

**In the Shadows of the Sea: the Destruction and Recovery of Zeeland, the
Netherlands, 1940-1948**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

In the Shadow of the Sea: the Destruction and Recovery of Zeeland, the Netherlands, 1940-1948

This study explores the wartime experiences of the rural Dutch province of Zeeland from the German invasion in May 1940 to 1948 by a close reading of Dutch newspapers as well as Dutch government and Allied sources. It seeks to contextualize the liberation of Zeeland in the autumn of 1944 by exploring both before and after the Second World War. It argues that the subdued reaction the Canadians received was a product of a very different understanding of the war for the citizens of Zeeland. Their experience was above all driven by geography, topography, confessionality, as well as a very complex and unusual understanding of a war that dated back to 1914. Zeeland's experience of neutrality during the First World War, as well as government responses to the post-war era and Depression of the 1930s created a precedent with which many would compare the experience of war a generation later. In many ways, the German occupation of Zeeland after May 1940 resembled the experience of neutrality after the outbreak of war in 1914. In both instances, the province was touched by war, but remained isolated by its economy, politics, and culture. In that sense, the idea of liberation in the fall of 1944 had a very different meaning, especially with the Allies' flooding and sinking of Walcheren Island in early October. That event brought an unprecedented level of destruction that framed the local response to liberation, which lasted well beyond the conventional end of the war in 1945.

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DEDICATION

Parentibus meis et Marta

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INTRODUCTION

“The water came with a speed and force that they had not believed possible. After all, the dikes had always been around the island; no one could imagine their ever giving way,” wrote Dutch novelist A. den Doolaard in his 1948 book *Roll Back the Sea*.¹ In it, den Doolaard described life on the island of Walcheren in autumn 1944. His version of the events of October 1944 said nothing of the joys of liberation, for the world in which den Doolaard inhabited had effectively been swept away by the sea. He recounted almost nothing about either the German occupation, or Allied liberation. Flooding and water took center stage. The war was peripheral.

All of this is very curious when many Canadian accounts of liberation in the Netherlands, and elsewhere in Europe, celebrate the valiant efforts of Allied soldiers, and depict almost without exception Dutch women climbing onto vehicles and showering Allied soldiers with kisses.² While this might be true for some parts of the Netherlands, it is not representative of the liberation experience for the entire country. Some Canadians noted the subdued reception they received when they crossed the Belgian border into the westernmost province of Zeeland. Reflecting on crossing into Zeeland in autumn 1944, Brigadier N.E. Rodger of 2 Canadian Corps noted that “the contrast with the flag-waving, bouquet-throwing, cheering dash across France from Normandy must have been pretty

¹ A. den Doolaard, *Roll Back the Sea* trans. Barrows Mussey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 32.

² See for example official fact sheets provided by Veterans Affairs Canada, “The Liberation of the Netherlands,” accessed 10 June 2014 <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/liberation-netherlands>

tough for [the Canadians].”³ To what exactly was Rodger referring and how was the reaction to liberation any different across northwest Europe?

This study explores the wartime experiences of the rural Dutch province of Zeeland from the German invasion in May 1940 to 1948 by a close reading of Dutch newspapers as well as Dutch government and Allied sources. It seeks to contextualize the liberation of Zeeland in the autumn of 1944 by exploring both before and after the Second World War. This study argues that the subdued reaction the Canadians received was a product of a very different understanding of the war for the citizens of Zeeland. Their experience was above all driven by geography, topography, confessionalism, as well as a very complex and unusual understanding of a war that dated back to 1914. Zeeland’s experience of neutrality during the First World War, as well as government responses to the post-war era and Depression of the 1930s created a precedent with which many would compare the experience of war a generation later. In many ways, the German occupation of Zeeland after May 1940 resembled the experience of neutrality after the outbreak of war in 1914. In both instances, the province was touched by war, but remained isolated by its economy, politics, and, culture. In that sense, the idea of liberation in the fall of 1944 had a very different meaning, especially with the Allies’ flooding and sinking of Walcheren Island in early October. That event brought an unprecedented level of destruction that framed the local response to liberation, which lasted well beyond the conventional end of the war in 1945.

The time frame of the study goes well beyond the beginning and the end of the Second World War. For Canadian historians, 1945 marked the end to Canadian military

³ Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) Historical Report No. 154, “Clearing the Scheldt Estuary and Opening the Port of Antwerp: Operations of First Canadian Army in North-West Europe, 1 Oct- 8 Nov 1944 (Preliminary Report)” p. 10.

involvement and thus the end of the Second World War. Canada's official historian, C.P. Stacey devoted less than one page to Civil Affairs and its role in the post-war world.⁴ The same trend can be found in popular histories written by journalist-cum-historian Mark Zuehlke and historian Michiel Horn.⁵ However, when approached from a European perspective, the periodization of the war is not so clear. Reconstruction and recovery efforts, the corollary of war, lasted well into the 1950s.

Only recently have a few non-Canadian historians begun to appreciate the complexity of post-war recovery in Europe.⁶ Tony Judt undertook the monumental task of examining the European continent from 1945 to the late 1990s. Although the majority of the book is not germane to this study, Judt first traversed time and space to show how occupation and liberation had considerably affected the immediate post-war period, particularly as governments from the English Channel to the steppes of Asia sought to rehabilitate their people and economies. His third chapter identified some of the challenges to physical and economic rehabilitation, such as de-nazifying local and national governments. Central to his book is the idea that while 1945 certainly marked the end of the war, in practice it meant very little for governments seeking to rehabilitate their states. In other words, he underscored the importance of political, economic, and cultural developments following the war and how the post-war era shaped European identities well into the 1990s. While 1945 witnessed the end of unprecedented death and

⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol. III The Victory Campaign: Operations in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), 638.

⁵ See for example, Mark Zuehlke's *Holding Juno: Canada's Heroic Defence of the D-Day Beaches* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005); David Kaufman & Michiel Horn, *A Liberation Album: Canadians in the Netherlands, 1944-1945* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1980).

⁶ The two major studies are Tony Judt's *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) and Keith Lowe's *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (New York: Picador, 2012).

destruction, it did not begin with immediate prosperity.⁷ Keith Lowe has also tried to encapsulate many of the same challenges facing European governments following the defeat of Nazi Germany, paying particular attention to the themes of vengeance and ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe.⁸ Using his father's experience in Nazi-occupied Utrecht, journalist Ian Buruma has contributed to this literature by interweaving his family's history into the broader context of destruction and post-war reconstruction in Europe. His book looked at how European societies or "civilizations" are put back together following such monumental change. Yet here, too, Buruma adopts the conventional periodization of the war, one in which 1945 remains an historical watershed.⁹ By contrast, the year 1945 is largely devoid of significance for the province of Zeeland. These are all valuable themes, many of which appear throughout the present study. To say that the province of Zeeland was deeply affected by post-war era politics on a national and international scale is to state the obvious. However, the pace at which rehabilitation and recovery could continue depended a great deal on national Dutch politics, as well as those of the Allied nations—both during and after the Second World War. In this way, my work seeks to resituate the chronology of liberation and reconstruction by exploring long-term continuity and change during the first half of the twentieth century in Zeeland.

This study contributes to the existing literature on post-war life in Europe. It argues that while the population of Zeeland endured a lengthy occupation under the Nazi regime, a violent liberation, and massive destruction as a result of Allied and German operations, it proved accommodating to each phase of its wartime experience with a stoic

⁷ Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, 63ff.

⁸ Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II*, 94.

⁹ Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013), 7.

and pragmatic commitment to survival, recovery, and regeneration. Furthermore, I argue that of all the political, economic, and cultural challenges the Zeeuwen faced during the first half of the twentieth century, Allied liberation was the most destructive and costly. It left an even more indelible print on the province than did Nazi occupation. Exploring the province's experiences from 1900 to 1947 helps highlight this point. In both First and Second World Wars, many in the province emphasized the economic challenges of war as well as maintaining a distinct Dutch identity grounded in a communal and bureaucratic culture. There were many parallels in the experiences of the province during these decades. This manifested in various ways in 1919 and 1946. Following the Great War in 1919, Zeeland fought off Belgian efforts to annex part of the province, while in 1946 the Dutch government sought to reclaim the Dutch empire and restore its pre-war international prestige. Additionally, the ways in which governments controlled and influenced the province during the Great War often resembled the benign occupation the Nazis imposed during the early 1940s. Exploring the economic pressures in the province during the Great War and the 1930s shows how German construction projects and other initiatives worked to assuage the financial troubles of the Depression and provided a certain degree of security for civilians in Zeeland. In other words, I argue that Zeeland's negotiation with the twentieth century was a complicated process. Aside from maintaining a precarious neutral position during the Great War and governmental measures to alleviate the worst effects of the Depression in the 1930s, Zeeland had but few reference points with which to understand the upcoming occupation when the German army invaded in May 1940. This study, therefore, deals with an important and

pointed question: was it Nazi occupation or Allied liberation that really marked the breaking point in this region's modern history?

All of these events have had profound consequences on how the people of this region have come to remember the war. The memory of war, occupation, and liberation in Zeeland is not a collective one, but rather communalized over the various islands that make up the province. This communalization varies a great deal from one town to the next, and often diverges from the liberation narrative upheld by the Dutch government, one centered on the spring of 1945. In at least one museum that this study explores, Allied liberation in 1944 was the first time during the twentieth century that the Zeeuwen became victims on a large scale. This diversity in memory corresponds to the uneven contours of the liberation process.

This study also suggests that reconstruction in Zeeland was particularly challenging for both Dutch and Allied authorities. The Netherlands lacked a collective reference point in their memory related to war and reconstruction, while France and Belgium had experienced the destructive nature of modern warfare from 1914 to 1918. Their neutral status meant that the Netherlands navigated and evaded the most destructive period in modern European history. Because of their precarious experience in maintaining neutrality during the First World War Dutch civilians and politicians alike invested great currency in neutrality during the interwar years. Studying life in the province before 1939, therefore, underscores the permeating shock of occupation, war, destruction and reconstruction.

Owing to the absence of this historical reference, before the war had ended the Dutch government authorized the establishment of the *Militair Gezag* (MG), or

Netherlands Military Authority, an institution which in many ways mirrored the mandate of Civil Affairs (CA), while the French and Belgian governments authorized no such equivalent. As we will see, the sheer scale of desolation in Zeeland also contributed to its uniqueness. Although Civil Affairs operated on similar mandates across Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, the situation facing CA authorities first in Zeeland and then elsewhere in the Netherlands offered a different set of challenges.

Methodology and Sourcebase

The sources used in this work come from a variety of Dutch and British archives. The *Militair Gezag* (MG), or Netherlands Military Authority, was tasked with assessing damage and working alongside Allied Civil Affairs (CA) units during the very chaotic and transitional phase from liberation and destruction, to reconstruction and recovery. The documentation for Zeeland's MG can be found in the *Zeeuws Archief* (ZA) in the province's capital, Middelburg. This series of manuscript sources is an important foundation for this study. The work of the MGs was extremely diverse and extensive, which is reflected in the large body of records they left behind. This documentation includes notes, communiqués, and reports on the distribution of foodstuffs, rationing, providing fresh drinking water, the evacuation of internally displaced people, evacuation of cattle, repairing the dykes and reclamation of land, and the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, among other issues. The diversity inherent in these sources highlights the complexity of tasks given to the Allied and Dutch officials.

Another extensive body of manuscript sources comes from the *Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie* (NIMH) located in Den Haag, which is part of the Dutch

Ministry of National Defense. Many newspapers from the province have also been used to shed light on the activities, concerns, and thoughts of the province's inhabitants.

Although the use of newspapers is not without methodological problems, such as investing too much currency in the representativeness of the stories newspapers carried, the combination of newspapers and extensive bodies of archival sources helps supplement this historical investigation by painting a fuller picture of life in the region.

The vast majority of primary sources employed in this study, therefore, are in the Dutch language, which has dictated the trajectory of the work. The sources that examine recovery are inherently negative in tone and deal with extensive human and physical loss. Thus, the topics on which MG and CA officials reported were rarely of a positive nature and lacked the triumphalism commonly associated with liberation. The choice to focus on such sources means that this is very much a bureaucratic history, one that looks at the ways in which institutions played a key role in shaping Zeeland's experience after 1944. These sources highlight the challenges civilians faced during this period. There are a couple reasons why I have not included ego-documents, such as memoirs or oral histories, some of which are pragmatic while others are methodological. As a European historian in Canada, time and financial constraints forced me to be selective in what types of sources to investigate. My journeys to the Netherlands were very often consumed by reading manuscript and archival sources over secondary material. Methodologically, the ways in which memories are constructed and how they change after decades influenced my decision to rely more on evidence from archives as opposed to the oral testimony of individuals recalling their experiences years later. *Ex post facto* accounts of civilian experiences under Nazi occupation can be particularly challenging to interpret. A farmer,

who may have supported the benign occupation of Zeeland in the 1940s, may have excoriated Nazism after the 1960s or 1970s, when more detailed accounts of the Holocaust came to light. These are just some of the problems inherent in the complexity of memory. As such, my study lays the foundation on which further research involving ego-documents like oral histories and memoirs can build. It is neither the first nor the last account on the topic, but rather a way to encourage discussion about the long-term affects of war and reconstruction in Europe.

This is neither an operational military history nor a political history, yet both of these sub-genres of historical inquiry have informed the work at one point or another. This is above all a regional, social and cultural history of one rural province in the Netherlands, which at times is interwoven with important political, institutional, military, and environmental themes. The sources used here help reflect how Dutch authorities perceived the experiences of civilians, how civilians reacted to Nazi occupation and Allied destruction, as well as how they understood their existence in a rural part of the Netherlands after the most destructive period of their province's history.

While Dutch sources have formed the basis upon which this study has been written, I have also included archival material from the Public Records Office (now called and referred to as the National Archives) in the United Kingdom. This material consists of records from the Foreign Office (FO) and War Office (WO). Because the primary purpose of this study aims to explore Dutch civilian experiences, the British material acts as a supplement rather than a core group of records. In addition, I have used aerial photographs, which can be found in the appendices, from the unique collection housed at the *Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies* (LCMSDS)

in Waterloo, Ontario. These will help the reader envisage the level of destruction inflicted upon the region by both German and Allied operations.

In addition to this body of manuscript sources, there are several Dutch-language monographs which explore various parts of Zeeland's history. These have proven invaluable to foreign readers of rural Dutch history. In particular, L.W. de Bree's 1979 study in which he attempted to examine the impact of the Second World War on Zeeland.¹⁰ His premature death, however, prevented the completion of the history, which ends abruptly around 1941. In the late 1980s, Gijs van der Ham, who unlike de Bree was a professional historian, was commissioned to write the second part to de Bree's unfinished history of the province's wartime experience.¹¹ This account was much more satisfactory in both methodology and breadth. Van der Ham employed archival material rather than solely relying on newspapers as de Bree did years before.

Two other Dutch-language studies are invaluable when studying the history of Zeeland. Jacoba Kramer-Vreugdenhil, who was old enough to remember occupation in her village on Walcheren, published her dissertation in 2001 in which she analyzed "occupation and inundation" in three villages on the island.¹² To flesh out the complexities of life under Nazi occupation in her pastoral surroundings, she used synodal and church records from the Dutch Reformed Church, an institution which wielded great influence in the region. In many ways, Vreugdenhil's work shows how confessional culture in Zeeland had a substantial impact on how civilians understood their role before and after the war often within a covenantal and chiliastic framework. Another study is

¹⁰ Bree, L.W. de *Zeeland 40-45, deel 1* (Middelburg: Den Boer & Provincie Zeeland, 1979).

¹¹ Ham, Gijs van der *Zeeland 1940-1945. Deel 2* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1990).

¹² J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners: bezetting en inundatie in drie Walcherse dorpen* (Vlissingen: Uitgeverij ADZ, 2001)

Jan Zwemer's monumental work that explores aspects of reconstruction in the province.¹³

Taken together, these few works represent the most significant attempts to examine Zeeland's wartime experiences.

During one of my visits to the NIMH in Den Haag, Dr. D.C.L. Schoonoord was kind enough to lend me a copy of his unpublished manuscript, entitled *Het 'Circus Kruls': Militair Gezag in Nederland, 1944-1946* (2011). This magisterial study, consisting of over 800 pages, is one of the first works to explore the role of the MG across the Netherlands from 1944 to 1946. Schoonoord's work helps situate the institutional framework of the MG across the country and some of the challenges to reconstruction it encountered in other provinces. Although the book mainly focuses on the northern and western regions of the country, Schoonoord does address the evacuation scheme and the situation facing MG and CA authorities in Zeeland.

There are other works that do not address Zeeland specifically, but whose themes and questions have informed this study. This dissertation ultimately sheds light on the civilian experience in the wartime Netherlands. As early as the 1980s, Michiel Horn called for a more nuanced approach to understanding the Canadian relationship with the Netherlands, arguing correctly that it involved more than simply "cigarettes, sex and chocolate."¹⁴ Later, in 1995, Geoffrey Hayes drew from translated secondary sources to examine the effects of liberation from the perspectives of both civilians in West Brabant and Canadian soldiers. While the Allies had reached Antwerp by 4-5 September 1944, the people of Bergen op Zoom waited long and anxiously for their liberators. For

¹³ Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog* (Vlissingen: den Boer de Ruiter, 2000).

¹⁴ Michiel Horn, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: The Canadian Army in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, no. 3/4 (Autumn 1981), 156-173.

civilians, as Hayes rightly points out, “The long [delay in the] arrival of the liberators was frustrating.”¹⁵ Civilians in that part of the country were impatient with the progress of Allied armies. Central to the narrative of liberation in this part of the country was how local accounts described Dutch civilians as active agents in their own liberation, rather than as passive victims caught helplessly between belligerents. As we will see, one museum in Zeeland has adopted a similar narrative to emphasize their role in post-war reconstruction at the expense of Allied Civil Affairs. These two revisionist approaches have influenced the ways in which I have approached this work by using the word “liberation” in a more critical way.

The Canadian historians concerned with the Schelde tend to focus on the operational efficacy of First Canadian Army as opposed to what civilians experienced and the various recovery efforts in the region. This is understandable given their bodies of evidence and the types of questions each raises. Popular historians Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, as well as Mark Zuehlke have all assessed Canada’s performance in the campaign, but none have used Dutch sources.¹⁶ As a professional historian, Terry Copp has offered the most extensive look into the Schelde campaign. Published in 2006, *Cinderella Army* is the authoritative account on military operations in the region. Drawing on a wealth of English-language sources from British and Canadian archives, Copp has provided the most in-depth operational history of the campaign in northwest Europe.¹⁷ Focusing on Canada’s operational history, he aimed to disabuse the traditional,

¹⁵ Geoffrey Hayes, “‘Where are our liberators?’ The Canadian Liberation of West Brabant, 1944,” in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XVI, ii (Fall 1995), 56-62.

¹⁶ Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Tug of War: The Canadian Victory that Opened Antwerp* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1984); Mark Zuehlke, *Terrible Victory: First Canadian Army and the Scheldt Estuary Campaign* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007).

¹⁷ Terry Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), Introduction.

and not too flattering, interpretation of Canada's wartime army proffered by C.P. Stacey in the 1960s. The plight of civilians and the pace at which recovery unfolded, however, were well beyond the scope of his study. Nonetheless, Copp is correct in his conviction that the Allied flooding of Walcheren played an essential role in defeating Nazi Germany in Zeeland. As he suggests, the flooding of Walcheren was at the time the best option available to Allied decision makers and one which would maximize Allied strength while also minimizing Anglo-Canadian casualties.¹⁸ To say that the decision to flood the island in October 1944 was misguided, as one Dutch historian has claimed, is to impose a teleology that ignores the strategic context in which the Allied decisions were made.¹⁹ This study agrees with Copp's premise, but picks up where he left off in an attempt to understand what happened to the region after liberation.

These contributions notwithstanding, successive Canadian governments have emphasized the so-called "Sweetest Spring" narrative that continues to be celebrated in Canada, focusing on Canadian military achievements during the spring of 1945. This is especially evident when looking at the narratives created by Veterans Affairs Canada or other official channels. Government of Canada publications highlight euphoric letters written about Canadians and the oral testimony of young Dutch observers in towns which were rather unaffected by war compared to elsewhere in the country.²⁰ The memory of Canada's role in liberation is therefore intimately connected to the central and northern parts of the Netherlands; it is divorced from events in the southern part of the country in

¹⁸ Copp, *Cinderella Army*, Ch. 5.

¹⁹ Tobias van Gent, "The Allied Assault on Walcheren, 1944," in *Building Liberty: Canada and World Peace, 1945-2005* edited by Conny Steenman-Marcusse and Aritha van Herk (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2005), 11-30.

²⁰ See for example, Veterans Affairs Canada, "Remembrance: The Liberation of the Netherlands," *Letter from Holland 27 April 1945*, accessed 12 June 2014
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/second-world-war/liberation-netherlands>

autumn 1944. If 1945 is most renowned for Canada's role in liberating large parts of the Netherlands, then 1944 is best known as the year in which Canada spearheaded the amphibious assault on Juno Beach on 6 June 1944. This has cast a wide shadow over the First Canadian Army's role in clearing the Schelde in between these two significant periods.

Other European historians, such as Peter Schrijvers, have reexamined what life was like in Belgium once the Allies liberated the country in September 1944. He argues that after the initial euphoria of liberation had subsided, the civilians grew tired of what some saw as a second occupation that prevented a return to the pre-1940 world. The clichés of chocolate, kisses, and bubble gum began to give way to disappointment and even crime.²¹ As Schrijvers writes, “[historians] would almost have us believe that, after cheers and kisses in September 1944, the Allied armies packed up, moved on to Nazi Germany, and vanished from Belgium altogether, allowing the country to get back to normal all by itself. The reality was, however, that as long as the campaign against neighboring Germany continued, there remained a mass presence of Allied troops in Belgium.”²² William Hitchcock has similarly emphasized the costs of victory in Europe and the ways in which destruction was a necessary evil in the bitter road to freedom.²³ While reconstruction efforts in the Schelde were not necessarily an occupation as Schrijvers suggests was the case in Belgium, this work does identify issues that caused increasing discontent among the civilian population in Zeeland. Schrijvers' work in particular represents a trend in relatively recent English-language reassessments of how

²¹ Peter Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2-3.

²² Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945*, 3.

²³ William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

“liberation” is understood. The common thread connecting his study to this one lies in how concepts like “liberation,” “rehabilitation,” and “recovery” are understood.

This study contributes to the literature on war and society in a number of ways and engages in a discussion that Schrijvers has initiated. Using evidence that Canadian historians have not had access to in the past, I seek to reconfigure the language of liberation, to show that the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in this region of the Netherlands was part of an extremely diverse set of liberations that exacted an uneven toll on the territory over which German and Allied armies fought. It also highlights many of the problems contemporaries experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in the Netherlands. In this way, this work adds to the existing discussion on civil-military relations. Additionally, the environmental impact of warfare is a common theme that appears throughout the study. Both Allies and Germans mobilized water and manipulated topography to their advantage during combat, which suggests the degree to which even the physical environment, and particularly the lithosphere, was not beyond the realm of operational planners. The use of water as a weapon illustrates the totality of “total war.” The pervasiveness of water, not only in times of peace but also in war, dominates popular Dutch imagination—exemplified by den Doolaard’s work in the immediate post-war period.

This study does not focus on regions or provinces beyond Zeeland. As such, I have focused on the history of reconstruction and recovery *during* the war in the Netherlands and often very close to military operations, as opposed to following the complete liberation of the country in May 1945. In so doing, this case study demonstrates

some of the pressures facing both Allied and Dutch authorities in their efforts to recover a region while military operations to defeat Nazi Germany continued.

One final and important note must be made regarding methodology. The documentation of the MG is vast and sometimes disparate. For this reason, some aspects of occupation, destruction, inundation, and reconstruction are emphasized over others, and some regions of the province receive greater ministrations than others. Contemporaries gave a disproportionate amount of attention to Walcheren, partly because of the damage inflicted upon that island by the Allies and partly because of the island's administrative and economic primacy to Zeeland. The evidence from the archives reflects this emphasis often, and unfortunately, at the expense of more remote parts of the province, such as Tholen and Schouwen-Duiveland, the latter of which was not liberated until May 1945. Additionally, because many towns were badly damaged, communication between authorities in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and other parts of the province in September and October 1944 was erratic at best. For this reason, this dissertation adopts a thematic approach because this is most conducive to the presentation of such a diverse set of themes. The use of themes also helps to understand the immense complexity of the situation facing both Allied and Dutch authorities and civilians during the transitional period from November to December 1944.

Structure and Themes

This work follows the experience of Zeeland both chronologically and thematically. Chapter I provides an overview of the history of Zeeland and its people from about 1900 to the outbreak of the Second World War. In so doing, this chapter

tacitly underscores the problem of periodization in history. It argues that a look at the period covering the First World War, industrialization, and economic crises helps understand Dutch mentalities and reaction to occupation in May 1940. It also highlights the historical parallels between the Great War, the depression, and the occupation in 1940. In order to understand better occupation experiences, this chapter helps contextualize the occupation of Dutch territory within the social, political, and economic developments of the interwar period. This, furthermore, emphasizes another important point that interwoven throughout the study: the rural-urban dichotomy in history. Much of what historians in the English-language world know about the occupied Netherlands comes from evidence found in the densely populated urban areas of the so-called “old provinces” and cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. Far less is known about the rural regions of the Netherlands and how dominantly agrarian societies, particularly ravaged by the economic crises of the 1930s, reacted to Nazi occupation. While readers versed in Dutch history may be familiar with this information, I have included this chapter for English-language readers whose knowledge of Dutch history and geography is limited.

Chapter II explores Nazi occupation in the countryside and shows how the environment played a significant role during those years. The Germans very quickly understood the importance of controlling land for defensive purposes. This manifested in the construction of Hitler’s *Atlantikwall* and the emphasis he placed on the fortification of the Schelde and Zeeland. The construction of this defensive system had great consequences for over 20,000 Zeeuwen who worked on building projects, either as conscripts or volunteers. However, given the province’s geographic position and unlike

other Dutch provinces, most workers were permitted to stay within Zeeland rather than being forced to work in Germany or elsewhere. Additionally, although resistance groups were widespread in the occupied Netherlands, Zeeland's topographic circumstances and its sparsely populated islands made resistance an extremely challenging enterprise, especially once the German presence crested in the region after 1942. Until late in the war, Nazi occupation in Zeeland was relatively benign. In this chapter, I have tried to emphasize the use of primary source material or sources that focus exclusively on Zeeland to shed light on occupation experiences. For this reason, readers will notice that the voluminous work of Louis de Jong, namely the multi-volume *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, is not used. While his works are indeed prolific, de Jong often sacrificed depth for breadth. In this context, lesser-known works, such as those of de Bree or Zwemer offer greater insight into the history of this region specifically.

In Chapter III, I provide a very brief overview of the strategic and operational plans for Allied action in the Schelde, as well as a look at how German armed forces reacted to the Allied advances. This chapter also stresses how Allied decision makers used the environment to neutralize the heavy coastal batteries and “sink” the island of Walcheren. Although the Allies were left with little other choice, the Allied bombardment that flooded Walcheren and killed many civilians was a *sine qua non* of opening the port of Antwerp and supplying Allied armies in western Europe. From the perspective of Canadian and Allied military planners, the use of water as a weapon was the optimal choice, even if that meant widespread suffering and destruction. Mobilizing

water as a weapon significantly aided in capturing the province and resupplying armies in the west. But water also had a profound effect on the local people.

Chapter IV introduces the authorities responsible for assessing and commencing reconstruction projects in the badly damaged, but liberated, parts of Zeeland in October-November 1944. It provides a brief institutional overview and history of Allied Civil Affairs and its Dutch counterpart the *Militair Gezag voor Zeeland* (MG). This chapter explores some of the early personnel problems identified with CA and MG units. Chapter V examines how CA and MG units worked to restore some semblance of pre-war society in Zeeland amidst inundation and evacuation. It underscores the complexity of civil-military relations and, at times, the almost antithetical understanding of the situation between officials and civilians. Efforts to evacuate civilians and transfer them to other parts of the province, for example, were not always greeted kindly and many civilians articulated their frustration through their *burgemeesters*. It also suggests that the establishment of the MG was informed by a Dutch pre-war political and bureaucratic culture. This partly influenced the Netherlands' decision to establish a separate military organization.

Chapter VI continues the examination of the rehabilitation of post-war Zeeland until 1947. In particular, this chapter uses the concept of “exiting war,” an idea postulated by French historian Henry Rousso.²⁴ “Exiting war” refers to processes during which autochthonous populations are left to conceptualize their own memories following the official and diplomatic declaration to end hostilities. As Rousso writes,

²⁴ See Henry Rousso, “A New Perspective on the War” in Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens, *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1-9.

“‘Exiting wars’ not only refers to a simple state, a given situation at a certain point in time, such as the term ‘postwar era,’ but rather a process, a development that encompasses social dimensions of great scope and in a certain sense can be understood as a continuation of the war—on the national as well as the international level. The term thus avoids a clear-cut distinction between ‘before’ and ‘after,’ which is characteristic for legal documents that define specific states of war or peace, ceasefire, capitulation, or armistice, and that assume a clearly defined temporal caesura...Not everybody arrives at the war’s end at the same time, or under the same circumstances, or even with the same short-, mid-, or long-term consequences.”²⁵

The concept applies to Zeeland, but here, too, problems of periodization surface when we consider the ways in which war and its corollaries of destruction and recovery affected Zeeland particularly. The year 1945, in the history of this province, means very little and certainly does not mark the denouement of the province’s problems. In addition, this chapter broaches a number of questions about the Dutch government’s curious prioritization of reclaiming the Dutch East-Indies, while large segments of the country remained destroyed.

Finally, Chapter VII focuses on the construction of memory long after the cessation of hostilities between Allied and German armies. It compares the ways in which two museums in the province have given meaning to war, occupation, and liberation in Zeeland. This chapter demonstrates that the memory in this province is communalized. Even within separate provinces, the construction of memories can differ drastically in the

²⁵ Rousso, “A New Perspective on the War,” 5.

space of a few kilometers. Yet, it also suggests that memory in some parts of Zeeland has changed very little from the immediate post-war period. The literature written by individuals like den Doolaard in the late 1940s continues to inform the narratives adapted by one particular museum in the region, one in which civilians' resilience in the face of adversity takes center stage. In adopting the communalization thesis, this chapter suggests the difficulty of creating and maintaining a provincial memory in Zeeland.

In the end, an examination of this painful period of Zeeland's history presents an alternative narrative to how Dutch "liberation" is understood in the English-speaking world. The idea that the Netherlands celebrates Canadian and British efforts in their country is not wrong, but it is certainly not representative of the entire country. By focusing on the rural-urban dynamics of history, the environmental impact of war, the problems of periodization between Dutch- and English-language history, as well as the various ways in which Dutch towns have given meaning to the most destructive event in their history, this study highlights how Canadian historians of Europe and the Second World War need to reevaluate comfortably held certainties and ask critical questions about the liberation of western Europe. This study raises those critical questions. It aims to show how complex the two narratives are and how multiple narratives compete against one another. This is effectively a regional history of a little-known rural province that nonetheless figures prominently in Canadian and British military histories. In this way, historians of the war have often neglected one very important side of Dutch wartime experience. While Dutch civilians celebrated the capitulation of German armed forces in the Netherlands in May 1945, the people of Zeeland continued to rebuild their homes and lives. A close reading of the documents dealing with the destruction and recovery of this

province shows that “liberation” is a word that needs to be reconfigured and applied much more cautiously than it has been in the past.

Note on Language

Throughout this study I have maintained the use of Dutch-language names and locations as they would have appeared to contemporaries during the war. For example, Vlissingen is used instead of “Flushing,” Zuid-Beveland instead of “South Beveland,” Zeeuws-Vlaanderen instead of the cumbersome “Zeelandic Flanders,” and so on. Additionally, Dutch-language demonyms and their derivatives are often difficult to render into proper English. Readers will frequently encounter the plural demonym for people of Zeeland, “Zeeuwen.” “Zeeuws,” which can be translated as Zeelandic, can refer to the dialect spoken in Zeeland and in parts of Zuid-Holland, while “Zeeuwse” or “Zeeuwsch” are used to describe or modify nouns. Although C.P. Stacey used the English spelling of the “Scheldt,” he included an important note on its usage in a footnote. Citing a letter written in 1944 by a Dutch-American physician, Dr. G.J. Rennie, Stacey claimed that English speakers should “pronounce the name of the Scheldt in the Dutch fashion (‘Skelt’) and abandon the German pronunciation ‘Shelt’.”²⁶ I advocate for the same.

