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DUTCH DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS, 1933-1940

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

JOHN R. KENNEDY, MAJ, USA
B.S., United States Military Academy, 1977

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The study concludes that the national civilian and military leadership failed to understand the nature of the German threat in time to effectively prepare its defenses.

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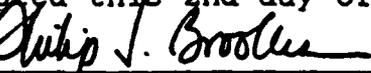
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_____, Thesis Committee Chairman
LTC Arthur T. Frame, M.Ph.


_____, Member, Graduate Faculty
Samuel J. Lewis, Ph.D.


_____, Member, Graduate Faculty
MAJ Keith M. Hitchcock

Accepted this 2nd day of June 1989 by:


_____, Director, Graduate Degree
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ABSTRACT

DUTCH DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS, 1933-1940, by Major John R. Kennedy, USA, 126 pages.

This study is an historical analysis of the military preparations made by the Dutch from the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in 1933 until the German invasion of the Netherlands in 1940. The impact of Dutch history, national character, defense and security policy, national leaders, and the organization of the armed forces is examined based on contemporary accounts and reports submitted to the War Department from American military attachés stationed in Europe.

Among the many conclusions which could be drawn from this investigation are: Dutch defensive preparations during the period were generally inadequate although the total number of soldiers mobilized was entirely sufficient, the national defense and security policy was not based on a realistic appraisal of the German threat or Allied assistance, the Dutch Army was unable to withstand a German invasion alone, the successful Netherlands policy of neutrality in World War I greatly contributed to the nation's attempt to stay out of World War II by remaining neutral, the government possessed few perceived policy options due to the country's neutrality by the spring of 1940, and the national leadership never endeavored to mobilize public opinion to support increased military preparedness.

The study concludes that the national civilian and military leadership failed to understand the nature of the German threat in time to effectively prepare its defenses.

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CHAPTER 1

THE NETHERLANDS AND ITS ARMED FORCES

On 10 May 1940 Germany invaded the Netherlands and four days later the Dutch armed forces surrendered. A cursory glance at such a short campaign would suggest that Dutch defensive preparations were inadequate. However, a study of Dutch actions prior to the German invasion is necessary to determine if the Netherlands could have better prepared its defenses. This paper will develop the theme of Dutch defensive preparations and will seek to answer the question, "Were the Dutch defensive preparations during the period 1933-1940 adequate?" In order to properly respond to this question, the actual military preparations undertaken by the Dutch, the threat perceived by the Dutch government and people, and the maximum feasible defensive preparations that the Netherlands could have taken will be discussed.

The focus of this thesis is on the period 1 January 1939 through 10 May 1940, the period just before the German invasion. The six year period prior to this time is

important also, and a fairly detailed iteration of the pertinent events since Adolf Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor on 30 January 1933 is included. Concurrently with the measures taken to improve the defenses of the home country, the Netherlands increased the military capabilities of its overseas possessions, chiefly in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). These preparations were largely naval, and are not addressed in this study. The preparations of the Dutch Army including the Army's air assets are the central interest of this paper.

The Netherlands had no real reason to fear Germany until Hitler came to power. Beginning in 1933, however, many potentially threatening events occurred which eventually caused the Dutch to realize that their country was in danger. During the mid-1930s the Dutch Army suffered from serious personnel and equipment shortages and was not organized to mobilize quickly. An appreciation of Dutch history, national character, defense and security policy, national leaders, and organization of the armed forces during the 1930s is necessary for an understanding of the defensive preparations made in the sixteen months prior to the German attack.

DUTCH HISTORY THROUGH 1933

The most applicable lesson learned by the Dutch from

their history was that a policy of neutrality was in their best interest. Practically since the beginning of the Dutch Republic in 1579 the country's government realized that non-involvement in European military confrontations was the most beneficial national policy. Even during World War I the Netherlands managed to stay out of the fighting though its southern neighbor, Belgium, was occupied. From 1918 to 1933 the Netherlands allowed its military strength caused by World War I to fade away.

Evidence of Dutch neutrality can be found as far back as the Burgundian period, circa 1450. Since the late 16th century, neutrality was firmly established due to three relatively constant factors. Geopolitically, the Netherlands contained the mouths of three large rivers which were utilized by almost all of western Europe. Economically, the foreign trade generated by these water highways was essential to the financial growth of the country and Europe. Politically, powerful neighbors surrounded the Netherlands. In fact, all Dutch governments from 1880 to 1940 espoused neutrality as their foreign policy.¹

Additional support for Dutch neutrality was the absence of recent participation in a war. Not since Napoleon had the Netherlands been seriously engaged in war. Prior to 1940, the last time the Netherlands had fought in Europe was in 1831 against Belgium. In that ten day

campaign the Dutch lost only three hundred men. Never in Dutch history had the Netherlands fought Germany. The Dutch preferred to remain aloof in European affairs and disputes in order to prevent the disruption of trade and because they had no desire for territorial aggrandizement.²

The country's World War I experience was the foundation of Dutch public and political opinion just prior to World War II. The Netherlands remained neutral throughout World War I and did not fight. The country mobilized in 1914 and remained mobilized throughout the duration of the war. Defense expenditures in 1918 were five times the amount spent in 1933. The Dutch expended much energy and money to maintain full mobilization. Non-involvement in the actual fighting was interpreted as confirmation of the policy of neutrality. The perceived success of avoiding active participation in the war became a strong factor in the attempt to repeat this feat in the face of Hitler twenty years later.³

In the fifteen years between the end of World War I and 1933, the military capabilities of the Netherlands armed forces declined considerably. There were three primary causes for this decrease in effectiveness. Firstly, the Netherlands chose to rely on the new League of Nations and its collective security provisions, and believed that it could therefore economize on defense. Secondly, the people were unwilling to sacrifice so soon after they had undergone

the hardships associated with the blockade and total mobilization between 1914 and 1918. Thirdly, economic concerns brought about by the Depression were instrumental in reducing defense expenditures and thereby decreasing readiness.⁴

Defense budgets declined dramatically in the Netherlands even before the Depression. In 1918 the government spent over 442 million guilders on defense. Total outlays decreased to 127 million guilders in 1920, 93 million in 1924, and 81 million in 1929, the year the Depression began. The Depression affected the Netherlands more deeply than most other European countries due to its devastating impact on world trade. Defense spending even increased to 88 million guilders in 1931 but dropped to 77 million in 1933 and bottomed out at 75 million guilders the following year. In 1923 the government formed the Welter-Idenburg Commission to recommend cuts in government spending. By 1932 the decreased expenditures in the military budget were expected to result in personnel losses in the Army, which were to be absorbed in part by early retirement for officers in the rank of major and below. By 1937, however, the country was sufficiently alarmed to allocate 93 million guilders for defense, and in 1938 that figure increased to 152 million guilders.⁵

A final area of concern which exacerbated an already dismal military situation during the interwar years was the

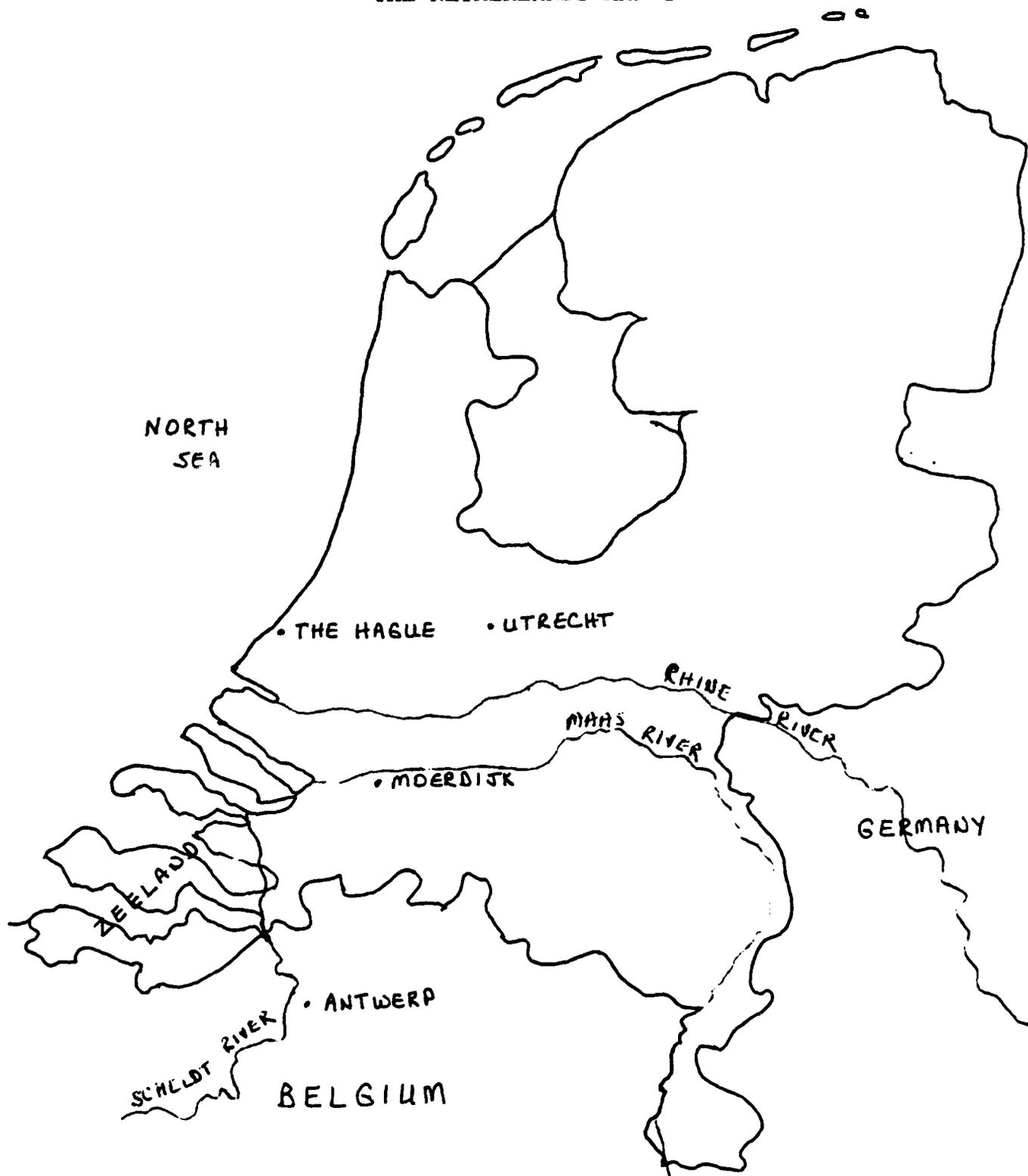
Dutch relationship with Belgium. The Netherlands was highly critical of Belgium's 1920 secret defense agreement with France. In 1925, the Netherlands and Belgium were very close to signing a treaty primarily concerned with a proposed new canal between Antwerp and Moerdijk (see Map 1). At the last minute the Dutch Parliament (the States-General) refused to ratify the treaty which generated more animosity between the two neighbors. Belgium-Netherlands relations did not materially improve until the 1930s when both nations were contemplating the growing threat from Germany.⁴

NATIONAL CHARACTER

The Dutch were not militarily inclined. The typical Dutchman was much more interested in cultural than in military activities. The Netherlands remained a strong proponent of international law and hosted several related conferences. Neutrality was a natural policy for a people among the most pacific in Europe. The nation had fought in the past, but only after extreme provocation- and long ago.

During the interwar period a strong pacifist sentiment continued among the populace, and this anti-military opinion could have been a factor in the absence of Queen Wilhelmina from the Army maneuvers in 1927 and 1928. Consequently, the small cadre of professional officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who trained the new recruits

THE NETHERLANDS—MAP 1



had an "onerous" task, especially since the Netherlands had been at peace for such a long time.⁷ The few volunteers for military service did so almost exclusively because such service was a prerequisite for residence in the NEI. Dutch Army officers realized that the typical Dutchman was averse to soldiering, and the citizenry often displayed contempt at the sight of a soldier in uniform until the late 1930s when the danger of war was obvious. The Netherlands was usually unwilling to spend considerable amounts for defense and did not intend to use its armed forces for ideological or expansionary purposes.⁸

Support for law and order in the international arena was very strong in the Netherlands; the Dutch possessed a veritable fetish for the rule of international law. The country viewed international law as a first line of defense and therefore typically favored the status quo. Dutch faith in international law was so strong that many believed it would even obstruct Hitler.⁹

Many people questioned the willingness of the Dutch to fight. In response, Foreign Minister Eelco Nicolaas van Kleffens wrote that the Dutch "have at all times been ready to defend their liberties."¹⁰ Another Dutchman contended that "the Dutch had always fiercely resisted foreign invaders."¹¹ When MAJ Truman Smith, the American Military Attaché in Berlin visited a Netherlands Army unit in 1936, Dutch officers assured him that the Dutch soldiers would

fight to the finish if the country was invaded and the population aroused. By 1937, public opinion concerning the military shifted, however, as citizen groups formed volunteer military units to guard the frontier and raised money for weaponry. Given the appropriate circumstances, the Dutch had fought before and would fight again.¹²

DEFENSE AND SECURITY POLICY

The defense and security policy pursued by the Netherlands government during the 1930s was based on neutrality in an attempt to avoid provoking Germany. Neutrality, the Dutch believed, would keep the Netherlands out of the impending European war. If forced to fight, the government hoped the Allied nations such as Belgium, France, and Great Britain would come to its rescue. The Dutch, however, never effectively coordinated their defense plans with the Allied nations, for to do so would compromise their strict interpretation of neutrality. The inherent dichotomy in these policies produced fewer policy options as the threat of battle moved closer to the Dutch homeland.

Fear of antagonizing Germany and a consequential invasion were the greatest concerns of the Dutch government. The Netherlands had supported the League of Nations in its denunciation of Italian aggression in Ethiopia in late 1935, but by 1936 realized that the League could no longer

guarantee the country's security. Prior to that year, the Dutch spent little on defense for several reasons, including Prime Minister Hendrik Colijn's desire to maintain a balanced budget, the unpopularity of military service, and the political might of the Socialist Party. Once it became clear to the government that collective security was no longer a viable policy, the country reverted back to the familiar policy of neutrality.¹³

There were two facets of the Dutch neutralist policy. First, the government understood that any neutral nation required a strong military to lend credence to its policy. Therefore, as the World War II Foreign Minister van Kleffens stated, the Netherlands adopted a course of action which called for a "reasonable scale of national armament."¹⁴ The second aspect of the neutral policy concerned the prohibition against any alliances. The Dutch strongly believed that conducting talks with any nation on defense or security issues would be viewed by Germany as an unneutral act, and that any hint of non-neutrality would provoke a German attack.¹⁵

As the likelihood of war continued to increase during the latter years of the decade, the government more strictly interpreted and applied its neutral policy in an effort to give Germany no excuse to invade. The Dutch erected defenses in the west facing Great Britain and in the south opposite Belgium as well as in the east against

Germany. The government assigned two missions to the armed forces: maintain neutrality and defend the entire country from attack. The land borders on the east and south alone totaled 700 kilometers and the coastline in the west was also to be defended. Although Germany was the only recognized threat, the armed forces were required to give the impression that all possible invasion routes had been considered in the nation's defense plan. Only then could the Netherlands appear completely neutral. Government censorship of the press prevented publication of any articles condemning German aggression or persecution. Strict neutrality meant, therefore, that the country must appear to be as concerned with a British or Belgian invasion as a German attack.¹⁴

The government furthermore never effectively coordinated for Allied support in case of war. The Dutch interpretation of strict neutrality prevented cooperation, collaboration, or even staff talks with other countries. Never did the government admit to consultations with another country, and the top political leaders abided by the intent of this policy almost to the letter. The Dutch did not coordinate their defensive strategy even with Belgium and each country was in reality forming its war plans in isolation. No coordination had been made with British forces either, but until the bitter end the Dutch expected Great Britain to come to their assistance if invaded. In

fact, the British never developed a plan to occupy the Netherlands.¹⁷

Some low level coordination was accomplished with the Allies, however. The Chief of the Dutch Military Intelligence Service, MG J.W. van Dorschot, consulted with Czech, British, and French intelligence in the late 1930s. The majority of van Dorschot's collaboration was with France, and he even visited GEN Maurice Gamelin in France while on personal leave. The Dutch Supreme Commander, LTG I.H. Reynders, personally talked with the French concerning occupation of Zeeland if Germany attacked the Netherlands. The Dutch preferred to substitute principally economic agreements with smaller nations, such as the Oslo Group, for political treaties or military alliances with larger countries.¹⁸

The Dutch continued to adhere to their neutral policy for many reasons. Firstly, they perceived the Allies to be weak and therefore unable or unwilling to commit military assistance to the defense of the Netherlands. Although the Dutch political leadership understood that small nations could not oppose Hitler alone, they also believed that the large European nations were not interested in cooperation during the 1930s. Secondly, neutrality was widely accepted as a successful policy in World War I. Thirdly, neutrality made sense economically for a country that traded equally with Great Britain and Germany.

