William III. And to finish, it was set up in a time of generally liberal, more or less humanistic reign, but nevertheless in the midst of a two year conservative interregnum.

In 1866 William joyfully had accepted the resign of the liberal Fransen van de Putte-administration, because of a conflict with the minister of Colonial Affairs. He then called to office the conservative Van Zuylen-Heemskerk-administration, which would remain in office until the midst of 1868. This government too could not solve the colonial difficulties but it soon found a new *pièce de résistance*: strengthening the in conservative eyes by liberal governments for years neglected defence.<sup>39</sup> Setting up the Red Cross must be seen in this light, but the immediate cause was an international conference on aid in times of war to be held in Paris at end of August 1867. To avoid the shame of absence, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July Royal Decision nr. 60 was signed at last calling into being the 'Dutch Society for the Lending of Aid to Sick and Wounded Warriors in Times Of War, whether or not the Netherlands themselves are involved'.<sup>40</sup> By the way, these last words have not always been adhered to. In the First World War, for instance, no DRC-ambulance crossed the border for all the men, women and resources of the DRC should be available in case the Dutch army would get involved in the battle after all.<sup>41</sup>

But all this does not mean we should point at the Dutch King as the sole founder of the DRC. The man who should get at least part of the

<sup>39</sup> Bevaart, *Nederlandse defensie*, 314, 322, 352-353.

<sup>40</sup> Royal Decision, 19-7-1867, art. 1; Beelaerts van Blokland, *Enkele hoofdpunten*, 5; Verspijck, *Het NRK*, 69, 296; 'Verslag van het internationale congres der maatschappijen tot hulpverschaffing aan zieken en gekwetsten in tijden van oorlog (gehouden te Parijs van 26-31 augustus 1867)', in: *Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*, 1867, deel 1, 561-566.

<sup>41</sup> Leo van Bergen, *De Zwaargewonden Eerst? Het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis en het vraagstuk van oorlog en vrede 1867-1945*, Rotterdam, 1994, 210-211.



praise as well is before mentioned Verwey and in his footprints the conservative minister of War J. A. van den Bosch. On request of Van den Bosch, in 1866 Verwey published the *Report on Setting Up a Committee to Nurse Sick and Wounded Warriors in Times of War*. This report was handed over to the king.<sup>42</sup> Thereupon the minister, convinced that Dunant's ideas would strengthen the Dutch army at little cost, persuaded William to indeed set up such a committee.<sup>43</sup> This not only means the Paris exhibition was indeed but an immediate cause and not the underlying cause, it also means that it indeed was William's hand who called the society into being, but this hand was led by others.

In 1869, closing an exhibition in The Hague on military medical instruments, William made clear he was fairly easily convinced. Not only did he regard it 'one of my most dear obligations' to ease and better the fate of wounded and sick warriors, he also made clear 'the interest of fleet and army, of which I am proud to hold a rank, are very near to my heart'. By the way, Moynier was one of the members of the jury at this exhibition, and he noticed that unofficially the Dutch organisation was simply called the Red Cross. According to Rombach, back in Geneva he addressed several national organisations to adopt that name.<sup>44</sup>

### The first board

Twelve days after the decision was published the honorary members were made known: besides Dunant, they were Basting, Van de Velde and Knoop, so exactly those who had failed setting up the organisation themselves. The board was presented on 15 August, just in time to give *acte de présence* in Paris.<sup>45</sup> The first main committee was constituted out of 28 The Hague dignitaries, on proposal of the ministries of War and Navy,<sup>46</sup> giving it an almost exclusive conservative character. Amongst them eight military men, four health officers and one civilian physician. To be named are H. Hardenberg, the very influential, conservative,

<sup>42</sup> Archive Hoofdbestuur NRK, inv. nr. 309, archival piece 20a, 20b.

<sup>43</sup> 'Het Roode Kruis en de Amsterdamsche linie', in: *De Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, 1874, 188-205, especially 189.

<sup>44</sup> *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part I, 89; Rombach, *Nederland en het RK*, 28-29.