Where sources are quoted extensively, I have provided in full the original Dutch-language quotation in a footnote. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted.

²⁶ C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, see footnote on p.365.

CHAPTER I

Zeeland and the Zeeuwen, 1900-1939

The scale of violence and destruction that befell much of Europe during the Second World War was unprecedented. Historians of the Second World War have rigidly periodized the period from 1939 to 1945, paying great attention to how and why war erupted and evolved through those years. While this focus covers most military operations, it does not help us understand how and why certain peoples reacted to German occupation in 1940. It also misleads us into thinking that the Belgians, French, and Dutch had no point of reference to gauge or conceptualize the developments of war and occupation in their lands. This idea is particularly important for the Netherlands. During the Great War the Netherlands adopted a position of armed neutrality and their sovereignty was never fully violated. As Hermann von der Dunk has rightly pointed out, “to understand the persistent effect of the shock of 1940... we have to dig rather a long way back into the past, because we cannot separate Dutch reactions during and after the war from some peculiar features of Dutch political culture and society, and we cannot understand these, in their turn, without delving into history.”²⁷ For von der Dunk, particular notions of anti-centralism, religious pluralism, and the pragmatic form of tolerance found in the Netherlands considerably affected Dutch mentalities in 1940.

This chapter examines the socio-economic, political, and confessional development of Zeeland from about 1900 to the eve of occupation in 1940. It is important to explore some of the characteristics that have influenced the province’s historical development. Although the Netherlands remained neutral for the duration of the Great

²⁷ Hermann von der Dunk, “The Netherlands and the Memory of the Second World War,” *European Review* 4, 3 (1996), 222.

War, Zeeland's proximity to the Western front and Belgium subjected the province to some of the pressures *bona fide* belligerents experienced. As a consequence, the echoes of war heard in Zeeland reinforced the importance of Dutch neutrality in the crises leading to war in 1940. Maartje Abbenhuis has shown how difficult it was to maintain a position of armed neutrality and how the political and socio-economic pressures of war from 1914 to 1918 nearly plunged the country into the war on a number of occasions.²⁸ After 1918, parts of Zeeland experienced a period of rapid modernization and general economic prosperity. Like elsewhere in Western Europe, this period of prosperity ended abruptly in the early 1930s after the stock market crashes of 1929. As a dominantly agrarian region, the economic challenges arguably affected Zeeland more than other provinces in the Netherlands where population density was greater. After several years of economic deprivation Zeeland, along with much of Western Europe, was subjected to Nazi occupation in May 1940. The unique geographical and topographical features of Zeeland's various islands made it a crucial part of the Nazi war machine and, as we will explore later, its conquest was a *sine qua non* for Allied victory in 1945.

To contextualize better the various provincial experiences of the Zeeuwen during occupation and after liberation, the following chapter provides a brief background about the province and its people. This chapter argues that while the importance attached to neutrality in the Netherlands prevented the country from entering the Great War in 1914, it strengthened the idea of neutrality among decision makers in the 1930s. With no experience of dealing with destruction and recovery in modern memory, Dutch

²⁸ Maartje Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral: The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). See also, P. Moeyes "Neutral Tones: The Netherlands and Switzerland and Their Interpretations of Neutrality, 1914-1918" in (ed.) Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert, *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 57-84.

authorities after 1944-1945 lacked the practical experience of reconstruction their Allies had gained in 1918. For this reason, as we will see in later chapters, post-war recovery presented a number of substantial challenges for Allies and Dutch authorities alike. In addition, the political and economic pressures placed upon the Dutch during the Great War and the 1930s resonated with the relatively benign Nazi occupation of the province in the 1940s. This chapter highlights long-term trends and continuity during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

When driving on the E312 from Vlissingen in Walcheren past a village like Nieuwdorp in Zuid-Beveland it is difficult to imagine that until relatively recently the province of Zeeland consisted of seven separate constituent parts, six of which were islands and one attached to the mainland. Walcheren protrudes furthest into the North Sea, while Zuid- and Noord-Beveland lay to its east and northeast (Appendix VI). Schouwen-Duiveland is the most northern part of the province and is closest to the island of Overflakkee near the mouth of River Maas. While Overflakkee is technically part of Zuid-Holland, the people there resemble the Zeeuwen in dialect, culture, and also had very similar occupation experiences, including inundation in 1944.²⁹ Tholen, which consists of two peninsulas that were formerly islands, borders Noord-Brabant to the east. The most southern part of the province is Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, which lies on the southern side of the Schelde and borders Belgium. Before the 1950s, the various islands separated the estuaries of the three great rivers—Rhine, Maas, and Schelde— with dune barriers at their western ends. Nowhere in the province of Zeeland exceeded 10 feet in altitude,

²⁹ A.J. Jansen, *Bezetters & water: Een Geïsoleerd Gebied in Oorlogstijd* (Dreischor: Uitgeverij Steengracht, 1988).

which means that over the centuries the Zeeuwen had developed a very effective dyke system and a variety of dune belts to protect the land against inundation.³⁰ For that reason settlements normally grew around the areas protected from floodwaters called polders. Being below sea level and living so close to the sea has presented the inhabitants of Zeeland with innumerable challenges over the centuries. Zeeland was, as Wijlen W. de Bree put it, “a land created by the people’s hands in a millennial battle against the sea.”³¹ While no doubt romanticized, Zeeland’s history has been characterized by regular inundation and reclamation.

Zeeland experienced some marked demographic changes from 1900 to 1930. From 1899 to 1909, the overall provincial population increased by 16,220 and from 1909 to 1920 the population again increased by 12,922. This population growth, as we will examine later, likely correlates to the nascent industrialization that took place in Zeeland at the turn of the century. From 1920 to 1930, however, the growth witnessed in previous decades had begun to level out, but still increased by 2,169 (see Table 1).

Population of Zeeland Province ³²	
1899	216, 295
1909	232, 515
1920	245, 437
1930	247, 606

³⁰ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series* (London: Naval Intelligence, 1942), 24.

³¹ Wijlen L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945* (Middelburg: Den Boer, 1979), 6. “een land door mensenhanden geschapen in een duizentjarige strijd tegen de zee.”

³² Censuses conducted in the Netherlands from 1795 to 1971 have been digitized and are available online at www.volkstelling.nl. Understandably, no data or official censuses exist for the period from 1930 to 1947.

This provincial demographic trend reflects similar growth found in major Dutch towns. For the purposes of this study, major towns include towns with a population greater than 1500 and some which we will encounter later, such as Breskens (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), Goes (Zuid-Beveland), Middelburg (Walcheren), Terneuzen (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), and Vlissingen (Walcheren). Some towns, however, experienced very little shift in population from 1899 to 1930. This is particularly true for the capital of Zeeland, Middelburg. In 1899, Middelburg had a population of 18,837, a figure that largely remained the same throughout the period, boasting 18,395 inhabitants by 1930. The smaller towns of Terneuzen and Goes experienced constant growth during this period. The port town of Terneuzen on the southern side of the Schelde, for example, went from 8,174 in 1899 to 10,458 in 1930. Vlissingen, the province's largest economic and industrial center, experienced population fluctuations according to the broader economic developments of the 1930s. During the period of industrialization in the 1920s, Vlissingen's population was at its height, reaching 23,025, but decreased during the 1930s to 21,716.³³ By 1939, only 9 percent of Zeeland's population lived in towns of 20,000 inhabitants or over, mainly in Vlissingen. This figure pales in comparison to the 72 percent of the population in Noord-Holland, or even the 38 percent in neighbouring Noord-Brabant, that lived in towns of 20,000 inhabitants or more.³⁴ As these data suggest, a significant number of Zeeuwen inhabited small villages across the various islands, with the only two major concentrations of the population residing on Walcheren.

³³ See Appendix I "Populations of Selected Towns, 1899-1930."

³⁴ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series*, 246.

To evaluate Dutch reactions to the events of May 1940 von der Dunk found that the sixteenth century provided a useful *point de départ*.³⁵ Indeed, many scholars of the Netherlands maintain that divisions in confessional composition and politics can be traced to the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish in the 1560s.³⁶ Although the events of the 1500s are well beyond the scope of this study, it would be worthwhile to consider the confessional composition of Zeeland and how the spread and adoption of Calvinism affected the development of politics and life in the province. When the Dutch Reformed Church in Alphen caught fire in April 1916, the *Goessche Courant* claimed it was the town's first serious "warning for each community that appreciates the preservation of its valuable buildings," eluding to divine admonition.³⁷ In the 1940s, as historian Jan Zwemer has pointed out, some people in Zeeland "saw, out of religious conviction, [military] occupation as a punishment from God for the sins of the Dutch people and by extension regarded the Germans as the legitimate government."³⁸ In short, to resist against the Germans was to question an ordained and divine plan. Confessional culture, therefore, remains an important component in assessing prewar and occupation experiences in the dominantly rural regions of the Netherlands. This is especially true for Zeeland and we will encounter this later regarding the immediate reconstruction of Walcheren in 1944.

³⁵ Hermann von der Dunk, "The Netherlands and the Memory of the Second World War," 222-227.

³⁶ Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series*, 88; J.W. de Beus, J.A.A. van Doorn, en Percy B. Lehring, *De Ideologische Driehoek: Nederlandse politiek in historisch perspectief* (Amsterdam: Boom/Meppel, 1989), 112; Ruby B. Andeweg and Galen A. Irwin, *Dutch Government and Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

³⁷ *Goessche Courant*, "Een ernstige waarschuwing," 11 April 1916, 1. "Een waarschuwing voor iedere gemeente, die prijs stelt op het behoud harer kostbare bouwwerken"

³⁸ Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog* (Vlissingen: den Boer de Ruiters, 2000), 74. He writes "Maar sommigen zagen uit religieuze overtuiging de bezetting als een straf van God op de zonden van het Nederlandse volk en in het verlengde daarvan beschouwden zij de Duitsers als de wettige overheid."

In his study on politics in the post-war Netherlands, Arend Lijphart wrote that “the two basic cleavages which divide the Dutch population are class and religion.”³⁹ For the most part, this observation also applies to twentieth-century Zeeland. In 1909, the majority of Zeeuwen belonged to *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church) with small pockets of Roman Catholics found in villages throughout the Province and in the larger towns of Middelburg, Vlissingen, and Terneuzen. In the town of Breskens (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), for example, which in 1909 had a population of 2,198, 81.3 percent recognized themselves as Dutch Reformed. Larger towns like Middelburg, whose population reached 19,564 in 1909, had a more diverse confessional composition including 61.9 percent belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church, while 9.2 percent confessed to the Roman Catholic Church, as well as a small Ashkenazim population (less than one percent) whose synagogue can still be found on the Seisplein. The largest city in Zeeland, Vlissingen, counted 21,363 inhabitants in 1909, 53.7 percent of whom were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, 32 percent were Roman Catholic, and roughly 11 percent were recognized *Gereformeerd* (Calvinist Orthodox Reformed).⁴⁰ Communities of Orthodox Reformed Zeeuwen could be found scattered throughout the province, but were typically in the minority. For instance, of the 1,529 inhabitants of Koudekerk, located about three kilometers northwest of Vlissingen, a total of 783 people were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, while only 26 were members of the Orthodox Reformed community. But “the bastions of heavy Christianity,” as de Bree put it, “were found—and still found—spread over the different islands: on Walcheren in

³⁹ Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*, 16.

⁴⁰ Volkstelling, 1909. “Percentsgewijze verhouding voor iedere gemeente van Nederland, van het aantal personen behorende tot de voornaamste kerkelijke gezindten, tot de totale bevolking,” 1-13 www.volkstelling.nl

Aagtekerke, Arnemuiden, Meliskerke; on Zuid-Beveland in Borssele, Waarde en Yerseke; on Tholen in Poortvliet, Scherpenisse, Sint Annaland and Stavenisse; on Duiveland in Nieuwekerke and Oosterland.⁴¹ These were the towns, situated on the island furthest out on the North Sea, in which villagers were arguably most devout. In Sint Philipsland, for example, more than half of the 2,000 inhabitants belonged to the Orthodox Reformed community.⁴² Still other confessions were found in the province and included “Other reformed Churches,” Evangelical Lutherans, Mennonites or Anabaptists (*doopsgezinden*).⁴³ Of the many hamlets and villages that cover the province, however, the majority were Dutch Reformed. Beyond Zeeland to the east and northeast, in neighbouring Noord-Brabant for example, Catholicism dominated as opposed to the various forms of Protestantism across Zeeland.

This confessional composition had obvious implications for the political complexion of the province. But first a brief and general mention of Dutch politics is necessary. The sovereignty of the Netherlands resides in the House of Orange-Nassau and the monarch, but the Netherlands also has a powerful parliament called the States-General. The States-General consists of two Chambers, the First (Upper) and Second (Lower), which convenes at Den Haag. The First Chamber consists of fifty members who are chosen by indirect election through the Provincial States, or legislatures, which are in turn elected by universal suffrage. The eleven provinces are arranged in four groups with

⁴¹ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 8. “De bastions van het zware Christendom vond—en vindt—men verspreid over verschillende eilanden: op Walcheren te Aagtekerke, Arnemuiden, Meliskerke, op Zuid-Beveland te Borssele, Waarde en Yerseke, op Tholen te Poortvliet, Scherpenisse, Sint Annaland en Stavenisse, op Duiveland te Nieuwekerke en Oosterland.”

⁴² de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 8. “Op Sint Philipsland, waar meer dan de helft van de 2.000 bewoners tot de oud-gereformeerde gemeente behoorde, stemde meer dan de helft der kiesgerichtigden op de SGP.”

⁴³ Volkstelling, 1909. “Tabel I: indeeling van de bevolking der verschillende gemeenten, der groepen van gemeenten, der provinciën en van het Rijk naar het geslacht en de kerkelijke gezindte,” 44.

www.volkstelling.nl

roughly equal populations, each of which is allotted roughly one-quarter of the total membership of the Chamber. Thus, Noord-Brabant, Zeeland, Utrecht, Limburg, and Gelderland formed one group which had 13 representatives. In contrast, Zuid-Holland alone had 12 representatives based on its larger population. To bring fair composition to the First Chamber with the wishes of the electorate, the States-General “weighs” their votes. Members of the Chamber are elected for six-year terms.⁴⁴

The Second Chamber consists of 100 members and has been elected by universal suffrage since the reforms of 1917-1922. In 1939, there were 4,639,503 voters in the Netherlands (98.5 percent of all citizens over the age of twenty-five). The Second Chamber is elected as a whole and typically sits for four years. The States-General shares the legislative function with the Queen, but the two Chambers differ in their function and legislative capacity. The Second Chamber exercises the initiative in legislation and the First Chamber can only put forward proposals that are not bills. The First Chamber has no power to amend bills accepted by both the sovereign and the Second Chamber. The First Chamber can only reject or accept bills.⁴⁵

Each province possesses its own legislative and administrative assembly known as *Provinciale Staten* (Provincial States). Members of these bodies are elected by universal suffrage according to the same system described above. The population of each province determines the size of the Provincial State. Thus in 1939 Zeeland had one member per 5,900 Zeeuw for a total of 42 members in the provincial assembly, whereas Zuid-Holland had one member per 23,900 inhabitants for a total of 82 members. The

⁴⁴ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series* (London: Naval Intelligence, 1942), 178.

⁴⁵ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series* (London: Naval Intelligence, 1942), 179.

Provincial States are rather autonomous and have jurisdiction over all administration in the province, with the exception of public works administered by the *Departement van Waterstaat*. Each province also has an executive power which is comprised of a permanent six-member committee called the *Gedeputeerde Staten* (Deputed States). Importantly, this committee also oversees the communal authorities. Both bodies of the provinces meet under the presidency of a Commissioner appointed by the Crown (*Commissaris der Koningen*).⁴⁶

The *Gemeente*, or Commune, was and continues to be an important part of provincial politics in the Netherlands. In 1940, there were 1,054 communes across the country. Each commune is administered by two bodies: the *gemeenteraad* (communal council) and the *wethouders* (aldermen). Both of these bodies are led by a single *burgemeester* (burgomaster or mayor). While the councils are elected by universal suffrage, the aldermen are chosen by the council itself and the mayor is appointed by the Queen and remains in office for six years. As *de facto* representative of the Queen or monarch in towns, the mayor is responsible for the maintenance of public order and morals, as well as local taxation.⁴⁷ The extent to which people identified themselves with their commune is difficult to know, but the communes wielded a great influence on local populations. During recovery, the communal governments and *burgemeesters* would act as the first point of reference for Allied and Dutch civil affairs projects.

The various administrative bodies were comprised of a multitude of political parties, but a detailed exposition of the parties need not concern us here. However, many

⁴⁶ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series* (London: Naval Intelligence, 1942), 183.

⁴⁷ Naval Intelligence Division, *Netherlands: Geographical Handbook Series* (London: Naval Intelligence, 1942), 185.

political parties were organized according to confessional background. This is generally true for all of the Netherlands, but especially important for Zeeland. Some of the major political parties of the early twentieth century consisted of the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP), *Christelijk-Historische Unie* (CHU), *de Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij* (RKSP) and, after 1918, the *Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij* (SGP).⁴⁸ Lijphart observed that, for all of the Netherlands, three sub-cultural groups called *zuilen* (pillars) dominated Dutch politics in the twentieth century.⁴⁹ According to him, political affiliation could normally be divided by Catholicism, orthodox Calvinism (i.e. Reformed Church, other fundamentalist Protestant churches), and a third bloc dominated by more liberal-leaning individuals of the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as secular or non-affiliated individuals.⁵⁰ To a certain degree, the Nazi occupying forces would capitalize on the political and confessional landscape of the province.

Like many other parts of Western Europe, most political parties operated or, at the very least, influenced certain newspapers. In Zeeland, *de Zeeuw* provided daily news and was largely influenced by the Reformed Church and the CHU. Other significant daily newspapers, some of which later proved important means to disseminate information regarding occupation proclamations and other Nazi regulations, included the *Middelbursche Courant*, *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, and the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*. While these were certainly important media, this should not obscure the fact that copious other smaller papers provided news to smaller communities, not to mention

⁴⁸ Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog* (Vlissingen: den Boer de Ruiter, 2000), 26. Anti-Revolutionary Party, Christian-Historical Union, and the Roman Catholic State Party respectively.

⁴⁹ Some political scientists have referred to this composition as *de ideologische driehoek* (the ideological triangle). Cf. J.W. de Beus, J.A.A. van Doorn, en Percy B. Lehring, *De Ideologische Driehoek: Nederlandse politiek in historisch perspectief* (Amsterdam: Boom/Meppel, 1989).

⁵⁰ Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation*, 17.

the extent to which church services provided many Zeeuwen with weekly news and information. It would be misleading to assume that people from Zierikzee in Schouwen-Duiveland read the *Middelburgsche Courant* on a regular basis and, for as de Bree emphasized, “everyone from the seven parts of Zeeland spoke their own dialect, in 1919 they also wore their own clothes or clothing, each island had its own health-care centre, its own market, and its own lifestyle.”⁵¹ In other words, the Zeeuwen remained highly regionalized in language and experience. That the islands of the province are in so many ways disparate suggests that historians must be mindful of the Zeeuwen’s heterogeneity when considering the changes wrought by economic crises and the effects of occupation and war. The effects brought on by socio-economic and political pressures, therefore, were not uniform and did not affect all of Zeeland equally. This work, therefore, tries to flesh out the complexity inherent in rural-urban dynamics in relation to historical development. In other words, the occupation of Schouwen-Duiveland or Tholen likely had few similarities with occupation in Noord-Holland or Utrecht.

This basic introduction provides a backdrop against which two important eras can be explored. The Great War presented Zeeland with a host of challenges to its supposed neutrality and offered a very different experience compared to what Belgium and France had gone through in 1914. Consequently, the Dutch had a much different point of reference to conceptualize the invasion and occupation in May 1940. Additionally, the post-war period and the economic crises of the 1930s not only significantly affected the dominantly agrarian lifestyles of Zeeland’s many fishermen and farmers, but also the newly industrialized centres of Vlissingen and Terneuzen.

⁵¹ De Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 6. “Elk van de zeven Zeeuwse delen zijn eigen dialect, in 1919 ook nog zijn eigen klederdracht of klederdrachten; elk eiland zijn eigen verzorgingscentrum, zijn eigen markt, zijn eigen leefklimaat.”

The Great War and the Netherlands, 1914-1918

Few historians have investigated how the Great War affected the Netherlands. Maartje Abbenhuis argued that because the Second World War, or simply “the war” in Dutch parlance, affected the Netherlands irreclaimably the history of the First World War was simply not a priority for Dutch historians in the post-1945 era.⁵² Consequently, only a handful of studies on the Great War and the Netherlands existed until the late 1990s.⁵³ Abbenhuis examined how the Netherlands navigated along the often difficult path to maintain its neutrality, and how on many occasions the towns along the borders of Germany and Belgium dealt with refugees, the black market, and other pressing circumstances which effectively violated their neutral status. According to Abbenhuis, the Dutch remained neutral by “compromising with each belligerent when and where possible, even at the expense of conceding its own independence and neutrality.”⁵⁴ What Abbenhuis observes for the First World War is the pragmatism with which the Dutch approached occupation and destruction.

Because of its proximity to the fighting in Belgium and northern France, Zeeland’s waterways and strategic position naturally made Great War neutrality challenging. As early as 21 September 1914, the Imperial German cruiser, *Karlsruhe*, sunk the Dutch cargo ship *Maria* en route to Ireland. This was one of many Dutch ships leaving from ports in Zeeland that were destroyed by the German navy over the course of

⁵² Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 14-15.

⁵³ For instance, Marc Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande* (München: Oldenbourg Akadamieverlag, 1998); Hubert P. van Tuyll van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert (eds), *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁵⁴ Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 17.

the war, including the *Medea*, *Katwijk*, *Tubantia* and the *Palembang*.⁵⁵ By 1918, a total of 121 Dutch cargo ships were sunk, among them some 96 Zeeuwse fishing vessels that were shot at, torpedoed, or destroyed by mines drifting through the Schelde or North Sea. The cost was roughly 1,200 Dutch lives.⁵⁶ Newspaper headlines from Middelburg and other towns reveal that the German introduction of airpower, mainly by employing Zeppelins to bomb certain targets, caused much consternation for some in Zeeland.⁵⁷ Throughout the war, there were several cases of both British and German aircraft making emergency landings in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Walcheren after overshooting the objectives of Zeebrugge or IJzer.⁵⁸ On 23 September 1914, only days after the sinking of the *Maria*, the *Middelburgsche Courant* published an article entitled “Our Neutrality” in which the editors urged the central Dutch government to pursue belligerents who had dropped bombs from Zeppelins that had landed along Zeeland’s eastern border in towns like Bergen-op-Zoom and as far north or east as Nijmegen. Other bombs had also exploded in Zeeland in Zierikzee, Sluis, and Goes.⁵⁹ The article recommended that “when it could be determined that this [Zeppelin] has thrown bombs, then there is every reason to question the government vigorously to insist on strict punishment of those reckless acts and [demand] reimbursement for damages.”⁶⁰ The author of this article thought that the neutral Netherlands should not have to fear destruction from the sky and, moreover,

⁵⁵ On the *Tubantia*, see P. Moeyes, “Interpretations of Neutrality, 1914-1918,” in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940* edited by Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 77.

⁵⁶ De Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 2.

⁵⁷ See for instance a detailed report of airpower over Zeeland, *Breskensche Courant*, “De oorlog,” 30 December 1914, 2.

⁵⁸ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 3.

⁵⁹ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 3.

⁶⁰ *Middelburgsche Courant*, “Onze Neutraliteit,” Wednesday 23 September 1914, 1. All newspapers used in this study were accessed online through Krantenbankzeeland.nl, a provincial initiative to digitize and make available newspapers from the late nineteenth century onward. “wanneer het mocht worden vastgesteld welke vlieger deze bommen gegooid heeft, dan zal er alle reden voor zijn om bij de betrokken regeering krachtig aan te dringen op strenge bestraffing van die roekelooze daad en op vergoeding der aangebrachte schade.”

“That [the bombing] was done over a neutral country can only be explained by, and not defended by, [a pilot’s] irresponsible mistake in calculating the place where he was, and that it was done over an open city without defense makes the matter worse.”⁶¹ This emphasis on Dutch neutrality during the Great War would resonate with similar claims made during the 1930s.

It would be dangerous to assume such attitudes regarding neutrality could be ascribed to all Zeeuwen, but the article does articulate how some conceptualized the Netherlands’ rather exceptional status among nations engulfed by war. The Dutch had, after all, remained neutral since 1815. Such status, however, did not mean that Zeeland was unfamiliar with military obligations. On the contrary, the unique contours of the land and familiarity with the maritime environment and industry meant that the Zeeuwen were often at the forefront of maintaining Dutch neutrality. As the gateway to the Schelde estuary and Antwerp, Zeeland was vulnerable to attacks, yet in the early twentieth century the General Staff allocated only a token defence force to Zeeland. Growing tension between Britain and Imperial Germany in 1910, however, led the Dutch government to plan the construction of a large fortified position in Vlissingen.⁶² Even before plans for the fortress materialized, Britain, France, and Belgium accused the Dutch of neglecting their role as a neutral country and claimed they had sided with Germany. Abbenhuis rightly stated that this controversy indicates how central the Schelde and Zeeland could figure in a continental dispute.⁶³ Far from being an obscure rural province,

⁶¹ *Middelburgsche Courant*, “Onze Neutraliteit,” Wednesday 23 September 1914, 1. “Dat het gedaan werd boven een neutraal land kan alleen verklaard, maar zeker niet verdedigd worden, door een, voor een vlieger onverantwoordelijke vergissing in berekening van de plaats waar hij was Dat he gebeurde boven een open stad zonder verdediging, maakt de zaak nog erger.”

⁶² Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 40.

⁶³ Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 40.

Zeeland was at the heart of both defence and neutrality and remained the focus of much international discussion both before and during the Great War.

Whether one lived in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen on the Belgian border or as far north as St. Philipsland in Tholen, the Zeeuwen became familiar with the sights and sounds of war that had brought much destruction to neighbouring Belgium and France. That the Territorial Commander of Zeeland (*Territoriale Bevelhebber in Zeeland*) issued proclamations warning Zeeland's residents about undetonated ordnance found on their property suggests that the Zeeuwen were exposed to some of the dangers that other *bona fide* belligerents faced during the period.⁶⁴ As early as 29 August 1914 the Dutch government declared that the Province was in a "state of siege" (*in Staat van beleg*), the increasing rate at which the residual effects of war were being felt in Zeeland made an indelible print on daily life.⁶⁵ By 1915 Zeeland's traditional municipal administrative bodies were governed by the armed forces to ensure the country's neutrality was not being compromised. This is a significant point. Although the Dutch were neutral, they had experience in implementing emergency measures to combat the residual effects of a war of which they were not a part.

The larger provincial towns of Middelburg and Vlissingen saw the flow of refugees from Belgium and Northern France beginning immediately after German attacks

⁶⁴ *Ierseksche en Thoolsche Courant*, "Waarschuwing: Artillerie-Schietoefeningen," 3 July 1915. For instance, "De Territoriale Bevelhebber in Zeeland enz., waarschuwt een ieder tegen het aanraken van niet gesprongen artillerie-projectielen, zijnde zulks levensgevaarlijk. Van het vinden van dergelijke projectielen moet onmiddellijk kennis gegeven worden aan den Burgemeester ter plaatse of den Kantonnements-commandant te Krabbendijke. Schijven, vlaggen, overblijfselen van gesprongen projectielen zijn Rijkseigendommen, waarvan het ontvreemden strafbaar is volgens de Wet."

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion on the *Oorlogswet* (War Law) of 1899 and the differences between "state of war" and "state of siege," see Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 139ff. Contemporary newspapers also issued the regulations. Cf. *Ierseksche en Thoolsche Courant*, 3 July 1915, "Gezien de Koninklijke Besluiten van 29 August 1914 (Stbl. no. 435), van 8 September 1914 (Stbl. no. 448) en van 11 Febr. Stbl. no. 81, waarbij de gemeenten in de Provincie Zeeland zijn verklaard 'in Staat van beleg'."

on Belgium. Refugees put pressure on Zeeland's territorial and neutral integrity, as well as its resources. In December 1914, the Inspector for Public Health, G. de Graeff, traveled to Vlissingen to monitor the current influx of Belgian refugees that had crossed the Schelde from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. The inspector, whose job was to oversee providing public housing for these people, found that over 5000 Belgian refugees were being put up in private homes. The government ordered the construction of four experimental housing units (*loodsen*),⁶⁶ which could house between 350 and 400 refugees. These helped monitor the refugees.⁶⁷

The generous treatment of Belgian refugees stemmed from the widespread news of German atrocities. Yet the local press chose not to take sides, instead offering a more abstract and neutral view of the war that denounced war in general. In Breskens, the *Breskensche Courant* published articles on the treatment of the Belgians at the hands of advancing German units—the so-called German atrocities—as well as the plight of Belgian children.⁶⁸ As early as February 1915, the editors of the *Breskensche Courant* used Belgian refugees as the physical manifestation of the war's malevolence. In this way, the editors began publishing pieces explicitly condemning the war and highlighting its disastrous effects on Zeeuwse society. The editors used some of the first issues of the year to reflect on the war's development: "Today is the first full half year of the war. A

⁶⁶ This Dutch term is very difficult to render into English and roughly translates to "pilotage" or something characterized by or of experimentation—perhaps even a type of tenement house.

⁶⁷ *Vlissingsche Courant*, "Nederland en de Oorlog: Belgische vluchtelingen," 14 December 1914, 1. "De inspecteur der Volksgezondheid, in het bijzonder belast met het toezicht op de handhaving der wettelijke bepalingen betreffende de volkshuisvesting, jhr. G. de Graeff, is Vrijdagsavond teruggekeerd van een reis van Vlissingen... Te Vlissingen zijn thans pl.m 5000 vluchtelingen in particuliere woningen gehuisvest. Het aantal woningen bedraagt ongeveer 800. Er worden daar vier loodsen gebouwd, die in ieder 350 a 400 menschen kunnen bevattend en waarin dus een deel der vluchtelingen zal kunnen worden ondergebracht. Het algemeene streven is echter, te bewerkstelligen, dat de mensen zich zooveel mogelijk in de door de regeering gestichte vluchtdorpen vestigen.

⁶⁸ *Breskensche Courant*, "Breskens, 8. December 1914," 9 December 1914, 2.

full six months now that millions of men, in the prime of their lives, [were] snatched from their usual labour in society and from their families, in two giant groups facing each other with no other immediate objective than to kill, maim, or wound as many of their ‘enemies’ as possible.”⁶⁹ Weekly newspapers in Tholen, further away from the Belgian border, reveal a similar anti-war sentiment, though issues of Belgian refugees figure less prominently in the press due to Tholen’s isolation. The *Ierseksche en Thoorsche Courant* asked its readers “Will the New Year bring change and perhaps a breath of fresh air?” and later admonished both Germany and the Entente, exclaiming that they should “Cease fighting! throw down the weapons, [and] end the mass murder.”⁷⁰ These common editorials are resoundingly anti-war in tone.

By 1916, the people of Zeeland began to feel the effects of resource scarcity. Most newspapers from the Province generally included detailed reports on the war’s development. In 1916 the major newspaper of Goes in Zuid-Beveland published a three-column article entitled “The Paper Crisis” as part of the war news in which the authors used the scarcity of paper to highlight the dearth of other supplies like raw materials and grain.⁷¹ Just as the newspapers were reporting on the conditions of the French and British armies after the Somme, Zeeland also began dealing with government-imposed regulations like the *Bruinbroodregeling* (Brown Bread Regulation), or *noodbrood* (emergency bread). In April 1916, the Minister of Agriculture, Trade and Industry held a

⁶⁹ *Breskensche Courant*, “Tegen den oorlog,” 3 February 1915, 1. “Heden is het eerste halve jaar van den oorlog vol. Een vol half jaar staan nu millioenen mannen in de kracht van hun leven, ontruikt aan hun gewonen maatschappelijke arbeid en aan hun gezinnen, in twee reusachtige machsgroepen tegenover elkander met geen ander onmiddellijke doel dan om zooveel hunner "vijanden" als slechts mogelijk is, dood, verminkt of gewond buiten gevecht te stellen.”