Fourthly, the central location of the country between Germany, France, and Great Britain caused the government to believe it was also caught in the middle geographically. Fifthly, some leaders did not want to rely on other, unreliable nations for the country's defense. Sixthly, since all the political parties supported the policy it was perceived to be in the public interest. Seventhly, the Dutch believed their neutrality provided the belligerents with a place to go in order to discuss peace propositions and other matters.¹⁹

Lastly, and significantly, many Dutchmen thought that they would not be involved in a war. Even after the fall of Poland, most Dutch citizens thought the possibility of a major war in Western Europe was remote due to the large French Army. As late as the night before the 10 May invasion, Foreign Minister van Kleffens did not think the Netherlands would have to fight. He insisted that neutrality was the only feasible course of action for a country in the Netherlands' geographical and political position and that the British both understood and agreed with the Dutch view. Any other policy would have proved "suicidal" for the country, he argued.²⁰

Some Dutchmen opposed the government's neutral stance and were not optimistic concerning the chances of escaping invasion. A Professor Anema spoke out against the government policy in the First Chamber of the States-

General, and G.H. de Slotemaker de Bruine criticized neutrality in a speech to the Netherlands Christian Students Association. LTG (Retired) Schuurman called for an open alliance with the West. Within the Foreign Ministry a contingent of officials believed it would take a "miracle" to prevent a German invasion.²¹ The great deficiency of the Army in equipment and weapons invited an attack, and they maintained that the only hope for the Netherlands was to resist a German invasion long enough to allow the Allies time to intervene.²²

To the Dutch policymakers, neutrality seemed to be the natural course to follow for a nation that had been economizing on defense and that primarily relied on inundations, not its armed forces, for defense. The Netherlands possessed an extremely limited capability to manufacture modern weaponry, and few of the weapons ordered from France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States were ever delivered. Prime Minister Colijn appeared unconcerned about these facts when he stated in 1937 he could halt an invasion by pushing a button to open the floodgates. By 1939, however, the Dutch leaders perceived that they possessed few policy options due to the country's military unpreparedness. As Wels so aptly summarized,

Dutch policy on the eve of World War II can be characterized best as a voluntary, permanent policy of neutrality that started from the assumption that good conduct and standards of

justice and decency would perhaps prevail again over power-political factors in the war that was thought to be unavoidable.²³

NATIONAL LEADERS

The Netherlands government in the 1930s was a parliamentary democracy with a sovereign from the House of Orange. The Prime Minister or Premier was the head of the government, and Queen Wilhelmina wore the Dutch crown. Other influential governmental positions regarding national security were the Foreign, Defense, and Finance Ministers. The Chief of the General Staff was the senior Army officer in the Netherlands during peacetime and the most important military leader in the country. The Commander of the Navy was a separate position except in emergencies or war, when a senior Army officer was appointed as the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy. The Commander in Chief of the NEI Armed Forces possessed an entirely separate command consisting of his own army and elements of the Royal Netherlands Navy stationed in the East Indies.

Of all the national civilian and military leaders in the Netherlands during the period 1933-1938, Prime Minister Colijn was undoubtedly the most prominent and capable. A former officer in the NEI Army, Colijn was the principal leader in the Netherlands during the entire interwar period. His first government was from 1925 to 1926. Active in economic organizations of the League of Nations, Colijn was

also the leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party. In 1933 the country was in the depths of the Depression and Colijn, due partly to his knowledge of economics, was asked to form another government. He led four different cabinets between July 1933 and August 1939. Regarded as "the strongest political personality in the country"²⁴ when he took over as Prime Minister in 1933, Colijn was also hailed as "probably the most influential politician of the time" in the Netherlands.²⁵

The Queen of the Netherlands since 1898 was Wilhelmina Paulina Maria, who was born in 1880. As the monarch, she was intimately involved in the formation of new cabinets and was one of the four primary decision makers in the country during the tense months just prior to the invasion. Constitutionally, the crown was also the Supreme Commander of the Army and Navy and had sole responsibility for declaring war and peace. Crown Princess Juliana, her daughter, married Prince Bernhard from Germany in 1937 and was heir to the throne.²⁶

The senior military officer during this period was LTG I.H. Reynders. He followed LTG H.A. Seyffardt as Chief of the General Staff in 1934 and served in that post until 1940. As Chief of the General Staff he worked directly for the Minister of Defense. During the majority of his tenure the Defense Minister was J.J.C. van Dijk, but in August 1937 LTC A.Q.H. Dijkhoorn became the Minister of Defense.

Conflicts between Reynders and Dijxhoorn arose and were factors in Reynders' resignation in February 1940.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

The organization of the Dutch Army in peacetime resembled a conscript training organization more than a combat force. The Minister of Defense supervised the Chief of the General Staff who was responsible for military policy, training, maneuvers, foreign intelligence collection, and mobilization plans of the Field Army. In time of war, major subordinate commands under the Commander in Chief of Land and Sea Forces included the Field Army, the Navy, the Military and Naval Air Forces, the Fortification Troops, and the Lines of Communication. Field Army strength requirements in war were estimated to be 270,000 men, yet on 1 April 1933 only 28,800 soldiers were on active duty. On 31 December 1936 the Army possessed 7,907 officers and NCOs plus the 23,184 conscripts that had been called to service that year.²⁷

Peacetime units were maintained at skeleton levels, and generally became the next higher level unit upon mobilization for war. In peace, the major units in the Field Army were eight brigades in four divisions. These brigades became divisions in wartime, and formed four divisional groups of two divisions each. A division in

peacetime totalled 698 officers and soldiers; in time of war the division was authorized at least 10,251 men. Each of the brigades was assigned three regiments, each of which in time of war was authorized three battalions and one battery of light artillery and light mortars. The peacetime regiment, however, possessed only one of its authorized twelve infantry companies plus a Specialist Company consisting of signal, machinegun, and trench mortar assets. Even some of these companies, which were organized with four platoons, were understrength.²⁰

Annual training within the Netherlands Army was driven by the nation's conscription policy. The Military Law of 1922 mandated that 19,500 men would join the Army annually as conscripts. In any given year, approximately 63,000 nineteen year old males were available for the draft, and 23,000 were selected in order to achieve the 19,500 man figure of trained soldiers. The initial terms of service were five and one-half months for infantry and artillery conscripts and fifteen months for cavalrymen. Consequently, the typical regiment received 550 conscripts annually. Over half of these men reported on or about 15 March and trained with the unit until after the fall maneuvers. The balance arrived for duty on 1 October. During the year the regimental strength could fluctuate from approximately two hundred in the winter to as many as nine hundred during the maneuvers in the fall. Reservists who were called up for

the maneuvers served for ten to twenty-one days. Except for the maneuver period, regiments were little more than schools for conscript training and were unable to train effectively for their wartime missions.²⁹

The Netherlands defense plan depended on frontier units to delay an invader until the inundations could be executed and mobilization accomplished. By 1937 the frontier defense mission was the responsibility of the Military Police plus eighteen reserve battalions. These forces were to man the concrete pillboxes along the border, protect bridges and roads, create obstacles, and prepare defenses to cover these obstacles by fire. While these forces delayed the enemy, massive flooding surrounding the densely populated western provinces would create an eight to fifteen kilometer wide corridor of water protecting "Fortress Holland" from invasion. Inundation stations were under round the clock military guard and control even in peacetime. At every conceivable crossing site the Dutch constructed fortifications, and by the time an attacker reached this line of water mobilization should be completed. The Dutch General Staff made no attempt to keep the plans secret, and believed the more the Germans knew the lesser the chance of invasion.³⁰

Perhaps the best American insight into the Dutch Army in the 1933-1938 period was provided by the Military Attache in Berlin, MAJ Smith, based on his 21 January, 1936

visit to the Brigade of Grenadiers and Jaegers near The Hague. He observed officers teaching conscripts subjects that had little if any relation to the officers' wartime tasks. Neither unit had its authorized horses on hand to train with; these were to be provided upon mobilization. The entire Army needed a total of 15,000 horses to go to war. Officer promotions were pitifully slow. The Grenadier Regimental Commander had just been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel within the year, yet he was retiring due to age (he was sixty) within six months. Promotion to Captain was generally twenty years, so the average Captain was in his forties and Majors were over fifty. In summary, the Dutch Army was neither manned nor equipped to defend the country in the mid 1930s, and when mobilized would have to completely change its peacetime organization.³¹

ENDNOTES

1. Bernard H.M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 342. See also Cornelius Boudewijn Wels, Aloofness and Neutrality: Studies on Dutch Foreign Relations and Policy-Making Institutions (Utrecht: Hes Publishers, 1982), p. 15 and Hendrik Riemens, The Netherlands: Story of a Free People (New York: Eagle Books, 1944), p. 87. The three rivers were the Rhein (Rhine), Maas (Meuse), and the Scheldt.

2. Vlekke, p. 342. See also Oscar Mohr, "Netherlands Keeps Cool in Midst of War Alarms," The New York Times, 12 February 1939, IV, p. 6 and Wels, p. 15. The New York Times hereafter cited as NYT.

3. E.N. van Kleffens, The Rape of the Netherlands (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p. 43. Hereafter cited as Rape. See also Netherlands Information Bureau, Netherlands News, 1 December 1941, Vol. 1-2, p. 81 and Amry J. Vandenbosch, "Netherlands Foreign Policy," in The Netherlands, ed. Bartholomew Landheer, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), p. 147.

4. P.L.G. Doorman, Military Operations in the Netherlands from 10th-17th May, 1940 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1944), p. 12.

5. Netherlands News, 1 December 1941, Vol. 1-2, p. 81. See also C.M. Schulten, "The Netherlands and its Army (1900-1940)" in Je Maintiendrai: A Concise History of the Dutch Army, ed. H. Amersfoort and P.H. Kamphuis, (The Hague: Historical Section of the Royal Netherlands Army, 1985), p. 79; MAJ Truman Smith, "The Defense of the Netherlands East Indies," Military Intelligence Division (MID) Report No. 14,499, 29 January 1936, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives (NA); Gerald Newton, The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey 1795-1977 (London: Ernest Benn, 1978), pp. 122-123 and 132; and "Reductions in Dutch Army," G-2 Report File No. 7214, 27 September 1932, RG 165, NA. Disparities in the amount of defense funds allocated for a particular year exist between various sources. For instance in 1935 Amersfoort and Kamphuis state 76 million guilders were earmarked for defense yet MID Report No. 14,499 lists a figure of 53.4 million guilders. Most of the amounts in the text are from Amersfoort and Kamphuis who list all defense budgets from 1920 to 1935. A guilder was worth fifty-three cents on 21 February 1940 (NYT, p. 7).

6. Wels, p. 79. See also Riemens, p. 90 and Walter B. Maass, The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945 (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), pp. 16-17.

7. Doorman, Foreward.

8. Maass, pp. 16-17. See also MAJ Edwin M. Watson, "The Dutch Army Maneuvers of 1928," G-2 Report No. 6448, 5 October 1928, RG 165, NA; MAJ Smith, "The Home Army of the Netherlands," MID Report No. 14,503, 31 January 1936, RG 165, NA; Adriaan J. Barnouw, The Dutch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 7; and James H. Huizinga, "Holland in the War," in Landheer, p. 411. The Queen's appearance at the annual Army maneuvers showed her support for the military. The fact that she chose not to attend in the late 1920s indicated the country's, not necessarily her disdain for the armed forces at that time.

9. Wels, p. 18. See also Eelco Nicolaas Van Kleffens, Juggernaut Over Holland: The Dutch Foreign Minister's Personal Story of the Invasion of the Netherlands (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 22, hereafter cited as Juggernaut.

10. Rape, p. 82.

11. Maass, p. 14.

12. MID Report No. 14,503. See also LTC H.H. Fuller, "Published or Spoken Views on National Defense Policy," MID Report #22,537-W, 9 June 1936, RG 165, NA. MAJ (later COL) Smith was born at West Point, NY in 1893. His father was killed in action in the Philippines in 1900. A 1915 graduate of Yale University, he was commissioned in the Regular Army as an infantry officer in 1916. In World War I, MAJ Smith served as a Company and Battalion Commander in the 3rd Infantry Division and was awarded the Silver Star. In 1922, he became the first American to interview Hitler. From 1928 to 1932 MAJ Smith served at Ft. Benning, GA with George C. Marshall who became his "mentor." Assigned as the Military Attaché in Berlin from August 1935 to April 1939, MAJ Smith was determined to awaken the War Department to the German threat. He envisioned, coordinated, and hosted COL Charles A. Lindbergh in his visits to Germany from 1936 to 1939. MAJ Smith became embroiled in the ensuing public furor over these visits, especially when he and Lindbergh received the Service Cross of the German Eagle from Reichsmarshall Hermann Goering in October 1938. Diagnosed with diabetes that same year, only the advent of war allowed him to continue serving in the Army. He retired from the Army and unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 1946, and died in 1970. See Robert Hessen, ed., Berlin Alert: The Memoirs and Reports of Truman Smith (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1984).

13. Maass, pp. 15-16. See also Landheer, p. 147; Rape, p. 10-11; Samuel H. Cuff, The Face of War (New York: Julian Messner, 1942), p. 20; Werner Warmbrunn, The Dutch Under German Occupation, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 4; and MID Report No. 14,499.

14. Juggernaut, p. 9.

15. Juggernaut, p. 23. See also Wels, p. 19.

14. Juggernaut, p. 9.
15. Juggernaut, p. 23. See also Wels, p. 19.
16. Cuff, p. 111. See also Doorman, pp. 26-27 and Wels, p. 21.
17. Maass, p. 15. See also Vlekke, p. 350.
18. Frederic S. Pearson, The Weak State in International Crisis: The Case of the Netherlands in the German Invasion Crisis of 1939-40 (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), pp. 57, 59, and 61 and Andreas Wilhelmus Maria Ausems, III, Ten Days in May 1940: The Netherlands Defense Against "Fall Gelb" (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1983), p. 49. The Oslo Group was a group of smaller, European nations that conferred during the 1930s on items of mutual interest. Consisting of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, they met in Copenhagen in 1938 and released a statement declaring their determination to stay out of any war between the great European powers. (See George Gilbert Armstrong, Why Another World War? (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1941), p. 136.
19. Pearson, pp. 51, 54, 60, and 63. See also Vlekke, p. 348; Rape, p. 11; Amry Vandenbosch, Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815 (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1959), p. 282; and Juggernaut, p. 21.
20. Pearson, pp. 56 and 136. See also Rape, p. 56 and Juggernaut, p. 21.
21. Pearson, p. 63.
22. Vandenbosch, p. 282.
23. Juggernaut, p. 69. See also Maass, p. 15; Riemens, p. 292; and Wels, p. 21.
24. British Naval Intelligence Division, Netherlands: October 1944 (Great Britain, 1944), p. 171.
25. Warmbrunn, p. 3. See also Vlekke, p. 339; Pamela and J.W. Smit, The Netherlands: 57 B.C.-1971 (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1973), p. 54; MID Report No. 14,499; and Pearson, p. 80.
26. Pearson, p. 80.
27. LTC Sumner Waite, G-2 Report #23,479-W, 10 June 1937, RG 165, NA. See also LTC Waite, "Strength and Organization of the Dutch Army," G-2 Report #23,699-W, 1 September 1937, RG 165, NA and LTC Waite, "Dutch Army-General," G-2 Report #23,686-W, 26 August

28. MAJ Edwin M. Watson, "A Resumé of the Dutch Army for 1928," G-2 Report No. 6521, 22 January 1929, RG 165, NA. See also G-2 Report #23,699-W; G-2 Report #22,686-W; and MID Report No. 14,503. The Dutch called their corps "divisional groups" because the term "corps" sounded too militaristic (G-2 Report No. 6448).

29. G-2 Report No. 6521. See also MID Report No. 14,503 and G-2 Report #23,686-W.

30. G-2 Report #23,699-W. See also MID Report No. 14,503.

31. MID Report No. 14,503.

CHAPTER 2

DUTCH DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS, 1933-1938

The nadir of Dutch military capability came with the ascension of Hitler to power in Germany in 1933. Disturbing news quickly emanated from Nazi Germany when in October 1933 it withdrew from the League of Nations and all disarmament talks. For the remainder of the decade, potentially threatening developments in Germany caused the Netherlands to reassess its defensive capabilities. The Dutch slowly responded to the true nature and latent danger of the Nazi regime, and by 1938 had begun a "rearmament."

BUDGET CUTS HARM READINESS

The full effects of the Depression became evident in 1933 as defense spending stood at under twenty percent of the 1918 figure. The Dutch government cut spending considerably in response to the financial crisis. The Navy suffered a substantial decrease in pay early in the year.

Months later the new Prime Minister, Hendrik Colijn, sought other ways to save money by further military reductions. The government, however, in 1933 also enacted its first anti-Nazi proposals.

On 30 January, the day Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, the Netherlands cut pay for Dutch sailors by fourteen percent. Immediately, seamen in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Navy refused to work, and on 5 February native sailors (whose pay the government decremented seventeen percent) mutinied aboard the Zeven Provinciën, an old battleship. They commandeered the ship and sailed away, causing the Dutch to bomb their own vessel on 10 February to stop the mutiny. Twenty-two seamen died. The Dutch decreased the number of native sailors from fifty to thirty percent in the NEI Navy as a result of the mutiny. This incident illustrated the low morale in the Dutch armed forces, and thoroughly embarrassed the government. Notwithstanding, in September Prime Minister Colijn named a commission to recommend further savings from the defense budget.¹

The government took several actions against the Dutch Nazis during the year. As a result of unrest among 25,000 German miners in the province of Limburg (see Map 2), the Netherlands expelled the Nazi leader from the country. In July, the minister of justice outlawed all Nazi organizations within the country. The government also

THE NETHERLANDS-MAP 2



passed a general law prohibiting the wearing of political uniforms. This legislation greatly affected the Nazis in the Netherlands who already possessed party uniforms. Although never a major force at the polls, the government viewed the Dutch Nazis as a potential threat to the nation's security throughout the decade.²

During the course of 1934, many Dutchmen realized that continued defense cuts would damage national defense. The turmoil in Austria, which involved both Germany and Italy and culminated in the assassination of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss by Austrian Nazis in July, convinced many Dutch citizens of the need for an increase in defense outlays. Individuals and groups as disparate as the Social Democratic Party, the Defense Minister, and citizens of the province of Limburg called for a reversal in the trend of lower defense budgets.