<sup>45</sup> Beelaerts van Blokland, *Enkele hoofdpunten*, 5; Verspijck, *Het NRK*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part II, 351; W. J. F. Nuyens, *Het Roode Kruis: een woord tot mijnen landgenooten*, Haarlem, 1970, 19; A. R. J. Stumpel, M. J. van Lieburg, 'Het Nederlandse Rode Kruis als opleider van verpleegsters 1867-1897', in: *Spiegel Historiae*, 19, 1 (Jan. 1984), 23-29, especially 24.



secretary-general of the War department and chief quartermaster at the military administration; A. Klerck, secretary-general of the ministry of Naval Affairs; J.J. Sas, inspector of the army's MHS, and J.J. van Mulken, who became minister of War in 1868. Although thereupon this retired, Roman-Catholic, politically independent lieutenant-general put down his presidency of the Red Cross department 'transport and means of housing', he stayed on as member of the main committee. This was seen as 'proof once again of the interest in our society which certainly will be approved by all'.<sup>47</sup> Bosscha became president and the as Van Mulken politically independent retired lieutenant-general C. T. van Meurs vice-president.<sup>48</sup> To cover the first costs, the ministry of War, in which the DRC was incorporated, presented a gift of 1842.25 guilders.<sup>49</sup> It also offered the building in which the DRC found its first shelter, near the place where the army's MHS had its quarters. According to the proceedings of the first general assembly, 'this place could not have been chosen better'.<sup>50</sup>

There is no doubt that as a consequence of the setting up by William III himself; the personal ties with the government, especially the ministries of War and Navy; by making the DRC part of ministry of War, and by placing the responsibility for executing the Royal Decision in the hands of the mentioned ministries, the independence in relation to the state, nevertheless agreed upon, suffered. Not for nothing G.M. Verspijck, author of the 1967 book on 100 years of DRC, spoke of an independence 'in an abbreviated form'. Although the organisation was in charge of the activities undertaken by her, in times of war the government would have to be able to rely on the personnel and material support of the DRC.<sup>51</sup> In 1895 the Royal Decision was changed tightening the strings with the military even more.<sup>52</sup>

### The main committee and the local branches

As a consequence of the 1865 healthcare regulations of Thorbecke and the 1876 law on higher education, the opening years of the DRC fell in a time military healthcare was raised to an academic level, finally put to law in 1880. However, the pupils of the former non-academic Royal

<sup>47</sup> *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part I, 19-20.

<sup>48</sup> Nuyens, *Het Roode Kruis*, 21-23.

<sup>49</sup> *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part I, 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*, 13; Verspijck, *Het NRK*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Verspijck, *het NRK*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Van Bergen, *De zwaargewonden eerst*, 154-160.



Medical Teaching School for a long time kept playing a role in the DRC.<sup>53</sup> Amongst them general A. A. J. Quanjer – DRC-representative at the Red Cross-conferences at St. Petersburg (1902) and London (1907) and at the deliberations on the Second Geneva Convention (1906)<sup>54</sup> – and M. W. C. Gori, who by the way loathed the teaching school's education,<sup>55</sup> and who, more importantly, looked upon war as a blessing to mankind.<sup>56</sup> But men like Quanjer or Gori, and Basting, for that matter, were not the only healthcare officers influencing the Red Cross thoughts, ideas and activities. Be it not on an academic level, they had enjoyed a medical education. A part of the military medical echelon, however, was medically almost illiterate. It concerned men who were made medical officers after having put on some bandages during the war with Belgium 35 years before. Especially because of support of William III,<sup>57</sup> these 'military quacks' kept on playing a role within the Red Cross. But the actual ambulance work – starting at the Prussian-Franco war of 1870-1871 – was done by young doctors combining medical knowledge and a sense for adventure.

The discrepancy between a medically partly incompetent board and the more thorough medical knowledge of the ones actually doing the job, is probably one of the causes of the quickly emerging problems between the conservative main board and more progressive local branches.<sup>58</sup> However, one should take care not to exaggerate these conflicts. Mostly, even after the most turbulent meetings, the silent majority turned out to be an obedient majority accepting the main boards propositions without any fundamental changes.<sup>59</sup> This obedience certainly is in part a consequence of the Royal offspring, but not its only one.