⁷⁰ *Ierseksche en Thoorsche Courant*, “De Oorlog,” 1 January 1915. “Zal het Nieuwe jaar verandering en misschien verluchting brengen?...Staakt het strijden! Werpt de wapenen neer; eindigt den massamoord, gij menschenkinderen

⁷¹ *Goessche Courant*, “Verspreid Oorlogs-Nieuws: de papier nood”, 17 June 1916, 2.

conference with the executive of the *Nederlandschen Bakkersgezellen-Bond* (Dutch Bakers Union) to discuss the prevailing food shortages in their communities.⁷² The minister planned to ask the mayors of each town to enforce the government provisions to produce bread with adulterated flour in order to ration the Province's cereals.⁷³ The editors of the *Middelburgsche Courant* blamed the dismal situation facing the Zeeuwen on Britain's maritime and economic blockade, calling the war *De Handelsoorlog* (War of Trade). They also claimed that Dutch bakers had been exporting bread to Belgium illegally as part of the growing black market, which partially explained the current state of affairs.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, this measure affected not only Zeeland but also the rest of the Netherlands and preceded an even more intense period of scarcity. Until that point, the government had left supply issues to private organizations, but by 1917 the government recognized the need to assuage Dutch foodstuff shortages and intervened directly.⁷⁵

On 19 August 1916, the Dutch government devised the *Distributiewet* (Distribution Law), which monitored stocks of goods, distributed raw materials to key industries, and kept account of domestic consumption needs.⁷⁶ The government began by regulating bread with the *Bruinbroodregeling*, but by the following year it had issued ration cards for most staple items, such as milk, butter, meat, soap, potatoes, and cheese. In February 1917, adults received about 400 grams of bread per day. By late 1918,

⁷² *Goessche Courant*, "Bruinbroodregeling," 22 April 1916, 2.

⁷³ *Goessche Courant*, "Bruinbroodregeling," 22 April 1916, 2. "De minister was voornemens den burgemeesters te verzoeken, aan de bruinbroodregeling stipt de hand te houden en opgave te verstrekken van de patroons, die hieraan niet voldeden, opdat die bakkerijen verstoken zouden blijven van de verstrekking van regeeringsmeel."

⁷⁴ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "De Handelsoorlog," 6 March 1916, 3; *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Uitvoer stopgezet," 17 August 1916. "Naar wij uit goede bron vernemen zal de uitvoer van brood naar België de volgende week geheel worden stopgezet." The paper also said the same about the exportation of onions, see for example, *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Uitvoer van uien weer stopgezet," 18 August 1916.

⁷⁵ Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 188-189.

⁷⁶ Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 189.

however, food rations had decreased to four kilograms of potatoes per week, and 200 grams of bread and 100 milliliters of milk per day.⁷⁷ These strenuous average rations affected urban and rural regions differently. In Zeeland, although foodstuffs were readily available, the majority of farmers were forced to raise the prices of their produce. Until the *Distributiewet*, prices of produce were generally what they had been in 1914. But, as one in Breskens put it, “with the New year [1917], the minister of agriculture raised prices, which for many thin wallets is an unpleasant surprise.”⁷⁸ Apples, a staple export from parts of Zeeland, increased by 5 ½ cents per kilogram, while red and yellow cabbage also increased by 5 to 6 cents per kilo. Salt, which had a pre-war price of 1 cent per kilogram, doubled by 1917. Petroleum prices also increased by 4 cents, reaching about 14 cents per can.⁷⁹ Eggs, which normally sold for 9 ½ cents in the early 1900s, were now sold for 14 cents. Cheese farmers and their consumers in Zeeland experienced some of the most severe price increases. Gouda cheese without the *Rijksmerk* (government brand) cost about 55 cents per pound and 11.5 cents per ounce. Cheeses with the *Rijksmerk* were 61 cents per pound and 13 cents per ounce.⁸⁰

Increased government control on production and higher prices encouraged black marketers and smuggling. This was a particularly difficult problem for the central government to monitor and was prevalent in Zeeland, especially in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen along the Belgian border. In May 1917, police in the town of Sluis began to crack down

⁷⁷ Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 189

⁷⁸ *Breskenssche Courant*, “Verhoogde prijzen,” 6 January 1917. “Met Nieuwjaar zijn door den minister van landbouw verschillende prijzen verhoogd die voor menige dunne beurs een onaangename surprise is.

⁷⁹ See for instance, *Goessche Courant*, “De Gasprijzen,” 3 March 1917, 1.

⁸⁰ *Breskenssche Courant*, “Verhoogde prijzen,” 6 January 1917. “De kaassoorten sloegen elk met 5 cent per pond op; jonge Goudsche kaas zonder Rijksmerk kost voortaan 55 cent per pond of 11 ½ cent per ons. Oudere kaas met Rijksmerk kost 61 cent per pond en 13 cent per ons, zonder Rijksmerk is de prijs per pond 2 cent en per ons ½ cent lager, dus respectievelijk 59 cent en 12 ½ cent.” Cf. *Goessche Courant*, “Minimumprijzen landbouwproducten,” 22 February 1917, 2.

on black market trade and piracy. On 7 May, police apprehended a man from IJzendijke (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) and two Belgians. A search of the man's house in IJzendijke uncovered more than 85 kilograms of hard soap, more than 17 kilograms of coffee beans, and a large quantity of cacao.⁸¹ Not only were the borderlands subjected to smuggling and black market trade. The *Goessche Courant* reported that the tugboat *Jantina Rensiena* had cruised the Schelde for some time before coming into Middelburg. Suspicious of its activity, the authorities searched the vessel and discovered it was filled with contraband fats and soap. Both the captain and the first mate were arrested and brought to Middelburg.⁸²

The regulation of food prices and production had profound implications for daily life in Zeeland. Given its proximity to Belgium and high domestic prices imposed by the province and central government, some Zeeuwen turned to illicit trade and smuggling to assuage daily needs. They reacted to these difficult years with pragmatism and accommodated to their conditions accordingly.

These issues coincided with an important change in how newspapers reported on the war's development. Initially, newspapers like the *Middelburgsche Courant* and the *Breskensche Courant* contested the war, outlined military operations in Flanders and northern France, and focused on the external pressures facing the province and the importance of upholding the country's neutrality. By 1916, however, one observes a marked change in the types of stories the major newspapers published. The vast majority

⁸¹ *Breskensche Courant*, "Breskens, 8 Mei 1917," 2. "De vorige week kon de politie alhier een geode slag slaan. Bij een poging tot smokkelen zijn gesnapt een tweetal Belgen en een bewoner van IJzendijke, meevoerende 85 kilogramms harde zeep. Bij een grensbewoner werd na huiszoeking in beslaggenomen een hoeveelheid cacao en 17 KG koffieboonen."

⁸² *Goessche Courant*, "Hansweert," 5 May 1917, 1. "Bij het visiteeren der sleepboot '*Jantina Rensiena*', kapitein v. K., werd door de ambtenaren alhier een partijtje smokkelwaar gevonden, bestaande uit vet en zeep. Sleepboot en smokkelwaar zijn in beslag genomen, terwijl de kapitein en de stuurman gevankelijk naar Middelburg zijn gebracht."

of headlines began to deal with the many internal conflicts the Dutch faced as a result of the war. Military operations were no longer the most important stories to report, but rather the side-effects that had put increasing pressure on the province. The introduction of rationing, the flow of Belgian refugees, and a flourishing black market meant that Zeeland and the rest of the country only nominally maintained their neutrality.

For the duration of the war, the waters that encircle and crisscross the province remained subjected to the sights and sounds of war, which for many reinforced the importance of upholding neutrality in the Netherlands. On 2 January 1917, the people living in South Vlissingen woke up to find a German destroyer stranded on the coast. One observer noted that some of its munitions had fallen out and that there was a possibility of the ordnance exploding under water or against the shore.⁸³ In another case in January 1918, a German pilot made an emergency landing in Sluis while trying to take aerial photographs of the Belgian-Dutch border. The pilot was questioned and then interned in one of several prisoner of war (POW) camps in the Netherlands.⁸⁴ As a neutral country, and broker of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Netherlands set up POW camps to deal with prisoners and deserters who crossed over the borders from Germany and Belgium.

⁸³ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Uit Vlissingen," 2 January 1917, 1. "In den vroegen morgen van Zondag is ten N. van het fort de Nolle te Vlissingen de torpedoboot G1 gestrand. Naar wij vernemen was de boot die voor anker lag van haar anker geslagen en is toen in den storm en duisternis op de steenglooiing van een oud paalhoofd geslagen. Een der onderofficieren had de pistolen van de torpedo's afgehaald en daardoor voorkomen, dat deze ontploften bij het stooten tegen den wal.

Door het brengen van een lijn naar den wal door een der matrozen, konden de opvarenden zich redan. De boot zat gisteren nog op dezelfde plaats en zoowel Zondag als gisteren werd druk gewerkt aan het demonteeren der boot, die vrij ernstig beschadigd is. Het is te begrijpen, dat vele personen van de twee vrije dagen gebruik maakten om eens een kijkje te gaan nemen, maar niet velen hebben iets gezien daar de dijk bij de punt voor het fort door de militairen was afgezet."

⁸⁴ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Vliegmaschine gedaald," 2 January 1918, 1.

These incidents illustrate that many Zeeuwen experienced the effects of the Great War in a different and peripheral way compared to how the Belgians or French endured the physical destruction of war. The clearest difference between the experience of the Netherlands compared to that of Belgium and France is that the former's neutrality prevented widespread destruction from spilling over Dutch borders. Both France and Belgium had been occupied, civilian homes had billeted Imperial German troops, and civilians in Flanders and northern France saw and heard death and destruction on a widespread scale. In short, the Dutch experience was dramatically different and many in the country accounted for this difference by the country's neutral status.

For Zeeland, the armistice announced in November 1918 meant that soldiers on guard could once again return home and were no longer in a "state of siege." All foreigners interned on Dutch territory like prisoners of war and the thousands of refugees were to begin planning their return.⁸⁵ Importantly, government interference with prices and production would soon stop, and the market would eventually return to its prewar trends.⁸⁶

Although the Dutch managed to maintain their neutrality, the residual effects of war still affected the people of Zeeland. Whether imagined or not, many Zeeuwen felt threatened from the use of airpower and were often subjected to stringent government control. However, the key difference in experiences between the Netherlands and the rest of Western Europe was that the residual effects of war led to a greater investment in neutrality. According to many in Zeeland, the country's neutral status meant that the province had not been occupied by a foreign sovereign in the way that Belgium and

⁸⁵ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Terugkeer van krijgsgevangen," 12 November 1918, 1.

⁸⁶ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Distributie en productie," 11 November 1918, 1.

France had. Until the *Meidagen* (May Days) of 1940 the Netherlands tenaciously clung to what its citizens believed saved them from the ravages of war in 1914. Neutrality, many Dutch believed, offered the greatest defense in an increasingly hostile Europe. In the end, however, Zeeland's position within the neutral Netherlands embodied a paradox: the province's topography and geographic position created a type of negotiated neutrality in the twentieth century. As we will see, this unfamiliarity and inexperience played a key role in Zeeland's reactions to the Nazi invasion in 1940 and how they attempted to recover. This, however, did not mean the Dutch were unfamiliar with stringent government control during times of crisis.

The 1920s and 1930s in Zeeland: Annexation, Economic Growth, and Financial Crisis

The immediate postwar era ushered in a series of changes to the socio-economic and political landscape of Zeeland. One of the most complex political issues that Zeeland's government dealt with, and one that called into question the loyalty of the Zeeuwen to the Netherlands, came from Belgium and the *Comité de Politique Nationale*. In 1919, in the midst of negotiations at Versailles, the Belgian government began advocating for the annexation of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen on the grounds that the Schelde would improve the economic conditions of Belgium. The debate about whether or not Zeeuws-Vlaanderen should be part of Belgium was centuries old, so it is no surprise that after the tumultuous experience of the Great War questions about Belgium's reparations also included territorial expansion. Even the Dutch historian de Bree admitted that the Belgian "position was not utterly incomprehensible."⁸⁷ For it would provide the Belgians with a port on the southern side of the Schelde. The proposal of the *Comité*, which the

⁸⁷ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 9. "Volstrekt onbegrijpelijk was deze houding niet."

Belgian government in Brussels supported, argued that if France should reclaim Alsace and Lorraine from Germany, then Belgium should also reclaim what was rightfully and historically theirs. To compensate its losses, according to the *Comité*, the Netherlands would receive adjacent parts of Germany. The plan received little support at Versailles. While France showed some willingness to favor the Belgian cause to have a country from the ‘Mosel to the Rhine’, both Britain and the United States vehemently opposed the annexation of a neutral country during war.⁸⁸ The debate had once again brought the Netherlands into the world of geopolitics.

If the plan had received little support among diplomats at Versailles, it earned even less in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and the rest of the Province. The great powers requested that an entourage from Den Haag, led by Minister H.A. van Karnebeek, visit Versailles to discuss the Dutch position on the matter.⁸⁹ In both East- and West-Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen, many municipal and residential buildings and businesses flew the Dutch flag to protest the annexation proposal and to show their support to the Dutch monarchy. In most communes in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, towns established protest-committees and planned public rallies to contest annexation, which were led by preachers, pastors, politicians, and journalists, all of whom highlighted the important historical bond between Zeeland and the House of Orange. Importantly, “they wanted no action taken against the Belgians, but against the annexationists among them.”⁹⁰ The delegates in Versailles decided that a

⁸⁸ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 10. “Frankrijk toonde enige bereidheid zijn klein noorderbuur ter wille te zijn. Engeland en de USA verklaarden zich tegen elk pogen de Belgische staat ten koste van de Nederlandse te vergroten.”

⁸⁹ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 10. “Op verzoek van de geallieerden reisde een omvangrijke deputatie uit Den Haag naar versailles, om daar als gelijkberechtigde partij het nederlandse standpunt kenbaar te maken. Minister H.A. van Karnebeek, die een knap verdediger van de Nederlandse belangen bleek te zijn, wist zich sterk gesteund door de publieke opinie, in het bijzonder die in de omstreden gebieden.”

⁹⁰ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 10. “De sprekers- predicanen, pastoors, politici- zij wensten geen actie tegen Belgen, maar uitsluitend tegen de annexationisten onder hen.”

plebiscite be held in Zeeland to decide whether Zeeuws-Vlaanderen would remain part of the province. About seven weeks after the vote, Queen Wilhemina arrived in Vlissingen on 5 March 1919 to a celebratory reception, parade, and naval flotilla led by the Dutch cruiser *Hydra*. In her speech to the people of Zeeland, the Queen famously stated that “the people of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen are Dutch and shall remain that way.”⁹¹ Upon her return to Den Haag, the Queen wrote “I felt compelled to say how deeply affected I was by the impressive national parade, which has given my visit to both parts of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen great historical significance.”⁹² After months of debate and negotiation, the plebiscite showed that the people of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Zeeland wanted to remain a part of the Netherlands, and the threat of annexation eventually subsided.

The annexation issue was only one of many external obstacles Zeeland had to surmount during the post-war period and as the province negotiated with the outside world. It took considerable time for market forces and economies to adjust to peacetime production, so the threat of being subsumed under Belgian suzerainty was at the nadir of Zeeland’s troubles.⁹³ The 1920s witnessed an increase in industrialization and modernization for many parts of the Province. Importantly, however, this growth was neither distributed evenly nor uniformly.

⁹¹ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 10-11. “De bevolking van Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen is Nederlands en zal dit blijven.”

⁹² *Middelburgsche Courant*, “Het Koninklijk bezoek aan Z-Vlaanderen,” 7 March 1919, 1. “Bij mijn terugkeer te 's-Gravenhage gevoelde ik mij gedrongen uit te spreken, hoe diep ik getroffen ben door de indrukwekkende nationale betooging, welke aan dezen dag van mijn bezoek aan beide gedeelten van Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen een groote historische beteekenis heeft gegeven. De gevoelens van trouw en verknochtheid aan ons dierbaar vaderland, welke heden wederom op zoo trefende wijze tot uiting werden gebracht, hebben mij tot diepgevoelde erkentelijkheid gestemd.”

⁹³ A survey of the major newspapers, *Middelburgsche Courant*, *Goessche Courant*, *Breskensche Courant*, etc., shows that towns were very concerned with how the war affected the production and distribution of agricultural products and employment, and this trend continues well into 1920.

As described above, some demographic changes partially reflect the changing economic and social complexion of the Province, particularly the improvement of infrastructure. In towns where ports and harbours dominated commerce and industry, such as Vlissingen and Terneuzen, the population typically increased following the war (see Appendix I). Although Zeeland's ports had always been important for seafaring trade and commerce, the advent of railway connections and land transport facilitated both travel and industry.⁹⁴ In 1875, the *Stoomvaart Maatschappij Zeeland* (Steamship Company of Zeeland) established its headquarters in Vlissingen to provide a cross-channel service to England. In that same year, the shipbuilding firm *De Schelde* was founded and provided employment for many men in Vlissingen and surrounding areas. Following the war, this company received government subsidies to modernize its inner- and outer-port which became a fueling station for other seagoing vessels.⁹⁵

But it was, as de Bree wrote, the development of infrastructure in the 1920s that brought Zeeland into an age of modernity.⁹⁶ Established in late 1919, the *N.V. Provinciale Zeeuwsche Electriciteitsmaatschappij* (Zeeland Provincial Electricity Company/PZEM) began providing electricity to many towns in the province and took over several smaller electricity companies in the region. The PZEM laid a cable under the Westerschelde to connect the six islands of Zeeland, and constructed a separate power station in Westdorpe for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Eventually, the PZEM monopolized the inchoate power industry in Zeeland. By 1 January 1939, the entire province's electricity

⁹⁴ Dirk Marc de Waard, "*Luctor et Emergo: The Impact of the Second World War on Zeeland*," (M.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1983), 10.

⁹⁵ de Waard, "*Luctor et Emergo: The Impact of the Second World War on Zeeland*," 12.

⁹⁶ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 12. "Infrastructurele voorzieningen brachten Zeeland in de jaren twintig nader tot de modern samenleving."

was administered by the PZEM, with the exception of Tholen and Sint-Philipsland, whose electricity was provided by a company in Noord-Brabant.⁹⁷

Railways also deepened the connections between Zeeland and the rest of the country, as well as Belgium. In March 1920, a steam train line offered transport between Breskens and Sluis in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen to Maldeghem in Belgium, increasing mobility for the residents of that part of the province south of the Schelde.⁹⁸ Although there were talks of expanding train lines to other towns and building a more comprehensive transport system for the region, it is clear that the *Stoomtram Maatschappij* (Steamtrain Company) for Breskens required more funding than what the province and investors had provided.⁹⁹ On the other hand, bicycles were (and still are) much more common in the Province. In 1929, for example, a bridge was constructed between Tholen and Noord-Brabant. In one year, no more than 120 automobiles had travelled across the bridge, which was more widely used for bicycle traffic.

These changes in transport also coincided with the introduction or expansion of *waterleiding*, or public water systems, and this was particularly important for the countryside. The larger towns of Vlissingen and Middelburg had watermains at the turn of the nineteenth century, but many Zeeuwen preferred rainwater. De Bree characterized the Zuid-Bevelanders as “in general somewhat more progressive” since many of them had tap water as early as 1913. Tholen introduced waterworks in 1923, Sint-Philipsland

⁹⁷ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 13. “Levering van energie van een centraal punt uit stuitte op praktische bezwaren; met name tegen het leggen van een kabel over de bodem van de Westerschelde opperden de technische adviseurs ernstige bedenkingen. Daarom bouwde de PZEM te Westdorpe een aparte centrale voor Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen. Maar liefst 26 gemeentelijke distributiebedrijfjes in dit gebied werden achtereenvolgens door de provinciale maatschappij overgenomen--het laatste op 1 Januari 1939.”

⁹⁸ *Breskensche Courant*, “De tramweg Breskens-Sluis met zijlijnen,” 10 March 1920, 1.

⁹⁹ *Breskensche Courant*, “De tramweg Breskens-Sluis met zijlijnen,” 10 March 1920, 1-2. “De Maatschappij wil krachtig medewerken aan de totstandkoming der lijnen en harerzijds ook financieel flink steunen. Willen de lijnen tot stand kunnen komen, dan zullen echter belanghebbenden uit de streek zich ook aanmerkelijke geldelijke offers moeten getroosten.”

in 1924, Schouwen-Duiveland in 1930, and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in 1936. It took until 1954 for the people of Noord-Beveland to replace cistern wells with running water.¹⁰⁰

Such development widened the difference between the province's urban and rural residents unevenly across Zeeland. The various industries that existed offered employment opportunities for some Zeeuwen, but most were available in larger towns like Vlissingen, Breskens, Terneuzen, and, to a lesser extent, the political capital Middelburg. In many villages, agrarian life remained largely unchanged and the emphasis placed on the expansion of infrastructure here, as a way to demonstrate broader trends of industrialization in the region, should not obscure the fact that Zeeland was a dominantly agriculture-based economy. The economic crisis of the late 1920s and 1930s thus had disastrous effects on Zeeland's socio-economic conditions and presented the Province with an unprecedented set of challenges. Increasing connections, industrially and economically, with the outside world put the Dutch at risk regardless of the country's neutrality.

The Zeeuwse newspapers *Goessche Courant*, *Ierseksche en Thoolsche Courant*, or the *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, for example, did not begin reporting on the economic situation in the United States until about 4 November 1929. Even then the paper in Goes published a small article on the recent issues in the American automotive industry and delegated it to the last page.¹⁰¹ The problems in foreign industry were not the top-priority for many newspapers reporting on more dissociated and rural issues. By January 1930, Middelburg reported that from 1929 to 1930 the grain markets in the province fluctuated

¹⁰⁰ de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 13. "De Zuidbevelanders, in het algemeen iets vooruitstrevender, leerden het kraanwater al in 1913 kennen..."

¹⁰¹ *Goessche Courant*, "Amerikaansche automobiellindustrie," 6 November 1929, 4.

only “very slightly.”¹⁰² In the more industrial town of Vlissingen, however, reporters paid close attention to American President Herbert Hoover’s plans to generate industry by developing hydroelectricity in the United States.¹⁰³ Yet, the province was not immune to rising tariffs. The *Vlissingsche Courant* also warned investors and businesses that the port authorities in Antwerp had raised their duties on goods by 50 centimes per gross ton, from 3.00 frs to 3.50 frs.¹⁰⁴

These contemporary reports belied a serious but nascent problem in the dominantly agrarian region, which could be seen in the rising prices of foodstuffs and increased costs of land. The price of grain from the Province listed on the Rotterdam market decreased from 15.12 florins per 100 kilograms to a meager 8.54 florins in 1930. Barley worth 9.79 florins in 1926 dropped to 6.82 florins in 1933 and to 4.47 florins later that year. Kidney beans were worth 20.90 florins per 100 kilograms on the Middelburg grain market in 1926, plunging to 16.50 florins in 1930 and 10.80 florins in 1933. From 1926 to 1933, the price of pork also dropped from 0.73 florins per kilogram to 0.34 florins.¹⁰⁵ The decreases in the value of these products were commensurate with the value of land in the province (see Appendix II). On 19 November 1930, the *Zeeuwsche Landbouwmaatschappij* (ZLM/ Zeeland Agricultural Society) met in Goes to address the crises. Roughly 1,700 farmers from all parts of Zeeland attended the meeting.¹⁰⁶ The meeting had the potential to become a serious protest as so many in the province depended on agriculture, but the meeting was calm and collected. The *Goessche Courant*

¹⁰² *Vlissingsche Courant*, “Marktberichten,” 2 January 1930, 3. “Wegens de festdagen was de aanvoer op de graanmarkt heden zeer gering en werd geen notering opgemaakt.”

¹⁰³ *Vlissingsche Courant*, “Hoover heeft groote plannen,” 25 October 1929, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Vlissingsche Courant*, “Verhooging havenrechten te Antwerpen,” 2 January 1930, 2.

¹⁰⁵ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Goessche Courant*, “De crisis-vergadering in Goes,” 21 November 1930, 1.

attributed the crowd's politeness to the meeting's chairman, Mr. Dieleman, and "the sober nature of most Zeeuwen."¹⁰⁷ The ZLM agreed that immediate assistance was necessary to stymie further deterioration of the situation in the Province, and decided that they would take measures against the so-called "dumping" of foodstuffs and provide greater subsidies to the many sugar beet farmers in the region. Further goals of the ZLM included the abolition of excised meats as well as the compulsory use of a percentage of local wheat.¹⁰⁸ While some contemporaries greeted these measures with enthusiasm, others were more skeptical and emphasized that "Only haste can prevent suffering and misery!"¹⁰⁹ One observer laconically noted that "we will be waiting to see what our government will do with our farmers."¹¹⁰ Despite these misgivings, still others were more moderate and claimed that "the meeting was a great success! But here, too, we are not there yet," indicating a degree of reticence in government action.¹¹¹ Although the situation facing the Zeeuwen was serious, the *Middelburgsche Courant* tended to focus on the distribution of bread and foodstuffs in more urban provinces like Noord-Holland and towns outside of Zeeland, which might suggest that the consumption of foodstuffs in Zeeland was not the issue, but rather the business many Zeeuwse farmers had lost as a

¹⁰⁷ *Goessche Courant*, "De crisis-vergadering in Goes," 21 November 1930, 1. "Een crisis-vergadering als die van Woensdag had gemakkelijk in een felle protest-vergadering kunnen ontaarden. Dat dit niet is geschied, is te danken aan de leiding, die bij mr. Dieleman in vertrouwde handen was, en aan de bezadigden aard der meeste Zeeuwen."

¹⁰⁸ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 18. "Eenparig waren de samengestroomden van mening, dat de boerenstand steun van de overheid behoefde, onverwijld steun: maatregelen tegen dumping (zodanig verhoging van invoerrechten), subsidie voor de teelt van suikerbieten en invoering van een maalgewort, waarbij het gebruik van een zeker percentage inlandse tarwe verplicht zou worden gesteld; afschaffing van de vleesaccijns."

¹⁰⁹ *Goessche Courant*, "De crisis-vergadering in Goes," 21 November 1930, 1. "Spoed kan veel leed en veel ellenden voorkomen!"

¹¹⁰ *Goessche Courant*, "De crisis-vergadering in Goes," 21 November 1930, 1. "In een tarieven-oorlog kan een klein landje zich onthouden zoolang het dermate afhankelijk is van zijn export als Nederland. Wij zullen dienen af te wachten wat onze regering met onze landbouwers van plan is."

¹¹¹ *Goessche Courant*, "De crisis-vergadering in Goes," 21 November 1930, 1. "De vergadering is een groot success geworden! Maar hiermede zijn we er nog niet!"

result of poor market conditions.¹¹² Nonetheless, the combination of higher tariffs, lower commodity and land prices resulted in an increased rate of unemployment by the mid-1930s.

The fishing industry on which a large number of Zeeuwen traditionally depended also experienced similar pressures. The main fishing areas around Breskens, Brouwershaven, Tholen, Yerseke, Arnemuiden, Veere, and Vlissingen were largely unaffected until the early 1930s. In 1934, however, France and Belgium closed their borders to the traditional supply of Zeeuwse shrimp, oysters, mussels, and other pelagic foodstuffs. These were the traditional markets to which Zeeuwen exported their fish. The French and Belgian decrees were so stringent that many fishermen were left unemployed, exacerbating the employment conditions in the province.¹¹³ By the 1940s, Nazi authorities dictated the rates at which farmers were paid for produce and livestock, sustaining agricultural activities at least for the first few years of occupation.

One of the measures the provincial and central governments took to alleviate the financial and unemployment crisis involved strengthening key manufacturing sectors through subsidies, though this typically only helped larger port towns like Vlissingen and Terneuzen. This meant that shipbuilding companies and maritime industry garnered greater attention from politicians in Middelburg and Den Haag. By the early 1930s, the Province had requested the construction of several large ships in Vlissingen: the passenger-carrying *Dempo* and the motor ship *Bengalen*. Both of these ships, however, were ordered by the company Rotterdam Lloyd, but constructed in Vlissingen. Other

¹¹² See for instance *Middelburgsche Courant*, “Brooduitdeeling aan kamerleden,” 26 November 1930, 1.

¹¹³ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 20. “In 1934 besloten België en Frankrijk de invoer van garnalen te contingenten. De maatregelen waren zo streng, dat de grenzen in feite voor dit visserijproduct gesloten werden, althans een groot deel van het jaar... In Breskens bleef inderdaad een aantal schepen werkloos langs de kade liggen.”

ships constructed as a way to generate the economy and decrease unemployment included two submarines for the *Koninklijke Marine* (Dutch Royal Navy) and the fire-fighting boat, *Havendienst VI*. The construction of these vessels still did not have the impact politicians had hoped for. In 1933, companies *De Schelde* and the *Provinciale Stoombootdienst*, with support of the central government and the Royal Dutch Navy, began building the naval ship *Johan Maurits van Nassau*, which during the invasion of Nazi Germany in 1940 became a cornerstone of Dutch defense.¹¹⁴ After 1933, the maritime companies in the province put more effort into producing turbines, motors, boilers, and other necessary parts.¹¹⁵ During Nazi occupation, Vlissingen became an important centre for maritime construction, which helped relieve unemployment in the town.

In one week in January 1934, 1,082 men and 8 women were registered as unemployed of Vlissingen's total population of 21,716 (see Appendix I).¹¹⁶ Although the Province did try to provide unemployment relief, their efforts were rarely enough to assist such large numbers of unemployed citizens. For instance, while about 1,121 people in Vlissingen registered as unemployed, only 129 were on relief.¹¹⁷ These data come from the most populous and industrial town in the province and one can only speculate about the situation facing families in more rural areas like Noord-Beveland or Tholen. In Tholen, for example, newspaper headlines reflected greater skepticism when it came to government assistance to relieve regional unemployment. One lengthy article read "Give Us Work!" which addressed many of the problems facing the villages around Tholen and

¹¹⁴ *Vlissingse Courant*, "De N.V. Kon. Maatsch. 'De Schelde'," 2 January 1934, 1.

¹¹⁵ de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 21.

¹¹⁶ *Vlissingse Courant*, "De werkloosheid," 3 January 1934, 1.

¹¹⁷ *Vlissingse Courant*, "Werkloozen," 5 January 1934, 1.

warned that “the injustice in income distribution is really concentrated in the younger generation, who at the moment see only closed business.” “Here lays the central problem,” the article continued, “which is dominated by the distribution of social income. There is less to divide and the pot is becoming increasingly smaller as the period of austerity and degradation lasts longer and [is] more intense.”¹¹⁸

The socio-economic challenges of the era led some to speculate about the potential offered by alternative political movements, notably communism or national socialism. But an apostatical communism found very little support in most parts of the province. In the “battle for better social conditions,” many churches argued that their flocks should look to God and not an ideology that considers both Protestantism and Catholicism as “opium for the people.”¹¹⁹ Political movements, particularly the NSB, will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but for now suffice it to say that the socio-economic pressures of the economic crises in 1930s pushed many Zeeuwen into thinking about the values of burgeoning political movements. Although some churches appear to have stressed the importance of refraining from atheism and communism for confessional reasons, every major newspaper in the province was writing about the developments of European politics. Without overstating the influence of newspapers among the Zeeuwen, the number of papers in the province carrying stories about Adolf

¹¹⁸ *Thoolsche Courant*, “Geeft Ons Arbeid!,” 6 April 1934, 1. “De onrechtvaardigheid in de verdeeling van het inkomen concentreert zich in onzen tijd bij de jongere generatie, die momenteel het bedrijfsleven voor zich gesloten ziet. Ook voor de werkloozen, die uit het productieproces gestooten zijn en die nergers anderseen onderkomen weten te vinden. Zij krijgen hun werkloozensteun, die weliswaar minder is dan zij met werk zouden hebben verdiend, maar voor broodsgebrek worden zij ongetwijfeld gespaard...Hier ligt nu het zwaartepunt van het probleem, dat beheerscht wordt door de verdeeling van het maatschappelijk inkomen. Er is minder te verdeelen en de pot wordt hoe langer hoe kleiner, naarmate de periode van versobering, van afbraak langer duurt en intenser wordt.”

¹¹⁹ *Thoolsche Courant*, “De strijd voor betere sociale toestanden. De kerk tegen Atheïsme en Bolsjewisme,” 18 December 1936, 1. “Even lang als het communisme bestaat, bestaat ook de strijd van de kerk, zowel protestant als katholiek, [?] deze ideologie, die openlijk het atheïsme predikt en elken godsdienst als 'opium voor het volk' beschouwt.”

Hitler, Benito Mussolini, the Soviet Union, and the war in Spain, suggest that Zeeuwen were at the very least familiar with national socialism and communism—even if the ideologies were presented in a distorted way.¹²⁰ Jan Zwemer has rightly argued that the economic crises of the 1930s, and the massive unemployment that the crises produced, led to a “crisis of democracy” in Zeeland on which the origins of the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB/National-Socialist Movement) in the province capitalized.¹²¹ The boom and bust of the 1920s and 1930s had profound implications for both occupation and post-war recovery.