On 3 April, the Social Democratic Party changed its longstanding antipathy for military spending and endorsed fighting for democracy. Events in Germany and Austria precipitated the policy shift within the Social Democrats, the second largest party in the nation. Later in the year, Minister of Defense Deckers stated that the government's attempt to save money by cutting the defense budget could not continue. He observed increasing animosity between the countries in Europe, and said the government would increase defense expenditures the following year.³

On 6 August, a Belgian paper published an article which asserted that national defense had become the dominant issue in both the Netherlands and Belgium. According to the article, many Limburgers doubted that Hitler would respect Dutch neutrality, and the mayor of Maastricht believed that the Dutch Army was incapable of preserving neutrality. Recent defense cuts had left the provinces of Limburg and Brabant defenseless, and the voices of those calling for disarmament were less vocal. These residents of the Dutch province of Limburg argued that it was better to pay a soldier and stimulate the economy than to keep him on the dole as an unemployed citizen.⁴

THE THREAT OF GERMAN REARMAMENT

The German threat became more ominous in March 1935, when Hitler denounced the Versailles Treaty and instituted conscription. Conditions within the Netherlands remained depressed. By late 1935 forty percent of Dutch workers were unemployed and the country faced a large debt. In spite of the deficit, the government planned to expand the Navy. More importantly, on 27 November the government recommended that a Defense Fund be established to purchase armaments (such as anti-aircraft guns) and to improve defensive positions along the eastern and southern borders. Though embryonic, these were the first tentative steps taken by the

Netherlands to improve its military capability.⁵

The year 1936 marked a watershed in the march toward World War II. Germany denounced the Locarno Pact and in March occupied the Rhineland. Hitler and Benito Mussolini created the Rome-Berlin Axis altering the balance of power in Europe. Many in the Netherlands first realized that modern bombers could strike Dutch cities and that Germany could attack without warning. These possibilities largely invalidated the historic Dutch reliance on inundations and mobilization for defense. Clearly changes in the Dutch defensive plans were needed and in 1936 the Dutch made major efforts to improve their military situation.⁶

The prospects for long term peace in Europe appeared bleak to many Dutchmen by 1936, including Prime Minister Colijn. The German abrogation of the Versailles Treaty, denunciation of the Locarno Pact, and Italian invasion of Ethiopia concerned the Dutch leaders greatly. These reverses underscored the dissolution of the high hopes the Dutch had placed in disarmament talks and collective security. The occupation of the Rhineland demonstrated the aggression of Nazi Germany as well as the impotence of Britain and France. Coupled with the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, the Rhineland occupation precipitated a real desire within the Netherlands to spend more for defense. In fact, Hitler's guarantee of Netherlands sovereignty so disgusted the Dutch that they immediately undertook the

strengthening of their eastern border defenses. Perhaps the most significant legacy of the German occupation of the Rhineland, however, related to the belief of many Dutchmen that the Netherlands could not ally openly with Britain and France, for such a move would now invite a German invasion.⁷

In early February, two consecutive articles in the Chicago Daily News concerning German rearmament and Dutch response created quite a stir and were summarized in the London Times. The author of both articles, Edgar E.A. Mowrer, depicted the German threat in the first article. The advent of conscription in 1935 in addition to increased numbers of airfields, barracks, troops, bridges, and highways close to the Dutch-German border posed a direct danger to the Netherlands. Mowrer further stated, "The most phlegmatic and pacifist people of Europe is becoming alarmed."⁸ In his second article, Mowrer attributed the change in Dutch attitude to three factors: the ability of modern aircraft to bomb cities, the construction of French and Belgian fortifications which could persuade Germany to attack through the Netherlands, and thirdly, indications that Germany would be less prone to respect Dutch neutrality to assure success in an attack to the west.⁹

Dutch leaders undoubtedly realized by 1936 that their military situation had changed drastically. No longer could the collective security provided by the League of Nations be trusted to provide for the nation's security.

Prime Minister Colijn foresaw the necessity to mobilize the armed forces in hours, not days. Many Dutchmen now doubted the ability of the Netherlands to remain neutral if Germany attacked west. The Dutch Intelligence Service discovered the construction of German airfields near the border and that the Germans were seriously considering a modified von Schlieffen Plan which called for an attack through Dutch Limburg to outflank the Albert Canal and the Belgian fortifications. Both the prime minister and Parliament favored increased defense spending, including more funds for intelligence activities. According to the Italian Naval Attaché to the Netherlands and Belgium in early 1936,

Military circles in Holland have at last generally woken up to the German peril and the necessity to act promptly in the matter of defense, but in mentality and armament one might almost say they are twenty years behind the modern military points of view of nations that have been preparing for trouble. I am afraid that whatever they will do will be of so tentative and minor a nature that it will do little good.¹⁰

The efficiency of the Dutch Army in 1936 indeed remained cause for concern. The cadre of professional officers and NCOs as well as the period of service had been reduced. Materials and supplies had been so neglected that a General Staff officer estimated it would take several years to remedy. Mobilization would require at least five days, and during some periods of the year there were practically no soldiers on active duty. To make matters worse, unemployment in the Netherlands for the interwar

period peaked at 475,000.¹¹

The Dutch Army remained in dire need of improvement in 1936, and the government took concrete measures to increase the country's defensive capabilities. On 19 February the Defense Fund proposal passed the Second Chamber of the States-General (or Parliament). The legislation proposed priority funding for aircraft, fortifications along the borders, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns and searchlights, armored cars, the Intelligence Service, artillery, and gas masks. After the Rhineland occupation, Prime Minister Colijn announced that the new conscripts would be retained in service past their normal release dates. Although they were released in late April, by the end of the year the government publicized plans to increase the number of conscripts drafted annually and extend their term of service from five and one-half to twelve months. The year ended with the passage of the 1937 defense bill which called for a twenty-two million florin (or guilder) increase over the 1936 defense authorization. The Dutch government embarked upon a major effort in 1936 to improve the nation's military posture.¹²

By 1937 the Dutch leaders viewed themselves as surrounded by large countries in the midst of a rearmament. The armies of nearby nations were not only big but capable of launching surprise attacks with modern, mechanized forces. The virtual universal realization of the nation's

military weakness caused all major elements within the country to favor increased defense spending.¹³

The Dutch populace, the Volksraad (Peoples' Council in the NEI), the States-General, Prime Minister Colijn, and the Social and Liberal Democratic Parties all favored greater military expenditures. Colijn stated on 28 February that he desired to spend as much on defense as the nation's resources would allow. The government conscientiously labored to improve the country's defenses and the people generally supported these efforts. The budget situation had improved, and the 1937 defense budget of 93 million guilders topped the 1935 figure by seventeen million guilders. On 10 December the Second Chamber within the States-General passed the government's Defense Estimates. The "AYE" votes cast by the Social and Liberal Democrats ensured their passage; the first time since 1915 that these parties had voted in favor of the annual estimates.¹⁴

Concurrent with the groundswell of support for increased defense spending, the Dutch Army implemented much needed improvements. Colijn publicly stated in late February that the Netherlands had to be strong enough militarily to defend itself alone for a few days to warrant assistance from other countries. The Army, therefore, set about to better its materiel and personnel situations. Aircraft and anti-aircraft guns received priority for purchase in 1937 to counter a perceived air threat. The

personnel arena realized the greatest improvement, however, based on the passage of the Military Service Act in September. The number of conscripts inducted each year increased from 19,500 to 32,000. Additionally, the initial period of service for the draftees doubled to eleven months. These measures enabled the Army to greatly expand in size.¹⁵

DUTCH REARMAMENT BEGINS

Dutch rearmament began in earnest in 1938. The Anschluss in Austria and annexation of Czechoslovakia caused great anxiety in the Netherlands and gave further impetus to increased defensive preparations. Early in 1938 the Dutch government began ordering foreign arms and took other significant steps to prepare the country for war. Modifications to the nation's defense plan, peacetime economy, and frontier defenses moved the Netherlands much closer to a wartime footing.

The Dutch perceived that the possibility of a war in Europe might become a reality in 1938. By February, overflights had become a problem and anti-aircraft defenses continued to receive high priority for modernization. On 12 March Germany occupied Austria, an event which Colijn declared severely affected the Netherlands. Three days later he announced that the eleven month period of service would be retroactive for conscripts called up in October

1937. Another threatening event occurred after the Czech elections in May, when Germany began construction of the Siegfried Line from Switzerland to the Netherlands. It is no wonder that Prime Minister Colijn's speech in September commemorating forty years of Queen Wilhelmina's rule mentioned "war rumors" and "fears."¹⁶

During the Munich crisis in late September the Dutch were genuinely afraid of an outbreak of war. On 27 September, suspected German experiments with lights in Westphalia were reported and the government mobilized reservists to fill the frontier battalions. The following day the Queen proclaimed a Royal Decree which stated a danger of war existed. The government warned mayors that complete mobilization of tens of thousands of soldiers was a near-term possibility. On 30 September, after Munich's Four Power Conference averted war, the Dutch government halted mobilization. Colijn declared in a national broadcast that the danger of war had passed. During this crisis and throughout the year, German propagandists effectively operated among the Dutch populace.¹⁷

The Dutch Army had been in a protracted period of neglect when "rearmament" began in 1938. In order to arm and equip the expanding Army, the Dutch attempted to expand their indigenous industry and simultaneously order arms and materiel from other countries. The Netherlands possessed no substantial arms producing capability, and proved unable to

build its own arms industry before the German invasion. The Dutch did have two large aircraft production companies, Fokker and Koolhaven, which built new fighter aircraft. During 1938, the Netherlands rapidly expanded its military aircraft production, and expected one hundred and twenty new airplanes by 1940. Fokker began building only military aircraft which forced KLM, the national airlines, to purchase its civilian aircraft from the United States.¹⁰

The Dutch government ordered many items of military hardware from other countries, but received only a fraction of its orders primarily because every other nation was rearming its own armed forces. In January, the United States Munitions Control Board approved over one million dollars of Dutch purchases, and sanctioned an additional four million dollar request in October. The Dutch sought Martin bombers from the United States and Dornier seaplanes (for the NEI) from Germany. Earlier the Dutch had ordered 105mm howitzers from Krupp in Germany, and had planned to make this piece their standard artillery weapon. By February few pieces had been delivered and practically no ammunition was ever received. The Dutch also began the standardized use of the 47-mm anti-tank gun, and MAJ Smith believed they wanted to procure the Swedish Bofors gun to meet this need. The Netherlands could not procure the military equipment it desired to modernize its Army from abroad, and a member of the Dutch General Staff used this

fact to blame others for the country's defeat in 1940.¹⁹

The Netherlands government significantly improved the nation's capability to wage war by modifying the defense plan to take into account the ability of modern aircraft to overfly inundated areas and strike deep. The old plan basically abandoned the eastern and southern areas of the country and called for a fairly rapid retreat behind the waterlines protecting Fortress Holland (see Map 2). The government now planned to put forth a more resolute defense in the south. Another reason for this change was the realization that the Belgian border defenses in the east and along the Albert Canal could cause the Germans to invade through Limburg and Brabant to avoid these obstacles. The Dutch therefore focused their weapons improvements to counter such a move by Germany.²⁰

The Dutch greatly improved their frontier defenses as a result of the revised war plan. In March, within a week after the Anschluss, the soldiers conscripted in 1937 moved to the frontier instead of being released from service. By the end of the month twenty-five new frontier battalions deployed along the eastern and southern borders. The Army enlarged its peacetime regiments from one to two battalions, and positioned these second battalions to the rear of the frontier units manning defensive positions along the IJssel River and in North Brabant. The Dutch improved fortifications along the frontier and had already by this

time completed their plans for demolitions and flooding along their borders. The extension in the term of service promoted better mobility for the frontier units, which Colijn desired. Dutch defensive improvements along their borders became so evident that in December the German press complained that the Dutch were improving only their eastern border defenses.²¹

The Netherlands government also took measures to prepare the economy for war. The several million guilder deficit which surfaced in January due to increased military spending concerned the fiscally conservative Dutch leaders. Queen Wilhelmina, however, opened a new session of the States-General in September with a call for an increase of 109 million guilders over 1938 to a total of 261 million guilders for defense in 1939. Recalling its experience in World War I, the government in May created a board to stockpile food in case of war. At year's end, the government sent eight bills to the Second Chamber designed to prepare the nation's economy for war. The Allied blockade, German U-boats, and consequent economic hardships suffered in World War I had not been forgotten by the Dutch government and it took concerted action in 1938 to prepare the Dutch economy for the strains of a coming European war.²²

OPINIONS OF AMERICAN MILITARY ATTACHÉS IN EUROPE

The United States did not have a Military Attaché in the Netherlands from 1922 to 1939 due to budget limitations. Consequently, attachés in Germany, France, or Belgium forwarded information concerning the Dutch military to Washington during the 1930s. MAJ Truman Smith from Berlin reported most often on military developments in the Netherlands. MAJ Smith and the other European attachés through 1938 generally believed that the Dutch military had fallen far since World War I, but should be greatly improved by 1940.

Based on a report submitted by MAJ Edwin M. Watson, Military Attaché in Belgium-Netherlands in the late 1920s, the great loss of Dutch military capability occurred after 1929. He observed in early 1929 that the Dutch had made progress since the World War. Even considering the glaring military shortcomings within the Dutch armed forces, he contended that the Dutch were at least as capable as the Belgians. He also stated that the Netherlands "has no longer any illusions about the neutrality of her country being respected by Germany in another war."²³ The defense budgets also substantiate this fact for the pre-Depression 1928 defense authorization of 86 million guilders was not surpassed until 1937.²⁴

The personnel situation in the Dutch Army disturbed

the attachés in Europe. They believed that the original five and one-half month period of service was much too short, and that the policy of maintaining only two complete companies out of an entire regiment was courting disaster in case of a surprise attack. MAJ Smith contended that the 23,000 men called up annually was much smaller than the number available or affordable to the Netherlands. The 1936 army was "pitifully small, inadequately trained, and only moderately well officered."²⁵ He faulted the officer corps for being too old, too theoretical, possessing little experience in leading soldiers, and considered Dutch soldiers less able than American soldiers physically. MAJ Smith described the Dutch troops he observed as "listless...not ...thoroughly trained in the use of their weapons."²⁶ He evaluated the performance of the NCOs and private soldiers alike as poor. Though admittedly based on brief observations, the American attachés reported that the Dutch Army of the 1930s had too few soldiers and those it had were not well trained.

The Dutch Army possessed an unenviable materiel situation in the 1930s as well. The Netherlands was practically the last European country to begin rearming, and not until the spring of 1937 did MAJ Smith begin to see evidence of the government's intent to improve its armed forces. Prior to this time, the Army possessed pre-World War I artillery, no anti-tank guns, and only a small number

of modern airplanes. No efforts had been taken by the Dutch to improve Fortress Holland and the city of Maastricht in Limburg had no defenses.²⁷

The American observers contended that the "military position of the Netherlands in Europe...in...1937 can only be described as exceptionally weak."²⁸ The Netherlands had become a tempting target due to its impotent armed forces. In addition to being "proverbially penurious,"²⁹ the Dutch had been slow to realize the German danger and to take action. On the other hand, MAJ Smith spoke with some Dutch officers in 1936 who were unafraid of Germany but hoped the fear of a German invasion would result in an increase in the Army's budget. MAJ Smith concluded the report of his 1936 visit to a Dutch brigade with the opinion that a Dutch Army unit was thirty to forty percent as effective as its counterpart Wehrmacht unit, and believed that those figures were optimistic. According to LTC Robert D. Brown, the American Military Attaché in Brussels, the attachés in the Netherlands before 1937 contended that

despite the admirable patriotism and unity of the army, the truth cannot be escaped that, in mentality and in armament they are nearly twenty years behind the modern military viewpoints of those nations who are susceptible of launching war.³⁰

Beginning in 1937, however, the American attachés in Europe noticed a concerted Dutch effort to improve their defensive capabilities. MAJ Smith considered the amount of

money included in the defense appropriations bill submitted to the States-General in March 1937 nothing short of a "rearmament"²¹ for such a small country. The Dutch had taken steps to improve their artillery and anti-tank gun shortages, and by mid-1939 had greatly narrowed the twenty year gap in "mentality and in armament." Considering the fact that the Dutch had completely prepared their frontier demolitions and inundations for execution, MAJ Smith surmised that an invader would be halted for several days before the waterline. In the two years between 1938 and 1940, he expected the military capability of the Netherlands to double. By the end of 1938, the last full year of peace in Europe, the American military observers saw ample evidence of improvements in Dutch defensive preparations and potential for increased readiness by 1940.²²

ENDNOTES

1. The London Times, 31 January 1933, p. 9; 6 February 1933, p. 12; 11 February 1933, p. 11; and 12 September 1933, p. 11. Hereafter cited as LT. See also Amry Vandebosch, The Dutch East Indies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), p. 349.
2. Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1933 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 173-174. See also Pamela and J.W. Smit, The Netherlands: 57 B.C.-1971 (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publishers, 1973), p. 53.
3. LT, 4 April 1934, p. 12. See also COL Jacob W.S. Wuest, Military Intelligence Division (MID) Report No. 13,768, "Holland Rearms," 17 November 1934, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives (NA).
4. COL F.P. Lahm, MID Report #20,763-W, "Holland and National Defense," 10 September 1934, RG 165, NA.
5. Smit, p. 54. See also LT, 18 September 1935, p. 9 and "Defence Fund for Holland," 28 November 1935, p. 13.
6. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1936, p. 12. See also Walter B. Maass, The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945 (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), p. 15.
7. Department of State, "The Minister in the Netherlands (Emmet) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers (Washington: United States Government Printing Office), 1936, Vol. 1, 20 March 1936, pp. 260-262 and 19 October 1936, p. 362. Hereafter cited as FRUS. See also Vandebosch, p. 347; Gerald Newton, The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey 1795-1977 (London: Ernest Benn, 1978), p. 123; and Amry J. Vandebosch, "Netherlands Foreign Policy," in The Netherlands, ed. Bartholomew Landheer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), p. 147.
8. LT, "A Rearmed Germany/Dutch Fears," 7 February 1936, p. 13.
9. LT, "A Rearmed Germany/Defences of Holland," 8 February 1936, p. 11. A report from the American Military Attaché in Switzerland, LTC John Magruder, clarified the motives behind these influential articles. Edgar Mowrer worked in Paris for the Chicago Daily News as a correspondent; his brother also worked for the paper as an editor. Mowrer had been expelled from Germany due to his anti-Nazi activities. He initially considered writing the articles because a Dutch

journalist expressed concern about the German threat and the lackadaisical attitude many of his countrymen exhibited toward military preparations. Mowrer spoke with LTC Magruder before leaving for the Netherlands to write the articles. LTC Magruder believed that Mowrer ultimately wrote the pieces not only because of his personal dislike for the Nazis, but primarily because the French wanted the Dutch to expedite their defensive preparations and the London Times desired to silence British opposition to rearmament. (See LTC John Magruder, "Article by Mr. E.A. Mowrer on Defenses of Holland," 18 February 1936, RG 165, NA.)