<sup>53</sup> M. J. van Lieburg, 'De tweede geneeskundige stand (1818-1865). Een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het medisch beroep in Nederland', in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 96 (1983), 433-453, especially 450-453; Idem, 'De academisering van de militair-geneeskundige opleiding in Nederland (1860-1880)', in: De Moulin, 's Rijkskweekschool, 81-94.

<sup>54</sup> Van Bergen, *De zwaargewonden eerst*, for instance 174-176, 221-230.

<sup>55</sup> 'Tets over de militaire geneeskundige dienst', in: *De Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, 1873, 285-301, especially 286-287.

<sup>56</sup> Van Bergen, *De zwaargewonden eerst*, 138-145.

<sup>57</sup> Bevaart, *Nederlandse defensie*, 26-27.

<sup>58</sup> S. Hermanides, 'De vredesconferentie en de medische faculteit', in: *Geneeskundige courant voor het koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, jrg. 61 (1907), 239-243, especially 239.

<sup>59</sup> *Handelingen van het Nederlandsche Roode Kruis*, part II, 348-349.



### The consequences of the Royal offspring

Although protestants remained in front,<sup>60</sup> because of the Royal Decision men and women of all religions and ideologies joined the Red Cross-ranks, for in their eyes the Royal Decision had made it a national and not anymore an ideologically driven society. Nevertheless, part of the liberals – of whom many hated the authoritarian William III – and the majority of socialists remained sceptic, one of the reasons the DRC would not gain popularity of some substance before the 1950's. In the short run this was however also the result of the words 'in times of war' ending the Society's name. With the short time exceptions of the Franco-Prussian and the Boer-war to which ambulances were sent, this meant invisibility in the decades of peace, at least in Europe, up until 1914.

But, as said, there now were also non-Reveillists joining the club. For instance catholic doctor W.J.F. Nuyens. He embraced the Red Cross because he thought war was an inevitable phenomenon, leaving the healing of wounds the only sane medical response. But he also embraced the organisation, as he said himself, 'out of love for our King, our country'.<sup>61</sup> Working for the Red Cross therefore was 'a noble, nationalist task'.<sup>62</sup>

Socialist M.W. Scheltema supported the DRC for rather different reasons. Contrary to Nuyens he strove for disarmament and abolishment of standing armies. War-preparation did not secure peace, but would only lead to a next war. But if prevention of war would fail, the existence of a Red Cross-society could prevent unnecessary suffering within that war, taking care of the wounded the MHS had to leave aside.<sup>63</sup>

It meant that amongst the members of the Red Cross and in the boards of local branches, no longer any part of society was absent. This definitely can be called an advantage, but the way the organisation was established had a disadvantage as well. Due to the royal interference the main board was appointed by the King and the ministry of War. As a consequence, the societal diversity was absent in The Hague. The main board's members were, excluding a seldom exception, conservative members of nobility or the military. It has defined its character and decisions until at least after World War Two. Furthermore, the manner

<sup>60</sup> J.J.L. Ten Kate, *Het Roode Zwaard, het Roode Kruis. Zang des tijds*, Amsterdam 1870; F.W. Donker Curtius, 'De Roode Kruis-gedachte', in: *Het Boek van de Prinses voor het Roode Kruis*, Amsterdam, 1940, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Nuyens, *Het Roode Kruis*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, 5-6, 18.

<sup>63</sup> M.W. Scheltema, *Over den Oorlog en het Roode Kruis*, Amsterdam, 1870.



Je cite d'après: Charles DRECHSLER, «Auguste Bruehl, 1815-1881», Samuel Lévy, 1906-1896, 1896, réédité dans la «Conférence de Genève», *Monographies et études*, tome 1, 1906, pp. 241-245, avec l'exemple Genève 1914.

<sup>64</sup> Gumpert, *Dunant*, 137, 200; Dieter Riesenberger, *Für Humanität in Krieg und Frieden. Das Internationale Rote Kreuz 1863-1977*, Göttingen, 1992, 27-28.