Conclusion

An exploration of Zeeland’s experiences during the Great War and after shows that the province experienced some of wartime’s hardships exemplified by stringent food regulation policies and government interference in most daily activities, such as conventional agricultural patterns and local economies. In addition to these economic pressures, many of Zeeland’s inhabitants were also subjected to the sights and sounds of war. Bombs occasionally dropped on Zeeland’s territory, neutral Dutch ships were sunk in the Schelde, and the Province had to deal with a massive influx of Belgian refugees, among other problems. But while Belgian and French civilians endured unprecedented violence and destruction on their own territory, the Dutch maintained their neutrality through strong government and were never under the sovereignty of a foreign power.

¹²⁰ In the *Thoolsche Courant* alone, see headlines for 17 July 1936, 18 December 1936, 14 August 1936, 13 November 1936, 31 December 1936, 5 June 1936, 6 November 1936, 15 May 1936, 6 March 1936, 18 September 1936.

¹²¹ Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 25. “...de economische crisis van de jaren 1930 met haar werkloosheid en de ‘crisis van de democratie’, die zich in Nederland rondom de NSB gemanifesteerd had en waarvan de Duitse bezetting als het ware het hoogtepunt vormde.”

This had a profound effect on the political culture and mentality of politicians in the country. In the final analysis, this was one of the most crucial differences in the wartime experiences of western European states. For the Netherlands, it reinforced the idea that neutrality could stave off even the most destructive war in Europe's history. On the other hand, a position of armed neutrality in Belgium did nothing to prevent Imperial German armies from invading. Later, we will see this experience profoundly shaped how Dutch authorities would conceptualize reconstruction and recovery efforts.

The 1920s ushered in the expansion of industry, infrastructure, and a prosperous agricultural market once it had recovered from wartime regulation. The general prosperity many Zeeuwen had experienced during the 1920s had subsided according to broader financial developments outside of the Province in 1930. Zeeland's predominantly agricultural economy was once again affected by external market forces and resulted in the loss of business for many farmers and fishermen. While the government attempted to subsidize larger industries, like the shipbuilding sector in Vlissingen, these measures did little to assuage the crisis in other parts of the Province like Tholen and Goes. Consequently, some in the province thought that assistance was beyond the capacity of strong government, or that their government was simply not strong enough. It sowed some seeds for dissension in an already disparate province and, like elsewhere in Europe, provided a foundation on which alternative ideologies could build. While the Netherlands remained neutral during Germany's rearmament in the late 1930s, ideologies from outside Zeeland began crossing the borders well before the Second World War began. Some of the salient issues addressed here serve as a backdrop against which we can

explore how Zeeland negotiated Nazi occupation, war and destruction, and, finally, post-war recovery.

CHAPTER II

Nazi Occupation in the Countryside

In *De Aanslag* (The Assault), set in Nazi-occupied Holland, award-winning Dutch novelist Harry Mulisch wrote that “a man who has never been hungry may possess a more refined palate, but he has no idea what it means to eat.”¹²² Mulisch referred to the so-called “Hunger Winter” of 1944-1945, an event which has become so entrenched, particularly in English-language conceptions of Dutch occupation experiences, that few would contest its historicity. In the 1980s Henri van der Zee, whose account of starvation in Nazi-occupied Holland helped reinforce this narrative, opined “it dawned on me that the story of Nazi-occupied Holland is almost unknown, even though, according to one American writer, of all Western democracies the Netherlands had suffered the hardest fate.”¹²³ While there is no doubt that the provinces of Noord- and Zuid-Holland suffered greatly during this period, particularly the Dutch-Jewish communities, this chapter differs from conventional interpretations, which are almost entirely based on evidence from urban and highly populated regions in the Netherlands, and demonstrates that the situation facing rural Zeeland was different. This historiographical trend can be found in arguably the most seminal English-language study on the Netherlands during Nazi occupation written by Werner Warmbrunn in the 1960s.¹²⁴ A recent study by Ralf Futselaar, however, has cast doubt on the effects of *De Hongerwinter* in rural areas. Using quantitative data and a wealth of manuscript sources, Futselaar suggests that in

¹²² For English edition see, Harry Mulisch, *The Assault*, trans. Claire Nicolas White, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 43.

¹²³ Henri A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland, 1944-1945* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1982/1998), 15.

¹²⁴ Werner Warmbrunn, *The Dutch under German Occupation, 1940-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963).

rural areas people managed to avoid starvation by acquiring sufficient calories from their own regions.¹²⁵ This, however, as he points out, was simply not the case in densely populated and urban cities in which civilians could not acquire substantial foodstuffs. Futselaar estimates that about 9,000 Dutch civilians died from starvation during the winter of 1944-1945, while 26,000 alone died of tuberculosis during occupation.¹²⁶ The central point is not to belittle the significance or degree of suffering, but to ask whether the experiences of urbanized Dutch citizens are representative of overall experience.

This chapter sheds light on the history of occupation in a rural province and highlights what Nazi occupation was like in a more rural environment. More broadly, it charts the experiences of both German occupiers and Dutch civilians in Zeeland from May 1940 up to the Allied invasion in 1944. In many ways, the Dutch were not prepared for an invasion given their experience in the previous twenty years. It argues that the initial presence of occupying forces in this part of the country reduced some of the unemployment of the 1930s and was not altogether intrusive. It was, in other words, a benign occupation. As time went on, however, German strategic concerns over the Schelde shifted the nature of occupation and became increasingly restrictive. This chapter suggests that Allied liberation in autumn 1944 represented a more costly and physically damaging period than the four years under Nazi occupation. This chapter is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather designed to sketch what occupation was like in the province. For purposes of clarity, this chapter primarily uses a thematic structure because of its variegated content.

¹²⁵ Ralf Futselaar, *Lard, Lice and Longevity: The Standard of Living in Occupied Denmark and the Netherlands, 1940-1945* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 45.

¹²⁶ Futselaar, *Lard, Lice and Longevity*, 60.

The previous chapter has shown how Dutch politicians and leaders clung to their neutral status to avoid being dragged into war in 1914. But, as Abbenhuis rightly points out, the Dutch government barely accomplished this. The experiences of the Netherlands during the First World War and the crises that followed it were fundamental in shaping Dutch mentalities during the late 1930s. Leaders in the provinces as well as in Den Haag believed that Nazi Germany, in the event of escalating tensions, would respect their neutral status as the Great Powers had in 1914.¹²⁷ This idea only partly accounts for the lack of preparation and inadequate defense policy in 1939-1940. Gathering reliable intelligence posed another problem. Information regarding the timing of the German invasion was received from Major G.S. Sas, the Dutch military attaché to Berlin, who in turn received intelligence from an *Abwehr* officer, Colonel Hans Oster, posted at the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) in Berlin.¹²⁸ Oster was later executed by the Germans for his relations with the Dutch government. He forwarded timely information about potential attacks, which were invariably cancelled or pushed back according to Hitler's capricious personality. As a result, Den Haag consistently played down the possibility of invasion, and politicians and military commanders alike remained skeptical about information deriving from Oster in Berlin.¹²⁹ When Nazi Germany invaded in May 1940, the Dutch government and military were caught unprepared.

It took the *Wehrmacht* about one week to force Dutch General Henri Winkelman to capitulate formally on 15 May 1940. Queen Wilhelmina and her government were then

¹²⁷ Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation 1940-1945* (New York: Berg, 1984/1988), 12-13; Herman Amersfoort and Piet Kamphuis, *Mei 1940: De strijd op Nederlands grondgebied* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 61-68.

¹²⁸ Andre Ausems, "The Netherlands Military Intelligence Summaries 1939-1940 and the Defeat in the Blitzkrieg of May 1940," *Military Affairs* 50, no. 4 (October 1986), 192.

¹²⁹ Ausems, 192.

en route to London to spend the war in exile. Zeeland was one of the last places to be occupied on 17 May 1940, two days after the Netherlands formally capitulated. And this was only after the *Luftwaffe* bombarded Zeeland's capital, Middelburg, causing a great deal of destruction to the *Grote Markt* and *Stadhuis* among other buildings.¹³⁰ Some historians in Zeeland refer to this act as a “terrorbombing,” since the Netherlands had already formally surrendered.¹³¹ In some ways, this event helps explain how quickly the German forces overran the country. The Dutch units in Zeeland were under the command of *schout-bij-nacht* (Rear Admiral) H.J. van der Stad, whose primary objective was to defend the route through Zuid-Beveland to Walcheren. There were provincial positions in two places: near the decommissioned Fort Bath and the so-called Zanddijkstelling, which remained fundamental to the defense of Zuid-Beveland and Walcheren. The Bathstelling was defended by 14th *Grensbataljon* under the leadership of *Majoor* F.G. Triebal and consisted of twelve casemates, one anti-tank ditch, and some flooded terrain.¹³² The remainder of Zeeland's islands, however, were sparsely defended. The important airfield in Haamstede on Schouwen-Duiveland, for instance, was guarded by only one company (*bewakingstroepen*) and one anti-aircraft battery.¹³³ The core of Winkleman's policy, therefore, aimed to defend against the violation of neutrality, and not necessarily to launch offensives. The emphasis on defence is a continuity of Dutch strategy that can at least be traced back to the Napoleonic era. In Zeeland, van der Stad aimed to protect the

¹³⁰ Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog* (Vlissingen: den Boer de Ruiter, 2000), 72.

¹³¹ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 149; Tobias van Gent, *Middelburg 17 Mei 1940: Het vergeten bombardement* (Middelburg: Den Boer/De Ruiter, 2010); Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 71.

¹³² Amersfoort en Kamphuis, *Mei 1940*, 241-242.

¹³³ Amersfoort en Kamphuis, *Mei 1940*, 242.

administrative center of the Province, Middelburg, where the attack would undoubtedly be directed.

On the morning of 10 May, the French 60th *Division d'infanterie* under the command of *général de brigade* Marcel Deslaurens, along with elements of the 68th *Division d'infanterie* and others, arrived in Zeeland to aid Dutch forces. French commander Durand arrived on 11 May and met with van der Stad. Durand appeared unimpressed by the Dutch troops and questioned van der Stad's strategy. The Dutch commander later recalled that "General Durand complained about my modest troop strength, especially the lack of sufficient artillery and antiaircraft batteries, he also explained that he had received orders to defend the islands to the last and he would do so, but I immediately got a strong impression that his main concern was to see that his road to retreat was secured."¹³⁴ From the very beginning, there existed some dissension among the decision makers and commanders in Zeeland during this crucial period. Above all, this suggests that there was no prior planning between the two countries, likely a result of the Dutch commitment to armed neutrality. This statement is indicting for a number of reasons. Did van der Stad blame the French for the failed defence of the province?

Despite tensions in the command, the manipulation of the Province's topography posed a number of problems for the attackers, notably the flooding of large areas in and around Kruiningen at the behest of Dutch authorities, which forced the German advance to follow the line from Zuid-Beveland to Walcheren. Nevertheless, Dutch historians have referred to the rapid advance of the XXVI *Armeekorps* through Limburg, Noord-Brabant,

¹³⁴ As cited in Amersfoort en Kamphuis, *Mei 1940*, 243-244. "Generaal Durand mopperde over mijne geringe troepensterkte; vooral gebrek aan voldoende artillerie en luchtafweerbatterijen, verklaarde verder opdracht te hebben de eilanden tot het uiterste te verdedigen en dit te zullen doen ook, doch ik kreeg dadelijk sterk den indruk, dat zijn grootste zorg was toe te zien, dat zijne terugtochtwegen waren verzekerd."

and Zeeland.¹³⁵ The *Middelburgsche Courant*, which stopped printing daily issues from 14 to 20 May 1940, reported that German sources claimed to have taken 1,600 French and 13,000 Dutch troops as prisoners.¹³⁶ This also included General Winkleman. The war for the Netherlands was over and this effectively marked the beginning of Nazi occupation.

Given the circumstances of preparation and intelligence, the war in May 1940 was necessarily limited to a defensive one. Although French and Belgian units arrived in Zeeland to hinder German advances, there was, as H.W. van den Doel has pointed out, inadequate communication and coordination between Dutch and French commanders, which precluded an effective defense against a far superior force.¹³⁷ By the afternoon of 17 May, the SS *Standarte 'Deutschland'* had crossed the Sloedam, and by late evening the German advance reached Middelburg. In total, 38 soldiers from the *Koninklijke Landmacht*, 49 sailors from the *Koninklijke Marine*, and about 229 French soldiers were killed in action. During their advance through Zeeland, 22 Germans were killed and an additional 17 were killed in their attempt to gain the Sloedam.¹³⁸ Although the Germans had fully captured Zeeland by 17 May, it took the Germans roughly two weeks to occupy more remote towns. The burgemeester of Breskens, for example, first came into contact with German troops on 31 May, while Middelharnis' (Zuid-Holland) burgemeester met with German authorities on 24 May 1940.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Amersfoort en Kamphuis, *Mei 1940*, 257.

¹³⁶ *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Het Duitse legerbericht," 23 May 1940, 1. "Bij de overgave van Zeeland op 19 Mei werden door een numeriek veel mindere Duitse troepenmacht in Zeeland 1600 Franschen en 13000 Nederlandsche soldaten gevangen genomen."

¹³⁷ Amersfoort en Kamphuis, *Mei 1940*, 258.

¹³⁸ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 183.

¹³⁹ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Breskens (bezetting), Middelharnis (bezetting).

The operational details of the *Meidagen* do not convey the consternation of Zeeland's civilian population, which also suffered casualties. As L.W. de Bree has described, many civilians had begun to evacuate to safer villages away from the fighting. In Yerseke, which faces the Oosterschelde, some sought refuge in villages in nearby Zuid-Beveland like 's-Heer Arendskerke, Wolphaartsdijk, Wilhelminadorp and the commune of Kortgene, Kats, and Colijnsplaat in Noord-Beveland. A schoolmaster in Yerseke, J. Glerum, established several of these evacuation routes on 10 May, some of which would be used in 1944 and again 1953.¹⁴⁰ During the several days of fighting, Middelburg's civilians suffered considerably. Jan Zwemer estimates that about 22 civilians were killed and over 573 buildings damaged. This was more than the rest of the Province combined.¹⁴¹ Yet, according to Nazi decree, civilians were to return to the addresses which were recorded by the communes in which they lived. The burgemeesters throughout the Province sent detailed lists to the German authorities regarding all inhabitants and any munitions, firearms, knives, military clothing or equipment in or near each household.¹⁴² The burgemeesters needed to complete these lists as soon as possible and submit them to the German commandant of Middelburg, whose headquarters was located in the Molenwater 115. The final occupation of Middelburg marked the end of resistance to the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands. The defeat of Zeeland, where the last Dutch and French troops saw action, initiated a period of withdrawal. Those Dutch and foreign forces still in the province withdrew across the Belgian border, many making their way to France.

¹⁴⁰ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 89.

¹⁴¹ Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 72.

¹⁴² *Middelburgsche Courant*, "Bekendmaking: bevel van den Duitschen Stadscommandant Middelburg," 23 May 1940, 2.

German Civilian Administration in the Netherlands and Zeeland

Werner Warmbrunn, whose work appeared in 1963, provided historians with the first systematic overview of Dutch reactions to German measures imposed onto administration and politics, the press and universities.¹⁴³ This was the first general survey available to English scholars, but Warmbrunn primarily focused on Dutch reactions to nazification.¹⁴⁴ In the mid-1980s Gerhard Hirschfeld published an important study on Dutch collaboration in German, later to be translated into English, which represented a significant contribution to the so-called “*goed en fout*” (“good and bad”) debates of the 1970s and 1980s. Hirschfeld’s purpose, however, was to clarify the political, social, and economic conditions which made cooperation or collaboration in almost every sector a possibility.¹⁴⁵ Together, these two studies offer the most thorough analyses available to English readers, but both neglect the pressures of occupation in rural regions including Zeeland. Hirschfeld mentions Zeeland once in passing, while Warmbrunn sometimes includes Zeeland in serial lists when referring to events in other Provinces.¹⁴⁶ It is, therefore, important to identify how occupation in Zeeland took form, beginning with the establishment of German administration, as well as how civilians reacted to the new order.

By 13 May 1940, the Queen and the Dutch cabinet had left the Netherlands and delegated the highest authority in the country to General Winkleman. When Winkleman

¹⁴³ Werner Warmbrunn, *The Dutch Under German Occupation, 1940-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963).

¹⁴⁴ Perhaps the most significant Dutch-language survey of this period was written by D.A. van Hilten, *Van Capitulatie tot Capitulatie* (Leiden, 1949).

¹⁴⁵ Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation 1940-1945* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 10.

¹⁴⁶ Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration*, 166; Warmbrunn, *The Dutch Under German Occupation*, 114.

capitulated formally on 15 May, he surrendered all authority to the German government and its armed forces. Following the German occupation of Middelburg on 17 May, Hitler assigned the supreme civilian authority in the occupied territory to a High Commissioner, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, an Austrian lawyer who had served as Austrian Chancellor during the *Anschluss* in 1938. This made Seyss-Inquart the *Reichskommissar für die besetzten niederländischen Gebiete* (High Commissioner for the Occupied Netherlands). In this way, Hitler hoped to maintain a civilian administration in the Netherlands along the lines of the Norwegian model in which the civilian apparatus operated almost entirely separate from its military counterpart.¹⁴⁷ In a letter dated 9 July 1940, for example, the commander of German troops in the Netherlands emphasized the importance of this distinction for Dutch civilians: “Whether or not the respect of the Dutch for Germany will develop further depends on whether or not, even with the increased presence of soldiers of the German Army, the previous peace is maintained and through the disciplined and given demeanor of the German troops. This cannot be achieved by trying to immediately come into close contact with the civilian population, but only by maintaining the necessary distance and impeccable behaviour of the troops themselves. The more difficult England's situation becomes, all the more will the Dutch look for a certain dependence on Germany. It is the most important and beholden task of the soldiers of the German Army in the Netherlands to lay the foundations for this end.”¹⁴⁸ The separation of military and civilian apparatuses, therefore, remained an important component of occupation.

¹⁴⁷ Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ NIMH, Duitse bezetting, 419, inv. 10. “Bevel van 9-7-'40 van Hdh. Kdo. z.b. V XXXVII (Kommandeur der truppen des Heeres in den Niederlanden), waaronder SS. V Div., 197 Inf. Div. enz. Met volledig overzicht van de Duitse Troepen in Nederland.” 2. “Es kommt darauf an, daß auch bei der stärkeren Belegung Hollands durch Truppen des deutschen Heeres die bisherige Ruhe erhalten bleibt und daß durch diszipliniertes und bestimmtes Auftreten der deutschen Truppen die Achtung der Holländer vor Deutschland weiter wächst. Das kann nicht erreicht werden durch den Versuch, sofort in enge Fühlung mit

Warmbrunn has pointed to different phases of the occupation, the first was characterized by relatively little coercion or violence and lasted from May 1940 to the spring of 1941. During this time, German employment services recruited labour, but did not force Dutch civilians to work in Germany. The Germans made sporadic arrests of civilians as reprisals for the alleged mistreatment of German civilians in the Dutch East Indies.¹⁴⁹ But, as far as administration is concerned, the Germans permitted some political expression by liberal and denominational parties. This general leniency would transmute into a different style of occupation as the war progressed. In some ways, the increasingly strict regulation of economic matters discussed in the previous chapter, resembles some of the early features of occupation in 1940.

Within the first years of occupation much of the Dutch administrative apparatus remained intact. According to Hitler's decree of 29 May 1940, Seyss-Inquart was directly subordinate to and derived his authority from Hitler. As *Reichskommissar*, Seyss-Inquart had four *Generalkommissare* (Commissioners General, GK) who oversaw administration and justice, finance and economy, security matters, and special affairs.¹⁵⁰ In theory, Seyss-Inquart and the GK could call upon various Dutch authorities, offices, and institutions to implement certain regulations or laws. One of the most important ways in which nazification developed was through communal and provincial administration. Rather than change or "modernize" the provincial government in the Netherlands, the early period of occupation was characterized by attempts to "supervise" the smooth

der Zivilbevölkerung zu kommen, sondern nur durch Aufrechterhalten des gebotenen Abstandes und durch tadelloses Auftreten der Truppe.

Je schwieriger die Lage Englands wird, umso mehr werden die Holländer eine gewisse Anlehnung an Deutschland suchen. Den Boden hierfür vorzubereiten, ist die wichtigste und dankbarste Aufgabe der Truppen des deutschen Heeres in den Niederlanden."

¹⁴⁹ Warmbrunn, *The Dutch Under German Occupation*, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration*, 20.

transition to nazification.¹⁵¹ By August 1941, however, this mantra changed with Decree 152/1941, which provided burgemeesters, but particularly Provincial Commissioners, with extensive authority over subordinate levels of administration. Most provincial governments in the Netherlands had already been suspended because of the ban on parliamentary parties, or were either dissolved or reduced to an advisory function.¹⁵² This had important consequences for Zeeland's administrations, in part because this enabled more sympathetic individuals to work with Nazi authorities.

The tasks that Seyss-Inquart performed at the national level were delegated to the *Beauftragte des Reichskommissars* (BRK, Representative of the Reichskommissar) who represented Seyss-Inquart in the provinces. Willi Münzer was tasked with overseeing the administration in Zeeland for the duration of the war.¹⁵³ Gijs van der Ham draws on archival evidence to suggest that Münzer came to see Zeeland as a second *vaderland*, which he expressed in a dirge outside of Koudekerke when his daughter died in 1943.¹⁵⁴ As BRK, Münzer worked closely with the highest Dutch authority in Zeeland, the Provincial Commissioner.

Like in other provinces, Zeeland's burgemeesters came under the direct supervision of an appointed Provincial Commissioner who received increased authority and jurisdiction in a variety of areas. Until July 1940, the Provincial Commissioners were known as "Crown Commissioners," who headed the *Provincialstaaten* and their executive bodies, the *Deputiëtenstaaten*.¹⁵⁵ Zeeland's Crown Commissioner, J.W.

¹⁵¹ Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration*, 41.

¹⁵² Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration*, 41.

¹⁵³ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgeverij, 1990), 38.

¹⁵⁴ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 38. "Hij was zeeland als zijn tweede vaderland gaan zien, zoals hij zelf op 7 januari 1943 verklaarde tijdens de plechtigheid in zijn buiten 'Der Boede', bij Koudekerke, ter gelegenheid van het overlijden van zijn dochter Almuth."

¹⁵⁵ Refer to Chapter I for a brief discussion on provincial government in Zeeland.

Quarles van Ufford was relieved in October 1940 for his alleged opposition to the regime and replaced by P. Dieleman.¹⁵⁶ Before the war Dieleman was a deputy in the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP), many of whose members went either underground or into exile in 1940. J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil argues that before 1940 Dieleman showed no signs of sympathy towards the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB) cause or the Nazi regime. But he curiously chose to work very closely with the Nazis in late 1940.¹⁵⁷ The relationship between Dieleman and the BRK was essential for the administration of the Province.

Another important administrative apparatus was the civilian police forces, although it is important to note that it was quite limited in manpower. The *Ordnungspolizei* established an office in Middelburg in the Dam 6-8. In every province, the BRK established one police officer who reported directly to the BRK, known as the *Polizeioffizier beim Beauftragten*.¹⁵⁸ In Zeeland, this position was given to another German, W. Staub, who took orders from the *Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei*, headquartered in Den Haag. The Zeeuwsche *Ordnungspolizei* was also tasked with enforcing curfews and issuing special permits for certain businesses or travel. On occasion, they were called into Vlissingen to disperse a strike at the shipbuilding firm *De Schelde*.¹⁵⁹ The Zeeuws police, however, were “primarily a matter of secondary

¹⁵⁶ J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners: bezetting en inundatie in drie Walcherse dorpen* (Vlissingen: Uitgeverij ADZ, 2001), 91.

¹⁵⁷ Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 92.

¹⁵⁸ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 41.

¹⁵⁹ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 41-42. “Tot Staubs andere taken hoorde de controle op de Nederlandse politie in de provincie, al was dit voor hem en zijn collega's 'voornamelijk een taak van secundair belang', aangezien zij de laagsten in een hiërarchie van Duitse politieorganen waren die de Nederlandse politie controleerden. Voorts was de Zeeuwse ordnungspolizei belast met het afgeven van vergunningen om het Zeeuwse spergebied te betreden en om zich s'avonds na spertijd op straat te begeven.”

importance” since they were one of many police organizations in the Nazi hierarchy.¹⁶⁰ In a way, the German authorities eased the civilian apparatus into occupation in much the same way that the Dutch government negotiated neutrality during the First World War.

Two other police organizations in Zeeland were the *Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo) and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). The former sought to suppress anti-German sentiment and combat espionage while the latter was primarily used for gathering intelligence. All police organizations in the Netherlands were under the authority of Hanns Rauter, the *Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer*, who was directly subordinate to Heinrich Himmler.¹⁶¹ As the war progressed, the Germans established smaller *Aussenstellen* (regional offices) throughout the country. Because of its topography Zeeland had three: one in Middelburg (Walcheren), Terneuzen (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), and Zierikzee (Schouwen-Duiveland).¹⁶² A total of six German police officers, assisted by six Zeeuwen, were assigned to combat illegal activity in the Province. By 1944, van der Ham estimates that in all of the Netherlands there were only between 300 and 350 Germans working for the Sipo and SD. That number increased to 700 when the number of Dutch police officers working for both organizations are included.¹⁶³ Given these figures, one can assume that the need for a

¹⁶⁰ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 41.

¹⁶¹ N.K.C.A. in 'T Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-Archieven 1935-1945* Deel 1/2 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1506.

¹⁶² Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 42.

¹⁶³ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 43. “Zes Duitse politieagenten die in heel Zeeland met behulp van zes Nederlandse ondergeschikten illegale activiteiten moesten bestrijden, het lijkt niet veel. Het is ook niet veel, maar dat was het in de rest van Nederland ook niet. In 1944 waren er in het hele land in totaal tussen de 300 en 350 Duitser bij de *Sicherheitspolizei* und *Sicherheitsdienst* werkzaam en het totale personeelsbestand, dus inclusief de Nederlandse krachten, bedroeg toen tussen de 650 en 700 man.” Cf. N.K.C.A. in 'T Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-Archieven 1935-1945* Deel 1/2 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 115.

stronger German police presence in Zeeland was unnecessary.¹⁶⁴ In short, the German police presence in the province was not overwhelming.

Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB)

The economic crises that permeated the fabric of most European societies during the 1930s had considerable implications for the political landscape. Like most other European countries, certain citizens of the Netherlands succumbed to the rhetoric of National Socialism and its promise of change in the particularly challenging socio-economic conditions of the depression. The *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB) in the Netherlands was led by Anton Adriaan Mussert, a *waterstaat* engineer, who, according to one recent study of his life, learned many of his anti-democratic attitudes from his father.¹⁶⁵ In Zeeland, Jan A. Dekker, the director of two factories in Goes (Zuid-Beveland), became the most important member of the NSB. Dekker, along with his older brother, joined the NSB as early as 1933.¹⁶⁶ Given his zealousness, Dekker was made leader of his Zeeuwse district until May 1942, when Mussert made him NSB leader of the province, with headquarters in Goes, where he would remain until September 1944.¹⁶⁷ Mussert organized the administration of the party in districts, which more or less coincided with provincial borders. The NSB supreme headquarters were in Utrecht. The larger cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Den Haag, however, formed their own entities. Zeeland, district 14, was divided into four main departments (*kringen*): Noord-

¹⁶⁴ For a survey of the SS, SD, and SiPo in the Netherlands, see In 'T Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-Archieven 1935-1945* Deel 1/2 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976).

¹⁶⁵ Tessel Pollman, *Mussert & Co: De NSB-Leider en zijn vertrouwelingen* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), 28. "Musserts antidemocratische gevoelens kunnen dus door zijn vader geïnspireerd zijn."

¹⁶⁶ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 44.

¹⁶⁷ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 45.

Zeeland (Schouwen-Duiveland, Tholen en Sint Philipsland), the Bevelanden (Noord- and Zuid-), Walcheren, and Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen. These, too, conformed to existing cultural and political boundaries, and therefore did not usher in dramatically different power structures.¹⁶⁸

While Dekker was indeed dedicated to the national socialist cause in Zeeland, his attitudes were not representative of the province as a whole. For very pragmatic reasons, Seyss-Inquart decided to maintain the basic structure of the Dutch government and administration, which meant that the German civilian administration had little use for a movement that many in the province, and the country as a whole, repudiated. As Warmbrunn points out, Seyss-Inquart knew that it was impossible to replace existing Dutch officials with members of the NSB when many of its supporters were simply unqualified to take up key positions.¹⁶⁹ Among German authorities, too, Mussert soon acquired a poor reputation. In his letter to Himmler on 19 June 1943, Rauter reported that many believed Mussert was “a bourgeois fascist” and simply lacked the political acumen for leadership.¹⁷⁰ For these reasons, the German regime ignored Mussert and gradually displaced existing Dutch administrators with more able members of the party. However, this would not take place until 1942-1943.

In her study of three villages on Walcheren, Kramer-Vreugdenhil demonstrates that in the days following the invasion membership in the NSB across the country grew considerably. In June, the NSB boasted a national membership of 27,000, which grew

¹⁶⁸ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 224.

¹⁶⁹ Warmbrunn, *The Dutch Under German Occupation*, 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Letter from Rauter to Himmler, 19 June 1943, In 'T Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-Archieven 1935-1945* Deel 1/2 ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1086. Rauter writes “...dass Mussert leider kein Nationalsozialist ist sondern ein bürgerlicher Faschist...”

slightly following the capitulation of France.¹⁷¹ By the autumn of 1941, the number of NSB members almost tripled.¹⁷² This national trend was commensurate with provincial patterns. In Zeeland, the NSB grew from 400 members in 1940 to 928 by the end of that year. Following *Operation Barbarossa* in June 1941, Zeeland's NSB membership grew to 1,568 out of a total population of 258,000. This represented about 2 per cent of the national figure.¹⁷³ One might argue that in Zeeland the increase in NSB support immediately following the attack on the Soviet Union can in part be explained by a confessional ideology, within which communism was perceived by reformed communities as anti-Christian, or simply a pragmatic reading of international events that would affect life in the province. Table 2 shows NSB membership in Zeeland broken down based on registered membership in each of the *kringen*:

Number of NSB Members Divided by <i>Kring</i> ¹⁷⁴			
Noord-Zeeland	317 members	42,197 inhabitants	0.75%
Bevelanden	382	62,536	0.61%
Walcheren	290	67,583	0.43%
Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen	388	85,606	0.45%

These data suggest that formal membership to the NSB in Zeeland was indeed limited. This relatively small membership is typically used to dissociate the province from the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime elsewhere, and to demonstrate an aversion to National Socialism in principle. However, historical reality is often more variegated than

¹⁷¹ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 224.

¹⁷² Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 95.

¹⁷³ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 224; Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 95. N.B. membership data as of September 1942.

¹⁷⁴ L.W. de Bree, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 225.

the *goed en fout* debates of the immediate post-war period, which sought to create a rigid dichotomy between those who were “good” and those were “bad” during occupation. The almost artificial division between collaborators and resisters does a disservice to the immensely difficult situations in which the Zeeuwen found themselves. In this way, we might either question the veracity or the relevance of NSB membership figures. The people of Zeeland were incredibly pragmatic when it came to dealing with the Nazis and membership to the NSB does not *ipso facto* demonstrate that only a small part of the population was staunch supporters of National Socialism in general and the Nazi regime in particular. In some ways, the lack of NSB support may suggest the degree to which the Zeeuwen remained loyal to the country as a whole. As we have seen in Chapter I, the people of Zeeland took pride in being part of the Netherlands when Belgium sought to annex part of the province, and these loyalties perhaps influenced how Zeeuwen perceived the NSB in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Atlantikwall and Organisation Todt in Zeeland

In some ways, focusing on Zeeland as a separate entity becomes increasingly challenging when we consider German military strategy and defense of the Netherlands. In general, the German armed forces often conflated Zeeland and neighboring Zuid-Holland, and this is particularly true of German defensive planning and the construction of Hitler’s continental defense, the *Atlantikwall*.¹⁷⁵ While the German civilian administration in the Netherlands differed little between each province, Zeeland and the southern sector received particular attention because of its various estuaries and

¹⁷⁵ Hans Sakkers, “De Atlantikwall en Zeeland,” *Nehalennia: bulletin van de Werkgroep Historie en Archeologie van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen en de Zeeuwse Vereniging voor Dialectonderzoek* 149 (2005), 9-13.

tributaries, some of which lead directly to Antwerp. Because of its topography and waterways, the Schelde became a focal point in German strategy from 1940 onward. This also broaches questions about why the Dutch military did not focus on this region during the *Meidagen*. Beginning in September 1940, the people of Zeeland, together with those residing on the islands of Zuid-Holland, were forbidden to leave their domiciles and non-residents were forced to leave. The coasts of Schouwen, Walcheren, and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen effectively became forbidden territory.¹⁷⁶ The Germans declared this region a *Sperrgebiet*, or restricted zone. By 26 September 1942, however, the restriction of mobility was loosened in some coastal areas. For example, the ban on traveling between Brabant to Sint-Philipsland, Tholen, Zuid-Beveland, or Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen was lifted at the behest of Hanns Rauter, *Generalkommissar für das Sicherheitswesen* and *Höhere SS-und Polizeiführer*.¹⁷⁷ The proclamations that curtailed civilian mobility, however, were within the purview of the civilian administration. However restrictive the *Sperrgebiet* was, many Zeeuwen rarely left their part of the province and thus did not represent a significant disruption to daily life.