10. LT, "Small Nations' Defences," 27 March 1936, p. 13. See also LTC H.H. Fuller, "National Defense Policy pertaining to Army, Navy, and Air," MID Report #22,266-W, 25 February 1936.

11. P.L.G. Doorman, Military Operations in the Netherlands from 10th-17th May, 1940, trans. S.L. Salzedo (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1944), pp. 12 and 15. See also Newton, p. 131.

12. LT, "Dutch Defence Fund," 19 February 1936, p. 11; "Dutch Defensive Measures," 11 March 1936, p. 15; "Dutch Precautions," 12 March 1936, p. 13; and 18 April 1936, p. 11. See also Toynbee, 1936, pp. 126-127 and MAJ Truman Smith, "The Defense of the Netherlands East Indies," MID Report No. 14,499, 29 January 1936, RG 165, NA.

13. LT, "Dutch Rearmament," 23 February 1937, p. 13 and "Dutch Army's Strength," 25 September 1937, p. 9.

14. Vandenbosch, p. 347. See also LT, "Strengthened Dutch Defences," 1 March 1937, p. 1; "Dutch Defences," 20 March 1937, p. 13; "Dutch Defences," 22 September 1937, p. 11; and 11 December 1937, p. 13.

15. LT, "Strengthened Dutch Defences," 1 March 1937, p. 1; 18 December 1937, p. 11; and "Dutch Army's Strength," 25 September 1937, p. 9. See also MAJ Smith, "Increase in Netherlands Armed Forces," MID Report No. 15,093, 22 January 1937, RG 165, NA.

16. LT, "Dutch Neutrality," 4 February 1938, p. 13; "Dutch Conscripts Kept with Colours," 16 March 1938, p. 13; and "A Queen Gives Thanks," 7 September 1938, p. 11. See also F. Lee Benns and Mary Elisabeth Seldon, Europe 1939 to the Present (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), p. 35.

17. LT, "Dutch Frontier Manned," 28 September 1938, p. 9; "Defence of Dutch Independence," 29 September 1938, p. 11; and "Dutch Gifts for Mr. Chamberlain," 1 October 1938, p. 11. See also Bernard H.M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch

Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 340 and Hendrik Riemens, The Netherlands: Story of a Free People (New York: Eagle Books, 1944), p. 286.

18. Riemens, pp. 291-292. See also MAJ Smith, "The Military Expansion and Rearmament of the Netherlands," G-2 Report No. 15,749, 23 February 1938, RG 165, NA and Newton, p. 123. The Air Arm of the Dutch Army began in 1932, but even with the famous Fokker plant the Dutch aircraft industry relied on foreign subcontractors. See Andreas Wilhelmus Maria Ausems, III, Ten Days in May 1940: The Netherlands Defense Against "Fall Gelb" (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1983), p. 14.

19. G-2 Report No. 15,749. See also Doorman, p. 90 and The New York Times, "Two Dutch Boards Seek Planes Here," 19 February 1939, p. 34.

20. LTC Robert D. Brown, "Nat'l Defense Policy pertaining to Army, Navy and Air-General," Report No. 7531, 28 July 1939, RG 165, NA.

21. LT, "Dutch Frontier Force to be Increased," 17 March 1938, p. 13; "New Dutch Frontier Garrisons," 31 March 1938, p. 13; and "Dutch Anxiety Over Defenses," 20 December 1938, p. 13. See also G-2 Report No. 15,749 and Riemens, p. 91.

22. LT, "The Dutch Deficit," 4 January 1938, p. 12; "Dutch Food Reserves," 7 May 1938, p. 11; "Rearmament in Holland," 21 September 1938, p. 9; and "Dutch Precautions for War Time," 30 December 1938, p. 10. See also Newton, p. 123.

23. MAJ Edwin M. Watson, "A Resumé of the Dutch Army for 1928," G-2 Report No. 6521, 22 January 1929, RG 165, NA.

24. C.M. Schulten, "The Netherlands and its Army (1900-1940)" in Je Maintiendrai: A Concise History of the Dutch Army, ed. H. Amersfoort and P.H. Kamphuis, (The Hague: Historical Section of the Royal Netherlands Army, 1985), p. 79.

25. G-2 Report No. 15,749.

26. MAJ Smith, "The Home Army of the Netherlands," MID Report No. 14,503, 31 January 1936, RG 165, NA.

27. G-2 Report No. 15,749.

28. G-2 Report No. 15,749.

29. MAJ Smith, "Military Developments in the Dutch East Indies," G-2 Report No. 15,768, 3 March 1938, RG 165, NA.

30. MAJ Smith, "Military Developments in the Dutch East Indies," G-2 Report No. 15,768, 3 March 1938, RG 165. NA. See also G-2 Report No. 15,749; Report No. 7531; MID Report No. 14,503; and MID Report #22,266-W.

31. G-2 Report No. 15,749.

32. Report No. 7531. See also MID Report No. 15,093.

CHAPTER 3

DUTCH DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS, 1939

The strategic situation changed dramatically for the Netherlands in 1939. Europe entered the new year at peace, but within nine months the three large powers that surrounded the Netherlands were at war and the Dutch completely mobilized their armed forces. The year began with an exhortation from Queen Wilhelmina for the country to rearm morally and spiritually, and ended with the prediction of the new American Attaché, MAJ William H. Colbern, of a German victory over the Netherlands should Hitler invade. There were several notable events during the year that greatly affected the Dutch defensive preparations. In February, Defense Minister J.J.C. van Dijk finally admitted that the international situation required that the Netherlands possess a modern army and navy. Italy's invasion of Albania in April prompted a major Dutch reaction to improve their military posture. During the summer the government was paralyzed by grave economic concerns which

led to the appointment of a new Prime Minister and Cabinet. Fear of invasion captivated the entire nation in the second week of November. The Dutch significantly improved their defensive capabilities in 1939, but these efforts proved inadequate to successfully defend against a German attack.¹

NEED FOR A MODERN ARMED FORCES FINALLY REALIZED

It is truly amazing that it took over six years of Nazi rule in Germany to convince the Dutch Minister of Defense that his country needed a modern army and navy. Not only is this statement a revelation of several years of naiveté, but it is also an admission of the ineffectiveness of the Dutch armed forces at this late date. Armed with the new understanding of the international situation, the Netherlands immediately began to modernize its forces by purchasing more arms from the United States and by upgrading the frontier defenses. The press noted evidence of collaboration with Belgium, but the government never admitted any cooperation with other countries. However, in spite of van Dijk's statement, many Dutch leaders still refused to believe that a German invasion of the Netherlands was likely.

In February, the Netherlands sent missions from the Navy and Colonial Army to purchase arms, especially aircraft, from the United States. A correspondent of the

New York Times believed that the Japanese occupation of Hainan Island in the South China Sea and German diplomatic pressure on the Netherlands spurred the visit. He noted that the United States Congress would almost surely approve the Dutch purchases, unlike previous French attempts to buy arms. Furthermore, he observed that the Netherlands had been purchasing arms in the United States longer than Great Britain.²

Defense Minister van Dijk planned to concentrate the Army's modernization along the frontier and in air defense. He desired to increase the number of soldiers guarding the frontier and build hundreds of concrete bunkers along the border and the coast. Armed with machineguns, these concrete emplacements would not constitute a Maginot Line but would considerably improve the Dutch capability to defend their borders. He intended to concentrate additional air defense guns and units around large cities and important utilities.³

Two separate indications of Dutch-Belgian collaboration surfaced in the press in February. A 6 February London Times article reported matter of factly that other nations had knowledge of and accepted cooperation between the Netherlands and Belgium. An article appearing in the New York Times less than a week later asserted that if Germany attacked the Netherlands, the Germans would be facing one million armed men including the Belgian Army.

Never admitted by either government, secret talks occurred between Belgium and the Netherlands and would increase after the November 1939 war scare.⁴

In the same month that the Defense Minister declared that the international situation required defense modernization, many Dutch civilian and military leaders still did not believe that a German invasion was very probable. The New York Times reported that a high ranking Army officer stated the Headquarters Staff of the Dutch Army estimated the chances of the Netherlands going to war at five percent. On 25 February, Foreign Minister J.A.N. Patijn said that the Dutch government had never seriously considered the prospect of a German invasion because no need to ponder such an eventuality existed. Allowing for the difference in statements designed for foreign versus public audiences, such conflicting declarations nevertheless underscored the lack of control and direction from the Dutch government.⁵

In March Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, completing the conquest that had begun at Munich six months earlier. The invasion occurred immediately after the Oslo Convention had been declared dead, and was further evidence of the weakness of Great Britain and France. The Dutch undoubtedly felt isolated, for even though they were immensely relieved when the Munich Conference averted war, they also realized that another small nation had been sacrificed. Therefore,

on 20 March, the Dutch government reiterated its intent to remain aloof from any alliance against Germany, hoping to avoid offending the Nazis.⁴

IMPACT OF THE ITALIAN INVASION OF ALBANIA

The principal event affecting Dutch defensive preparations from April through June 1939 was the Italian invasion of Albania in April. The Netherlands was extremely agitated by this aggression and consequently undertook major defensive precautions. Unfortunately, yet typically, once the crisis passed in May the Dutch relaxed their military preparations and reverted to business as usual. In June, the debate over defense funding reached a fever pitch, which dominated the political and military scene.

On 7 April, Mussolini invaded Albania, prompting an immediate and considerable response from the Dutch government. Within a week the Dutch decreed that a danger of war existed. The government contemplated a substantial increase in the period of service for new conscripts, and both the Queen and Prime Minister actively labored to improve the Dutch military capability.

The Netherlands government took a major step on 11 April when it declared an Order in Council, which meant that the danger of war existed. Four days earlier, when the news of the Italian invasion first arrived in The Hague, the

government immediately cancelled leave for personnel manning the coast and frontier defenses and halted traffic along the frontier. In conjunction with the Order in Council on 11 April, Prime Minister Colijn ordered all frontier units to fully mobilize because he realized that the Dutch mobilization process was too slow to react to a surprise attack. Prior to the mobilization of the frontier units, the Dutch Army had 25,000 soldiers manning the frontier defenses. In this crisis, the government played down the seriousness of the actions taken and the threat to preclude alarming the populace.⁷

The Italian invasion of Albania caused the Dutch to seriously consider increasing the initial term of service. On 14 April, the press reported that the government was contemplating increasing the eleven month period of service to seventeen or eighteen months. If adopted, this plan would increase the size of the Dutch Army to 120,000 men, ten times its size in September 1938. Four days later the government debated an increase to twenty-three or twenty-four months. This plan would allow permanent reinforcement of the border defenses. On 18 April, the States-General considered a bill calling for a twenty-four month initial term of service. If enacted, this legislation would more than quadruple the five and one-half month term of service in effect as late as September 1937.⁸

The furor over the Italian aggression dissipated by

May, and on 26 May the government relaxed some provisions of the Order in Council. Simultaneously, however, senior General Staff officers escorted members of the Dutch press on a three day tour of the frontier. The reporters saw trees wired for demolition, mines emplaced, fortifications, and other obstacles. Dutch soldiers manned these defensive positions and obstacles at all times. The government obviously wanted the press to tell other countries that the nation was prepared to repel an invader.⁷

Three other events occurred in May which had long term implications for Dutch defensive preparations. Jacob A. de Wilde, the Finance Minister, refused to use deficit spending to finance the country's social and defense programs and resigned. Although Colijn assumed the portfolio of the Finance Minister, this issue would eventually cause the government to collapse and Colijn to be replaced as Prime Minister a scant three weeks before World War II began. Secondly, a Royal Decree on 19 May reorganized the army to make it conform more closely to its wartime organization. Each peacetime division became a corps and the Decree intended to foster greater cooperation between the infantry and artillery. Such a reorganization was sorely needed in the Dutch Army and addressed one of the most glaring weaknesses in the peacetime armed forces. Thirdly, and unknown to the Dutch, the German High Command began planning for a future invasion of the Netherlands.¹⁰

The resignation of the fiscally conservative de Wilde precipitated a national economic debate in June. Colijn publicly stated his determination to balance the budget without cutting defense or social programs. In terms of unemployment, industrial activity, and exports, however, the economy remained sound. The government instituted a plan to replace soldiers being released from frontier units with unemployed workers, and in May began withholding relief benefits to unemployed farmers who refused to work in Germany (for high wages, incidentally) for political reasons. Also in June, the government reiterated its neutral policy and declared that military talks with other countries were "entirely out of the question."¹¹

A GOVERNMENT IN CRISIS

The cabinet crisis instigated by de Wilde's resignation in May virtually paralyzed the government in July as Colijn and others attempted to form a cabinet. Scarcely two weeks before the Dutch completely mobilized in August a new Prime Minister, Dirk Jonkheer de Geer, assumed the mantle of leadership in the Netherlands.¹² After the war began with the German invasion of Poland in September, the Dutch declared their neutrality but began to suffer the effects of the war anyway.

The Dutch government continued in a state of turmoil

for the entire month of July. On 1 July, Colijn and his entire cabinet resigned and the Queen asked the Prime Minister to form another government. Unable to do so, on 9 July the Queen allowed Colijn to cease his efforts and she asked Dr. Dionysius A.P.N. Koolen to form a cabinet. He too was unsuccessful, and on 14 July Queen Wilhelmina asked Colijn for the third time to serve as Prime Minister and form a government. Financing the defense budget remained the chief stumbling block to forming a government that had the confidence of the States-General. On 25 July, Colijn's last cabinet left office ending his sixth consecutive year as Prime Minister and fifth different government. By mid-July the Dutch people became weary of the crisis and wanted to see a new government formed so the country could proceed with its defensive preparations.¹³

August proved to be a pivotal month in the march of the Netherlands toward war. The month began with no cabinet seated and the government hamstrung and ended with complete mobilization of the Dutch armed forces. Prime Minister de Geer assumed power on 10 August and within three weeks the threat of war in Europe, coupled with German provocations (discussed later), caused the Dutch to mobilize.

The two and one-half month cabinet crisis ended in early August when de Geer and his three-party Cabinet took office. Political leaders in the Netherlands remained divided over the proper manner in which to finance the

increased defense expenditures. To form a government in this politically divided country, de Geer's Cabinet was a compromise and assumed power with no real mandate. For the first time in Dutch history, the government contained Social Democrats. Also joining the cabinet, but without party affiliation, were E.N. van Kleffens as Foreign Minister, A.Q.H. Dijxhoorn as Defense Minister, and Professor P.S. Gerbrandy as Justice Minister. These men were all destined to play important roles in the Dutch preparations for war or later in the government-in-exile. Many considered de Geer to be an accomplished conciliator and knowledgeable of economics, but he was almost seventy years old and proved to be weak as subsequent crises shook the government.¹⁴

In the last eleven days of the month, momentous events occurred with great rapidity in the Netherlands and in Europe. International tension on 20 August led Defense Minister Dijxhoorn to extend the period of service for the Class of 1938. Two days later, the Army cancelled leave for certain soldiers. The call up of civilian KLM pilots necessitated the cancellation of all domestic flights. King Leopold of Belgium on 23 August made a plea for peace on behalf of the BENELUX and Scandinavian countries. Germany and the Soviet Union signed their Non-Aggression Pact on 24 August, and the Dutch Cabinet activated some reservists. By 25 August, the Dutch had completed their preparations for war short of full mobilization. The frontier had been fully

manned since the Italian invasion of Albania four months earlier, floodgates were ready to be opened, and even the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (see Map 3) had been strengthened with sandbags.¹³

On 27 August, the German Ambassador to the Netherlands assured the Queen that her country was inviolate. Germany held two hundred Dutch vessels on the Rhine River and reports indicated that the Germans had blocked all but the primary roads between the two countries. Germany informed the Dutch government that on 28 August all railroad service would be stopped at the border. Under these circumstances, and contemplating the results of the recently signed Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact, the Netherlands on 28 August totally mobilized its armed forces. The government called all classes of conscripts since 1924 to active duty (totalling between 250,000 and 400,000 men), and appointed LTG Reynders Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy. The Dutch flooded some lands as a precautionary measure, although during the entire First World War no land had been inundated. Dutch forces remained completely mobilized until the German invasion almost nine months later. Unfortunately, this sizable army fielded some 19th century artillery, no tanks, and only twenty-six armored cars.¹⁴

Before the start of World War II, Foreign Minister

THE NETHERLANDS-MAP 3



van Kleffens had prepared a Proclamation of Neutrality and when war came on 1 September the government publicly declared its neutrality. The conflict, however, did not leave the Netherlands unscathed. Beginning in September, the Dutch suffered casualties on the oceans and in the skies. The war placed great strains on the economy, and launched a reevaluation of government policy.¹⁷

The Netherlands sustained its first casualties exactly one week after war broke out. A Royal Netherlands Navy minesweeper struck a Dutch mine killing twenty-nine sailors. On 13 September, a German plane downed a Dutch aircraft, which prompted the Dutch to make their markings more distinguishable. Germany sank a total of eleven Dutch ships between 1 September 1939 and 10 May 1940 resulting in much loss of life.¹⁸

The war placed a tremendous burden on the Dutch economy. On 4 September the border with Belgium was closed. Simultaneously, the Netherlands government requested sixty million guilders to purchase stocks of food. In her "Speech from the Throne"¹⁹ opening the States-General, Queen Wilhelmina declared that the only increases in the budget were for defense and unemployment training. The day following her speech, the government announced that municipal income taxes would increase fifteen percent in the current year and forty-five percent in the next year. Unemployment and inflation steadily increased from September

until the German invasion the following spring. As in World War I, the Allied blockade also prevented the country from importing many needed items. The government, therefore, banned holiday travel in late September to conserve oil and rubber.²⁰

Diplomatically, the Dutch took another step which further caused them to doubt the possibility of a German invasion. On 2 September, the Netherlands agreed to handle the interests of German citizens in Poland. Later the Dutch assumed protection for German interests in other countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Hong Kong for the duration of the war. Defense Minister Dijkhoorn warned both sides in the war, however, that foreign aircraft violating Dutch airspace would be shot down. On 9 September the senior civilian leadership in the nation; Queen Wilhelmina, Prime Minister de Geer, Foreign Minister van Kleffens, and Dijkhoorn met for the first time to specifically discuss the Netherlands response to the outbreak of war. They all expected help from Belgium, France, and Britain if the Netherlands was attacked, but none of them had made any coordination to ensure this assistance would arrive.²¹

