In the early modern era the supply of news changed considerably due to the appearance of various new news media. Already in the sixteenth century news reports no longer reached the population just through the spoken word, songs or manuscript texts. Printed news tidings and pamphlets, engravings and cartographic material began to diversify the availability of traditional oral and manuscript media. From the seventeenth century onwards the printed newspaper increasingly satiated demands for coverage of current affairs.

A substantial part of early modern news was devoted to coverage of the wars that plagued the European continent. The Dutch Republic was involved in numerous wars, sometimes as a protagonist, at other times as a mediating neutral power. News of military confrontations was important. Regents, merchants and ordinary citizens wished to know the latest developments and outcomes of conflicts for a variety of reasons. Many were curious about the strength and size of armies and fleets, the courage or cowardice of allied or enemy troops, the tensions between allied partners, terms of surrender, peace treaties and many other military facts and figures. Such interest is universal, but the means to satisfy this curiosity are of course bound to their time, and are closely connected with technological and infrastructural developments.

The publication of newspapers and other printed news media fostered an expanding reading public and made ever more information available. For potentates and princes this development was a double-edged sword. Their political actions were influenced by the media, even if they did not have to justify their decisions. The authorities hoped to exercise control over the media by regulating the activities of news writers and publishers, implementing censorship and manipulating the news itself. But they could rarely prevent or restrict the emergence of political unrest or an independent public opinion, especially in threatening conditions.

* Translated by Arthur der Weduwen. The Dutch version was published as ‘Oorlogen in het vroegmoderne nieuws: Nederlandse nieuwsbronnen over militaire confrontaties’, *Historisch Tijdschrift Leidschrift*, 22 (2007), pp. 103–121.
This chapter concerns the dissemination and interpretation of war news in the Dutch Republic. The opening of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–1784) is discussed in detail in order to illustrate some of the themes of war reporting.

1 Rumours of Wars, Newsletters, Pamphlets, Engravings and Maps

Before the emergence of the printing press the Dutch population had to rely on oral reports and handwritten newsletters for news of wars. Pedlars, messengers and other travellers were questioned in taverns and other public places about their observations and experiences. News reports were also read aloud and sometimes messengers might leak confidential information from diplomatic despatches. We can only guess at the content of these oral reports, but the importance of this medium is confirmed explicitly by chroniclers of conflict in diaries and other egodocuments. For example, the diary of the secretary of Groningen, Johan Julsing, which he kept in the years before the siege of the city in 1594, contains numerous passages which open with the phrases “word has arrived” or “it is said that”. Julsing also notes more detailed introductions, including statements such as “a merchant arrived here who has said that” and “the news that the sailors have brought concerns”, and so forth. On 20 July 1590 Julsing wrote that: “It is said in Germany that the King of Spain has recruited 10,000 cavalry and six regiments of foot soldiers”. This report, according to the secretary, was false, as he added to the report in Hebrew characters the statement “Lies”.

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2 Jan van den Broek, Het geheime dagboek van de Groninger stadssecretaris Johan Julsing: Inleiding, tekst, vertaling en toelichting (Assen: Groninger Bronnenreeks 2, 2006), e.g. pp. 64, 72, 78, 91–96.