Significant changes came on 14 December 1941 when Hitler ordered the construction of coastal defenses across the Netherlands.¹⁷⁸ By the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the construction of a western defense system became imperative as Nazi Germany opened the eastern front and faced the prospect of a two-front war. On

¹⁷⁶ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (NIMH), Duitse bezetting, 419, inv. 98. “De Duitse Kustbezetting in het gebied van de Wehrmachtbefehlhaber in den Niederlanden van Mei 1940,” 10.

¹⁷⁷ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 17. “Samen met de Zuidhollandse eilanden werd Zeeland die dag *Sperrgebiet*—verboden gebied. Zij die geen inwoners van Zeeland waren werd het daarmee vrijwel onmogelijk gemaakt de provincie te betreden.” “Hanns Rauter liet toen officieel bekendmaken dat met onmiddellijke ingang het sperrgebiet in Zuid-Holland en Zeeland tot de kustgebieden beperkt werd--wat Zeeland betreft tot Schouwen-Duiveland, noord-Beveland, en Walcheren. De wateren hiertussen bleven, als voordien, evenmin vrij toegankelijk. De belemmeringen om vanuit Brabant of Holland naar Sint-Philipsland, Tholen, Zuid-Beveland of Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen te reizen werden opgeheven.”

¹⁷⁸ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 21.

23 March 1942, Hitler issued his more detailed *Führerweisung* number 40, which authorized major construction projects across Zeeland. This order effectively gave highest priority to the construction of defenses in Zeeland over all other regions in the Netherlands.¹⁷⁹ By April 1942, the first group from the *Organisation Todt* (OT), whose headquarters for western European operations was located in Paris, arrived in Vlissingen to assess the region.¹⁸⁰ Over the course of April and May, OT, along with elements of *Pioniere* of the *Wehrmacht*, reinforced existing positions and built new ones as part of the *Atlantikwall*. OT was tasked with building an intricate system of bunkers, coastal artillery batteries, anti-aircraft positions, minefields, and machinegun nests. By the time of the Dieppe raid in August 1942, construction on Zeeland's defensive positions was well underway. By 1 May 1943, over 15,000 bunkers had been completed, 200 of which were built between Den Haag and the Oosterschelde (the estuary between Noord-Beveland and Schouwen-Duiveland). That 445 were constructed on Walcheren and in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen alone indicates the importance of the region in German strategy.¹⁸¹

Both the pace at which construction took place and the magnitude of the program broach questions about the manpower and resources required to complete a project so extensive. On issues of manpower, the paucity of Dutch literature surrounding qualitative experiences of those Zeeuwen forced to work for OT and the Nazi regime precludes a balanced assessment of this part of occupation. However, many families, particularly on Walcheren, were forced to evacuate their homes because of the danger construction

¹⁷⁹ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Hans Sakkers en Hans Houterman, *Atlantikwall in Zeeland en Vlaanderen: Gedurende opbouw en strijd, 1942-1944* (Rijswijk: Uitgeverij De Citadel, 1990/2000), 42.

¹⁸¹ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 23. "Volgens een in augustus 1942 opgesteld bouwprogramma moesten per 1 mei 1943 langs de gehele Atlantische kust ongeveer 15,000 bunkers voltooid zijn, waarvan 200 in het gebied tussen Den Haag en de Oosterschelde en maar liefst 445 op Walcheren en in Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen, hetgeen het belang van de Scheldemond in het Duitse verdedigingsconcept typeert."

presented to civilians. In total, some 15,000 Walchenaars (22 percent of the island's population) were evacuated at the behest of Commissaris Dieleman in 1942. Those Zeeuwen unable to find alternative accommodations were relocated to Noord-Brabant, just east of Roosendaal. These measures were immensely difficult and disrupted life in many villages on Walcheren.¹⁸²

On 13 July 1943, Hitler mandated that 10 percent of all non-Germans working on the *Atlantikwall* in Zeeland were to relocate from their homes to Germany. OT required a large number of workers to help repair towns following Bomber Command's extensive raids against Hamburg or the Ruhr, which on 16-17 May 1943 was heavily damaged.¹⁸³ But if being conscripted (or volunteering) to work on the *Atlantikwall* permitted many Zeeuwen to work close to home, then it is hardly surprising some might have chosen to work for OT, rather than the *Arbeitseinsatz* which would force Zeeuwen and other Dutch civilians to work abroad. Working on the *Atlantikwall* also provided an extra 70 to 80 florins per week.¹⁸⁴ In total, about 20,000 Zeeuwen were conscripted to work on the *Atlantikwall* in Zeeland, which greatly exceeds 13,000 and 1,000 civilians mobilized in Rotterdam and Dordrecht respectively, most of whom were sent to Germany.¹⁸⁵ In short, while Nazi authorities implemented conscription, relatively fewer Zeeuwen left their home districts. In some cases, as Hans Sakkers and Hans Houterman have demonstrated, OT not only made use of local Dutch labor, but also conscripted POWs captured on the

¹⁸² Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 128-129. "De Duitse legerleiding besloot dat 'vanwege het gevaar voor de bevolking' 15.000 Walchenaars—22 procent van de bevolking—moest evacueren."

¹⁸³ Hans Sakkers en Hans Houterman, *Atlantikwall in Zeeland en Vlaanderen*, 42-43.

¹⁸⁴ B.A. Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet: De gedwongen arbeid van Nederlanders in Duitsland, 1940-1945* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 510.

¹⁸⁵ Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet*, 524. "Vooral sedert het voorjaar van 1944 breidde de Gemeindeinsatz zich sterk uit, Begin mei 1944 waren in Rotterdam 13.000, in den Haag 300, in Dordrecht 1.000, in Leiden 250 en in de Provincie Zeeland 20.000 ingezet. Vooral in laatst genoemde provincie werden dus velen tewerkgesteld. Teneinde de landing van geallieerde parachutisten te verhinderen, moesten overal palen (Rommel-asperges) worden geplaatst en draden gespannen."

eastern front and in Africa. On Walcheren, for example, a concentration camp was established at Koudekerke to house French colonial POWs, mostly from Morocco and Algeria, and they were used extensively in the construction of the *Atlantikwall* in that part of the province.¹⁸⁶ As this suggests, life under occupation in this particular part of the country allowed locals to work in their home provinces, rather than being forcibly removed and conscripted for work outside the country.

Economy in Zeeland and Occupation

As Ralf Futselaar reminds us, the reasons for the invasion of the Netherlands lay not in the economic advantages for the occupiers, but rather its strategic position.¹⁸⁷ Yet, for agrarian provinces and economies like Zeeland, occupation had provided opportunities for businesses and farmers. One of the first tasks for the Nazi regime in the Netherlands involved the devaluation and assimilation of the Dutch currency. On 17 May 1940, the *Thoolsche Courant* informed their readers that the German regime declared that 1.5 *Reichmarks* would be henceforth equal to one guilder, 10 pfennig to 7 cents, 25 pfennig to 16.5 cents, and so on.¹⁸⁸ While the switch to a foreign currency within the Netherlands was certainly unfamiliar, some of the controls the civilian administration placed on farmers and business in Zeeland were not unlike those imposed on the agriculture sector during the First World War and the depression years. However, the German devaluation of currency eventually put a strain on the Dutch economy. As the

¹⁸⁶ Sakkers en Houterman, *Atlantikwall in Zeeland en Vlaanderen*, 43. “Op Walcheren werd bij Koudekerke een kamp ingericht met krijgsgevangenen uit de vml. Franse kolonies Marokko en Algerije. De concentratie van arbeiders aan de kust, dat feitelijk een front vormde, deed de Duitsers plannen maken om in geval van een geallieerde invasie de arbeiders zo snel mogelijk landinwaarts af te voeren en daar opnieuw in te zetten voor stellingbouw.”

¹⁸⁷ Futselaar, *Lard, Lice and Longevity*, 23.

¹⁸⁸ “Pulicatie” *Thoolsche Courant*, 17 May 1940, 1.

previous chapter has demonstrated, the Dutch government had already restricted and strictly regulated agricultural imports and exports during the 1930s so, in this respect, wartime agricultural controls did not represent a monumental caesura in agrarian economies. B.A. Sijes estimates that the total number of unemployed in the Netherlands just before the invasion reached roughly 500,000.¹⁸⁹ By the end of 1940 there were 325,000 Dutch men and women registered as unemployed (114,000 more than in the previous month), in addition to 70,000 demobilized and jobless soldiers, all of whom were seeking work.¹⁹⁰ For many, occupation provided employment. Indeed, under occupation Zeeland's rich agricultural sector provided foodstuffs for not only the province, but also elsewhere in the country.¹⁹¹

To help stimulate the Dutch economy Hitler declared that the majority of non-professional soldiers captured during the invasion were to be released by 30 May 1940. In a communiqué, he wrote that because the Dutch civilian population had followed the "Laws of Humanity" (*Gesetze der Menschlichkeit*) and cared for wounded German soldiers, the majority of Dutch prisoners of war were to be released.¹⁹² This, however,

¹⁸⁹ Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet*, 663.

¹⁹⁰ Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet*, 663.

¹⁹¹ van der Ham, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 116.

¹⁹² NIMH, Duitse Bezetting, 419, inv. 138. "Der Führer und Oberste Befehlshaber der Wehrmacht, Nr. 32/40," 30-5-1940. "Der holländische Soldat aber hat überfall offen und ehrlich gekämpft und unsere Verwundeten und Gefangenen entsprechend gut behandelt. Die Zivilbevölkerung hat nicht am Kampfe teilgenommen und ebenfalls die Gesetze der Menschlichkeit gegenüber unseren Verwundeten erfüllt.

Ich habe mich daher für Holland entschlossen, die Genehmigung zur Freilassung der gefangenen holländischen Soldaten zu erteilen.

Die Hälfte der holländischen Armee wird mit sofortiger Wirkung entlassen. In erster Linie kommen holländische Wehrmachtangehörige in Frage, die in der Landwirtschaft, in Bergwerken, in der Nahrungsmittelindustrie, in der Bauindustrie und in verwandten Betrieben tätig sind. Die übrigen Angehörigen der holländischen Wehrmacht sollen allmählich demobilisiert werden, um die Wirtschaft nicht zu überlasten und Arbeitslosigkeit hervorzurufen. Sinngemäß gelten dieselben Bestimmungen für diejenigen holländischen Soldaten, die sich in Deutschland in Kriegsgefangenschaft befinden. Für die holländischen Berufssoldaten werde ich eine Entscheidung noch treffen.

had more to do with the economic advantages of gradually mobilizing the POWs into industrial and agricultural projects than it did with Hitler's good will.

Shortages of horses and the scarcity of fertilizers were perennial problems with which the Zeeuwen had to deal during occupation. These were just some of the consequences occupation had on the most important sector of the provincial economy.¹⁹³

The output and rationing of food was also controlled, but some of these measures came into effect during the mobilization of the Dutch armed forces during the *Meidagen*.¹⁹⁴

German economic policy under occupation generally favored agricultural foodstuffs at the expense of livestock. In so doing, the ways in which land was used in Zeeland also changed. Beginning in 1941, many plots of pasture land were transformed into arable land for agricultural produce. However, as Jan Zwemer has argued, this shift required many more drainage points than the province offered. New drainage points lowered the ground enough to transform the parcels of land from pasture into arable land, or to build bunkers and above-ground constructions. The surplus of livestock was then slaughtered, which in large measure accounts for the scarcity of local fertilizers.¹⁹⁵

Until 1942, when the German military presence in the region crested, farmers in Zeeland experienced increased wages for their produce or work. Unemployment, which rose steadily during the 1930s, virtually vanished. Additionally, Zeeuwen saw increased benefits like health insurance and child allowances. Many people understood these

¹⁹³ Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 72.

¹⁹⁴ Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 72. "De controle op de voedselvoorziening verscherpte bovendien. In het kader van de mobilisatie waren in augustus 1939 trouwens al maatregelen getroffen: instelling van de akkerbouw-, veehouderij, groente- en fruitcentrales."

¹⁹⁵ Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 72. He writes "In Zeeland was zo'n verandering van bodemgebruik ook mogelijk en vanaf 1941 werd veel grasland omgezet in bouwland. Daarbij liep men natuurlijk aan tegen een snel groeiend tekort aan draineerbuizen die nodig waren om de lagere weidepercelen geschikt te maken voor de bouwprodukten. Zo kwam de Zeeuwse landbouw in dienst te staan van de voedselvoorziening van het Derde Rijk en het bezette Nederland: "handelsgewassen" was een irrelevant begrip geworden door de teeltvoorschriften en leverantieplicht, de overtollig verklaarde veestapel werd deels afgeslacht."

changes as the product of National Socialism and part of the regime's promise for a better future, although, as noted above, sizable numbers of inhabitants were forced to relocate. Nonetheless, resistance to the regime in Zeeland from 1940 to 1942 was almost non-existent, a topic discussed in greater detail below.¹⁹⁶ There were, however, cases in which German economic policy disrupted and interfered with daily life in Zeeland, but the extent to which policy interfered with daily life corresponded to the progress of war. For example, as German construction projects preoccupied more local labour, authorities recognized potential shortages in agricultural production. Both Dutch and German authorities also noted a shortage of workhorses.¹⁹⁷

Zeeland's provincial archive in Middelburg holds an extensive collection of documentation pertaining to agricultural development in the province. One such holding is that of the *Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland* (State Agricultural Advisory of Zeeland), which covers the period from 1893 to 1958. Although the advisory board remained active during occupation, the documentation covering the occupation is curiously thin and contains only a series of fragmented correspondence in both Dutch and German regarding a debate between the *Generalkommissar für Finanz und Wirtschaft* and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, who then directed the *Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland* in Goes.¹⁹⁸ The initial correspondence indicates that some of the areas used for *Luftwaffe* airfields were on plots of fertile grassland, which farmers could use for feeding or grazing livestock.¹⁹⁹ Local farmers in and around

¹⁹⁶ J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil, "Walchenaars over hun verleden," *Zeeland Tijdschrift* 12, no. 2 (Juni, 2003), 44.

¹⁹⁷ van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 117.

¹⁹⁸ Zeeuws Archief (ZA), 18.1 Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, inv. 256.

¹⁹⁹ ZA, 18.1 Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, inv. 256. Letter to Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, Den Haag, 22 April 1941. The letter reads "Das auf den Flugplätzen anfallende Futter kann seitens der Wehrmacht Dienststellen nicht immer seiner Verwendung zugeführt werden. Damit das Futter aber

Vlissingen noticed that excess feed was spoiling and they wanted to use the feed for their own purposes. This, however, sparked a lengthy debate about the rate at which the Germans should let out the parcels of grassland to local farmers. The debate ran parallel to the discussions that took place between farmers during the 1930s. The type of arrangement many of the farmers in the area wanted to agree upon had been implemented elsewhere in the country, notably in Leeuwarden (Friesland).²⁰⁰ Unfamiliar with the rental prices and the average cost of land in Zeeland, the German authorities relied on C. Zwagerman in Middelburg who worked for the advisory board. He argued that prices be set at 5 Gulden per hectare. The Germans responded unfavorably and claimed that 5 Gulden was far too low. They wanted to set the price to pre-war standards, which fluctuated between 50 and 80 Gulden per hectare, and almost always 80 Gulden when the surroundings were promising.²⁰¹ It took well over three months to decide exactly how much the Germans could charge the farmers. The Dutch authorities advised that it would take great effort to ensure that the grass would be removed from the land evenly and quickly, and this meant that Zeeuwse farmers would have to leave their own land to tend rented plots and possibly disrupt the local economy. The solution came when the *Generalkommissar für Finanz und Wirtschaft*, headquartered in Den Haag, gave into local pressure and agreed with Zwagerman's proposal whereby a number of farmers

nicht verdirbt, wurde mit dem Luftgaukommando Holland vereinbart, dass überflüssige Futtermengen den in der Nähe des jeweiligen Flugplatzes ansässigen Holländischen landwirten zur Verfügung gestellt wird. Hierbei ist es unbedingt notwendig, dass das anfallende Grünfutter zu dem von dem Luftgaukommando bestimmten Zeitpunkt abgenommen wird. Zum Zweck einer reibungslosen Abwicklung dieser Angelegenheit wurde mit dem Luftgaukommando vereinbart, dass sich bei notwendigwerden einer Futterabgabe an die holländischen Landwirte der Platzlandwirt des betreffende Flugplatzes mit dem zuständigen Reichslandbaukonsulenten in Verbindung setzt, um eine zweckmässige Verwertung des anfallenden Futters sicherzustellen. Ich bitte daher die Reichslandbaukonsulent anzuweisen, im Bedarfsfalle mit den Platzlandwirten der Flugplätze in dieser Frage eng zusammenzuarbeiten.”

²⁰⁰ ZA, 18.1 Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, 256. Letter to Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries, Den Haag, 22 April 1941.

²⁰¹ ZA, 18.1 Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, inv. 256. Letter from Rijkslandbouwconsulent to Abteilung Landwirtschaft, 26 May 1941.

would remove the grass from airfields and ensile it with acid to prevent the feed from spoiling.²⁰² The final correspondence between German and Dutch officials emphasizes the speed at which the proposed system should be implemented to avoid further conflict with the local farmers and administration. As this example suggests, confrontation between the Germans and locals was often circumscribed to economic affairs. More importantly, this case highlights the German effort to control the provincial economy for the benefit of the German regime. While German authorities were sometimes lenient, they sought to devalue the prices of Dutch land and labour. At the same time, however, this case shows that the Germans wanted to deal more leniently with the local population in this region.

Quantitative data pertaining to German efforts to recruit labor in Zeeland is unavailable, and the only comprehensive study to analyze the Dutch labour force sent to Germany was written in 1966. Gijs van der Ham argues that between April 1942 and May 1943 a total of 167,000 Dutch civilians were sent to Germany for work, around 2,350 of whom were Zeeuwen representing just 1.4 percent of the total number.²⁰³ This represented a small number compared to the Dutch civilians outside of Zeeland forced to work in Germany. For better or for worse, Zeeuwen were allowed to stay in their homes. Despite the lack of more detailed data, anecdotal evidence exists to support the claim that efforts to mobilize the Dutch labour force in the province were largely limited to the construction of the *Atlantikwall* mainly after 1942, and not to be sent abroad as foreign

²⁰² ZA, 18.1 Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, inv. 256. Letter from Generalkommissar für Finanz und Wirtschaft to Rijkslandbouwconsulent voor Zeeland, 23 June 1941. “Unter Mitwirkung von meinem Amtsgenossen Zwagerman, Reichsviehzuchtkonsulent für Zeeland ist eine Organisation zu Stande gebracht, wobei eine Anzahl Bauern das Gras vom Flugplatz wegholen und mit Säure ensilieren.”

²⁰³ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 150. Van der Ham employs data from the *Rijksarbeidsbureau* (RAB).

labour. Later, in West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen, for instance, daughters, mothers, and wives were sometimes targeted by the NSB if male family members had absconded or avoided German labour duties. In some cases, hundreds of women were intimidated and threatened with prison sentences.²⁰⁴ These threats, however, often came from local NSBers and not from the German authorities.

Rural Resistance

Perhaps no other subject in Dutch history has been couched in more mythic terminology than that of resistance (*verzet*). Almost immediately following liberation Dutch individuals, families, groups, and businesses alike became associated with *de Duitsers* (Germans), *de collaborateurs* (collaborators), or *het verzet* (the resistance).²⁰⁵ This rigid division was part of a larger, and often brutal, socio-political process known as *Zuivering*, or “purification.” The de-nazification of the Netherlands aimed to cleanse and bring to justice those individuals who worked with the Nazi regime to pursue ideological goals. It affected burgemeesters, members of the NSB, women who had relationships with German soldiers, or shops whose owners provided various forms of support for the Germans during the war. Post-war statesmen and politicians created a very rigid dichotomy between collaborators and resisters that did not allow space for Dutch civilians whose very survival depended on the vacillation between *goed en fout*.

²⁰⁴ Sijes, *De Arbeidsinzet*, 394. He writes “De bemiddelaarster in Middelburg, lid van de NSB, bedreigde bijv. meisjes met maatregelen tegen de vrouwelijke familieleden, wanneer zij weigerden werk te aanvaarden of zouden onderduiken. In Westelijk Zeeuws-Vlaanderen vorderde de Wehrmacht honderden meisjes. De afdeling Vrouwen van het arbeidsbureau Nijmegen deed grote moeite, enkele vrouwelijke weigeraars in een strafkamp geplaatst te krijgen, waarin zij in enkele gevallen ook slaagde.”

²⁰⁵ J.W.M Schulten, *De geschiedenis van de Ordedienst: Mythe en werkelijkheid van een verzetsorganisatie* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1998), 14.

In the early 1980s, however, historian J.C.H. Blom argued adamantly for a more nuanced approach to occupation experience, one which moved beyond the stale debates of the immediate post-war period.²⁰⁶ While Blom's argument did not fall on deaf ears in the Netherlands, conventional wisdom, particularly in the English-speaking world, continues to bifurcate wartime experiences into either collaboration or resistance, with resistance as the standard.²⁰⁷ Pieter Lagrou, whose recent work compares the politics of memory in the post-war Netherlands, Belgium, and France, notes that in the Netherlands successive post-war governments "deliberately constructed a forced consensus around the myth of a unanimous resistance, at the expense of veterans' movements and all forms of associative memory."²⁰⁸ The Dutch government, according to Lagrou, was perhaps the most resolute of all European countries to maintain a unanimous resistance myth.

The issue of dividing an occupied population along these lines is compounded by another problem that historians have failed to highlight: the rural-urban dynamics of occupation. Central to any exploration of a rural region during the war is to question the extent to which the Zeeuwen were involved in active or passive resistance, and to ask whether resistance, as portrayed by Mulisch as well as other historians, was the norm. In a province that had a very small Jewish population and relatively small German police presence, was Zeeland's experience of occupation different from other parts of the Netherlands?

²⁰⁶ J.C.H. Blom, "In de ban van goed en fout? Wetenschappelijke geschiedenisschrijving over de bezettingstijd in Nederland," in *Crisis, bezetting en herstel: Tien studies over Nederland, 1930-1950* (Den Haag: B.V. Universitaire, 1989), 102-120.

²⁰⁷ Blom, "Verzet als norm," in *Crisis, bezetting en herstel: Tien studies over Nederland, 1930-1950* (Den Haag: B.V. Universitaire, 1989), 151-163.

²⁰⁸ Pieter Lagrou, "The Politics of Memory: Resistance as a collective myth in post-war France, Belgium and the Netherlands, 1945-1965," in *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003), 527.

There was a small resistance movement in Zeeland. Almost immediately after the capitulation and the capture of the province in May 1940, a small group of former soldiers began to organize around ex-mariner A.C. van Beest from Middelburg. Van Beest contacted the *Inlichtingendienst Nederland* (ID, Netherlands Intelligence Service) in London. Before their activities could begin, however, the SD infiltrated their circle and arrested the participants.²⁰⁹ *Dienst Wim*, another underground organization, established throughout the Netherlands and facilitated by Dutch and Britons in London, was also active in Zeeland. In Zuid-Beveland, for example, Kees de Graaff, helped organize the spread of an underground newspaper called *Trouw* (Allegiance). This group also had contacts on Walcheren, but specifically within the shipbuilding firm *De Schelde* in Vlissingen. In 1943, an active collaborator, Anton van de Waals, informed the German authorities of the group's aspirations and several of its members were apprehended.²¹⁰ More arrests took place in Goes in August 1943 after civilians in that town tried to help a German deserter escape. Following the failed attempt, the leaders of *Dienst Wim* reorganized under the name *Geheime Dienst Nederland* (Netherlands Secret Service). This group, as one of its former members recalled, operated in Zeeland but was particularly active in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.²¹¹ Another group that operated in Zeeland was *Groep Albrecht*, spread mainly by Kees Bouwer whose family came from Dordrecht but had a holiday home in Domburg (Walcheren). Eventually, Bouwer came into contact

²⁰⁹ J.P. van Alten, "Spionage—een Zeeuwse bijdrage aan het geallieerde inlichtingenwerk," *Zeeland Tijdschrift* 12, no. 2 (Juni, 2003), 49.

²¹⁰ van Alten, "Spionage," 49. "Via infiltratie door een zogenoemde v-Mann, Anton van de Waals, wist de SD in 1943 een groot aantal arrestaties te verrichten, waardoor aan de activiteiten van Groep Wim in Zeeland in feite een eind kwam."

²¹¹ van Alten, "Spionage," 49. "Daarbij kwamen arrestaties in Goes in Augustus 1943, ten gevolge van een mislukte poging tot hulp aan een Duitse deserteur. Na het eind van Groep Wim werd door enkele medewerkers een nieuwe opzet gemaakt onder de naam Geheime Dienst Nederland. Hiervoor was men wat Zeeland betreft vooral in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen actief." Cf. Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 212ff.

with Wim Jobse from Aagtekerke (Walcheren).²¹² Together this small group worked to collect information and forward it to London.

Before exploring what types of resistance existed in the province, it should be emphasized that armed resistance, such as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, was unwonted and exceptional. Much less extraordinary, and much more pertinent to Allies and military authorities, was the collection of troop movements, battery installations, and enemy strengths.²¹³ The collection of intelligence, as a form of resistance, did exist in Zeeland, although operations were extremely minute and sometimes inconsequential for Allied purposes.

This brief outline argues that most groups were both highly localized—even when organized from London or elsewhere in the Netherlands—and ephemeral. They were often quickly and quietly suppressed. More importantly, the efficacy of their work is also questionable. By the end of 1943, Dutch intelligence being sent to London regarding German troop strengths was generally accurate and extensive. This, however, cannot be said for information regarding Zeeland. For example, a top-secret report compiled by one resistance network on 31 December 1942, offered information regarding German troop strength and movement was limited. The report provided as much as was known about the Germans in Zeeland on that date: “?’ Division (Infantry Division, unknown, Nr. Unknown, Emblem unknown.) has been reported at the Zeeland Islands of Noord Beveland, Zuid Beveland an [*sic*] Walcheren with Div.H.Q. at Oostburg, Z.VI. No further information about this Division as yet.”²¹⁴ The lack of information regarding German

²¹² van Alten, “Spionage,” 49.

²¹³ Lagrou, “The Politics of Memory,” 530.

²¹⁴ NIMH, Duitse bezetting, 419, inv. 17. “Netherlands Battle-Order (Situation as on 31st December 1942),” no. 4.

troops is striking when compared to other regions listed in the same report. For example, the report details information of troops around Alkmaar (Noord-Holland):

“the ‘CHALET’ Division (infantry Division, Nr. Unknown) (Emblem: a Chalet in circle- Units drawn from Bavaria, Tyrol) Arrival in Netherland in May 1942. Division on full strength, Batteries of the divisional artillery in fixed positions, very immobile. positions in between and partly behind the Coastal Artillery. Fixed slits and weapon-pits all along the coast for the Infantry... This Division has one year fighting experience on the Russian Front. It is likely that this division will still be more contracted and take up a final position along the Coast from approximately The Amsterdam-Noord Zee canal down to The Hague/Wassenaar.”²¹⁵

By this account, German efforts to maintain Zeeland as a restricted area had kept details of their extensive construction all but hidden from the Dutch resistance. Although the effects of the aforementioned groups are dubious, one resistance group, which established a network in each province and modeled itself on a military hierarchy, was the *Ordedienst*, or Order Service (OD). Of all resistance networks in the province, the OD was most effective.

In his magisterial work on the OD, J.W.M. Schulten suggests that as an armed resistance network the OD saw itself as the dominant resistance organization entrusted by the exiled Dutch government, though in reality relations between the OD, other movements, and the government were unclear and sometimes strained. After the government established the *Nederlandse Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten* (Forces of the

²¹⁵ NIMH, Duitse bezetting, 419, inv. 17. “Netherland Battle-Order (Situation as on 31st December 1942),” no. 2.

Interior, NBS) in September 1944, many leading figures in the OD eventually secured important positions within the NBS. In the end, the most important contribution of the OD was its ability to maintain public order and contribute to the Government's efforts to control other armed resistance groups in the country immediately following the war.²¹⁶

The OD was established in Den Haag almost immediately after the *Meidagen* and began to operate across the Netherlands the following year. Shortly thereafter a large number of arrests led to the movement's denouement. In summer 1942, however, the organization regrouped under the leadership of P.J. Six.²¹⁷ The OD became most active in Zeeland when Allied troops pushed out of Normandy in 1944. In Zeeland, the OD established district 15 (*Gewest-15*). The commander of G-15 was a reservist named C.A. van Woelderen, who on 30 April 1943 was arrested by the SD because the Germans suspected that he had connections with the OD. After many interrogations, however, the Germans failed to connect him with the organization, and on 2 December 1943 van Woelderen was released from German custody. In practice, van Woelderen worked closely with A.F.C. de Casembroot, who had been a deputy in the *Provinciale Staten* for the Province of Zeeland from 1940 to 1941, at which point he became a member of the OD. By June 1944, the German authorities once again came searching for van Woelderen, which forced him into hiding in Kortgene on Noord-Beveland. On 31 October 1944, following liberation, van Woelderen went to Goes to meet *Militair Gezag voor Zeeland* captain C.W. Slot to work alongside the *Militair Gezag*. In the meantime, however, the OD had worked to activate radio contact with the Allies upon the capture of

²¹⁶ Schulten, *De geschiedenis van de Ordedienst*, 287ff.

²¹⁷ Schulten, *De geschiedenis van de Ordedienst*, 135.

Antwerp in early September 1944.²¹⁸ Much of the OD's work in G-15 centered on radio communications during the crucial period of September-November 1944.

Yet, even this description, based on Schulten's research on the OD, only permits speculation about the extent to which the OD operated in Zeeland. Kramer-Vreugdenhil has argued that underground actions, even helping *onderduikers*, on Walcheren was virtually impossible. She claims that the operations of the OD were initiated from those outside the province.²¹⁹ The topography of Walcheren made resistance an extremely challenging enterprise, as one former OD member recalled: "you could not stick your nose outside of the door without running into a German. Elsewhere, resistance fighters were in all directions and they were not trapped like us on Walcheren."²²⁰ Because the Germans had declared the islands a restricted zone and imposed a *Sperrgebiet*, restricting mobility and the transfer of personnel. Nonetheless, the OD executed some tasks, although opportunities to do so only arrived with the Allies. At that point, the responsibilities of the OD included liaising with Allied authorities and maintaining public order. These types of tasks were different compared to those executed by Belgian resistance groups. As Martin Conway has noted in his book, *The Sorrows of Belgium*,

²¹⁸ Schulten, *De geschiedenis van de Ordedienst*, 301.

²¹⁹ J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 156. "Ondergrondse actie, zelfs onderduikers herbergen, was op de eilanden lang vrijwel onmogelijk. Toen de Ordedienst toch van de grond kwam, was dat veelal op initiatief van mensen die niet op de eilanden geboren waren. Dat had ook te maken met het feit dat uit de beroepsgroepen van boeren en arbeiders weinig illegale werkers kwamen, maar veel uit die van onderwijzers, artsen en ambtenaren, en dat soort mensen was op de Waddeneilanden grotendeels allochtoon. Een verschil was dat het Zeeuwse verzet op ging kwam mede op initiatief van autochtone Zeeuwen."