Three authoritative individuals analyzed Dutch defensive capabilities at the end of the first month of the war. Hanson W. Baldwin, the chief military correspondent of the New York Times, on 25 September attempted to correct the overly optimistic appraisal printed by the Associated Press

two days earlier. Baldwin characterized the Dutch as strongest at sea, which had the least utility to the defense of the home country. He believed that the Netherlands armed forces were weak on the ground and in the air, possessing approximately 340,000 trained reserves and less than two hundred combat aircraft. Foreign Minister van Kleffens wrote after the war that the Dutch Army was still deficient in equipment, training, and defensive lines in September. Evidently Hitler reached similar conclusions, for on 27 September he decided to invade the Netherlands.²²

THE NOVEMBER WAR SCARE

During the Phony War after the fall of Poland, the prospect of war became very real to the Dutch. Army intelligence noticed German divisions across the border in October. The following month, fear of a German invasion drove the Dutch into closer cooperation with the Allies and Belgium. By this time, the United States had posted its first permanent Military Attaché in the Netherlands since 1922, MAJ William H. Colbern. After two months in The Hague, he predicted a German victory if Hitler invaded in December 1939.²³

After the Polish surrender in late September, Germany began moving divisions that took part in the invasion of Poland to the Western Front. In October the

Dutch discovered large concentrations of German troops across the German border. The American military attaché in Berlin estimated that fifteen to eighteen German divisions were located north of Aachen by 22 October. The presence of these units caused great concern to the Dutch. The government instituted civil defense measures and undertook "extraordinary" military spending proposals.²⁴

Foreign Minister van Kleffens subsequently wrote that the Netherlands did not seriously begin preparing for war until German divisions appeared on the border in October. Also during this month, reports from the Dutch Military Attaché in Berlin, MAJ G.J. Sas, began arriving in The Hague detailing German intentions. The confidential source for these reports was COL Hans Oster²⁵ of the Abwehr, the German Intelligence and Counterintelligence Service. Sas had earlier befriended Oster while both studied at the Military Academy in Berlin, and Oster wanted no part of Hitler's aggressive schemes. The Dutch government rarely acted on Sas's reports, however, due to its naiveté and to the repeated postponement of planned invasions of the Netherlands. The failure of the government to heed Sas's warnings and to recognize the true nature of the German threat became a major factor in the Dutch defeat.²⁶

The Netherlands took several measures in October to better protect the populace in event of war. Citizen groups nationwide raised money to purchase anti-aircraft guns for

the large cities. The government announced plans to sell gas masks to civilians. Four days later, only four of 600,000 Rotterdammers applied for the masks; the average Dutchman had no fear of a gas attack. Other civil defense measures to be implemented if invaded included staying indoors and pouring alcohol down the drain to prevent rape.²²

In November, the greatest invasion scare to date gripped the Netherlands government and pushed it into deeper collaboration with Belgium and the Allies. The Dutch expected a German attack on 12 November. In anticipation of this event, King Leopold of Belgium and Queen Wilhelmina met in The Hague and discussed Dutch-Belgian military cooperation. As a result of the Venlo Incident of 9 November and the perceived faulty information provided concerning the impending German attack, the government's faith in the Army's intelligence service was shaken. Consequently, MG van Dorscht, the Chief of the Dutch Military Intelligence Service, resigned.

The Dutch government genuinely believed that Germany would launch a surprise attack against the Netherlands on 12 November. British intelligence warned the Dutch of the coming attack as did MAJ Sas, who returned to The Hague on 5 November. Many other indications caused the Dutch leaders to conclude an attack was imminent. Accounts in the German press from 5-9 November were inflammatory. The government

considered the Venlo Incident (discussed below), which implicated the Dutch in military collaboration with the British, an excuse for a German invasion. The large increase in German divisions north of Aachen (now estimated at between twenty-three and thirty-one divisions), their movement near the Dutch border, and the presence of pontoon bridges over the Rhine River at Emmerick all pointed to aggressive action by the Wehrmacht. Additionally, The New York Times reported on 11 November that the British and American Consulates in the Netherlands were urging all non-essential personnel to leave the country.²⁰

The Venlo Incident was the culmination of attempts by the British government to contact disaffected elements within the German officer corps. When MG van Dorscht heard of the British intent, he insisted that a Dutch officer be present to observe the conversations between the British and German officers on Dutch soil. At a meeting in Venlo on the Dutch-German border on 9 November, the Gestapo seized two British officers, wounded a Dutch driver, and killed a Dutch lieutenant. All were quickly taken across the German border. The Netherlands government demanded an explanation from Germany on several occasions but never received a response. This incident greatly embarrassed the Dutch, because it proved to the Germans that the Netherlands had been collaborating with the British after all.²¹

The Venlo Incident caused irreparable harm to the

Dutch intelligence system. Van Dorschot resigned as Chief of the Intelligence Department at the end of November and was replaced by LTG H.A.C. Fabius, who was naive to the true nature of the German threat. Furthermore, the top Dutch leaders henceforth thought that reports from the Dutch attaché in Berlin contained deceptive German information. Incredibly, the Netherlands government believed that the Venlo Incident was not directed by the German government but was initiated by the Gestapo without the knowledge of high-ranking German leaders. Such a conclusion, based on no factual data, illustrated the naiveté and as Harold Butler stated the "antiquated and hopeful" thinking of the top Dutch leadership.³⁰

In the midst of this crisis King Leopold and Queen Wilhelmina met in The Hague and discussed the issue of military cooperation between their nations. They tried to meet in secret on 6 November but the increased guard surrounding the Royal Noordleinde Palace betrayed their talks. MAJ Colbern was sure that they spoke about collaboration among the armed forces. Prior to the meeting the Chief of the Dutch Intelligence Section told him that the Netherlands expected no Belgian assistance if Germany attacked. After the talks, however, he informed MAJ Colbern that he believed Belgium would come to the aid of the Netherlands if invaded by Germany. Colbern suspected that the monarchs discussed responses to future German aggression

and to possible German queries concerning free passage of Nazi forces to occupy air and sea bases on the coast. The most significant result of the talks was the agreement that an attack on one country was an attack on the other. Publicly, the monarchs offered mediation to the warring powers which was never accepted by the belligerents.²¹

By the end of November secret, low level military consultations occurred between the Netherlands and Belgium, France, and Great Britain. Foreign Minister van Kleffens distributed sealed envelopes containing the Dutch war plans to the military attachés in these countries, with express orders that these were to be opened only on the commencement of hostilities. One or more of these officers, all of whom were posted by van Oorschot, promptly opened and read the war plans and discovered that they did not complement the plans of their host country. The attachés informed the Dutch Army leadership of the discrepancies, but not until March 1940 did the Commander in Chief disseminate a new war plan via sealed envelopes. The government continually discounted the reports from these officers in much the same way as it refused to believe dispatches from MAJ Sas in Berlin.²²

The November war scare drove the Dutch into closer cooperation with the Allies and decreased the government's faith in the Army's intelligence reports. Furthermore, the government enacted additional anti-Nazi legislation.

including a prohibition against Nazis holding commissions in the Army or responsible government positions. The Army cancelled leave, inundated some areas, conducted limited evacuation of civilians, and removed all road signs within seventy-five kilometers of the border. The government evacuated some gold and silver reserves from the country and several citizens coordinated with the Navy for future removal of money from the country. Authorities arrested a man for smuggling military and civilian uniforms into Germany and incarcerated an army lieutenant colonel and former Nazi for spying. The response of the Netherlands armed forces to the expected attack also enabled the Germans to ascertain elements of the Dutch war plan.³³

During this crisis, as in others before and after, the lack of Dutch military power limited the nation's response. The de Geer government had been formed a scant three months before the momentous events of November, and the Prime Minister's lack of experience in foreign policy crises was evident. He and LTG Reynders continued to discount MAJ Sas's warnings and remained skeptical of those who ascribed aggressive motives to Germany. Foreign Minister van Kleffens and Defense Minister Dijkhoorn, on the other hand, believed the warnings but thought no option was open to the government. The desire to avoid provoking Germany, the country's affirmed neutrality policy, and the obvious lack of a credible armed force all contributed to

the perception that the Netherlands possessed no effective response to the crisis. In the midst of the heightened tensions, Queen Wilhelmina sent Hitler a congratulatory note for escaping the 8 November attempt on his life in Munich. These efforts to placate Hitler were ineffective, for on 23 November he informed his military leaders that "Dutch neutrality is meaningless; no one will question it when we have won."³⁴

By December, MAJ Colbern foresaw a German victory over the Netherlands if Hitler invaded. He had observed the Dutch defensive preparations and concluded that the nation's military capabilities were not adequate. In a report to the War Department, he laid out a possible German campaign plan which, if followed, could defeat the Dutch armed forces. Furthermore, by the end of 1939, the Dutch people were agitated by the international situation but not fully supportive of the government's efforts to prepare the country for war.

Overall, MAJ Colbern reported that the Dutch military remained unprepared to defend against a German attack. The improvements to the fortified positions would not enable them to withstand German artillery fire, and he believed that the Dutch desired to defend only Fortress Holland. He determined that the Dutch Army was incapable of conducting offensive operations due to the lack of tanks, artillery, training, and to "indications of passivity."

Given the large number of German divisions currently believed to be located opposite the Dutch border, he concluded that the army could not successfully defend the Netherlands in case of a German invasion. His sole optimistic note regarding the Dutch defensive preparations concerned the already inundated Grebbe Line, which he considered a major obstacle to a road bound attacker.

Colbern predicted the tactics that the Wehrmacht might employ in an attack on the Netherlands. He believed that the Germans would utilize their superior Air Force and artillery to blast a hole for the advancing infantry. The primary mission for the infantry would be to move quickly along the roads to seize the bridges. Closely following the infantry would be the engineers, to repair the roads and bridges and expedite the continued attack of the German forces. He opined that the Dutch could not stop such an attack, and that the Netherlands military leadership realized that they could not defeat the German forces massed across their border.³⁴

The Dutch people were immensely concerned and upset over the recent turn of events in Europe by December 1939, but were not wholly committed to the government's attempts to prepare the nation for war. The Soviet invasion of Finland greatly perturbed the Dutch, and the German press stepped up its attacks on the Netherlands, claiming Dutch complicity in the British blockade. Rumors of a German

invasion to occur on or about 17 December abounded throughout the country. On 13 December, the government initiated a large bond issue for defense. The public, however, bought only forty-two percent of the bonds by 19 December and the government considered the loan a failure. The Dutch people greatly respected their Queen yet lacked total support for the government's efforts to improve the country's defensive preparations.³⁷

ENDNOTES

1. The London Times, "Queen Wilhelmina's Broadcast," 28 January 1939, p. 11. Hereafter cited as LT.
2. The New York Times, "Two Dutch Boards Seek Planes Here," 19 February 1939, p. 34. Hereafter cited as NYT.
3. NYT, "Netherlands to Arm Borders," 23 February 1939, p. 6. See also LT, "Dutch Defenses," 13 February 1939, p. 11. When the government emplaced anti-aircraft guns to protect an electricity plant in the province of Friesland, it expected the company to man the weapons through a reserve unit and pay for part of the expenses of the guns (see LT, "A.A. Guns for Dutch Works," 14 February 1939, p. 14).
4. LT, "Holland's Position in Wartime," 7 February 1939, p. 13. See also Oscar Mohr, "Netherlands Keeps Cool in Midst of War Alarms," NYT, 12 February 1939, IV, p. 6.
5. Oscar Mohr, "Netherlands Keeps Cool in Midst of War Alarms," NYT, 12 February 1939, IV, p. 6 and "Dutch Deny German Designs," 26 February 1939, p. 22. Patijn served as the Netherlands Foreign Minister from June 1937 to August 1939.
6. LT, "The Spirit of Holland," 8 March 1939, pp. 17-18. See also NYT, "Netherlands Shuns Any Bloc," 21 March 1939, p. 5 and Walter B. Maass, The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945 (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), p. 17.
7. LT, "Precautions in Holland," 8 April 1939, p. 12 and "Dutch Frontier Manned," 12 April 1939, p. 10. See also Oscar Mohr, "Netherlands Keeps Cool in Midst of War Alarms," NYT, 12 February 1939, IV, p. 6 and "Navy Leave Cancelled by the Netherlands," 8 April 1939, p. 3.
8. LT, "Dutch Defenses," 14 April 1939, p. 13; "Dutch Military Service," 18 April 1939, p. 13; and "Dutch Military Service Bill," 19 April 1939, p. 13. The Dutch Army began expanding from 12,000 to 40,000 in September 1938. See Command and General Staff School, Quarterly Review of Military Literature, Vol. XIX, March 1939, No. 72, p. 29.
9. LT, "Dutch Defenses," 27 May 1939, p. 11. See also NYT, "Netherlands Trees Wired for Mines in Event of War," 7 May 1939, p. 38.
10. NYT, "Leaves Dutch Cabinet," 21 May 1939, p. 19. See also LTC Robert D. Brown, Report No. 7502, "Reorganization of the Army," 18 June 1939, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives

(NA) and Werner Warmbrunn, The Dutch Under German Occupation, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 6.

11. LT, "Dutch Cabinet Split," 1 June 1939, p. 16. See also NYT, "Colijn Warns on Budget," 17 June 1939, p. 3; "Amsterdam Holds Fate of Guilder Rests on Cabinet Decision, Expected this Week," 26 June 1939, p. 23; "Netherlands Not in Conference," 27 June 1939, p. 10; and "Netherlands Forces Idle to Take Jobs in Germany," 3 May 1939, p. 12.

12. Prime Minister de Geer led the Christian Historical Union, the second largest Protestant party in the Netherlands. He had earlier served as the Dutch Premier from 1926 to 1929, when he also followed Colijn as Prime Minister. Colijn's first government ruled from 1925 to 1926.

13. NYT, "Colijn and Cabinet Quit in Netherlands; Queen Asks Premier [Colijn] to Form New Ministry," 1 July 1939, p. 7; "Colijn Ends Cabinet Hunt," 9 July 1939, p. 18; "Cabinet Delay Irks Dutch," 10 July 1939, p. 5; and "Colijn Asked Again to Serve," 14 July 1939, p. 6. See also Gerald Newton, The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey 1795-1977 (London: Ernest Benn, 1978), p. 124.

14. NYT, "Netherlands Gets a Three-Party Cabinet," 10 August 1939, p. 10. See also Maass, p. 18.

15. LT, "Dutch Conscripts," 21 August 1939, p. 9; "Netherlands Army Leave Stopped," 23 August 1939, p. 11; "Military Precautions in Holland," 25 August 1939, p. 11; and "Dutch Ready for Emergency," 26 August 1939, p. 6. See also NYT, "Mobilization of Pilots Curtails Dutch Air Runs," 23 August 1939, p. 5 and R. Ernest and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 1029.

16. LT, "Dutch Integrity Guaranteed," 28 August 1939, p. 9 and "Mobilization in Holland," 29 August 1939, p. 9. See also E.N. van Kleffens, The Rape of the Netherlands (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p. 43; Frederic S. Pearson, The Weak State in International Crisis: The Case of the Netherlands in the German Invasion Crisis of 1939-40 (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), p. 64; and Maass, p. 26.

17. Warmbrunn, p. 5. See also Eelco Nicolaas Van Kleffens, Juggernaut Over Holland: The Dutch Foreign Minister's Personal Story of the Invasion of the Netherlands (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 19, hereafter cited as Juggernaut.

18. LT, "Dutch Minesweeper Hits a Mine," 9 September 1939, p. 8. See also Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands Orange Book: Summary of the Principal Matters Dealt With by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Connection With the State of War Up Till November 1939 and Suitable for Publication (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgeversmaatschappij N.V., 1940), p. 15 (hereafter

cited as Orange Book); Bernard H.M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 349; and Newton, p. 134.

19. On or about 20 September each year, Queen Wilhelmina opened the new session of the States-General with her "Speech from the Throne." The American equivalent would be the President's annual "State of the Union" address.

20. LT, "Dutch-Belgian Frontier Closed," 5 September 1939, p. 7; "Netherlands to Spend More on Defense," 21 September 1939, p. 7; and "Dutch Ban Holiday Motoring," 29 September 1939, p. 7. See also NYT, "Wilhelmina Holds Peace Hope Exists," 20 September 1939, p. 12; Vlekke, p. 349; and Warmbrunn, p. 5.

21. NYT, "'State of War' in Netherlands," 2 September 1939, p. 2; "Netherlands Anti-Hitler," 12 September 1939, p. 5; and "Neutrals Act for Foes," 15 September 1939, p. 3. See also Orange Book, p. 31 and Pearson, pp. 80 and 87.

22. NYT, "Netherlands Arms to Save Neutrality," 23 September 1939, p. 2 and Hanson W. Baldwin, "Belgium Prepared, But Army is Small," 25 September 1939, p. 7. See also Pearson, p. 48; Juggernaut, p. 74; and Brigadier Peter Young, The World Almanac Book of World War II (New York: World Almanac Publications, 1981), p. 40 (this book has been used for many general dates throughout the paper).

23. MAJ (later MG) Colbern attended the Virginia Military Academy and the University of Virginia and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry on 9 August 1917. He transferred to Field Artillery in 1923 and attended the Polish Cavalry School from 1931-1933. Promoted to Major in 1935, he graduated from the Command and General Staff College in 1938 and was assigned to Warsaw as the American Military Attaché to Poland. He experienced the German invasion of Poland and was transferred to The Hague on 23 October 1939. He remained in the Netherlands after the Dutch surrender until 16 June 1940. The Dutch destroyed their intelligence summaries (which Colbern generally had access to) and his references to them are the only remaining primary source documentation for the summaries. See André Ausems, "The Netherlands Military Intelligence Summaries 1939-1940 and the Defeat in the Blitzkrieg of May 1940," Military Affairs, 50 (October 1986), pp. 190-191. Hereafter cited as "Intelligence Summaries."

24. MAJ William H. Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 1," Report No. 4516, 20 November 1939, RG 165, NA. See also NYT, "Netherlands Defense Costs Rise," 18 October 1939, p. 6.

