

William of Orange (1533–1584)

William I, called William of Orange, was the leader of the Dutch Republic. He was born of a German count of Nassau, William the Rich and Juliana of Stolbergen.

A cannonball forever changed William I's life when it killed his childless uncle during the Hapsburg siege in a French town in 1544.

His uncle, René of Chalons, appointed William his heir. He inherited vast property, including a property in Southern France called Orange.

That's when William became a prince.

Emperor Charles V (Holy Roman Empire, Spain, and the Netherlands) summoned William to the Netherlands. The newly made prince became a page at the court and became a loyal Catholic.

Thus William I was transformed into a brilliant leader. He became a wealthy nobleman, which was only strengthened by his marriage to Anna van Buren.

Then under the reign of Philip II of Spain, successor of Charles V in the 1560s, everything changed drastically.

That's because he went from a pillar leader of the community to a leader to an armed group that was against the Habsburg rule in a region called the Low Countries which is now the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

This started because of his second marriage to Anna of Saxony whose family were enemies of the Hasburgs and Lutherans.

This led William to be more critical of the religious persecutions and martyrs of Protestants and more critical of Catholicism. And naturally, this led to doubts with the government that he was loyal.

He began to champion religious tolerance and became critical of Philip II's harsh religious policy. In 1564 he gave a speech that criticized leaders who forced the consciences of subjects.

That's when he found himself in conflict with Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle whom he deeply detested. He also found himself in conflict with the new Philip II regime.

Orange viewed Granvelle as a mere upstart and so William and other nobles formed an anti-Granvelle league.

Philip's harsh religious persecution led to rebellion. This led to in 1566 the Netherlands experiencing a crisis.

Orange tried to steer a middle course between the factions. He failed because he was distrusted by each side. He fled to find rest and peace with friends in Dillenburg in 1561.

He would not find it as his property was confiscated when he did not comply with a summons to the Council of the Blood that was formed to counter the opposition. Then William's eldest son was taken. William the Orange was now an exile.

In 1568 he launched a military campaign armed with mostly propaganda. It failed. He failed to help the people who were virtual slaves to the harsh regime.

Then on April 1, 1572, pirates who carried letters of the brand or marque of William the Orange seized a small port. Other countries like Holland and Zeeland opened their gates to Orange.

They chose the lesser of evils, these pirates called the Sea Beggars. He was recognized as a leader of the Netherlands. When he could not get some regions to accept him, he withdrew to Holland, expecting to die.

Civil war ensued and through that William became a Calvinist. In the darkest hour he became the finest political leader. He had strong faith in God, he was charismatic, and pragmatic.

As a result of his leadership, the rebels overcame their squabbles. A treaty happened and Orange was swept into Brussels as a victor.

Unfortunately, the rebels were too fractured so it didn't last. In 1583 Orange was declared a traitor by Philip II. A price was put on his head and his popularity plunged, in part due to his support of the French.

He was killed by Balthazar Gérard, a French Catholic Zealot on July 10, 1584 by a pistol.

His grave was poor and his dream for a free Netherland seemed impossible, but 20 years later a statue was raised for William the Orange, the leader of the Dutch Republic.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/benelux-history-biographies/william-orange>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/arts-construction-medicine-science-and-technology-magazines/william-i-orange-1533-1584>

Questions:

What does the Spanish Inquisition have to do with this history?

Who was William III?