²²⁰ As cited in J. Kramer-Vreugdenhil, *Eilandbewoners*, 157. "Je kon je neus niet buiten de deur steken of je liep tegen een Duitser op. En elders konden verzetsstrijders alle kanten op, ze zaten niet voor een gat gevangen zoals wij in Walcheren."

some resistance fighters guided Allied tanks through Belgian towns and cities, including Antwerp.²²¹

Piet de Kam, whose wartime experiences are well documented in Kramer-Vreugdenhil's local study, was born in Grijpskerke (Walcheren) in 1914. In the 1930s he became a reserve officer in the infantry and also worked as the director of Zeeland's *Christelijke Boeren- en Tuinersbond* (Christian Farmers and Gardeners Association, CBTB). During the *Meidagen* de Kam was mobilized with the 2nd Battalion of the 14th Infantry Regiment (3-II 14 RI). In 1941, the CBTB was shut down at the behest of the NSB, at which point de Kam joined the OD. Upon liberation, de Kam was made a commandant in the NBS and remained in Zeeland until being mobilized in the 8th Battalion of the Regiment Stoottroepen, which was sent to the Dutch East-Indies immediately after the war.²²² In October 2012, shortly after his death, de Kam's personal papers were donated to the NIMH in Den Haag. He was part of a small group of OD members in the province, the majority of whom were active in radio-communications only. Found within his personal archive were lists of men along with their aliases and where they had operated. Piet de Kam, or "Black Piet" (*Zwarte Piet*), was listed as "device builder and wireless operator" and worked in this capacity from 1941 onward. Likewise, W.M. Jansen or "Redhead Wim" (*Rooie Wim*) operated as a "code officer," perhaps because of his civilian background as a ship's draughtsman. Just nine men worked in radio communications for the OD operating in Middelburg. In Zeeuws-

²²¹ Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 60-61.

²²² I am grateful for the permissions granted to me by drs. E.J.J.F. Rossmesl and the staff at the NIMH for permitting me to look through an incomplete and unfinished collection. During my stay, the collection was tentatively named, NIMH, De Kam, 510, inventaris.

Vlaanderen, only four men operated in the radio service.²²³ According to this documentation, the list details the names, function, and date on which they joined the OD. In total, 30 individuals from Zeeland are listed as part of the radio-communications service (*Radiodienst*).²²⁴ It is almost certain more men considered themselves part of the OD, but the number indicated in de Kam's documentation suggests very few men could create and operate clandestine radios in service of the OD, especially considering their civilian professions. Perhaps most instructive is the date on which these men appear to have joined, most of whom joined in late 1944. 17 of the 30 men listed by de Kam joined in late 1944, while only six joined in 1941. The documentation also shows that by 1943, only two men were being trained in Middelburg and an additional two trained in Noord-Beveland.²²⁵ Additionally, these documents are instructive in that they give some idea about what type of civilians took part in OD activity. For the most part, the men listed here were not agricultural labourers, but often listed as a draughtsman, bookkeeper, electrician, telegrapher, and in one case a journalist. Only one man, L. Leendertse from Noord-Beveland, was listed as a farmer (*veehouder*).²²⁶ Together, these documents found in de Kam's archive show how limited in resources and personnel the OD in Zeeland was.

In 1947, former burgemeesters were required to answer questions about occupation, resistance, and liberation in their respective communes. These sources, known as *burgermeestersverklaringen* (mayors statements), offer some insight into various activities in each commune. When asked which notable acts of resistance took

²²³ NIMH, De Kam, 510, inv. 13, Bijlage II, "O.D. Personeel Radiodienst Gewest 15. (Zeeland)." n.d.

²²⁴ NIMH, De Kam, 510, inv. 13, Bijlage III, "O.D. Personeel Radiodienst Gewest 15. (Zeeland)." n.d.

²²⁵ NIMH, De Kam, 510, inv. 13, Bijlage II, "O.D. Personeel Radiodienst Gewest 15. (Zeeland)." n.d.

²²⁶ NIMH, De Kam, 510, inv. 13, Bijlage II, "O.D. Personeel Radiodienst Gewest 15. (Zeeland)." n.d.

place in Breskens, the burgemeester responded with “unknown.”²²⁷ In Goes, the burgemeester responded to the same question by attaching a small booklet entitled *Bezet, Verzet, Ontzet (Occupied, Resistance, Relief)*, while in Middelburg the burgemeester claimed two men were shot and killed by German authorities.²²⁸ In Middelharnis (Zuid-Holland), liberated in May 1945, the burgemeester wrote that no notable acts of resistance took place in his commune.²²⁹ The burgemeester of Terneuzen (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) provide the most detail. These responses show that beginning with *Dolle Dinsdag* (Mad Tuesday) in September 1944, about 10 civilians were killed in resistance action, although details about the type of action are unclear.²³⁰ These documents also highlight the diversity of wartime experience from one commune or town to another. They tell us that resistance in the rural areas of the Netherlands, and Europe in general, requires closer scrutiny. In a dominantly agricultural society, very few individuals possessed the technical acumen to build and operate devices for radio and communications. This does not necessarily suggest that the people of this province were relatively complacent or ambivalent society under Nazi rule. Instead, it indicates that the people of this region were pragmatic when it came to enduring occupation, and further substantiates the claim that historians have often ignored some common factors that dictate whether and how Europeans resisted against the Nazi regime. Occupation was characterized by an accommodation in Zeeland, which often blended the lines between collaboration and resistance.

²²⁷ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Breskens.

²²⁸ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Goes; NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Middelburg.

²²⁹ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Middelharnis.

²³⁰ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Terneuzen, 1. Unlike the majority of responses, the burgemeester of Terneuzen wrote on separate pages allowing for greater detail and longer answers.

Conclusion: Dolle Dinsdag in Zeeland

“It was not what one called an orderly retreat,” recalled the burgemeester of Terneuzen (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen). “Streets, squares and roads to the town were covered with abandoned cars, tanks, lorries, and weapons of all sorts. Heavy guns and tanks were arriving in Terneuzen so quickly through canals; munitions trucks and other lorries burned. The whole thing was a chaotic sight.”²³¹ The scene in Terneuzen on *Dolle Dinsdag* was played out in innumerable communes throughout Belgium and Zeeland following the capture of Antwerp in September 1944.²³² From a civilian perspective, it is hardly surprising that the war appeared as though it was coming to an end, for the German units that had occupied Zeeland for four years had hitherto maintained a stolidly calm and orderly image. That calmness gave way to frenetic movements northward. But *Dolle Dinsdag* belied the arduous and destructive battles that lay ahead for the Allies pushing through northern France and Belgium. The German units that had abandoned their posts in Belgium were preparing to push north and, eventually, across the Schelde to reestablish a new defensive line. Zeeland saw an increased military presence, greater restriction of civilian mobility, all while civilians could here fighting between Allies and Germans across the Schelde in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in late September-October 1944.

²³¹ NIMH, *burgemeestersverklaringen (1940-1945)*, 420, inv. Terneuzen, 2. “Op de z.g. "Dolle Dinsdag" werd de gemeente overstroomd door terugtrekkende troepenonderdelen van allerlei wapens. Onderdelen en Commandanten zijn hiervan niet met zekerheid bekend. Het was niet wat men noemt een geordende terugtocht; straten, pleinen en de toegangswegen tot de bebouwde kom der gemeente waren overdekt met de steek gelaten wagens, tanks, pakwagens en wapens van allerlei soort. Zware stukken geschut en tanks werden bij aankomst te Terneuzen zo meteen in de kanaalarmgereden [?]; munitiewagens en andere pakwagens verbrand. Het geheel bood een chaotische aanblik.

²³² Geoffrey Hayes, “Where are our liberators? The Canadian liberation of West Brabant, 1944” in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XVI, 2 (Fall, 1995), 56ff.

The summer of 1944 was one of relative calm for some in Zeeland. Life in the province can be characterized by an increasing degree of Nazi interference. Initially, the German regime left much of the bureaucracy intact and negotiated with Zeeland's agricultural economy. As the war progressed, however, the nature of occupation changed. The Nazi regime utilized the land differently, constructing massive defensive systems and uprooting local families. Resistance, too, was ineffectual and did little to hinder Nazi plans for the province. In other words, the German occupation of Zeeland might be characterized as a successful occupation. As we will see in the next chapter, the Allied campaign to open up the port of Antwerp devastated many Zeeuwen, ruined homes, businesses, and was arguably more destructive than life under Nazi Germany. It was, to borrow William Hitchcock's words, "a bitter road to freedom."²³³ Liberation would be the most destructive event in Zeeland's recent history.

²³³ William L. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

CHAPTER III

Caught in the Crossfire: The Destruction of Zeeland, 1944-1945

After four years of occupation, many Zeeuwen had come to terms with daily life under Nazi dominion. Despite some resistance to the *Arbeitsinsatz* proclamations, life for many in Zeeland continued under relatively normal circumstances. Most were neither resistors nor collaborators, and many had accommodated pragmatically when it appeared Nazi Germany had achieved victory in Europe. But in the months following the D-Day invasion in June 1944, and the rapid advance of Allied troops through Western Europe, Zeeland became the centre of a strategic debate that would have enormous consequences for the province. By mid-September, General Bernard Law Montgomery believed he could push to the Ruhr without Antwerp and its fully intact port. General Dwight Eisenhower doubted Montgomery's certitude. The approaches to the Port of Antwerp needed to be secured for the Allies. This put the Schelde and the Province of Zeeland directly into the broader strategy of the war and operations in northwest Europe in general. It was a fundamental part of Allied victory in Europe. Walcheren, because of its seminal position within the *Atlantikwall*, garnered the attention of all branches of the German and Allied armed forces. Although other parts of Zeeland—Schouwen-Duiveland and Tholen for example, were also defended, the mouth of the Schelde was the best-defended German position replete with its vast array of coastal batteries and minefields. This put Walcheren, Zuid-Beveland, and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen at the heart of Allied strategy and operations. Indeed, it was also at the heart of the German defences.

This chapter explores a relatively short period, from the capture of Antwerp on 4 September to December 1944, during which the people of Zeeland were caught between

Nazi occupation on one hand and Allied attempts to liberate them on the other. This chapter provides an inventory of destruction as a result of the costly fighting, which will be surveyed following a brief discussion of both Allied and German strategies and operations in the province. This chapter is organized around the following questions: what strategic considerations led the Allies to bomb Walcheren and other parts of Zeeland, and what effect did the decision to inundate the island have on the population of Zeeland? What type of aid would be required to facilitate reconstruction in the region? Although the battle for the Schelde was part of a European-wide strategy, we must necessarily circumscribe this chapter to the effects of war in Zeeland. This is neither a military history nor an operational one. The purpose here simply is to provide, as much as it is possible, a brief strategic and operational overview to show how essential opening the port of Antwerp was for the Allies, and to demonstrate that nothing was too costly from a military perspective. This chapter follows a period that coincides with the Battle for the Schelde. This chapter argues that, while the Allies considered the civilian casualties associated with military operations, military exigency trumped all other considerations including civilian casualties and physical destruction. The Allied armies had everything to lose if they could not clear the mouth of the Schelde. In the same way, the Germans had everything to lose if they gave it up.

Zeeland and the Port of Antwerp: Allied Strategy and Operational Overview, 1944

The Allied armies that broke out of Normandy in late August 1944 faced shortages in resources and manpower that pressured them to capture more port facilities.

The Allied advance was remarkable. Paris fell with little resistance on 25 August, and the expected German stand along the Seine and the Somme rivers failed to materialize. By 4 September 1944, elements of 11th British Armoured Division and the Belgian Resistance had captured Antwerp and its port intact. But Antwerp is an inland port, leaving its approaches in Zeeland heavily defended by elements of the German Fifteenth Army under the command of *General der Infanterie* Gustav von Zangen. Following the Normandy campaign, the Fifteenth Army gradually withdrew to the northeast facing the Channel coast in northern France and western Belgium. Just before the capture of Antwerp, von Zangen withdrew his forces across the Westerschelde towards Breda in Noord-Brabant. With Antwerp captured, Hitler ordered von Zangen to move northward with elements of Fifteenth Army, while at the same time in mid-September German command designated Walcheren a “fortress.” At this time, Hitler also made clear the instruction to breach dykes and locks in northern Belgium to stymie Allied operations.

These movements resulted in the Fifteenth Army withdrawing to a large area around Breskens in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen by 8 September. This area, which the Allies referred to as the Breskens Pocket, was gradually reduced to a permanent bridgehead centred on the heavy coastal batteries in Breskens, Knoeke, and other points on the southern bank of the Schelde.²³⁴ The Germans called it *Festung Süd-Schelde*. In the face of only minor Allied air attacks, as many as 100,000 men of the *Wehrmacht*, 6,000 vehicles, and over 750 pieces of artillery were ferried across the Westerschelde to reinforce positions north of Antwerp, leaving 64th Division to defend the pocket. The *Kriegsmarine* conducted these challenging logistical operations day and night over two

²³⁴ *German Defences of the Gateway to Antwerp*, 4.

weeks beginning on 6 September.²³⁵ With Hitler declaring Zeeland a fortress, the mission of German forces involved defending Zeeland's coastline, which included the northern islands of Schouwen-Duiveland. At the same time, however, by 10 September the Allies began to intensify their ground and air operations against the Fifteenth Army in Breskens. By mid-September large elements of the German Fifteenth Army had readjusted their lines and were forced northward to defend the islands of Zeeland.

Meanwhile, the decision to proceed with Operation "Market Garden," the airborne operation to cross the Rhine near Arnhem, on 17 September meant that First Canadian Army held an increasingly long list of tasks in northern Belgium and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Montgomery's continued attention to "Market Garden" through the rest of September and into October also meant that resources were diverted from First Canadian Army. Established in 1942, First Canadian Army replaced the existing unnumbered Canadian Corps.²³⁶ The Canadians, already well short of manpower and resources by the fighting in Normandy, had the unenviable job of opening the Channel ports of Le Havre, Dieppe, Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, before it could turn to Zeeland and the approaches to Antwerp.

The tasks were formidable, and had to be carried out by three understrengthened Canadian divisions. To eliminate the German defenses in the Breskens Pocket, the Allies devised Operation "Switchback," which Canadian Lt.-Gen. Guy Simonds thought "may be a major operation."²³⁷ Simonds argued that an assault across the Schelde could not be

²³⁵ S.J. de Groot, "Escape of the German Army across the Westerscheldt, September 1944," *Canadian Military History* 6, 1 (Spring, 1997), 109.

²³⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, Operations in North-West Europe* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), 358ff.

²³⁷ As quoted in Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 87.

ruled out if Walcheren were to be taken, and claimed that preliminary bombing operations were absolutely necessary “to break the dykes and completely flood all parts of the island below high water level” in early October. Once this was accomplished, Simonds maintained, aerial bombardment would concentrate on coastal battery installations and radar stations.²³⁸ While the discussions about the advantages of flooding Walcheren were underway, Simonds issued a preliminary plan for “Switchback” on 30 September. The two-stage operation required a bridgehead to clear the Knocke-sur-Mer fortress area. The 3rd Division, which by 30 September was still fighting in Boulonge and elsewhere, was then to penetrate into the pocket in two places: across the Leopold Canal from the south and then across the Savojaards Plaat to the east, all of which were planned for 6 October 1944.²³⁹ The operation began on 6 October and, by 12 October, elements of 3rd Canadian Division had accomplished their objectives and closed the gap between the two bridgeheads. This was a necessary step to launch an amphibious assault on the other parts of Zeeland.²⁴⁰ The Canadians faced innumerable challenges during these operations, including German strategic flooding, an extremely determined and well focused defence, as well as cold weather and materiel shortages. As Lt.-Gen. Simonds recalled, “Neither the terrain nor the weather were favourable. The low-lying fields were a honeycomb of polders, often flooded, affording scanty cover to attacking troops but enabling the defenders to dig in at the base of the dykes with comparative immunity from artillery fire.”²⁴¹

²³⁸ As quoted in Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 87.

²³⁹ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 88.

²⁴⁰ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 90.

²⁴¹ CMHQ-154, “Report no. 154: Clearing the Scheldt Estuary and Opening the Port of Antwerp: Operations of First Canadian Army in North-West Europe, 1 Oct-8 Nov 44,” 12.

During this period the civilians living around the Schelde witnessed an unprecedented level of destruction and chaos, especially when one considers Zeeland's experience throughout the twentieth century. On Monday morning on 2 October, many of Westkapelle's 2,369 inhabitants gathered around their radios, which, according to one contemporary, were in abundance during occupation.²⁴² At around noon the Allies warned the people living near the mouth of the Schelde to prepare for "an immediate evacuation! Warn your neighbours—Leave without delay!" The message from across the Channel quickly enumerated several other warnings:

- 1) It is highly probable that the enemy troops and installations on your islands will soon be exposed to a severe and prolonged aerial bombardment.
- 2) It is the desire of the Allied High Command [SHAEF] that the civilian population will be spared the consequences, as much as possible, of this necessary military action.
- 3) Not only the aerial bombardment, but also the danger of flooding threatens your life and that of your families.
- 4) Leave the islands or, if that is not possible, then immediately move your family to a safe place on the islands.²⁴³

²⁴² J. Ligthart-Schenk, *Westkapelle voor en na 3 October 1944* (Westkapelle, n.d.), 4.

²⁴³ Ligthart-Schenk, *Westkapelle voor en na 3 October 1944*, 6-7. "1. Het is zeer waarschijnlijk, dat de vijandelijke troepen en installaties op uw eilanden binnenkort aan een hevige en langdurig luchtbombardement zullen blootstaan.

2. Het is de vurigste wens van het geallieerde oppercommando, dat de burgerbevolking zal worden gespaard voor de gevolgen van deze noodzakelijke militaire actie, voorzover dit enigszins mogelijk zal zijn.

3. Niet alleen een luchtbombardement, maar eveneens het gevaar van overstroming bedreigt uw leven en dat van uwe families.

4. Verlaat de eilanden of, indien dat niet mogelijk is, verhuist dan onmiddellijk met uw families naar een veilige plaats op de eilanden.

The warning concluded that all military targets—roads, canals, transport lines, power stations, train yards, depots, warehouses, enemy concentrations of all sorts—should be avoided at all costs. “Travel only by foot and take nothing with you that you cannot easily wear,” the broadcast continued, “keep away from main roads and travel only by fields, and not in large groups which may be erroneously mistaken for enemy formations.”²⁴⁴ The bombing of Walcheren island began the next day.

The decision to bomb Walcheren island was a complex one that continues to draw attention. Some Dutch historian Tobias van Gent has criticized the Allied strategy and has argued that “sinking” the island by breaching its major sea dykes was unnecessary. Furthermore, van Gent claims that the Allies were hindered more by the flooding than the defenders as the water made mobile warfare increasingly difficult.²⁴⁵ However, a look at the changing Allied strategy helps appreciate the context in which the decision to bomb Zeeland took place. The decision to inundate parts of the Province must be examined in the context of the German orders to push northward and hold their positions to the last man. It must also be looked at against the various shortages in elements of 21 Army Group. In the end, the destruction that befell the Province presented the Allies with an unprecedented task of helping the Zeeuwen recover following liberation. As we shall see, the challenges posed by the destruction put immense pressure on the ingenuity and resources of both the Allies and the people of Zeeland.

²⁴⁴ Ligthart-Schenk, *Westkapelle voor en na 3 October 1944*, 7. “dragen. Houdt U verwijderd van de grote verkeerswegen en begeeft U uitsluitend door velden. Reist niet in grote groepen, welke ten onrechte kunnen worden aangezien voor vijandelijke formaties. Houdt U verwijderd van laagliggend grondgebied en van militaire doelen, totdat de vijand van uw eiland is verdreven.”

²⁴⁵ Tobias van Gent, “The Allied Assault on Walcheren, 1944,” in *Building Liberty: Canada and World Peace, 1945-2005* edited by Conny Steenman-Marcusse and Aritha van Herk (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2005), 11-30.

Meanwhile, as Terry Copp has shown, the capture of Antwerp ushered in an intense debate between Eisenhower and Montgomery, the latter of whom tried to convince Eisenhower to adopt a narrow-front strategy aimed at the Ruhr.²⁴⁶ On 8 October, SHAEF officials learned that high winds and storms had again severely damaged the Norman ports at Arromanches and Cherbourg. The next day, the Royal Navy reported on the shortages of ammunition in First Canadian Army, which Montgomery appeared to have denied, as well as shortages in manpower. These issues broached logistical questions about resupplying armies in the west. Yet, in light of the failure of “Market Garden,” Montgomery’s directive of 9 October reemphasized 21 Army Group’s commitment to the Ruhr, and also promised to reinforce First Canadian Army in the near future. As head of SHAEF, Eisenhower might have yielded to Montgomery’s persistence if it had not been for the Royal Navy and its Commander, Admiral Bertram Ramsay. As early as 5 September, Ramsay recognized the importance of opening up the Schelde and how Antwerp’s large port could supply Allied armies.²⁴⁷ Additionally, on 10 September, Eisenhower explained the condition of Allied supplies.²⁴⁸ In their correspondence, Eisenhower stressed to Montgomery the many problems Antwerp presented, but Eisenhower rarely directed Montgomery on how to execute tasks.²⁴⁹

In his oft-quoted letter to Montgomery on 9 October 1944, Eisenhower noted the damage done to the port of Cherbourg and wrote that “this reemphasizes the supreme importance of Antwerp. It is reported to me this morning by the Navy that the Canadian Army will not repeat not be able to attack until November 1 unless immediately supplied

²⁴⁶ Terry Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 149ff.

²⁴⁷ Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt* (Alma, ON: Maple Leaf Route, 1985), 42.

²⁴⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 306.

²⁴⁹ Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt*, 43.

with adequate ammunition...Unless we have Antwerp producing by the middle of November our entire operation will come to a standstill...I consider Antwerp of first importance, and I believe that the operations designed to clear up the entrance require your personal attention.”²⁵⁰ Montgomery’s reply was prompt, visceral and denied that there was a shortage of ammunition. He reminded Eisenhower that he had agreed that the main effort should be directed toward the Ruhr, to which Eisenhower stated “Let me assure you nothing I might ever say or write with respect to future plans in our advance eastwards is meant to indicate any lessening of the need for Antwerp...”²⁵¹ Montgomery had received Eisenhower’s letter on 15 October.

The crisis in command put pressure on all of First Canadian Army, but particularly 2 Canadian Division, which was told on 9 October that “the limit to artillery ammunition expenditure has been removed.”²⁵² From 1 October onward, 2 Canadian Division had been pushing north of Antwerp, while Operation “Switchback” unfolded in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.

By 16 October, Montgomery finally admitted to Eisenhower that Antwerp would be the top priority in all operations of 21 Army Group. On the same day, Montgomery’s directive put his words into action. The offensives of Second British Army directed eastwards were cancelled and it would now attack westwards. Additionally, Montgomery redirected First Canadian Army which could now head for Antwerp, so its operations could influence the battles north of Antwerp in Bergen-op-Zoom, Roosendaal, in Noord-Brabant as well as the push into the islands of Zeeland.

²⁵⁰ As quoted in Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt*, 42.

²⁵¹ As quoted in Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt*, 42.

²⁵² Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt*, 43.

The port of Antwerp itself lies some 80 kilometers from the North Sea and the Germans had defended both the southern and northern sides of the Schelde. The powerful coastal batteries on Walcheren and in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen made any naval approach to the Schelde deadly. The Allies knew that before any approach to the port could be made, these vital parts of the *Atlantikwall* needed to be destroyed and secured. On Walcheren, the Germans had constructed heavy coastal batteries along the coastline from Vlissingen to Westkapelle, which included six batteries totaling 25 guns manned by 202nd Naval Artillery Battalion. They could fire out at sea to any approaching vessel as well as across the Schelde to Breskens and other parts of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Additionally, anti-aircraft guns positioned on Walcheren provided effective defence against Allied air strikes. Walcheren island was defended by the 70th Infantry Division, a force of about 7,500 led by General Wilhelm Daser. This division was given the sobriquet the *Magenkrankendivision* (Stomach-Illness Division), since many of its troops suffered from a variety of stomach-borne ailments. The 64th Division, under the command of General-Major Kurt Eberhard, defended Zeeuws-Vlaanderen to the south of Walcheren. Originally, this force consisted of 11,000 men, 500 machine guns, 200 anti-tank guns and 70 field guns. By mid-September, it was reduced to about 2,500 men.²⁵³ Many from this division were on leave from the Eastern Front and were experienced and battle-hardened troops.²⁵⁴ Given the extent of German defenses, and the materiel and personnel strength of Allied troops, the Allies needed to consider how to combine airpower and amphibious landings to capture key parts of Zeeland.

²⁵³ *German Defences of the Gateway to Antwerp*, 9.

²⁵⁴ NIMH, in *De Strijd in Zeeland: Algemeen October-November, 1944*, Deel 4.

SHAEF officials knew that Antwerp needed to be opened and fully operational before winter in order to supply armies in the west. To accomplish this, the Allies developed a three-part plan to capture Walcheren that involved: (1) sealing off the isthmus leading to Zuid-Beveland and clear the area south of the Schelde; (2) clearing Zuid-Beveland by an advance along the *Sloedam* in conjunction with an assault across the estuary from the south; and (3) clearing Walcheren by attacks from east, south, and west, which involved a second crossing of the estuary and a seaborne expedition from one of the Channel Ports. Crucially, the fixed defences and coastal batteries were to be neutralized by bombing the sea dykes and flooding the island.²⁵⁵ Proposals to flood Walcheren had been considered at Army Headquarters and discussed among Lt.-General Henry Crerar, GOC, First Canadian Army, Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Major-General Francis de Guingand, and Naval Commander in Chief, Admiral Ramsay. Ramsay, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, approved the plan to bomb the dykes if only because it would alleviate pressures for the amphibious assault by creating beachheads large enough for vehicles to pass through.²⁵⁶ On 1 October 1944, Eisenhower, without consulting Queen Wilhelmina or the Dutch Government exiled in London, authorized the bombing of Walcheren.²⁵⁷ Beginning on 3 October 1944, Bomber Command launched 2,219 sorties and dropped 10,219 tons of bombs over Walcheren. On 3 October Westkapelle's main sea dyke was breached and flooded the town, while on 7 October the dykes east and west of Vlissingen were breached. A few days later on 11 October, the dyke in Veere was bombed. On 17 October alone, 1,500 bombs were dropped between

²⁵⁵ NIMH, "The Operations to Open Antwerp and Clear the Lower Rhine: The Operations of 21 Army Group," in *De Strijd in Zeeland: Algemeen October-November, 1944*, Deel 4.

²⁵⁶ Copp, *Guy Simonds and the Art of Command* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 95.

²⁵⁷ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 88.

Zoutelande and Westkapelle.²⁵⁸ This action effectively began to “sink” the island and, according to the Allies, softened the defences enough to mount an effective amphibious assault. A report entitled “Joint Planning for the Assault on Walcheren,” stated that the decision to flood the island was only taken after most careful consideration of all possible alternatives. However, from a strategic point of view, the Allies agreed that flooding the island would offer the Allies a number of important advantages, namely that Walcheren would be divided into three sections—the northwest strip of dunes and wooded areas; the southwest strip of dunes; and the Vlissingen area which included higher land. In addition, the report maintained, the movement of enemy reserves would have been greatly hindered and many field batteries would be submerged and therefore not operational.²⁵⁹ Under the command of Admiral Ramsay, Force ‘T’ consisting of 200 landing and close support craft would make a seaborne assault, using a variety of Landing Vehicles Tracked (LVT) known as Buffaloes. This assault was supported by a bombardment squadron of HMS *Warspite* and monitors *Roberts* and *Erebus*.²⁶⁰

Operational Planning to Capture Zeeland

The capture of Walcheren and the liberation of Zeeland was an Anglo-Canadian operation of several constituent parts. The Allies delegated the task to clear the Schelde to First Canadian Army, commanded by Lt.-General Henry Crerar, which consisted of 1st British Corps and 2nd Canadian Corps. By late September, however, Lt.-Gen. Guy Simonds replaced Crerar as Acting Army Commander for medical reasons. Simonds was the commander of II Canadian Corps, so this was his first opportunity to command a two-

²⁵⁸ F. Bertijn, “De Strijd om de Westerschelde in 1944,” *Marineblad* 105, 5 (Mei, 1995), 133.

²⁵⁹ “Joint Planning for the Assault on Walcheren,” 112.

²⁶⁰ NIMH, in *De Strijd in Zeeland: Algemeen October-November, 1944*, Deel 4.

corps army. Whilst Bomber Command flew myriad sorties over Zeeland and breached many of the dykes in October, plans for Operation “Infatuate” were underway at the same time and slated to begin on 1 November 1944. Because the assault of Walcheren came from the west and south, joint planning was required to coordinate the attack between naval and military operations. This meant that the intentions of the ground forces needed to be disclosed to Admiral Ramsay.

The forces allocated to capture Zeeland were 1 British Corps, then under First Canadian Army, who were tasked with clearing the area between the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal and the Maas. 2 Canadian Corps was to clear the Schelde. 2 Canadian Infantry Division had to seal off the isthmus and clear Zuid-Beveland. 3 Canadian Infantry Division, along with 4 Canadian Armoured Division, were to destroy the enemy south of the Schelde in mid-October, and 4 Canadian Armoured Division moved east of Antwerp to operate on the right flank of 2 Canadian Infantry Division. The opening of the Schelde involved four concurrent operations, but the first task was to clear the area north of Antwerp across the Schelde to Zuid-Beveland. Operation “Switchback,” mentioned above, was devised to clear the Breskens pocket in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Operation “Vitality,” which was divided into two phases, aimed to seal off and capture Zuid-Beveland. Operation “Infatuate,” the capture of Walcheren, represented the final stage in the battle. All of these operations were to commence after the RAF had breached Walcheren’s sea dykes. By 1 November 1944, most of Walcheren had been inundated except for parts of Vlissingen and Middelburg, and the narrow dune belts along the northern, western, and southern sides.

It would take just over a month of extremely bitter fighting over torturous terrain for the Anglo-Canadian force to defeat the German army and capture the Province of Zeeland. As early as 4 November 1944, the first minesweeper reached Antwerp. For the next few weeks, over 100 minesweepers cleared a 115 kilometer-long channel, which had to be swept 16 times.²⁶¹ On 28 November, the first convoy of 18 ships reached Antwerp and eventually allowed the port to bring in 40,000 tons of cargo per day.²⁶²

This has necessarily been a truncated presentation of a much more complex series of decisions and operations, but the operational history of the battle for the Schelde has received a great deal of attention in the English-speaking world. The key point here is that the province of Zeeland became the focal point for both Allied and German armies in the west. It was fundamental to Allied strategy in the west, and it was the first time that the Allies employed air power to sink an island in preparation for an amphibious assault. While the campaign for the Schelde was relatively short, it was extremely costly and destructive. But, as this section has shown, the decision to flood Walcheren and other parts of Zeeland was made amidst changing circumstances involving German intentions to defend Zeeland at all costs. These decisions and readjustments in the German army were made throughout September immediately following the capture of Antwerp.

German Reaction to Allied Offensive

By the end of September, the Germans understood full well that the situation in the Schelde was dire. The evacuation from the south side of the Schelde from 6 to 20

²⁶¹ NIMH, "The Operations to Open Antwerp and Clear the Lower Rhine: The Operations of 21 Army Group," in *De Strijd in Zeeland: Algemeen October-November, 1944*, Deel 4.

²⁶² C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, Operations in North-West Europe* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), 357.

September seemed to substantiate this. One German report from September 1944 noted the terrible conditions of German naval resources and highlighted that they understood the enemy's attempts to exploit the Belgian coast as a "foothold" (*Nachschuhbasis*). This indicated that a much more forceful offensive would soon unfold. However, the report continued, German resources were numerically too weak to represent a real threat to the enemy.²⁶³ By 13 October 1944, German war diaries indicate that morale among the troops stationed in Veere (Walcheren) was at an all time low because of Allied flooding. The diary continued, "The dyke breach created a strong depressing effect upon the soldiers in Veere."²⁶⁴ But the Allied bombardment that breached the dyke at Veere on 11 October was only part of the problem. The constant troop movements from Walcheren to both Zuid- and Noord-Beveland added to the logistic chaos, since many troops stationed in Veere had been ordered to move elsewhere. The remaining troops posted there after 13 October were tasked with double the number of patrols to confront increasing levels of looting during the night, cattle theft, and black marketers.²⁶⁵ The people took advantage of the chaotic situation in this chaotic stage of the war.

²⁶³ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-48: September 1944," 951. "Sehr bedauerlich ist es bei dieser Lage und den bei sich immer deutlicher abzeichnenden Absichten des Feindes, die belgische Küste als Nachschuhbasis auszunützen und gegen die Scheldemündung offensiv vorzugehen, dass es im Raume an stärkeren, zu einem offensiven Vorgehen gegen den Feind geeigneten Seestreitkräften fehlt. Die wenigen S-Boote, die z. Zt. sich auf den [niesagem?] Raum stützen, sind zahlenmässig zu schwach, um eine dauernde Flanken- u.s.w. Bedrohung für den Feind darzustellen."