25. COL Oster was the son of a Lutheran pastor, who had twice been awarded the Iron Cross for bravery in World War I. In the early 1930s he became bitterly disillusioned with Hitler and Nazism on moral and patriotic grounds. He firmly believed Hitler

would destroy his beloved Germany, and became active in plots against the Fuhrer as early as 1938. Promoted to Major General during the war, the Gestapo arrested him after the abortive attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944. Eventually interned at the Flossenburg concentration camp, the SS executed him (along with his former superior Admiral Canaris and the Reverend Dietrich Bonhoeffer) on 9 April 1945. See J.G. de Beus, Tomorrow at Dawn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), pp. 169-178.

26. Juggernaut, p. 72. See also Dr. Peter Voute, Only a Free Man (Santa Fe: The Lightning Tree, 1982), pp. 20-21. Voute stated that Hitler cancelled invasion plans of the Netherlands eighteen times, Pearson insisted he changed his mind twenty-nine times. The important fact is not the number of times the invasion was called off but the "cry wolf" syndrome that developed among the top leadership in the Netherlands. Since MAJ Sas could not inform his government of last minute changes in German plans, over time any report he submitted was suspect. See Pearson, p. 48 and de Beus, pp. 70-79.

27. NYT, "Give Money for Twenty Guns," 11 October 1939, p. 10; "Netherlands to Give Gas Masks," 20 October 1939, p. 7; and "Few Apply for Masks," 24 October 1939, p. 4. See also Voute, p. 28.

28. Oscar Mohr, "Lowlands Tense, Foreigners to Leave," NYT, 11 November 1939, p. 1. See also Pearson, pp. 47 and 75; Report 4516; and Juggernaut, p. 53.

29. Pearson, p. 82. See also Warmbrunn, pp. 5-6; Vlekke, p. 349; and MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 2," Report No. 4517, 15 December 1939, RG 165, NA.

30. LT, "Dutch Intelligence Chief Resigns," 30 November 1939, p. 7. See also Pearson, p. 82; Louis de Jong as cited by Pearson, p. 109; Vlekke, p. 349; and Harold Butler, The Lost Peace (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), p. 38. The replacement of van Oorschot by LTG Fabius cannot be overemphasized. Van Oorschot had been the Intelligence Chief since 1919, was convinced that Germany would eventually attack toward the west, and had been decorated by the British, French, and German governments for his distinguished service. LTG Fabius, as a lieutenant in 1913, was the first officer assigned to the newly created Military Intelligence Department within the General Staff. Recalled from retirement to replace van Oorschot, Fabius believed that Germany would not attack the Netherlands and attempted to prevent alarm. His reports were "bland nothingness" compared with van Oorschot's "realistic, but somewhat anti-German" accounts. Officially van Oorschot resigned but in reality the Dutch Cabinet relieved him. See Andreas Wilhelmus Maria Ausems, III, Ten Days in May 1940: The Netherlands Defense Against "Fall Gelb" (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1983), pp. 64-65, 68-69, and 71 and "Intelligence Summaries," pp. 195 and 198.

31. NYT, "Leopold at Hague Sees Queen on War," 7 November 1939, p. 1. See also Report No. 4516 and Lord R.N. Strabolgi, The Campaign in the Low Countries (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1941), p. 37.

32. Pearson, pp. 70 and 87. Also during November, the Defense and Foreign Ministers (Dijxhoorn and van Kleffens) secretly permitted talks with the French at attaché level. See Pearson, p. 94.

33. LT, "Dutch Spy Plot," 7 November 1939, p. 8; "Dutch Officer Held for Spying," 7 November 1939, p. 21 and "Precautions in Holland," 11 November 1939, p. 6. See also Pearson, p. 89; NYT, "Dutch Uniforms Smuggled into Germany," 6 November 1939, p. 5 and Vlekke, p. 350.

34. LT, "Uneasiness in Holland," 10 November 1939, p. 8. See also Pearson, pp. 81 and 83-84 and Newton, p. 134.

35. Report No. 4517.

36. Report No. 4517.

37. NYT, "Netherlanders Irked," 1 December 1939, p. 6; 14 December 1939, p. 15; "Victorian Pilot," 17 December 1939, VII, p. 6; and "Dutch Loan Goes Begging," 20 December 1939, p. 2.

CHAPTER 4

DUTCH DEFENSIVE PREPARATIONS, 1940

The year 1940 marked a watershed in the progress of Dutch history. Modern Netherlands history could be divided into two eras, pre and post 1940. The German invasion and occupation of the Netherlands shook Dutch traditions and institutions centuries old to their foundation in this momentous year. Beginning with a somber New Year's address to the nation by former Prime Minister Colijn warning of "extreme danger," within five months the nation had been totally defeated and occupied by Germany. Five long years of Nazi oppression, of mass deportations of Dutch citizens to concentration camps, and of hunger and deprivation began in 1940. Between January and May, the Netherlands replaced its commander in chief, adopted a new war plan, and became increasingly convinced that it might also become a victim of the German war machine.¹

THE MECHELEN AFFAIR

The Dutch learned of many indicators of potentially hostile German intentions during January. The capture of German plans to invade the Lowlands created another war scare in both Belgium and the Netherlands. MAJ Colbern still believed, however, that the Dutch armed forces remained unable to repulse a German attack. As in the November crisis, the Netherlands conducted high level discussions with other friendly nations concerning Dutch security. These talks uncovered many difficulties in the coordination of Allied assistance to the Netherlands, the majority of which were never resolved prior to the German invasion.

New evidence of Germany's malevolent designs confronted the Dutch leadership during January. Army intelligence discovered more German units across the border. Of the estimated six new divisions on the Western Front, most of these deployed opposite Belgium. The Dutch confirmed mechanized units in the vicinity of Venlo and Emmerick. Recent intelligence indicated that six to eight German divisions were located north of the Rhine and eighteen to twenty divisions between Wezel and Aachen (see Map 4). Luftwaffe aircraft now operated from previously vacant airfields close to the border. German overflights of the Grebbe Line had occurred in December, and the Dutch

THE NETHERLANDS-MAP 4



believed that these planes were on photographic missions. MAJ Colbern considered such flights an unmistakable sign of Germany's offensive intentions, and noted that they were difficult to prevent because of the short distances involved and the "limited capacity" of the Dutch Air Force.²

On 10 January a German plane inadvertently landed near Mechelen, Belgium carrying the plans for the invasion of the West. The Belgians confiscated the plans before the German officers could totally destroy them, and informed the Netherlands, France, and Britain of the details which called for a German attack on 17 January. After discussions between Queen Wilhelmina and King Leopold and their principal advisors, LTG Reynders cancelled military leave, prohibited civilian traffic in some areas, and prepared bridges for demolition.³

The Mechelen Affair spurred increased consultations among the Low Countries, France, and Britain, which highlighted many problems associated with Allied assistance to the Netherlands. MAJ Colbern believed that the Dutch would fight only if invaded. He concluded that an attack on Belgium alone would not cause the Netherlands to fight. Current opinion in The Hague contended that Belgium would aid the Netherlands if Germany attacked, but would march north into the Netherlands only with French and British support. The Dutch and Belgians conducted secret talks during January in an attempt to tie in the southern Dutch

defenses in the vicinity of Weert with the northern Belgian lines along the Albert Canal.⁴

Britain planned to occupy Belgium to help the Netherlands if Germany attacked the Dutch and Belgium did not assist. Colbern surmised that a German attack was much more likely than British help. He postulated that the quickest aid to the Netherlands would be Belgian soldiers supported by the British Royal Air Force. Yet if Germany attacked Britain by air simultaneously no British help would be forthcoming. The British had already ruled out an Expeditionary Force to the Netherlands due to the terrain. Colbern suspected that it would take one week for British and French troops to assemble in Belgium prior to a sally northward into the Netherlands. However, he doubted the ability of the Dutch Army to delay the Germans long enough to allow a link up with these Allied forces. In any case, to his knowledge, no coordination had been effected between the Netherlands and Great Britain for military assistance.⁵

Such confusion over the various countries' responses to different German attack options resulted primarily from the neutral, no-collaboration policies of Belgium and the Netherlands. Furthermore, the British and French publicly and privately exerted pressure on the Netherlands and other neutral nations to join the fight against Nazi Germany. In his famous "House of Many Mansions" speech on 20 January, Churchill strongly urged the neutral countries to renounce

neutrality and oppose Nazism. He stated, "Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last."⁶ French Premier Leon Blum and Churchill had often chided the Dutch for their neutral policy. They argued that neutrality hindered efforts to assist the Netherlands and that by not taking sides the Dutch had already done so. The Dutch government rejected Churchill's eloquent plea and on 22 January instituted censorship on all foreign correspondents.⁷

By early 1940, the Dutch Army remained extremely weak in materiel. MAJ Colbern wrote, "Dutch bravery and the will to resist is not questioned; they would probably put up a stubborn resistance with the means available."⁸ Although the Army received two hundred and twenty anti-aircraft guns from Switzerland via Germany in January, it still possessed deficiencies in training, aircraft, artillery, tanks, and numbers. The Wehrmacht could attack within twenty-four hours of notification, predicted Colbern, and with better weather in the spring an attack was much more likely. The Dutch Army, he concluded, remained too weak to prevent or deter an invasion.⁹

A NEW COMMANDER IN CHIEF

During the month of February, the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy resigned. LTG Reynders had clashed

often with the top governmental leaders, especially his nominal superior, Defense Minister Dijxhoorn. The government selected LTG Henri Gerard Winkelman, who had retired in 1934, to replace Reynders. As events unfolded, he had only three months to prepare the armed forces for war. Intelligence reported more German divisions opposite the Dutch border and additional work accomplished on the Siegfried Line.

LTG Reynders officially resigned on 5 February, after nearly five years as the senior Dutch soldier in the country. Reynders deeply resented the fact that Dijxhoorn, ten years his junior, was his superior. Before being named Minister of Defense by de Geer in August 1939, Dijxhoorn had been a lowly Lieutenant Colonel. After his appointment as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy in late August 1939, Reynders hoped that his new position "would prevent the Minister from interfering in tactical matters."¹⁴

Although Reynders wanted to vigorously prepare his nation for war, he did not believe that Germany would attack the Netherlands. Concurrent with his appointment as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, the government gave Reynders "state of war" authority in accordance with the War Powers Act of 1899. This authority accorded him limited powers over civil government, but he strongly desired "state of siege" authority, which would have enabled him to suspend liberties such as freedom of the press. Dijxhoorn

continually argued against giving Reynders these broad powers and faulted him for a lack of initiative. The commander in chief appeared eager to improve the nation's defensive capabilities, but only if he could lead the effort.¹¹

LTG Reynders' conviction that Germany would not attack the Netherlands naturally led to disagreements with MAJ Sas and his constant warnings of an imminent German invasion. Reynders went so far as to censor intelligence from Sas and other sources before the Dutch Queen or cabinet saw it. At one point, Reynders physically prevented MAJ Sas from entering the Royal Palace. The thought that Sas's informant was a high ranking German officer was incomprehensible to Reynders. Dijxhoorn, on the other hand, generally believed Sas's reports.¹²

Reynders had also clashed with de Geer prior to 1937 when de Geer served as Minister of Finance. Although Dijxhoorn in many ways hindered defensive preparations and proved difficult to work for, Reynders had become extremely resistant to new ideas after five years at the head of the Army. On 20 December 1939, Dijxhoorn informed de Geer that the government could no longer continue with the current Defense Minister and Commander in Chief. Not surprisingly, de Geer opted to keep Dijxhoorn and Reynders resigned in favor of the newly promoted GEN H.G. Winkelman. Officially Reynders resigned over the state of siege authority issue,

although a Dutch officer informed MAJ Colbern that the government dismissed him due to inefficiency.¹³

The new Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy graduated from the Royal Military Academy in 1896. Previous command and staff assignments included Commander of the 4th Division (1931) and Chief of Staff of the Field Army. GEN Winkelman retired in 1934 after the government selected LTG Reynders (five years his junior) to be the next Chief of Staff. Recalled to active duty in 1939, GEN Winkelman commanded the Utrecht-Soesterberg air defense sector. Surprisingly, Dijxhoorn never even considered Winkelman for the position of Commander in Chief when he named Reynders to the post in August 1939. Known for his energy and administrative abilities, MAJ Colbern nevertheless opined that the government's choice of a sixty-four year old retired officer at this juncture was "a great mistake."

GEN Winkelman, who did believe that a German attack on the Netherlands was likely, faced immediate dangers from the east. The papers habitually reported various espionage plots and smuggling activities associated with Germany, and such breaches of internal security plagued the Netherlands until the invasion. On 22 February, for example, the authorities arrested twenty-four Dutch Nazis for participating in military drill activities. The Germans had completed a barbed wire fence that ran almost the entire length of the Dutch-German border, suspected of masking the

extension of the Siegfried Line to the north. The Netherlands Army General Staff believed that Germany had completed the Siegfried Line as far north as the Rhine. The fence greatly hindered Dutch intelligence efforts, typically dependent on human intelligence such as Dutch workers or travelers in Germany.¹⁵

More immediate threats confronted GEN Winkelman. British and German aircraft violated Dutch airspace practically at will, and during the night of 27 February anti-aircraft units fired forty-four shells over Amsterdam alone. By early February, the Dutch General Staff estimated German strength on the Western Front at between one hundred and one hundred and five divisions. Intelligence reports indicated that thirty of these divisions were opposite the Netherlands. To MAJ Colbern, the presence of such a large German force clearly showed the German intent to invade the Netherlands. Offensive action was the only rationale for these forces.¹⁶

WINKELMAN MODIFIES THE DUTCH WAR PLAN

In his first month as Commander and Chief of the Army and Navy, GEN Winkelman reviewed and modified the war plan that LTG Reynders disseminated in November 1939. He received a cursory outbrief from Reynders, who never informed Winkelman of the problems discovered in the initial

plan. For instance, the Military Intelligence Section never briefed Winkelman that they now expected the Panzer Division located directly across the border to attack south instead of north of the Rhine and Maas Rivers. . Incredibly, the cabinet did not thoroughly review the new plan because it believed that to do so would compromise its neutrality. On 23 March, Winkelman completed his plan, entitled "Memo Concerning Cooperative Action to be Taken by the Dutch, Belgian, British, and French Armies, Sent by the Commander in Chief of the Dutch Land and Sea Forces." By the end of the month, the General Staff had distributed these instructions in sealed envelopes to the Dutch Military Attachés in the Allied countries.¹⁷

For years the highest military leadership in the Netherlands had debated the specifics of the nation's war plan. All agreed that the cornerstone of the Dutch defenses remained the ability to flood large portions of the country. The Netherlands had depended on inundations for defense since the 16th century. The principal, devious issue concerned the location of the main defensive line. LTD Reynders planned to annoy an invader from the east and promptly fall back into Fortress Holland to conduct a strong defense. Fortress Holland contained parts of the three west-central provinces in the Netherlands, including basically all of South Holland, the western portion of Utrecht, and the southern area of North Holland. Rivers,

canals, and lakes formed the boundary of the majority of this defensive line, and the bulk of the remainder could be flooded to a width of from one to five kilometers. The High Command considered the Dutch Army capable of successfully defending Fortress Holland. The General Staff recognized several weaknesses with this plan, however. The ground to the east of Fortress Holland was higher, provided cover, and could dominate the position. Additionally, the Dutch Army within Fortress Holland would be unable to either link up with or break out and join Allied ground forces.¹⁰

General Winkelman and LTG J.J. Godfried van Voorst tot Voorst, the Commander in Chief of the Field Army, insisted that the main line of defense should be further to the east along the Grebbe Line. This position was east of Fortress Holland from the IJsselmeer north of Amersfoort to the Waal River, and mitigated the weaknesses associated with defending solely from within Fortress Holland. The Grebbe Line could be flooded, could provide sufficient defensive depth to form a reserve, and could be adequately defended by the Dutch Army since it was only forty kilometers long. Two major weaknesses hindered the planned defensive line; the Grebbe Line was not an actual obstacle and the largest inundations were planned behind this position. Nevertheless, GEN Winkelman promulgated plans to upgrade the Grebbe Line defenses on 30 March, which were due to be completed not earlier than October.¹¹

The overall Dutch defensive plan to counter an attack from the east called for delaying actions (demolishing bridges and creating other obstacles) along the Ijssel Line in the north and the Maas Line in the south (see Map 5). The General Staff envisioned a more determined delay in the south by forces occupying the Peel-Raam Defenses, to possibly link up with Allied forces moving north into Brabant. Units in the lightly defended northeast portion of the country were to delay east of the Ijsselmeer (or Zuider Zee) and then defend the Wons Defenses. Winkelman decided to leave the eastern border of the provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland practically defenseless. The Dutch Navy stationed some small surface ships in the Ijsselmeer to assist in the defense of the Afsluitdijk, and had responsibility for coastal defense.²⁰

The fully mobilized Royal Netherlands Army possessed the following units on the eve of the German invasion; four corps with two divisions and an artillery regiment each, one light division consisting of two brigades of cyclists and two regiments of motorcyclists, five reserve divisions (A-D and the Peel Division), nine reserve regiments (or brigades), twenty-four frontier infantry battalions, two Air Force regiments to support ground operations, and numerous detached soldiers manning fixed installations. Each corps numbered approximately 28,000 men.²¹

THE NETHERLANDS-MAP 5

Defence Lines May, 1940

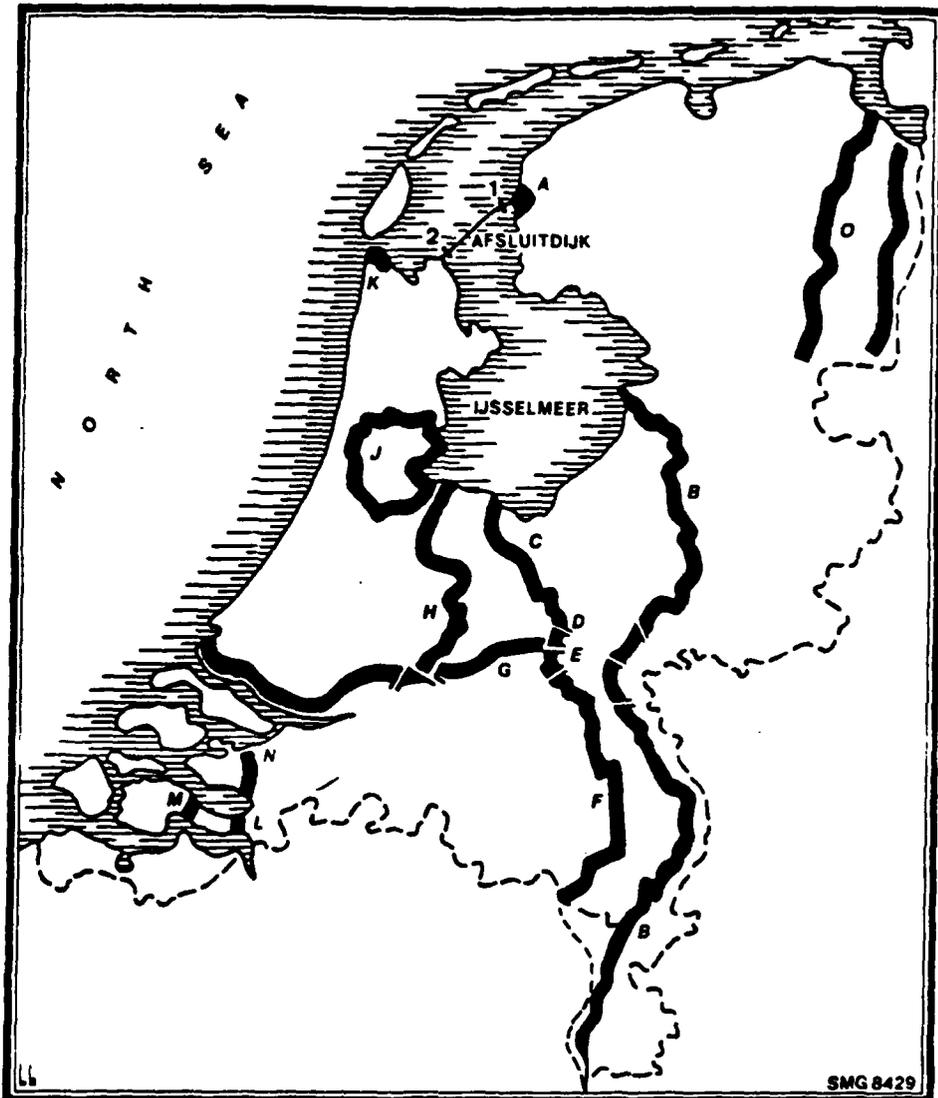


Figure 17 - Defence lines, May 1940.