²⁶⁴ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-53: 13 October 1944," 11. "Ein stark niederdrückenden Eindruck auf die Soldaten der (Garrison?) Veere machte der durch Feindmaschinen hervorgerufene Deichbruch beim Vrouwenpolder, der Veere ringsherum mit Wasser einschloß."

²⁶⁵ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-53: 13 October 1944," 11. "Die ständigen Truppenverschiebungen von Walcheren Süd- und Nordbeveland gleichzeitig die Truppenverschiebungen auf Walcheren selbst machten sich in Standort Veere sehr bald unangenehm bemerkbar. Trotz doppeltem Streifendienst, den ich im Einvernehmen mit dem Ortskommandanten eingerichtet hatt und der von Beginn der Dunkelheit bis Hellwerden den ganzen Ort beging, mehrten sich jede Nacht Plünderungen und Viehdiebstähle, sowie Schwarzschlachtungen. Die Haltung der Soldaten von der Darm- und Magenkranken Division liess milit. viel zu wünschen brig und waren die Leute für die dort ebenfalls stationierten Marinetruppen kein gutes Beispiel."

A report from 15 October 1944 by one *Kriegsmarine* admiral suggests bravely that the navy had remained steadfast in their defence against Allied troops. The diary entry notes that without the heavy and medium naval and anti-aircraft batteries in Vlissingen and elsewhere on Walcheren, the enemy would be able to land on Walcheren more easily.²⁶⁶ In reality, however, fighting was vicious. But, regarding the population of the Province, this entry warned that resistance movements were gaining influence.²⁶⁷ The Germans also recognized that they were incapable of supplying Zeeland's population with foodstuffs, electricity, gas, and water, as they now began to rely more on railway for transport rather than ships.²⁶⁸

At the same time that the battle for the Schelde was being fought, the Germans were growing desperate. In Zeeland, the Germans received preliminary orders to begin conscripting civilian men between the ages of 17 to 40 in preparation for a new line to be established.²⁶⁹ As new research from Hans Sackers has shown, some Germans saw that enduring the impending assault was futile and, instead, tried to desert their units. Sackers has claimed that to provide a precise statistic of how many deserters were executed from September to November is not possible. However, the execution of 20 German military

²⁶⁶ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-54: 15 October 1944," 1103. "Die schweren und mittleren Flakbatterien in Vlissingen haben infolge der schweren Luftangriffe auf Deichanlagen gewisse Ausfälle erlitten. Auch die 9.-202 (Kernwerk Vlissingen) ist nicht ohne Schaden geblieben. Diese Batterien sind zusammen mit denen südlich Vlissingen stehenden Batterien seit dem 9.X. sehr stark gegen den Feindeinbruch bei Hoofdplaat eingesetzt. Ohne mitwirkung dieser Marine-Batterien wäre der Feind bestimmt schon weiter gekommen."

²⁶⁷ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-54: 15 October 1944," 1104. "Verhalten Bevölkerung: Unverändert abwartend. Dies darf jedoch nicht davor täuschen, dass die sich aus den sogenannten Untergetauchten [zwangsläufig?] rekrutierenden Widerstandsbewegungen an Einfluss gewinnen und zur gegebenen Zeit wohl sicher in Erscheinung treten werden."

²⁶⁸ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-54: 15 October 1944," 1104. "Stilliegen von Bahn und auch grösstenteils Schifffahrt haben Versorgungslage der Städte, besonders der Grossstädte merklich erschwert. Versorgung dieser Bevölkerungsteile mit Lebensmitteln, Elektrizität, Gas und Wasser wird bald kritisch werden."

²⁶⁹ NIMH, *Duitse bezetting*, 419, inv. 31/3 "Oorlogsdagboek-54: 15 October 1944," 1104. "Erfassung wehrfähiger Holländer im Alter von 17-40 Jahren für den Arbeitseinsatz befindet sich bei den zuständigen zivilen usw. Dienststellen in Vorüberlegung. Durchführung wird bestimmt nicht leicht sein."

personnel stationed in Zeeland can be confirmed with some degree of accuracy.²⁷⁰ As early as 1942, two Germans were executed in Ritthem (Walcheren), while on 15 September 1944 Günther Rademacher was executed in Nieuwdorp (Zuid-Beveland).²⁷¹

Conceptualizing Destruction in Zeeland

For many North American readers, the extent of devastation inflicted upon parts of the Netherlands during the Second World War is immensely difficult to conceptualize. More to the point, the people of Zeeland found it difficult to conceptualize their experience. Historians, and particularly non-Dutch historians, often overlook the destruction and reconstruction of the region because this component is largely irrelevant in terms of constructing a narrative of Canadian or British combat experiences and their role in liberation. Instead, operational and military histories of the Schelde campaign almost always measure the aftermath of the war by the number of casualties meted out by each side. This puts the Canadian sacrifice disproportionately high, comprising more than 90 percent of the Allied figure, which included 1,418 men killed in action and 4,949 wounded.²⁷²

The impact of war on Zeeland's landscape, infrastructure, as well as the mentalities of its people has not received treatment in English-language literature. Only recently have historians, like Keith Lowe, emphasized the extent of destruction inflicted upon Europe.²⁷³ The loss of civilian life in Zeeland, which was relatively high, was only one consequence of the war. Aerial photographs of towns along the southern bank of the

²⁷⁰ Hans Sackers, *Duitse militaire standrechtelijke executies in Zeeland, september-december 1944* (Soesterberg: Uitgeverij Aspect, 2013), 47.

²⁷¹ Sackers, *Duitse militaire standrechtelijke executies in Zeeland, september-december 1944*, 47-48.

²⁷² Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 173.

²⁷³ Lowe, *Savage Continent*, 3-11.

Schelde highlight the devastating effects fighting had on civilian homes and villages (See Appendix V). As we will see in later chapters, both Allied and German operations flattened the majority of homes in places like Breskens (See Appendix V, Figure 1.2). These aerial photographs offer not only insight into the bitterness of the battle, but also the degree to which concerted reconstruction efforts were required.

When Bomber Command began its sorties over Zeeland on 3 October 1944, 152 Westkappelaars were killed instantly, while 28 more died later. Appendix V, Figure 1.1 demonstrates the destructiveness of the initial bombardment against Westkapelle. Out of a total population of 2,369, about 200 citizens, or over 10 percent of the town's population, were killed by Allied bombardment.²⁷⁴ Similar percentages of civilians were killed in villages like Biggekerke in Walcheren where 46 civilians died.²⁷⁵ Yet, even when measuring the war's effects on the population, the numbers alone fail to convey the extent to which the province was razed. For a dominantly agrarian region, the loss of vital infrastructure, arable land and cistern wells significantly disrupted daily life for the Zeeuwen. This was perhaps more damaging than four years under Nazi occupation.

While Allied bombing raids were responsible for inundating Walcheren and flattening much of Breskens, the Germans also used flooding as a tactic to slow down Allied advances (See Appendix V, Figure 1.5). This was especially true for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and the areas north of the Leopold Canal, as well as on Tholen and Schouwen-Duiveland. As Gijs van der Ham has shown, the *Wehrmacht* had begun flooding parts of northern Belgium and southern Zeeland as early as 1 September 1944,

²⁷⁴ Ligthart-Schenk, *Westkapelle voor en na 3 October 1944*, 3.

²⁷⁵ Ligthart-Schenk, *Westkapelle voor en na 3 October 1944*, 3.

which, in some towns like Oostburg near Sluis, forced burgemeesters to evacuate their citizens to safer ground much earlier than in other parts of Zeeland.²⁷⁶

The first and most pressing problem facing both the Allies and the Zeeuwen was obviously the flooding. Since the Allies destroyed four major sea dykes, and much of the island was flooded during high tide, Walcheren's dykes needed to be repaired before anything else could be assessed. Although radio communications and pamphlets dropped in towns like Westkapelle warned civilians of the impending Allied bombardment, many Zeeuwen stayed in their homes. While most of the fighting took place in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, Walcheren, and Zuid-Beveland, other parts of Zeeland were also inundated. Nonetheless, the people's reticence to flee may be explained by the German *Sperrgebiet* imposed on the population, which required the majority of civilians to obey curfews. After all, most of Zeeland's population had lived under a relatively benign occupation for four years without any major resistance or violent action that would force them from their lands. The result of many Zeeuwen remaining in their villages and towns meant that the Allied and Dutch authorities had to orchestrate evacuations from the countryside to towns like Middelburg, which largely remained above water throughout the fall and winter of 1944-1945. The demographic and logistical challenge of evacuation presented the Allies and Dutch authorities with a growing set of tasks. Problems of closing the dykes meant that other infrastructural issues could not be resolved, while overcrowding in Middelburg as a result of the forced evacuations posed a number of health and sanitation concerns. Temporary housing needed to be constructed and basic services, like electricity, policing, and providing drinking water, needed to be restored. Families whose loved ones had been mobilized to fight in the *Wehrmacht* (either voluntarily or involuntarily) or who had been

²⁷⁶ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945* (Zwolle: Uitgeverij Waanders, 1990), 275.

forced to work in Germany were anxious to visit other parts of the Province or travel to Germany directly. This, however, was a prominent problem elsewhere in the Netherlands. As we have seen, most Zeeuwen were conscripted to work within the province and comparably few were sent beyond the province's borders.

For many Zeeuwen the war was over and they could start rebuilding, but for the Canadians, British, and Americans much bitter fighting still lay ahead as they moved into northern parts of the Netherlands and penetrated the Reich itself. Even still, the war was not over for some Zeeuwen still under Nazi occupation. In fact, the Germans had flooded much of Schouwen-Duiveland in an attempt to defend approaches to the island. The people of that island were forced to fend for themselves amid rising water while the Germans readjusted their lines, with Schouwen-Duiveland behind them. This part of Zeeland would be liberated along with the rest of the country on 5 May 1945.²⁷⁷

In the absence of a formal Dutch government, quasi-military institutions worked alongside Allied Civil Affairs. Despite the good intentions of SHAEF Civil Affairs (CA) to help rebuild a province which they in large measure had to destroy, attempts to recover local socio-economic and political life should not obscure the overarching importance attached to military objectives. As we will see in the following chapter, SHAEF CA worked in concert with the Dutch authorities (*Militair Gezag*, MG) to assess all the physical and economic damages resulting from war, before formally passing sole jurisdiction to the MG. Throughout the processes of reconstruction that took place during

²⁷⁷ Jan Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog* (Vlissingen: den Boer de Ruiter, 2000), 85. Zwemer writes "Ook Sint-Philipsland en Tholen, onder water gezet op Tholen-stad na, waren op vier November zonder veel moeite bevrijd. Daarmee was het front voor een half jaar vastgelegd: Schouwen-Duiveland hoorde bij dat deel van Nederland (boven de rivieren) dat pas op 5 mei 1945 de Nederlandse vlag kon laten zien. In de tussentijd had het eiland te lijden onder beschietingen van de geallieerden en van verhevigde Duitse terreur- om van het zeewater binnen de dijken maar niet te spreken. Het was dat merkwaardige halfjaar waarin Zuid-Beveland bevrijd was, maar het grootste deel van het land nog onder de Duitse bezetting zuchtte."

the war, however, relations between Dutch and Allied authorities were often strained as SHAEF directed resources to the war effort while Dutch authorities waited anxiously for supplies and assistance. As Schrijvers has shown for the CA mission to Belgium, SHAEF authorities made clear to Belgium that their primary objective was the prosecution of the war.²⁷⁸

Conclusion

The level of destruction that resulted from the Allied assault on Zeeland must be considered against the backdrop of severe resource scarcity and the inability to supply armies in Western Europe. In order to continue the war effort, the Allies were willing to employ almost any tactic to drive Nazi Germany north and west. Antwerp was the quintessential element in all of this. Civilian casualties were to be expected, especially when flooding large parts of the province below sea level, and damage to homes, businesses, livestock, and other properties was also understood to be an unfortunate consequence of the fighting.

The civilian perspective, however, was much different. Beginning with *Dolle Dinsdag*, some believed victory in Europe would come just as rapidly and easily as it had in Belgium. Beginning on 6 September 1944, many civilians witnessed a mass exodus of German personnel and munitions across the Schelde. It seemed clear, at least as far as civilians were concerned, that the war would soon be over. However, the long wait from September to October showed that this was not going to be the case in the province of Zeeland. Nothing in their collective memory prepared the people for such as destructive

²⁷⁸ Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945*, 94.

event. When the Allies dropped pamphlets demanding immediate evacuation, Zeeland's expectations for a liberation that involved very little fighting on their soil were dashed.

The cost of battle for all three belligerents involved—Allies, Germans, and civilians—also marked the beginning of a memory in the province. For Canadians, the disproportionately high casualty rate remains the salient feature in Canada's military role in the Netherlands. For the Germans, their manipulation of the land, the construction of myriad bunkers, and munitions were the only elements left after they fled north to Schouwen-Duiveland in late 1944. In other words, forgetting this battle was likely paramount for the Germans. As a result, the construction of a German memory in the region is largely incomplete. However, for the people of Zeeland, this short period proved to be fundamental in shaping memories of the war. It was so chaotic and destructive that it could not be forgotten—even more chaotic than the occupation. Writers like den Doolaard used this period as a point of departure for his story of life in Zeeland during the war, as did others. This period in Walcheren's history was above all characterized by water. As we shall see in a later chapter, this inchoate memory that began in 1944 changed little in some parts of the province, while in others it changed dramatically.

CHAPTER IV

Institutional and Operational Context: Civil Affairs and *Militair Gezag*, 1944

“In the Netherlands, the reaction to Civil Affairs was quite different from that which had been encountered in either France or Belgium,” one 1947 report on the Canadian role in liberation and civil affairs stated.²⁷⁹ “In the Netherlands,” the report continued, “more was expected of it than Civil Affairs was intended to provide and the people never understood that it was merely part of the war machine and existed only to assist in the prosecution of the war and the defeat of the enemy. For this reason alone the Netherlands produced the most difficult Civil Affairs problems of the whole campaign.”²⁸⁰ To be sure, the wake of Anglo-Canadian operations in Walcheren, Zuid-Beveland, and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen left countless homes and towns destroyed or inundated and presented the Allies with a host of problems they needed to address expeditiously. Reconstruction in Zeeland would be an immensely difficult process. The difficulties encountered by both Dutch and Allied officials were a result of the wartime history of the province.

This chapter examines the institutional background of immediate post-war reconstruction and focuses on two organizations responsible for recovery in Zeeland: Allied Civil Affairs (CA) and the Dutch *Militair Gezag* (MG). It first explores the operational and military context of late 1944 and early 1945. The military challenges put pressure on the Allies to prosecute the war against Nazi Germany at the expense of putting the necessary resources in the hands of Dutch authorities. A discussion of the

²⁷⁹ Report no. 172, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part IV: Belgium and the Netherlands, General Historical Survey,” 9.

²⁸⁰ Report no. 172, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government,” 9.

institutional background to reconstruction provides a foundation on which a more detailed investigation of reconstruction can build. This chapter begins to outline the enormous challenges facing both officials, the sometimes strained relations between both authorities during this crucial period, and the extent of preliminary reconstruction undertaken in Zeeland while Allied armies were still fighting Nazi Germany in the Netherlands and into Germany.

Operational Context, November 1944-1945

On 18 October 1944, just two days after he promised to prioritize opening the port of Antwerp, Field Marshal Montgomery met with Eisenhower to discuss how best to defeat German forces in northwest Europe. The strategy for operations following the capture of Zeeland involved ambitious plans “to defeat decisively the enemy west of the Rhine; then to seize the Ruhr and, subsequently, to advance deep into Germany.”²⁸¹ In the meantime, elements of 2nd Canadian Division had captured Woensdrecht, while on 17 October 4th Canadian Armoured Division attacked the town of Bixgen to isolate German forces defending Zuid-Beveland. In the coming days, a number of simultaneous operations would take place including Anglo-Canadian attempts to gain the Zuid-Beveland Canal as well as the attack on Breskens and towns in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. On 26 October 2nd Canadian Division captured Krabbendijke and, two days later, Zuid-Beveland had effectively been cut off by 4th Canadian Armoured Division. By the end of October, 3rd Canadian Division and the Scottish 52nd Lowland Division launched amphibious attacks from Breskens across the Schelde to Zuid-Beveland. 2nd Canadian Division also captured Goes, at which point elements of the division accompanied by

²⁸¹ As cited in Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 177.

members of the OD gained Noord-Beveland. From 29 October to 1 November, Canadians launched a series of attacks on the well-defended Sloedam, attempting to gain the narrow and low-lying strip of land leading directly onto Walcheren. By 3 November 52nd Lowland Division successfully crossed the Sloedam into Walcheren. From 1 to 8 November, operations continued in Walcheren until the Germans formally capitulated on 8 November in Middelburg.

From a military and operational perspective, the battle orchestrated by First Canadian Army under the leadership of Simonds was considerably effective.²⁸² The human toll was high. From 20 September and 8 November 1944, First Canadian Army reported 3,244 men killed in action and an additional 6,784 wounded.²⁸³ In 1944, over 8,000 other ranks and 742 officers were killed in battle, while an additional 2,390 men died of wounds suffered in battle during that year.²⁸⁴ Despite these losses, there was a steady flow of reinforcements into First Canadian Army, notably a gradual increase in the strength of some infantry battalions like those comprising 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. Following operations in the Schelde, Montgomery sought to attack German forces in Venlo (Province Limburg) on the border with Germany, but south of the Canadian sector. This provided the Canadian army an opportunity for the first break from fighting in about five months. The two infantry divisions were given a week-long rest period in Belgium before moving to Nijmegen (Province Gelderland).²⁸⁵ While fighting in Nijmegen sector, logistics and the supply of rations for the military proved increasingly difficult. 21 Army

²⁸² C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, Operations in North-West Europe* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), 426ff.

²⁸³ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 177.

²⁸⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, Operations in North-West Europe* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), See Appendix A, Table 2 "Casualties by Category and Year, 1939-1947."

²⁸⁵ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 177.

Group failed to provide sufficient calories for soldiers who were required to take on difficult operations in the area.²⁸⁶ In this respect, it is hardly surprising that the Allies continuously rejected channeling invaluable resources into Dutch reconstruction efforts in Zeeland. Given the exigencies of military operations in Nijmegen and into Germany itself, the Allies simply could not afford to divert resources and materiel from non-essential military objectives. The essential point here is that while Anglo-Canadian operations came to an end in Zeeland, and civilians had to come to terms with liberation's corollaries of destruction and recovery, operations to defeat Nazi Germany continued unabated for the next eight months, with a German counter-offensive beginning on 16 December 1944. Allied armies pushed further north and eventually into the Reichswald and Rhineland in the final stages of the war in Europe. These brief operational details are necessary to understand the difficulties to separate essential military objectives from what some military officials saw as the tangential civil affairs projects in the newly-liberated regions of northwest Europe.

A Costly Liberation

Almost immediately after towns in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen were liberated in early October 1944, burgemeesters issued proclamations ordering the collection of materiel required for the demanding reconstruction projects that lay ahead.²⁸⁷ One newspaper in Terneuzen told its readers that the commune promised to repair homes damaged by the war, but also reminded them that taking damaged material from other property without

²⁸⁶ Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945*, 183.

²⁸⁷ As Schoonoord reminds us, the eastern part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen had been liberated as early as 20 September 1944, but by 31 October 1944 all of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen had been cleared of German forces. See Schoonoord, 143.

the expressed approval of the Department of Public Works was strictly forbidden.²⁸⁸

Civilians who were victims of *plunderschade* (wartime plundering) were required to file their complaints with a special committee established for this purpose, the *Schade-enquête-commissie*, whose headquarters were in Terneuzen. Farmers in the commune, whose barns had been damaged by the fighting, were permitted temporarily to use surrounding polderland for a variety of purposes. Additionally, the commune recognized the need to construct emergency cattle barns.²⁸⁹

While the communes of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen were trying to coordinate reconstruction in the south, Anglo-Canadian operations in the central part of Zeeland reached their apogee. *De Zeeuw*, the Reformed newspaper in Goes, reminded its readers that civilians should restrict water usage, as Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland witnessed increasing war damage.²⁹⁰ It also prepared its flock for intense fighting in their region. One article enumerated tips to protect civilians if and when fighting were to occur close to their homes: “by exercising self-protection [*zelfbeschermingsmaatregelen*] the risk of hazards is significantly reduced.”²⁹¹ Aside from reminding civilians that “inside your house provides a greater chance of preserving your life than outside,” *De Zeeuw* also

²⁸⁸ *Het Gemeentebblad voor Terneuzen*, “Publicaties: Oorlogschade—Wederopbouw,” 10 October 1944, 1. “Aangezien in de gemeente Terneuzen zoo goed als geen bouwmaterialen aanwezig zijn voor het repareren van de beschadigde woningen zal het Gemeentebestuur materialen der totaal vernielde woningen hiervoor beschikbaar stellen. . . In verband met het bovenstaande is het voor een ieder (ook eigenaren van vernielde parcellen) ten strengste verboden materialen te gebruiken van vernielde percellen zonder toestemming van de Dienst van Gemeentewerken.”

²⁸⁹ *Het Gemeentebblad voor Terneuzen*, “Publicaties: Oorlogschade—Wederopbouw,” 10 October 1944, 1. “Landbouwers die hun landbouwschuren door oorlogsgeweld verloren, kunnen misschien gebruik maken van de in alle polders geplante boomen en planken. Zodoende bestaat de mogelijkheid een noodstal voor het vee op te richten.” See also report issued to all burgemeesters regarding debris cleanup and reconstruction, ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van de Wederopbouw,” November 1944, 1-3.

²⁹⁰ *De Zeeuw*, “Zuinig Met Water,” 10 October 1944, 1. “Zuinig met water. Naar het schijnt is nog niet ieder op Walcheren doordrongen van de groote noodzakelijkheid met het gebruik van leidingwater de uiterste zuinigheid te betrachten.”

²⁹¹ *De Zeeuw*, “Algemeene Zelfbeschermingswenken,” 10 October 1944, 1. “Door het toepassen van zelfbeschermingsmaatregelen wordt de gevarenkans aanzienlijk verminderd.”

emphasized that people should “remain calm. The consequences of thoughtless acts are enlarged.”²⁹²

Other newspapers continued to provide readers as much news about the progress of the war in the province as was possible. One underground newspaper, *Vrije Stemmen Uit De Ganzestad*, paid close attention to the Canadian advance towards Zeeland. “The Canadians [are] approaching Bergen op Zoom, the longer the closer. More and more reinforcements to be brought to the bridgehead at Hoofdplaat. Oostburg, Sluis and Schoondijk were bombed.”²⁹³

The progress of liberation in one province was not a uniform process. As the Canadians pushed from the Leopold Canal into Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, communes and villages in the central and northern parts of Zeeland awaited the arrival of Allied armies. As the mayor of Terneuzen began to think about reconstruction, other parts of the province either remained firmly in the hands of the Germans or were inundated by Allied bombardment. Some areas experienced both. Reconstruction followed the process of liberation and therefore took place at different times and often with different degrees of enthusiasm by civilians and authorities alike.

By 17 October 1944 16,010 of Walcheren’s 18,800 hectares of surface area were flooded with saltwater.²⁹⁴ At Westkapelle, the Allied bombardment destroyed the 600-meter wide gap near the dyke that protected the town from inundation, while bombing

²⁹² *De Zeeuw*, “Algemeene Zelfbeschermingswenken,” 10 October 1944, 1. “Binnenhuis bestaat grotere kans op levensbehoud dan daar buiten.”; “Bewaart uw koelbloedigheid. Door ondoordacht optreden worden de gevolgen van ongelukken steeds vergroot.”

²⁹³ *Vrije Stemmen uit de Ganzestad*, “Nederland,” 13 October 1944, 1. “De Canadeezen naderen Bergen op Zoom hoe langer hoe dichter. Steeds meer versterkingen worden gebracht naar het bruggehoofd bij Hoofdplaat. Oostburg, Sluis en Schoondijk werden gebombardeerd.”

²⁹⁴ NIMH, *Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog*, 575, inv. “Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945,” “Walcheren.”; See also NIMH, *Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog*, 575, inv. 151 “Kaart 4”

raids took out dykes east and west of the industrial town of Vlissingen. On the east side of the town, now Ritthem, an 850 meter gap led to complete inundation and, on the west side at the Nolledijk, a 350 meter wide opening completed the flooding of the area.²⁹⁵ Although Walcheren witnessed the most flooding because of Allied operations, other parts of the province suffered from flooding as a result of military operations. In Zuid-Beveland, for example, around 1,500 hectares were covered with saltwater beginning in October 1944, 738 hectares of which were considered uncontrolled.²⁹⁶ As early as February 1944, the Germans also flooded swathes of territory in northern Zeeland. In Sint Philipsland, for instance, the Germans released sluiceways to cover 1105 hectares of the island. The only areas that remained dry were polderland Oude van St. Philipsland and Henriette Polder, a surface area of 1619 hectares.²⁹⁷ The Germans almost entirely flooded the island of Tholen with saltwater on 22 February 1944, actions which covered some 10,800 hectares of the island.²⁹⁸ Schouwen-Duiveland, the northern most part of Zeeland, remained in German hands and was flooded by the Germans to control approaches to the River Maas. Beginning on 1 March 1944, the Germans released sluiceways to cover almost 15,800 hectares of the island's surface area. They remained underwater until September 1945.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. "Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945," Provincie Zeeland.

²⁹⁶ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. 152, "Zuid-Beveland"

²⁹⁷ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. 151. "Provincie Waterstaat in Zeeland: Sint Philipsland."

²⁹⁸ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. "Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945," Provincie Zeeland, b. Tholen.

²⁹⁹ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. "Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945," "a. Schouwen-Duiveland."

Given the scale and severity of war damage inflicted by both Allied and German forces, SHAEF authorized the implementation of a Civil Affairs branch, whose main objective in this region was to assess the various types of war-related damage. It was tasked to work alongside a Dutch administration authority known as the *Militair Gezag* (MG). Once the province was liberated in early November 1944, how would both institutions go about rebuilding a province that had been bombed, inundated, and, in many places razed? Who would have jurisdiction over what and under whose authority would reconstruction projects in Zeeland fall?

SHAEF Civil Affairs (CA) and Zeeland

In 1944, CA, or “military government,” was a relatively recent addition to SHAEF. By the time Zeeland was liberated, approximately one tenth of the CA personnel in 21 Army Group was Canadian, and “in order that some records of its achievements may be kept, an Historical Officer (Civil Affairs) [had] been added to the War Establishment of the Historical Section at Canadian Military Headquarters.”³⁰⁰ At its core, CA was to ensure civilian populations in liberated regions would not interfere with military operations. In the liberated countries of Belgium, France, and the Netherlands the administration was known as CA, as opposed to a similar organization that would be established in Germany in 1945 called “Military Government.” CA was predicated on an existing form of civil administration created by the British Army during the Palestine Campaign from 1914-1918 and later used in other places under British imperial

³⁰⁰ Report no. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 1.

occupation.³⁰¹ Early in the Second World War, the War Office in the UK appointed Brigadier S. Swinton Lee the Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer to train CA officers to fulfill positions as CA officers. Not until 1944, however, did CA become an integrated part of the army in theatres of operations, though CA officials did operate in Sicily in 1943. Officials in London envisaged that CA would remedy problems with civilian populations in the “highly industrialised areas in Europe over which fighting was expected to pass,” and not necessarily rural regions.³⁰² This was crucial, for most of Zeeland’s rural regions required a significant reconstruction program. From its inception, therefore, CA sought to recover industrial regions, likely in an effort to rehabilitate post-war Europe. While early on CA had been referred to as “AMGOT” (Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory), *Amgot* “was widely, if scurrilously, rumoured to be an Arabic word meaning ‘horse manure’.” This may have contributed to the decision to change its name.³⁰³

One of the important principles on which CA operated was that the Allied administration needed “to exercise administrative control and supervision, in such areas as may be directed by the competent authority, in order that the civil machinery may be set going as early as possible and in such a way as to benefit the allied war effort and to ensure the preservation of law and order.”³⁰⁴ This prioritizing of military issues over domestic ones caused some problems between CA and Dutch institutions. This is particularly true in Zeeland, as assessment and reconstruction took place at the same time

³⁰¹ Report no. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 2.

³⁰² Report no. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 3.

³⁰³ Report no. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 3.

³⁰⁴ Report no. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 4.

as the Allies were fighting the Germans elsewhere. Peter Schrijvers identified the same problems between the Belgian government and CA in Belgium.³⁰⁵

A lack of personnel was a persistent issue for the CA branch, just as it was for the wartime army. The CA staffs were supplemented by officers who worked in detachments of a minimum of two administrative officers and two “Public Safety” officers, in addition to other ranks (OR), which were sometimes augmented by certain specialist officers. Michelle Fowler’s work has explored CA efforts to preserve historical artifacts and archives in Germany in the midst of operations, demonstrating some of the areas in which CA specialized.³⁰⁶ Selected personnel from 21 Army Group were organized into groups containing 240 officers of which half were available to form basic attachments and the remainder were “functional specialists,” with expertise in financial, legal, labour, supply, or public health issues.³⁰⁷ In theory, CA worked in “friendly and close cooperation” with the governments and civilian population of the liberated countries. In order to begin their work, CA required legal agreements between acting governments, which were then signed by the appropriate authorities. The first CA officers from First Canadian Army were interviewed and selected in January 1943. Fourteen Canadian candidates attended the first course which began at the CA Staff Centre in Wimbledon in February 1943. Candidates were required by CA to have experience in at least one or more specialized areas, as well as a “sound knowledge” of one or more European language, though in

³⁰⁵ Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society*, 96.

³⁰⁶ Michelle Fowler, “A Biography of Major Ronald Edmond Balfour,” in *Canada and the Second World War: Essays in Honour of Terry Copp* edited by Geoffrey Hayes, Mike Bechthold, and Matt Symes (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 431-442.

³⁰⁷ CMHQ Historical Report No. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 4.

practice a “sound knowledge” often meant little to none—later recruits would study elementary French through the adventures of *Bill et Tommy en France*.³⁰⁸

The curriculum for the course covered a variety of fields, ranging from military issues to the study of local government and historical background of the countries in which the candidates would likely operate.³⁰⁹ Between February 1943 and November 1944, 250 Canadian Army candidates had attended CA courses, and 131 graduates of the three Canadian CA Staff Courses represent the main source from which Canadian CA officers had been drawn. An additional 23 Royal Canadian Air Force officers were trained for CA duty. Some of the earliest Canadian CA officers were sent to Italy, where trained CA officers were badly needed.³¹⁰ At that point in 1943, there had been no exclusively Canadian CA unit. On 31 December 1943, however, the Director of Civil Affairs at the War Office suggested that “Canada may wish to raise a purely Canadian unit or units for employment with the Canadian Army, in so far as that may prove practicable in the field” and “in view of the part to be played by the Canadian Army in the forthcoming operations.”³¹¹ By February 1944, Canada’s commitment amounted to 34 officers and 62 other ranks at First Canadian Army Headquarters, 9 officers and 16 other ranks at 2 Canadian Corps Headquarters, while an additional 244 officers and 366 other ranks were added to the pool of CA officers. At the same time, 30 officers were

³⁰⁸ CMHQ Historical Report No. 148, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part II: Planning and Training, 31 Jan 44—30 Jul 44,” 5.

³⁰⁹ CMHQ Historical Report No. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 6.

³¹⁰ CMHQ Historical Report No. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 6.

³¹¹ CMHQ Historical Report No. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 6.

already operating in the Mediterranean theatre.³¹² As the war put pressure on personnel selection, CA went to greater lengths to develop officers and staff.

The circumstances facing CA operations in the Netherlands were unique in many ways, not least because the sheer scale and scope of reconstruction needed in Zeeland. Other differences lay in the type of regime the Nazis set up in the occupied Netherlands in 1940 and the lack of historical reference point the Dutch government had regarding war and occupation. The standard agreement regarding CA operations between the Allies and the Dutch government in exile was signed in May 1944. Unlike in Belgium where the local administration planned to work directly with SHAEF until the Allied authorities would pass sole jurisdiction to the Belgian government, the Dutch created an additional organization called the *Militair Gezag* (MG), or the Netherlands Military Authority. The precise details of the arrangement were sent to every burgemeester and representative of the Queen at the provincial level.³¹³ Initially, the Dutch government placed the MG at the disposal of the Allies, and later the MG effectively became a transitional government until the exiled government was repatriated.³¹⁴

The reasons for this decision to create another level of Dutch authority are subject to debate. Unlike the Belgian and French governments, the Dutch government had no experience or memory of political dislocation in their country. According to one observer, the pre-war Dutch administration was virtually destroyed by four years of Nazi occupation and it was “unable to function satisfactorily without the aid and control of the

³¹² CMHQ Historical Report No. 140, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government. Part I: Background and Beginnings,” 6.