A - Wons Defences, B - IJssel-Maas line, C - Grebbe line, D - Ochten-De Spees line, E - Maas-Waal line, F - Peel-Raam Defences, G - Waal-Linge line, H - Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinic, I - Southern front Fortress Holland, J - Amsterdam Defences, K - Den Helder Defences, L - Bath Defences, M - Zanddijk Defences, N - Eendracht Defences, O - Defence lines in eastern Groningen and eastern Drenthe, 1 - Fortifications near Korwerderzand, 2 - Fortifications near Den Oever.

The I Corps occupied The Hague to guard the coast and act as the Army reserve to reinforce the front. II Corps, headquartered in Arnhem, manned the Ijssel Line. The III Corps defended the Peel-Raam Defenses in the vicinity of Breda. Headquartered in Amersfoort, IV Corps defended the Grebbe Line. The Light Division and a reserve division were stationed in Brabant, two reserve divisions deployed between the Rhine and Maas Rivers, and the other two reserve divisions occupied positions within Fortress Holland. One brigade, positioned near Delfzijl in the extreme northeast corner of the country, defended the northern approaches to Fortress Holland across the Afsluitdijk.²²

MAJ Colbern's access to the weekly intelligence summaries prepared by the Dutch Army's Intelligence Section enabled him to inform the War Department of the latest Dutch estimates of German strength and intentions. Between his 8 February and 5 March reports, the Dutch identified a total of sixteen new German divisions opposite the BENELUX countries. The Dutch General Staff attributed this increase to German fears of an Allied attack through Belgium and Dutch Limburg, but voiced no rationale for their assumption. MAJ Colbern strongly believed that Germany planned an offensive because of this build up, the presence of Wehrmacht armored and light divisions close to the Dutch border, and the increase in Luftwaffe and bridging units opposite the Netherlands.²³

Nine days later, MAJ Colbern reported more evidence of Germany's hostile designs. The latest rumor in the Netherlands predicted a German attack westward now that the Russo-Finnish war had ceased. The Dutch counted forty-one German divisions opposite the German-Dutch border, including additional armored and mechanized units. These divisions occupied an area east of Gelderland and south of Venlo. German airfields had increased their stockage of fuel, ammunition, and their anti-aircraft systems. Dutch Intelligence identified eighteen German bridges between Emmerick and Dusseldorf. Armed with this mounting evidence of a probable German attack, the Dutch Military Intelligence Section merely admitted that Germany could use these forces to pressure the Netherlands but still insisted that Germany's most likely course of action was defense.²⁴

The Netherlands faced other internal and external threats in March. On the 1st, Germany informed the Netherlands and Belgium that effective 15 March the German border would be closed. During the weekend of 1-2 March, German aircraft fired on nine Dutch ships, killing two hundred and twenty seamen. The Dutch fired at both German and British aircraft over Netherlands territory on 4 March. In reality, the boundary between peace and war had become extremely blurred for the Netherlands by March 1940.²⁵

Internally, the Dutch government confronted

burgeoning espionage which would occupy the nation's leadership until the day before the invasion. On 1 March, authorities arrested two men in Rotterdam for transmitting weather conditions to Germany. The New York Times reported that Germany maintained a "wide espionage net" in the Netherlands.²⁶ The government banned a Nazi youth organization one week later. By this time, espionage had become so rampant that the government considered enlarging the area of the country under state of siege authority.²⁷

DUTCH RESPONSE TO THE GERMAN INVASION OF SCANDINAVIA

Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway on 9 April, without provocation or warning, abruptly shattered the "Phony War." Germany for the first time struck West, and many Dutchmen who earlier believed that the country could evade the war now admitted that the Netherlands might be the next nation to be attacked. The Dutch learned many lessons from the German modus operandi, especially in Norway, and took preventive measures to counteract these tactics. The increased danger of a German invasion, however, served only to make the Dutch government more determined than ever to continue its strict neutral policy.

The invasion of Denmark and Norway shocked the Dutch leaders. The Army immediately cancelled all leave. Germany stated its intention to respond if Britain threatened the

security of the Low Countries, and hoped that the Netherlands would have "as sensible an attitude" as Denmark in such an eventuality.²⁸ The Dutch blocked roads and bridges leading to Germany and doubled the number of guards along the German border. In mid-April, the Dutch conducted a realistic, nationwide alert of all the armed forces to demonstrate to any potential invader that the Netherlands could not be surprised.²⁹

The Dutch accumulated other unmistakable evidence of German aggressive intentions in April. In a very revealing speech to a group of Hitler Youth on 3 April, Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering stated that the decisive blow in the war must be made in the west, and that Hitler had prepared the German armed forces for this task. Accusations against the Netherlands appeared in the German press, similar to those which preceded the invasion of Scandinavia. The London Times considered the fact that the recent appearance of gaps in the fence constructed by the Germans along the Dutch border "prima facie evidence" of Nazi intention to attack.³⁰ According to the article, the Dutch leaders disregarded the information as too obvious.

On 17 April, the Dutch Military Intelligence Section identified six armored, five motorized, and three light divisions across the border. These forces represented the majority of the German mechanized forces arrayed along the Western Front, and were part of the fifty-five divisions

opposite the Netherlands. The Dutch also knew that Germany was continuing to form new divisions at a time when spring planting required large numbers of workers. Intelligence analysts estimated that forty-one new German divisions would join the Wehrmacht by 1 June. MAJ Colbern concluded that the massive German build up undoubtedly proved that Germany planned an offensive against the Netherlands. Since the new units would not complete their initial training close to the border before 20 April, and the extremely wet ground in that area would not dry before the end of April, he intimated that no German attack would occur before late April or early May. Dutch intelligence in The Hague seemed unruffled due to the fact that the Germans granted leave to some of their soldiers. The "notoriously pessimistic" MAJ Sas, however, believed that Hitler would attack as soon as the ground allowed mechanized movement.³¹

The German invasion of Scandinavia caused a reevaluation of Dutch policy among the political leadership in the country. Most notably, former Premier Colijn publicly urged the government to reject neutrality. Even van Kleffens, a very vocal proponent of neutrality, discussed with Churchill the specifics of British assistance available to the Netherlands. The Dutch considered Churchill's offer insufficient and opted to remain neutral. Additionally, the Netherlands government allowed companies to move their corporate headquarters out of the country.³²

Allied pressure on the neutrals to change their policy increased after the invasions of Denmark and Norway. On 12 April Churchill delivered a major address in which he intended to convince the neutrals to join the fight against Hitler. Both Britain and France threatened to seize the overseas possessions of any neutral which fell under Germany's sphere of influence by occupation or otherwise. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain chided the neutral countries for not allying with the other democracies in the fight against Germany. The Dutch government responded by rejecting British and French requests to be allowed transit rights across the Netherlands to strike Germany.³³

In addition to the threats from Germany and from the Allied nations, the Netherlands confronted internal threats as well. Press accounts of espionage appeared weekly in London and New York. The authorities placed the home of the Dutch Nazi leader, Anton Mussert, under constant surveillance and on 29 April arrested a Dutch Nazi editor. The government discovered an envelope with markings of the Dutch Nazi Party which contained information on fortifications and unit movements, and Dutch leaders knew that Germany had been receiving details about Dutch defensive positions. After the Dutch learned how the Germans used a fifth column in Norway, the government instituted other internal security measures. On 13 April

the government expanded martial law into four hundred and nineteen additional towns and cities. Six days later the government placed the entire country under a state of siege for the first time since the 1848 Constitution made such a provision. The military could now control civilian authorities throughout the Netherlands. The government legalized searches of homes for weapons and banned Nazi meetings. In the midst of all of these intense pressures, the country maintained its calm and resolute manner for, as de Geer said, the Dutch defensive preparations had been advanced "to the highest possible degree."³⁴

The Netherlands did slightly modify its defensive posture based on lessons learned from the German invasion of Norway. The Dutch strengthened their airfield defenses by stationing their best units nearby, and destroyed other unneeded airfields. British assistance to Norway pleased the Dutch, but they observed the great difficulties Britain had in landing, supporting, and fighting in Norway. The sacrosanct policy of neutrality continued, however, as the Dutch downed two British planes and bitterly denounced British mining of neutral Norwegian waters prior to the German invasion.³⁵

The widespread belief inside and outside of the Netherlands that the Low Countries were likely to become the next German victims became the principal outcome of the German attack into Scandinavia. Most diplomats in Berlin

predicted that Hitler would attack quickly to the West after his Scandinavian operation. Immediately following the German attack against Denmark and Norway, a Dutch Socialist paper declared, "The impassive among us who believed that the fire would not touch the neutrals now have proof that they have been wrong. The beast has broken loose."³⁶ A front page article in the New York Times on 12 April predicted that the Netherlands and Belgium would be the next countries to experience the German Blitzkrieg. Even Dutch officials in The Hague expressed the belief that war with Germany had become much more probable. Since the mid-1930s various Dutchmen had become convinced that a German attack on the Netherlands was truly possible. Now, scarcely one month before the German invasion, many Dutch leaders and citizens realized for the first time the likelihood of war coming to the Netherlands.³⁷

INVASION

As the month of May began, the Netherlands had less than two weeks of freedom before the German surprise attack. The government received advance warning of the 10 May German attack. On 3 or 4 May, reliable sources informed the Dutch leaders to expect the Nazis to attack within a few days. The Dutch took precautionary measures, but up until the night before the attack some leaders still did not believe

that Germany would invade the Netherlands.³⁸

The Netherlands undertook some preparations in anticipation of the German invasion. The Dutch limited their response, however, because they still did not want to violate their neutrality, alarm the populace, and some leaders still did not believe the Germans would attack. GEN Winkelman, who remained somewhat skeptical concerning the true danger to the Netherlands throughout the spring, finally believed Sas's warnings of the impending attack on 3 May. The army he commanded, although the largest standing army in the history of the country, still possessed glaring weaknesses. His soldiers lacked experience in the field, and had rarely participated in large unit maneuvers. Materially, the army lacked sufficient aircraft, artillery, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft weapons (although it did have some modern Vickers and Bofors models), tanks, armored cars, and ammunition.³⁹

The internal espionage threat continued unabated, and the government arrested citizens on suspicion of spying nearly every day. On 5 May, Dutch police arrested twenty-one people considered dangerous to national security. The authorities did not apprehend Anton Mussert, but did arrest one member of the Second Chamber. Ironically, on the day prior to the invasion, the Lower House debated the death penalty for spies and others involved in espionage activities. That night, after confirmation of the invasion

came from MAJ Sas, authorities seized thousands of suspected fifth columnists throughout the country. The Netherlands never solved its internal subversion problems. One writer noted "there were spies everywhere."⁴⁰

The Dutch leaders, fully cognizant of the fact that the invasion was fast approaching, still insisted on maintaining neutrality to the end. Prime Minister de Geer had consistently desired to "maintain neutrality toward all sides and so prevent the Netherlands from being dragged into a war."⁴¹ He once told a senior officer, "I do not understand strategy and I don't understand what reasons Hitler could have to attack our country."⁴² When the government received the warning of attack a few days prior to the invasion, it decided not to inform other countries because of the Netherlands policy of neutrality. Many government officials contended to the end that German pressure on the Netherlands was designed to cause the Dutch to commit an unneutral act or demonstrate their defensive plans. Just in case an attack did occur, however, van Kleffens alerted the Dutch representative at the League of Nations. Furthermore, the Navy Commander on his own arranged for British evacuation of the Royal Family.⁴³

The government consciously approached the expected day of the invasion without creating any undue alarm among the populace and without giving the Germans any excuse to invade. On 7 May the German press admonished the neutral

nations and the Netherlands cancelled all military leave without exception. The Dutch leadership directed "extraordinary military precautions" the following day, which were considered out of consonance with the European situation.⁴⁴ The Dutch people typically remained calm, yet the London Times speculated that the government had secret reasons for upgrading military readiness. On 9 May, Germany halted waterborne traffic with the Netherlands.⁴⁵

That night, the Dutch government received confirmation from MAJ Sas in Berlin that Germany would invade the following day. He sent the fateful message, "Tomorrow at dawn. Hold tight."⁴⁶ GEN Winkelman then issued several orders to his commanders. He specified that machinegun positions in The Hague and other large cities be established, that bridges in Limburg be destroyed, and that the Army be alerted. Soon after, he departed his headquarters to inspect the preparations. Meanwhile, several top civilian leaders met in the home of van Kleffens and some still did not believe the Germans would attack. The Dutch discovered German aircraft enroute to Great Britain early in the morning of 10 May, but these planes executed a flawless deception plan and turned back to initiate the invasion between 0330 and 0400 hours. For the first time in one hundred and nine years, the Dutch were at war in Europe. The German 18th Army under LTG Georg von Kuchler invaded the Netherlands with approximately 250,000

men in nine divisions. Within five days, the Dutch Army had surrendered, the Wehrmacht had occupied the country, and the government had moved to London where it remained until Germany capitulated five years later.⁴⁷

ENDNOTES

1. The London Times, "Time of 'Extreme Danger,'" 3 January 1940, p. 5. Hereafter cited as LT.
2. The New York Times, "Tension Relaxes in the Low Countries," 16 January 1940, p. 6, hereafter cited as NYT. See also MAJ William H. Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 3," Report No. 4541, 17 January 1940, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives (NA).
3. LT, "Low Countries Uneasy," 15 January 1940, p. 6. See also Brigadier Peter Young, The World Almanac Book of World War II (New York: World Almanac Publications, 1981), p. 46; B.H. Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), p. 37; Lord R.N. Strabolgi, The Campaign in the Low Countries (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1941), p. 40; and Frederic S. Pearson, The Weak State in International Crisis: The Case of the Netherlands in the German Invasion Crisis of 1939-40 (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), p. 98. Incredibly, and in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Foreign Minister van Kleffens insisted in both of the books he wrote after the Dutch collapse that he never knew of the captured plans. See Eelco Nicolaas Van Kleffens, Juggernaut Over Holland: The Dutch Foreign Minister's Personal Story of the Invasion of the Netherlands (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 54, hereafter cited as Juggernaut and E.N. van Kleffens, The Rape of the Netherlands (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), p. 93, hereafter cited as Rape.
4. Report No. 4541.
5. W.S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1948), pp. 578-579. See also Report No. 4541.
6. Amry Vandenbosch, Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815 (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1959), p. 281. Churchill perceived that the Netherlands took no action after being warned of the possible German invasion in January, and hence criticized the Dutch lethargy.
7. NYT, "Netherlands Applies Military Censorship," 23 January 1940, p. 5. See also Churchill, pp. 556-567; Liddell Hart, p. 55; and Report No. 4541. Colbern even attributed some of the invasion rumors appearing in the press to British and French attempts to cause the Netherlands to look to them for support.

8. Report No. 4541.

9. Report No. 4541. As previously stated, many Dutchmen simply believed that Germany would not invade their country. For instance, the General Staff presumed that Germany would not attack because it was delivering arms (such as artillery and anti-aircraft guns) to the Netherlands. Other arguments against a German attack were that the Dutch had taken the Kaiser in after World War I (and he lived until 1941 in the Netherlands), that the House of Orange originated in Germany (stated in the first lines of the Dutch National Anthem), and that the Queen's deceased husband had been German. See also Walter B. Maass, The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945 (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), p. 14; and Pearson, p. 71.

10. Enquete commissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945 (or Enquiry Commission), as quoted by Andreas Wilhelmus Maria Ausems, III, Ten Days in May 1940: The Netherlands Defense Against "Fall Gelb" (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1983), pp. 59-60. See also LT, "Dutch Defenses," 6 February 1940, p. 7 and Pearson, p. 102. Due to their differing views on the correct war plan for the Army, Reynders considered Dijkhoorn intellectually incapable of understanding the nation's strategic plans. See C.M. Schulten, "The Netherlands and its Army (1900-1940)" in Je Maintiendrai: A Concise History of the Dutch Army, ed. H. Amersfoort and P.H. Kamphuis, (The Hague: Historical Section of the Royal Netherlands Army, 1985), p. 85, hereafter cited as Je Maintiendrai.

11. Pearson, pp. 65 and 69.

12. Pearson, pp. 83 and 102-103. See also Ausems, p. 63.

13. Ausems, pp. 78 and 87. See also MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 4," Report No. 4550, 26 February 1940, RG 165, NA. Neither man was blameless. Ausems considered Dijkhoorn the "worst possible" choice for Defense Minister (p. 55); Wilhelmina Steenbeek, in Rotterdam: Invasion of Holland (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), p. 22 concluded that Reynders' replacement "came not a moment too soon."

14. LT, "Dutch Defenses," 6 February 1940, p. 7. See also Ausems, pp. 59 and 91 and Report No. 4550.

15. Ausems, p. 50. See also LT, "German Secrecy at Dutch Frontier," 23 February 1940, p. 23; NYT, "Netherlands Holds Six in Espionage Raid," 23 February 1940, p. 5; and Report No. 4550. The small Intelligence Section budget during the 1930s did not allow for actual agents, instead the Dutch relied on the German press and voluntary information from those who had recently traveled in Germany. See Ausems, pp. 64-65.

16. Report No. 4550. See also London Times, Intelligence Files, World War II, Aerial Operations, Vol. 1-4, 28 February 1940, hereafter cited as Intelligence Files.
17. Pearson, pp. 87-88. See also German Foreign Office, Allied Intrigue in the Low Countries (New York: German Library of Information, 1940), p. 40. Winkelman's instructions called for four French divisions and one British division, in addition to British anti-aircraft artillery and Royal Air Force support. Winkelman, too, ordered that the envelopes were not to be opened until the outbreak of hostilities. See Louis de Jong, as cited in Ausems, pp. 96-97.
18. Ausems, p. 85. See also P.L.G. Doorman, Military Operations in the Netherlands from 10th-17th May, 1940, trans. S.L. Salzedo (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1944), pp. 27-28 and Maass, p. 15.
19. Louis de Jong, as cited in Ausems, p. 97. See also Doorman, pp. 28-29; German Foreign Office, p. 41; and Bernard H.M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 352.
20. Doorman, pp. 30-33. See also Gerald Newton, The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey 1795-1977 (London: Ernest Benn, 1978), p. 133 and Vlekke, p. 352.
21. MAJ Colbern, "Corps," G-2 Report No. 4588, 2 May 1940, RG 165, NA. See also Doorman, p. 17 and H.S. Ashton, The Netherlands at War (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1941), p. 13.
22. MAJ Colbern, "Organization-General," G-2 Report No. 4586, 30 April 1940, RG 165, NA. See also Juggernaut, p. 118; Ashton, p. 13; and Vlekke, p. 352.
23. MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 5," Report No. 4560, 5 March 1940, RG 165, NA.
24. MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 6," Report No. 4567, 14 March 1940, RG 165, NA.
25. LT, "Germany to Close Two Frontiers," 2 March 1940, p. 7. See also Intelligence Files, 4-5 March 1940.
26. NYT, "Netherlands Finds Nazi Radio Station," 2 March 1940, p. 3.
27. LT, 9 March 1940, p. 5. See also NYT, "Nazi Group in Holland Dissolved," 9 March 1940, p. 2.
28. LT, "Precautions Taken in Holland," 10 April 1940, p. 7.

29. LT, "Holland Remains Calm," 11 April 1940, p. 7. See also NYT, "War Rehearsal is Warning," 16 April 1940, p. 6 and Juggernaut, p. 75. MAJ Colbern recorded the Dutch reaction as one of "alarm and anger. When a Dutchman is alarmed and angry he becomes supremely stubborn." See MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 9," Report No. 4580, 23 April 1940, RG 165, NA.

30. LT, "Pressure on Holland," 15 April 1940, p. 5. See also NYT, "Goering Predicts 'Blow in the West,'" 4 April 1940, p. 1.

31. MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 7," Report No. 4572, 1 April 1940, RG 165, NA. See also MAJ Colbern, "Comments on Current Events No. 8," Report No. 4573, 2 April 1940, RG 165, NA and Report No. 4580.

32. Vlekke, p. 351. See also Pearson, p. 89.

33. NYT, "Allies Hold Stick Over the Neutrals," 13 April 1940, p. 2. See also LT, "Rights and Duties of Neutrals," 23 April 1940, p. 7 and British Foreign Office, as cited in Pearson, p. 88.

34. LT, "Rights and Duties of Neutrals," 23 April 1940, p. 7; "Holland on her Guard," 12 April 1940, p. 8; and "Dutch Nazi Editor Arrested," 30 April 1940, p. 5. See also Louis de Jong, The German Fifth Column in the Second World War, trans. by C.M. Geyl (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 69; Werner Warmbrunn, The Dutch Under German Occupation, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 6; Victor Bodker, "Netherlands Nazis Closely Watched," NYT, 18 April 1940, p. 5; and Report No. 4580.

35. Pearson, p. 108. See also Maass, p. 27; de Jong, p. 67; NYT, "Netherlanders Score Mining Act by Allies," 9 April 1940, p. 11; Report No. 4573; and Report No. 4580.

36. NYT, "Netherlands Army Put on Alert," 10 April 1940, p. 1.

37. LT, "Nazis Driven to Act," 11 April 1940, p. 7. See also G.H. Archambault, "West Drive Feared," NYT, 12 April 1940, p. 1.

38. Juggernaut, p. 59. See also Pearson, p. 50. Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the Chief of the German Abwehr, ensured the Netherlands was warned of the impending invasion. See Liddell Hart, p. 38.

39. Pearson, pp. 43 and 88-89. See also Hendrik Riemens, The Netherlands: Story of a Free People (New York: Eagle Books, 1944), p. 295; Maass, pp. 16-17; Doorman, pp. 19-20; and J.J.C.P. Wilson, as cited in Je Maintiendrai, p. 84. The Army had only two hundred and forty-eight combat aircraft, most of its artillery possessed no recoil, only thirty-three percent of the

required number of anti-tank guns was on hand, and there were no tanks and only twenty-six armored cars.

40. LT, "Dutch Precautions," 6 May 1940, p. 6 and "Holland Takes No Chances," 10 May 1940, p. 5. See also Juggernaut, p. 80 and G.N. Clark, Holland and the War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 29.

41. Louis de Jong, as quoted in Ausems, p. 47.

42. Louis de Jong, as quoted in Ausems, pp. 47-48.

43. Juggernaut, p. 61. See also Pearson, pp. 75 and 89. Ausems further described de Geer as "an old gentleman and quite pacifistic in his outlook" (p. 89).

44. LT, "Dutch People Calm," 9 May 1940, p. 6.

45. LT, "Dutch on Guard," 8 May 1940, p. 6 and "Holland Takes No Chances," 10 May 1940, p. 5. See also Jonkheer F. Beelaerts van Blokland, The Five Days of Holland (Washington: publisher not given, 1940), p. 8.

46. Warmbrunn, p. 7. See also Dr. Peter Voute, Only a Free Man (Santa Fe: The Lightning Tree, 1982), p. 22.

47. Juggernaut, p. 81. See also Pearson, pp. 88-89 and 136; Former Foreign Ministry Official, as cited in Pearson, p. 75; and Doorman, pp. 42 and 90.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Dutch defensive preparations during the period from 1933 to 1940 were generally inadequate, though the Netherlands greatly improved its military capability in the 1930s. In some ways, Dutch preparations were adequate. The number of soldiers mobilized, roughly 400,000 out of a population of some nine million, was entirely sufficient for the mission assigned the armed forces. The Army made tremendous strides in numbers of personnel, materiel, organization, training, and morale between 1933 and 1940. Considering the simultaneous effort and expense associated with the military preparations in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) and West Indies, the Dutch worldwide military capability improved notably. The Netherlands surpassed any other country in the world in its ability to create substantial obstacles by flooding. Finally, the Dutch decision to remain mobilized for the duration of the war ensured that the country would be generally prepared for any

sudden invasion.

The primary reason Dutch defensive preparations were inadequate was because they based their national defense and security policy on illusion and not reality. For the policy of neutrality to have been successful, the Netherlands must have been able to withstand an invasion alone. Since the nation's rearmament fell far short of its goal, the country could have never defeated an attacker without significant military assistance from abroad. The policy of neutrality, therefore, was fatally flawed and could not succeed in the event of war. The only real hope the Netherlands possessed, given the failure of the nation's rearmament program, depended on Allied assistance coordinated well before war began. In reality, the Netherlands placed its fate squarely in Hitler's hands and by its strict neutrality completely forfeited any meaningful initiative or policy options.¹

Dutch attempts to rearm fell far short of enabling the country to stand alone against a German invasion. Foreign Minister van Kleffens, the premier government apologist for neutrality, stated that the measures undertaken by the Netherlands to rearm were not nearly enough to sufficiently protect the country. Dutch rearmament did not actually begin until 1938, which was too late to build an indigenous arms industry or receive appreciable amounts of arms from other nations frantically

rearming themselves. Some have argued that even a complete Dutch rearmament would not have prevented a German victory. Such a conclusion would further underscore the flaws in the Dutch policy of neutrality.²

For neutrality to have validity, the neutral nation must be able to withstand an invasion without assistance from other countries. Since the Dutch rearmament program fell short, the Netherlands could not resist Germany alone. In fact, the government leadership grossly overestimated the amount of time the Dutch Army could hold off the Germans. Some believed that the Dutch could delay the Wehrmacht for two to three weeks, hoping that the Allies would come to their aid. Hendrik Riemens wrote, "More than ever it was imperative for any country that wanted to remain neutral to muster enough force to withstand all violations of its policy."³ The Dutch policy of strict neutrality, was fatally flawed in case of war because the Netherlands could not militarily prevail against Germany.⁴

World War I proved to the Netherlands that neutrality was a highly successful policy. Prior to their entry into World War II, the Dutch leaders and people indulged in "wishful thinking."⁵ In essence, the Dutch believed what they wanted to believe, and presumed that their country would not be involved in the war. The overwhelming desire to stay out of the war made the Dutch blind to the difference between avoiding combat and

preserving their independence. The Netherlands misread its World War I experience by concluding that neutrality was the appropriate foreign policy regardless of the international situation. The nation failed to understand that German national interests, not strict neutrality on its part, determined whether or not Germany invaded the country in both world wars.⁶

Additionally, the Netherlands could never truly grasp the fact that its very existence was in jeopardy. The Dutch proved unable to comprehend the true nature of the Nazi menace, or that a country could act as dasturdly as Germany. The people were naive and uninformed concerning National Socialism from the early 1930s until the time of the invasion. The belief that Germany would not invade the Netherlands filtered down from the highest ranking national leaders. Both Prime Ministers Colijn and de Geer believed that Germany would not attack the Netherlands.⁷

Based on the probability that the Netherlands could not successfully defend against a German attack, the Dutch obviously needed to obtain Allied assistance. Dutch leaders understood the necessity of aid from the Western powers, yet never effectively coordinated for military support. The Dutch presumed that the required assistance could be arranged after Germany attacked. The Netherlands government hoped, thought, and assumed that the Allies would rush to its rescue in the event of an attack, but never actually

coordinated the Allied response. Since the Dutch recognized the real German intentions at such a late date, they forfeited the diplomatic initiative to Hitler. Consequently, by the time the government realized the necessity for military assistance from other nations, it reasoned that such a move would prompt a German invasion. Given that the avoidance of a German attack remained the cornerstone of Dutch foreign policy, the Netherlands perceived that it had no real option but to continue its fatally flawed policy of neutrality.⁹

By May 1940, the Dutch defense and security policy had placed them in a position with few, if any options or initiatives available. The country could not control its destiny, which rested entirely in the hands of that "befriended statesman," Adolf Hitler.⁷ Maintaining neutrality had become increasingly difficult, as Denmark and Norway had bitterly learned. C.M. Schulten bluntly characterized the Dutch policy of armed neutrality as a "pipedream."¹⁰

The Netherlands could have feasibly been better prepared for war if it had consciously set about to modify the pacifist outlook of its people. This basic belief caused the average Dutchman to be unwilling to freely sacrifice for the defense of his country, and hindered him from understanding the true nature of National Socialism in Germany. A strong, progressive leader would have been

essential in order to change the mental persuasion of the typical Dutch citizen. Without the national will to fiercely defend the nation coupled with a realistic appraisal of the threat, Dutch defensive preparations were doomed to be inadequate.

Although some have praised the fighting ability of the Dutch soldier, the everyday Netherlander was not fully committed to the defense of his country. The Dutch people did not possess the inner drive necessary to provide the sacrifices needed for an effective national defense.

While improvements in the defense establishment were made, the mental attitude or national spirit remained unchanged: it continued to object to defense expenditures and everything else that smacked of the military.¹¹

The government contributed to this attitude by consciously promoting a business as usual, non-alarmist mentality among the people. Never did it attempt to mobilize the national will to totally support military preparedness.¹²

To have successfully defended the Netherlands, the nation must have understood the nature of the threat and taken protective measures much earlier than it actually did. A small country surrounded by large, militarily powerful neighbors, must be constantly alert to potential dangers. Whether the Netherlands intended to rearm and stand alone or coordinate for effective outside assistance, it had to act well before 1938-1939. In retrospect, perhaps the best policy for the Netherlands would have been to secure an

early alliance with the Allies guaranteeing effective military assistance, even if negotiated in secret.¹²

The Netherlands efforts to improve its defensive capabilities during the 1930s could have been much more successful if it possessed strong, imaginative, and consistent national leadership. Queen Wilhelmina was loved by her people, but had decided back in 1905 that the Netherlands could never enter into an alliance. Prime Minister Colijn proved competent, but convinced (until April 1940 when it was too late) that Germany would not attack the Netherlands and therefore failed to sustain any consistent defensive preparations. Prime Minister de Geer was extremely weak, naive, and ineffective. He eventually deserted the government-in-exile and returned to the Netherlands while it was still under German occupation. LTG Reynders, too, believed a German attack unlikely and caused considerable tension between civil and military leaders when unity was most needed. The Netherlands required strong national leadership throughout the 1930s to correctly ascertain the international situation and act accordingly, but did not receive such leadership. The result was inadequate defensive preparations followed by disastrous defeat and occupation. The terrible consequences of the Dutch policy of neutrality during World War II caused the Netherlands to base its postwar defense and security policy on collective security within the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization. Dutch defensive preparations today are fully coordinated with other Western European nations, in stark contrast with the Netherlands of the 1930s.¹⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Louis de Jong, as cited in Cornelis Boudewijn Wels, Aloofness and Neutrality: Studies on Dutch Foreign Relations and Policy-Making Institutions (Utrecht: Hes Publishers, 1982), p. 83. Although I have attempted to obtain the mindset of a Dutchman living in the Netherlands during the 1930s, such a mental transformation is ultimately not totally possible. My conclusions, therefore, must be placed in the context of a person with a slightly different world view than that of a typical Netherlander two generations ago.
2. Eelco Nicolaas Van Kleffens, Juggernaut Over Holland: The Dutch Foreign Minister's Personal Story of the Invasion of the Netherlands (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 71, hereafter cited as Juggernaut. See also Walter B. Maass, The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945 (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), pp. 16-17 and G.N. Clark, Holland and the War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 31.
3. Hendrik Riemens, The Netherlands: Story of a Free People (New York: Eagle Books, 1944), p. 90.
4. Maass, pp. 16-17. See also Frederic S. Pearson, The Weak State in International Crisis: The Case of the Netherlands in the German Invasion Crisis of 1939-40 (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), p. 99 and C.M. Schulten, "The Netherlands and its Army (1900-1940)" in Je Maintiendrai: A Concise History of the Dutch Army, ed. H. Amersfoort and P.H. Kamphuis, (The Hague: Historical Section of the Royal Netherlands Army, 1985), p. 89, hereafter cited as Je Maintiendrai.
5. Pearson, p. 43.
6. Wels, pp. 20-21. See also André Ausems, "The Netherlands Military Intelligence Summaries 1939-1940 and the Defeat in the Blitzkrieg of May 1940," Military Affairs, 50 (October 1986), p. 196.
7. Harold Butler, The Lost Peace (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), p. 33. See also Pearson, p. 43; Jonkheer F. Beelaerts van Blokland, The Five Days of Holland (Washington: publisher not given, 1940), p. 4; Je Maintiendrai, p. 82; Department of State, "The Minister in the Netherlands (Gordon) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers (Washington: United States Government Printing Office), 1939, Vol. 1, 22 March 1939, p. 94; Henry L. Mason, "War Comes to the Netherlands: September 1939-May 1940," Political Science Quarterly, 78 (1963), p. 565; and Andreas Wilhelmus Maria Ausems, III, Ten Days in May 1940: The Netherlands Defense Against "Fall

Gelb" (San Diego: San Diego State University, 1983), pp. 5 and 64, hereafter cited as Ten Days in May.

8. Pearson, p. 99. See also Je Maintiendrai, p. 86.

9. Louis de Jong, as quoted in Pearson, p. 124.

10. Riemens, p. 292. See also Amry Vandenbosch, Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815 (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1959), p. 5; Je Maintiendrai, p. 86; and Werner Warmbrunn, The Dutch Under German Occupation, 1940-1945 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 6.

11. Ten Days in May, p. 20.

12. Bernard H.M. Vlekke, Evolution of the Dutch Nation (New York: Roy Publishers, 1945), p. 353. See also Maass, p. 252.

13. Pearson, p. 144. See also Je Maintiendrai, p. 85.

14. Je Maintiendrai, pp. 74 and 90. See also Enquiry Commission as cited in Pearson, p. 106.

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6. Royal Netherlands Embassy
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4200 Linnean Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20008
7. Dr. Frederic S. Pearson
Department of Political Science
University of Missouri
8001 Natural Bridge Road
St. Louis, MO 63121
8. Dr. C.M. Schulten
Chief Army Historical Branch
Frederikkazerne
PO Box 90701
2509 LS The Hague