³¹³ 280 Militair Gezag in Zeeland, inv. Wederopbouw bestuursapparaat I E, “Legal Agreement,” 18 August 1945.

³¹⁴ F.S.V. Donnison, *Civil Affairs and Military Government: North-West Europe 1944-1946* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1961), 129.

Netherlands Military Administration [MG].”³¹⁵ In the 1960s, F.S.V. Donnison has claimed that a military-type of administration was imperative in the Netherlands because “there had been and perhaps still was a not inconsiderable proportion of Nazi sympathizers in the population at large.” There was also a strong communist element within the various resistance organizations throughout the Netherlands, though not necessarily in Zeeland, and the government believed the MG could deal with these types of political threats.³¹⁶ While Donnison might have been correct for local and provincial governments in the northern provinces, NSB influence appears to have been weak in Zeeland. It is more likely that the lack of historical reference to such devastation, coupled with a political culture that favours bureaucratic influence at the most local levels, led the Dutch government to establish the MG. On the other hand, it is unclear whether this Dutch decision facilitated or hindered recovery efforts, for, as Schrijvers has shown for CA in Belgium, the “prewar local [Belgian] authorities...were out of the loop or in disarray.”³¹⁷

From its inception, therefore, there were a number of reasons why the Allies had very different experiences in the Netherlands than in other places. Before exploring the types of recovery projects CA and MG units orchestrated and completed, the MG as an institution of reconstruction requires some discussion.

Militair Gezag (MG) and Zeeland

The most pressing issue facing the people of Zeeland was inundation and therefore the loss of livestock, homes, and sources of income. The MG was given

³¹⁵ Donnison, *Civil Affairs and Military Government*, 129.

³¹⁶ Donnison, *Civil Affairs and Military Government*, 130.

³¹⁷ Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945*, 95.

sweeping powers to remedy the problems of reconstruction under the command of General-Major H.J. Kruls. The MG oversaw the functioning of public services, provided shelter for the influx of evacuees and displaced persons, sought out Nazi sympathizers and “collaborating” politicians, and worked to reconstitute the economy.³¹⁸ Particularly problematic in the southern Netherlands was to get coal supplies moving along damaged waterways and rail links. Without coal there could be very limited transportation, industry, electricity, and gas.³¹⁹ The MG oversaw other issues as well, such as the reconnection of telephone and telegraph lines and the reorientation of newspapers and other press organizations that were banned or strongly influenced during occupation. Additionally, repatriating the 380,000 Dutch civilians who were in Germany for work projects would pose an immense logistical challenge after 1945.³²⁰ This, however, as we have discussed in Chapter II was not as pressing in Zeeland.

The origins of the MG lay in political discussions of 1942 and 1943 when the government decided that a military authority would be established under the purview of Pieter S. Gerbrandy, then Minister of War. On 28 January 1943 the government formally

³¹⁸ I wish to extend my gratitude to Dr. D.C.L. Schoonoord for sharing with me his unpublished and magisterial work on the MG in the Netherlands. See D.C.L. Schoonoord, *Het ‘Circus Kruls’: Militair Gezag in Nederland, 1944-1946* (Unpublished, 2011), 10. The purpose of his study, which is instrumental to understanding the Dutch context of reconstruction in all of the Netherlands, is to write a more general description of the MG and what life was like under its jurisdiction until 15 July 1945, when the MG’s authority finally came to an end. Schoonoord writes “Het doel van deze studie is te trachten tot een meer algemene beschrijving te komen van militair gezag en wat dat voor Nederland heeft betekend. De Nederlandse soevereiniteit mocht dan niet zijn aangetast, het was de geallieerde bevelhebber die tot 15 juli 1945 via zijn Civil Affairs-organisatie het militaire bestuur uitoefende. Zijn bevoegdheden waren gebaseerd op militaire noodzaak en niet op Nederlandse wetgeving. Pas als de militaire situatie zich in gunstige zin ontwikkelde, kon de bevelhebber bepalen dat de regering het gezag weer kon overnemen. Die situatie werd pas twee maanden na het einde van de oorlog bereikt. Het MG was in dat opzicht evenzeer een instrument van het geallieerde Civil Affairs als een instrument in handen van de Nederlandse regering. De wisselwerking tussen Civil Affairs en het MG vormt een belangrijk aandachtspunt.”

³¹⁹ Schoonoord, *Het ‘Circus Kruls’*, 10.

³²⁰ Schoonoord, *Het ‘Circus Kruls’*, 12.

established the *Bureau Militair Gezag*, promoting Major Kruls to Colonel.³²¹ Just like its counterpart CA, the MG also consisted of constituent functioning bodies with specialists that dealt with policing, water and rail transport, judicial, economic and financial affairs, as well as public health, employment and public works.³²² From its inception some of the portfolios of the MG complimented and sometimes overlapped with those of CA.

Zeeland's experience provided both organizations with the first opportunity to work in the Netherlands. On 23 September 1944 the headquarters for the MC of Zeeland was established in Axel in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Following the liberation of Walcheren in November 1944, however, the PMC headquarters were moved to Middelburg where it would remain until the MG was decommissioned in March 1946. As the Allies continued to liberate provinces of the Netherlands, the MG established separate districts under the command of a *Provinciaal Militaire Commissariaat* (PMC). Zeeland was under the leadership of *kapitein-luitenant ter zee* C.W. Slot. The PMCs were further divided into *Districts Militaire Commissariaten* (DMC). In Zeeland, the PMC divided the province into three subsequent districts: Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen; Zuid- en Noord-Beveland, Tholen and Sint Philipsland; and Schouwen-Duiveland, the latter of which would be liberated along with the rest of the country in May 1945. Walcheren received particular attention and the island's reconstruction fell within the purview of the PMC itself and not as a separate DMC. In addition to C.W. Slot's role as PMC, Major Dr. M. Bokhorst also held a key position in which he acted as military commissioner attached to the 2nd Corps of First Canadian Army. Bokhorst worked directly under Slot until 5 February 1945 and was instrumental in orchestrating the evacuation of civilians from Walcheren. Following his

³²¹ Schoonoord, *Het 'Circus Kruls'*, 54.

³²² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag in Zeeland, inventaris.

work in Zeeland, Bokhorst would be transferred to perform similar functions for the MG in Noord-Holland.³²³

The MG and the Ordedienst (OD)

With the provincial structure of the MG in place, the Dutch government had other issues to flesh out, not least of which was how the MG would treat resistance organizations in general and the OD particularly, since the latter was the dominant resistance network in the country. Chapter two demonstrated that the OD was among the few organizations consistently active in Zeeland during occupation and there was some debate at the political level about the way in which the MG should use the organization's assets. D.C.L. Schoonoord has argued that, at the national level, "the end of 1942, even before the creation of the MG, the government already intended to use the services of the OD."³²⁴ In Zeeland, Piet de Kam, a reservist from Grijpskerke on Walcheren, became a member of the OD in 1941 and performed a number of important operations in the province during the Allied assault. In this capacity, de Kam and his co-resistors worked alongside the Canadian army in Zuid-Beveland in October and November 1944. In the initial days of liberation, de Kam's primary role was to maintain public order, especially on 30 October when civilians in and around Goes came to the town, not necessarily to see the Canadians, but "to ask for permission to leave Goes," which had been forbidden by the Canadian army and strictly enforced.³²⁵ During this transitional period, de Kam noted

³²³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag in Zeeland, inventaris "Geschiedenis van het archiefvormend orgaan."

³²⁴ Schoonoord, *Het 'Circus Kruls'*, 101-102.

³²⁵ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," 1. "Een groot gedeelte van de bezoekers op 30 Oct. kwam vragen om een toestemming Goes te mogen verlaten (het verlaten van Goes was door de Canadezen verboden)"

that the role of the OD was to maintain contact with the Canadians and remain with them as part of the military authority.³²⁶ According to one of de Kam's reports, the total number of members in the OD was around 1,200, although this figure is probably too inflated to be a provincial one.³²⁷ Among other functions de Kam and the OD performed during this crucial period was to requisition pistols and other firearms, which were to be handed over to Canadian authorities, as well as to survey war damages in Zuid-Beveland.³²⁸ De Kam was also part of preliminary attempts to account for casualties in 30 different towns in Zuid-Beveland (See Appendix IV).

Some newspapers detailed the destruction war brought to the region.³²⁹ In Rilland, liberation resulted in 15 civilian deaths and 24 others wounded, while in Hoedekenskerke 26 were killed and another 2 wounded. In Kapelle-Biezelinge, an additional 16 civilians were killed in the fighting.³³⁰ In short, the OD operations of which de Kam was a part were tasks that would later fall within the jurisdiction of the MG. Although initiated by the OD, the MG would build on the preliminary attempt to account for civilian casualties and maintain public order. In other words, the relationship between the MG and the OD added an additional layer of jurisdictional complexity to the immediate post-war reconstruction process. Inchoate efforts to recover the province were therefore begun by an illegal wartime organization in the wake of liberation. In this political vacuum, the

³²⁶ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," 1.

³²⁷ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," 2. "E. Leden: Het aantal leden der O.D. (+ 1200) bleek na eenige dagen te gering te zijn om een voldoende aantal wachten uit te zetten (aanvankelijk werden de uitgangen uit de gemeente's [*sic*] afgezet door dubbelposten om het verlaten van het dorp controleren.)"

³²⁸ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," Bijlage C—Staat van Oorlogschade.

³²⁹ *Vrije Stemmen uit de Ganzestad*, "Oorlogsverwoestingen op Zuid-Beveland," 14 November 1944, 1.

³³⁰ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," Bijlage D—Slachtoffers.

Dutch government made use of the OD before the MG could take over. As the type of work the OD completed bore increasing resemblance to the mandate of the MG, Kruls demanded that the OD understood that it was a subordinate organization. The OD would in short order be displaced by the MG.³³¹

Conclusion

The circumstances of Zeeland's liberation and the fact that operations against German armed forces elsewhere in the country continued meant that CA units were necessarily a matter of secondary importance. The decision by the Dutch government to establish a separate military authority during the very chaotic and transitional months from occupation to liberation presented the Allies with a completely different set of challenges than CA missions to France and Belgium. The expertise of MG units sometimes overlapped with those of CA, complicating jurisdictional matters and adding to an already complex institutional framework. CA training went according to established protocol, but the destructive nature and breadth of liberation in Zeeland represented a departure from other CA operations in which the Allies were involved. While villages in Sicily were destroyed, Zeeland was different. The extent of flooding, the first major obstacles over which CA and MG units were required to hurdle, differed drastically from operations in Belgium or France. While there had been flooding in France and Belgium, Zeeland's flooding covered entire islands that were swallowed by the sea, making reclamation and reconstruction particularly challenging. The issue of topography and environmental consequences of battle further complicated the situation facing both sets of authorities. Zeeland's composition as a series of islands, some of which were completely

³³¹ Schoonoord, *Het 'Circus Kruls'*, 103.

flooded, meant that any reconstruction team or objective needed to consider the natural challenges posed by the environment, as well as issues of the winter weather in 1944 and 1945. The challenges of the natural world, therefore, perhaps more than anything else, influenced the course of reconstruction and recovery in the province. While Dutch authorities had some degree of experience with flooding and the reclamation of land, the major issues occluding reconstruction efforts in the region were fundamentally foreign to CA units. No amount of training at Wimbledon and elsewhere could prepare CA units for the challenges to recovery in Zeeland. In short, the liberation of Zeeland in 1944 required civilians and Dutch authorities to take the lead in the reconstruction efforts of their province.

CHAPTER V

Immediate Recovery: Evacuation, Accommodation, and Reluctance, 1944-1945

This chapter details the ways in which both Allied and Dutch authorities began to assess and rebuild vital sectors of the province. Requisite to any type of reconstruction effort, however, was a series of evacuations aimed to remove civilians from severely inundated villages and hamlets on Walcheren and Tholen, and allot accommodation to families elsewhere in the province, mainly in Zuid-Beveland.

The documentation used in this chapter primarily comes from the archive of the MG found in Zeeland's provincial archive in Middelburg. Dealing with these sources requires an important caveat. Dutch contemporaries, and especially the Allies, gave considerable attention to the recovery of Walcheren and the themes explored here reflect a greater contemporary concern with the recovery of that island. One report stated simply "it should be noted that connections with Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen and with Tholen are not yet regulated, so what follows is generally not valid for these areas."³³² This can be explained for a number of reasons, not least because the Allies bombed much of Walcheren, the industrial and administrative heart of the province. In this respect, reconstruction efforts cannot be examined systematically according to constituent parts of the province, but rather thematically across time and space. For that reason, this chapter adopts a thematic approach.

Nonetheless, this chapter begins with plans for the evacuation of thousands of families from Walcheren and, to a lesser extent, Tholen and Schouwen-Duiveland. It

³³² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 "14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland," 29 November 1944, 1. "Allereerst moet worden opgemerkt dat de verbindingen met Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen en met Tholen nog niet regaalmatig zijn, zoodat wat hieronder volgt in het algemeen niet geldig is voor deze gebieden."

demonstrates the central place of the environment in preliminary reconstruction efforts, and the challenge of reconciling local cultural and economic norms with Allied and Dutch recovery projects. This chapter argues that out of any event in Zeeland's history from 1900 to 1945, Allied liberation was in fact the most destructive and devastating. It was not a period during which civilians celebrated or experienced euphoria.

“On October 17th the sea-dykes were breached in four places by R.A.F., and as the vast majority of the island (over 90%) is below high water level 85% of the island was flooded,” wrote CA officer H.P. Rickard in February 1945. “As the flood waters rose,” Rickard continued, “the rural population retired to the higher levels in the villages, to the easterly section of the island which, being protected by inland dykes forming polders, was not flooded, and to the city of Middelburg.”³³³ By November 1944, a total of 52,548 hectares³³⁴ of Zeeland's land had been flooded with salt water.³³⁵ Given the extent of flooding in the province, the most fundamental part of the immediate liberation and reconstruction era was the evacuation of Zeeuwen from parts of the province that were completely or partially inundated. Once these operations were completed other types of recovery projects could be initiated. Together, Allied CA and the Dutch MG worked to construct an evacuation scheme in late 1944. Reflecting on one of his first trips he took to

³³³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on the Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren” 7 February 1945, 1.

³³⁴ 1 hectare is equal to 2.47 acres.

³³⁵ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (NIMH), Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. “Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945,” 2.

Walcheren, Rickard wrote in February 1945 of the devastation wrought by war and what appeared to be an impossible task of reconstruction:

“The flood waters rendered 1/3 of MIDDELBURG and 1/2 of FLUSHING and 1/3 of OOST-SOUBERG (including their environs) uninhabitable...The semi-inundated villages of the island also were crowded with refugees, even the upper stories of houses whose ground floors were covered with two feet of water being used to the extent that whole families of up to twelve people were living in one room...Public utilities with one exception were not functioning: there was no rain water (rain water only from house cisterns was available), practically all wells were salted: there was no electric light or power; there were however limited supplies of gas in certain urban areas up to 1 hr. per diem at low pressure; there were no telephone facilities; the railroad was out of commission; the FLUSHING-MIDDELBURG-VEERE canal was tidal, due to the destruction of all locks and badly blocked, whilst the only road into Walcheren island was so damaged as to be available only for essential military traffic. The weather was unfavourable, autumn gales anticipated and an extreme shortage, often amounting to entire lack of fuel and warm clothing, still further complicated an already unpromising situation.”³³⁶

For these reasons, CA and MG officials seriously considered the evacuation of the entire island, but mainly to prevent anticipated epidemics and “other disasters,” which had already been noted by doctors in Middelburg.³³⁷ Authorities also expressed concern for

³³⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945.

³³⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Letter from Inspector for Public Health, Dr. L.J.H. Brongers to Militair Gezag voor Zeeland,” 16 November 1944.

the lack of fresh water since some towns relied on rainwater.³³⁸ But there were also strategic considerations at play: the Allies were still fighting German forces just north of the liberated areas of Zeeland. In light of the situation facing Walcheren's civilians, CA and MG officials agreed upon an evacuation scheme, a task given to 609 (P) Detachment CA to implement.

From 10 to 30 November 1944 there were several important changes in the military command that exacerbated the complexity of evacuation operations, one of which was the passing of military authority from 2 Canadian Corps to 1 British Corps on 10 November 1944.³³⁹ But there were other serious problems as well. One was the cultural dissonance between Anglo-Canadian CA units and the Zeeuwen who the Allies sought to aid. On this issue, Rickard wrote "by religion they are Protestant with a devout faith in God, which even extends to a firm conviction that any effort to avoid the consequences of the divine punishment of the floods would constitute mortal sin...Religious scruples against inoculation were difficult to overcome although diphtheria threatened, whilst with one exception it was impossible to move refugees from their communes on SUNDAY."³⁴⁰ To combat this issue, the MG and CA established a separate office for spiritual affairs (*Geestelijke Verzorging*), headed by a Reformed preacher from Middelburg named Dr. N.J. Hommes.³⁴¹

³³⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4288, "Evacuation of Walcheren Island: Record of agreement between commander SLOT, Military Commissioner for the province of ZEELAND and Colonel L. Gueney, SCAO, L of C 21 Army Group on 28 December 1944," 1.

³³⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, "Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren," 7 February 1945, 3.

³⁴⁰ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, "Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren," 7 February 1945, 3.

³⁴¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, "Rapport over de geestelijke verzorging der geëvacueerden in Zuid-Beveland" 10 February 1945, 1.

Another problem was an economic one. Many people in Zeeland became actively engaged in the black market during occupation in the same way that the black market flourished during the First World War. Some Zeeuwen accumulated stockpiles of food, butter, eggs, cheeses, salt, and meats, which they had sold to both Germans and neighbours at a profit. By the time of the floods in October 1944, the prices for goods on the black market inflated exponentially, which often resulted in a reticence to leave their homes during evacuation operations. The evacuation of some villages was made more challenging by the fact that civilians refused to leave their cattle and livestock. In Biggekerke, for example, DMC Bokhorst noted that still more villagers should be evacuated with their cattle to facilitate the process.³⁴² “These people, therefore,” Rickard opined, “were unwilling to be evacuated as they had plenty of food, representing a high money value, strong religious objections, and a lack of experience of the world outside their own commune which almost amounted to a fear of the unknown: furthermore, they were extremely well-to-do and the high rate of evacuation pay made little difference.”³⁴³

Despite these challenges noted as late as February 1945, operations to evacuate large numbers of Zeeuwen from Walcheren, Zuid-Beveland, and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen continued from November 1944 onward. Officials began by forming a Dutch Evacuation Committee on 16 November 1944 in Middelburg, which adopted the Technical School as an evacuation centre on 20 November. The PMC appointed an evacuation commissioner who assessed the availability of billeting and accommodation in Zuid-Beveland. The first civilians to be evacuated from Walcheren to Zuid-Beveland were 100 people already

³⁴² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. Evacuatie Walcheren I F 18, “Vergadering Burgemeesters Walcheren,” 21 December 1944, 1.

³⁴³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 4.

living in the Technical School in Middelburg, space that was needed as a transit nexus for further evacuation. On 19 November, a small party consisting of just two Allied soldiers in a FBE (Folding Boat Equipment)³⁴⁴ with an outboard motor sailed for Ritthem, just east of Vlissingen, which was completely inundated and badly damaged. There they arranged to have civilians assemble and prepare for evacuation on 30 November. Five small boats were sent to pick up civilians, but the process was long and problematic due to the outboard motors getting caught in submerged barbed wire and other obstructions, including minefields. The party arrived in Ritthem at 11:30 am, but did not reach Oost-Souberg until 8:00pm, a distance of only three kilometers. Eventually, the evacuees arrived at their destination in Middelburg at 1:00 am on 21 November, and only after one of the vessel's motors became unserviceable from water-borne obstacles.³⁴⁵ The following day, another trip to Ritthem resulted in the evacuation of additional civilians for a total of 74 villagers from the village. A few days later, however, CA and MG officials learned that 57 people from the village had avoided evacuation and had since returned to their homes, which were almost entirely flooded out.³⁴⁶

The experience in Ritthem forced officials to take a hard look at their policy. On 24 November 1944, Lt.-Col. Lloyd moved to Middelburg bringing with him 509 Field Company, which was under the command of Major W.C. Wilkinson. CA thus drew up a more detailed and systematic evacuation scheme that separated Walcheren into sectors and tasked certain units with evacuating people from each sector. The “Northern

³⁴⁴ Adopted by the British army in 1928, this small vessel could carry up to 16 individuals and used a 7.5 horsepower outboard motor. The boat typically contained a range deck or small fold away bridges. See for example, “Folding Boat Equipment,” www.thinkdefence.co.uk, accessed 12 October 2013.

³⁴⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 6.

³⁴⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 6.

Section,” for example, comprised the northern region of the island bound by the coastline running south to Domburg, Oostkapelle, and Vrouwenpolder. 509 Field Company was to clear the beach of mines northwest of Veere, which made the road from the beaches at Vrouwenpolder, Oostkapelle, and Domburg useable for DUKWs. DUKWs were mass produced six-wheeled amphibious trucks designed move on land and water. CA would accompany 509 Company to evacuate the estimated 2,000 civilians from the sector using four DUKWs provided by the military.³⁴⁷ The Allies considered the evacuation of this sector to be more easily executable, as opposed to the “Central Section,” which officials labeled all villages on Walcheren accessible only by boat. These villages, such as Grijpskerke, Serooskerke, Meliskerke, Biggekerke, Zoutelande, and Koudekerke, were covered by water of varying depths, some of which reached 20 feet, and therefore also obscured submerged obstacles like anti-glider poles, trees, fences, barbed wire entanglements, and minefields.³⁴⁸ In two days, 139 people from Koudekerke and 160 from Serooskerke were evacuated in early January 1945.³⁴⁹ Based on these factors, CA and MG estimated the type of materiel the evacuation of each subsequent sector would require:

Evacuation Sector on Walcheren ³⁵⁰	Equipment Required
Northern Section: trips by land and sea. Estimated number: 3,000 +	Enough DUKWs to maintain a serviceable fleet of 20.
Central Section: trips require safe passage over varying depths of flood waters, wholly submerged obstacles.	10 RE Motortugs shallow draft as used for towing pontoons; 20 Ships Life Boats. Service personnel to operate.

³⁴⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 7.

³⁴⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 8.

³⁴⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4287, “Medische Richtlijnen voor de Evacuatie,” n.d.

³⁵⁰ Adapted from chart provided in ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 10.

Estimated number: 3,000 +	
Urban Section: partial evacuation presents no problems, route connected by dry roads with the mainland. Estimated number: 1,000 +	A VHK team and equipment to be sent to Middelburg to operate evacuation centre under C.A.O. Personnel: 1 complete unit VHK; 5 qualified nurses; 1 dispatch rider. Equipment: 1 3-ton lorry; 2 15-owt trucks; 1 ambulance; 1 canteen; 1 motor trailer; 1 pick up; 1 motor cycle

As this table suggests, the CA officials were the only ones who could lead the evacuation given resource and materiel constraints.

The evacuation process hinged on the effective cooperation of the burgemeesters in each commune. The PMC and DMC instructed burgemeesters to prepare lists of civilians who were to be evacuated from their communes. These numbers were then passed on to the evacuation commissioner in Zuid-Beveland who would in turn provide accommodation according to family size and necessity. Importantly, “the evacuation responsibility of CA was to cease when the refugees were delivered to their destination.”³⁵¹ Allied authorities were to relinquish responsibility once civilians reached their billet homes. The handling of refugees in this province ran smoother during the Great War than it did in 1944. In practice, this smooth system as outlined in the scheme rarely functioned as such. Burgemeesters often changed lists of evacuees, committees were often not sent or were incompetent, and the allotment of billeting areas was often made without an exact assessment of capacity. For example, “this arrangement worked

³⁵¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 11.

very well except in Domburg where the incompetence of the burg master [*sic*] caused constant headache.”³⁵²

Evacuations were especially difficult in the villages of central Walcheren, partly because some of the cultural and economic issues mentioned above and partly because miscommunication between Dutch and Allied authorities. En route to evacuations, many civilians refused to venture further and resistance to evacuation stiffened, resulting in many “divers” who would simply return to their homes. In other cases, baggage restrictions imposed upon rural evacuees were met with opposition. CA ordered that while families from the flooded parts of Middelburg could take with them 200 kilos per family, villagers from more remote areas were only permitted hand baggage.³⁵³ Civilians often “smuggled” bags of coal, flour, onions, and small containers of pickled pork in bedding or linen. Tags indicating family names on baggage often became soaked during evacuation and personal belongings were often lost en route.³⁵⁴ Some 500 pieces of luggage were lost during the evacuation process. They were often sent from one commune to the wrong billeting accommodation in Zuid-Beveland, causing more discontent among the evacuees, who lost bicycles, hand towels, linens, and household soap.³⁵⁵ Locating and retrieving these belongings was given to a separate detachment, 629 CA Detachment through orders of the MG.³⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, in his MG reports, Bokhorst stated that burgemeesters from Zoutelande, Koudekerke, and particularly

³⁵² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 12.

³⁵³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4288, Evacuatie Walcheren I F 18, “Report of the Evacuation Conference on Nov. 16th 1944,” 2.

³⁵⁴ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 13.

³⁵⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4288, Evacuatie Walcheren I F 19 “vermist bagage: J. Aarnoutse.”

³⁵⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 15.

Biggekerke bemoaned that “the mood among the population is not particularly optimistic.”³⁵⁷ These were complex and difficult operations for which the training of CA official did not prepare them.

By 10 January 1945, the partial evacuation of Walcheren was completed by 609 CA detachment commanded by Rickard. From 20 November 1944 to 10 January 1945, CA claimed to have evacuated 6,603 civilians from Walcheren at a daily average of about 140 people per working days (excluding Sundays and during poor weather).³⁵⁸ As a concluding note on Walcheren’s evacuation operations in February 1945, Rickard stated that “it was learned by experience that local Dutch Committees and municipal officials could not be relied upon, that over 4 years under German occupation had robbed them of all initiative and ‘drive’, and had left instead a stolid mental attitude varying from passive resistance to bleak indifference.”³⁵⁹ Whether it was occupation that robbed the people of their ‘drive’ or the fact that many lives had been completely uprooted because of liberation is debatable. What is most remarkable about the evacuation operations is that while many families in remote villages displayed an initial reticence or outright resistance to leave, CA and MG authorities nonetheless managed to evacuate them. The available evidence permits only speculation, but the eventual success of the operation begs questions as to whether by February 1945 civilians were running out of food in their inundated homes, or whether some more confessional civilians came to terms with their divine punishment. As late as April 1945, the medical advisor to the MG, Dr. C.F.

³⁵⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4288, Evacuatie Walcheren I F 18, “Vergadering Burgemeesters Walcheren,” 21 December 1944, 1. “Zoals de bgm. verklaarde is de stemming onder de bevolking niet bijzonder optimistisch.”

³⁵⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 16; cf. ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, Evacuation figures in 10 villages on Walcheren, n.d.

³⁵⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286, “Report on Evacuation Scheme, Island of Walcheren,” 7 February 1945, 17.

Frumau, argued that evacuation procedures should have continued in places like Domburg, as well as Serooskerke and Grijskerke, where Dutch resistance had been most stiff, to prevent the continued spread of disease.³⁶⁰ Perhaps medical reasons contributed to the eventual evacuation of some villages. An additional contributing factor was certainly the winter weather. At any rate, according to CA officials, the original reasons for resistance to evacuation, noted early on, seemed to have lost significance in reports by winter 1945.

While evacuations were most pressing in Walcheren following the battle, other parts of the province also required immediate assistance as a result of inundation. Beginning on 22 February 1944, the Germans flooded out about 10,800 hectares of Tholen's surface area.³⁶¹ In Schouwen-Duiveland, beginning on 1 March 1944, the Germans released sluiceways to cover almost 15,800 hectares of the island's surface area and it remained underwater until September 1945.³⁶² The difference, however, was that large evacuation operations could begin in Tholen since the Allies had liberated that part of the province, while Schouwen-Duiveland remained occupied by the Germans until May 1945. There were, however, civilians from Schouwen-Duiveland who were evacuated or managed to leave their homes. This meant that evacuation operations were conducted quite close to the German defenders, who had readjusted their lines to the area around the mouth of the River Maas. Nonetheless, in January 1945, when operations to evacuate Walcheren had been completed, MG and CA officials worked to find

³⁶⁰ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4299 VIII E "Halfmaandelijksch rapport, Dr. C.F. Fruman, Mil. Gezag Med. Adviseur," April 1945.

³⁶¹ NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. "Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945," Provincie Zeeland, b. Tholen.

³⁶² NIMH, Duitse verdedigingswerken en inundaties van Nederlands grondgebied in de oorlog, 575, inv. "Staat van de Inundaties in Nederland: tengevolge van oorlogshandelingen in de jaren 1944-1945," "a. Schouwen-Duiveland."

accommodation for the people of towns like Scherpenisse on Tholen, a town which was badly damaged. There were about 60 civilians from Scherpenisse who had been evacuated and sent to towns in Zuid-Beveland like Yerseke and Krabbendijke and in Noord-Beveland near Kortgene.³⁶³ The town of 's Gravenpolder in Zuid-Beveland, for example, took in many displaced persons from Walcheren, Tholen, and Schouwen-Duiveland. By the time of the liberation of Zuid-Beveland, 's Gravenpolder had around 1,300 inhabitants. By January 1945, the town billeted about 150 military personnel, 91 civilians from Schouwen-Duiveland, 147 from Walcheren, and 11 from Tholen for a total of 249 evacuees, all of whom were allotted accommodation in one of 's Gravenpolder's 300 homes. Out of those 300 homes, 33 houses were completely destroyed in the fighting, while an additional 45 were damaged.³⁶⁴ This situation was played out in other towns in Zuid-Beveland, often straining the already limited resources such as water and electricity. Such was the case in Krabbendijke where, in addition to its 2,600 inhabitants, the towns housed an additional 1,225 civilians from other parts of Zeeland, while access to resources like electricity was sometimes erratic.³⁶⁵ Towns in Zuid-Beveland that took in displaced civilians played an essential role throughout this period, putting pressure on families and parts of the province that emerged from fighting relatively unscathed.

Throughout the winter of 1945, inspectors from various institutions made "house visits" to check up on the needs of evacuees in various communes. In some cases, up to 9 individuals lived in a single house. One inspector noted that in the Commune of Nisse the

³⁶³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4286. "Lijst (aanvullend de lijst van 19 Jan 1945) van evacuees, wier terugkeer noodzakelijk is," 1-3.

³⁶⁴ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4287, "Rapport betreffende de toestand der geëvacueerden in de Gemeente 's GRAVENPOLDER," 1.

³⁶⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4287, "Rapport over de Gemeente Krabbendijke," 5-11 February 1945, 1.

Breure family, evacuated from Tholen, “live, sleep, and cook, all in one room of 5 meter [squared]. 2 children sleep on the ground.”³⁶⁶ Overcrowding made possible the spread of communicative diseases, which in Krabbendijke led to 50 cases of scabies and 20 cases of diphtheria.³⁶⁷ These types of conditions, noted by inspectors and a variety of other authorities, are peppered throughout contemporary reports on situations facing communes across the province from liberation to mid-1945.³⁶⁸

Closing the Dykes on Walcheren

The most fundamental obstacle to reconstruction was inundation. Following the evacuation of Walcheren, repairing the dykes was the most important task for CA and MG units. Only once this was accomplished could other issues be addressed. However, in the early stages of planning the repair of Walcheren’s dykes, the procurement of necessary materials and transport posed a number of challenges. In November 1944, SHAEF agreed that “the question of the rehabilitation and restoration of WALCHEREN ISLAND was of the utmost importance, urgency and magnitude, and could NOT be laid at the door of 21 A Gp alone.”³⁶⁹ Occupied by ongoing military operations outside of Zeeland, Allied authorities believed “the problem was beyond the scope of the available machinery and equipment at the disposal of the military authorities in the area” and that the MG should draw up their own plan for the restoration of the island in consultation with Dutch engineers in the region. SHAEF, “whilst fully appreciating the gravity of the

³⁶⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4287, “Huisbezoeken lijst, Gem. Nisse,” 26 January 1945, 2.

³⁶⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4287, “Rapport over de Gemeente Krabbendijke,” 5-11 February 1945, 2.

³⁶⁸ See for example, ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4299 VIII C “Report submitted to PMC Zeeland by Major A.S. O’Hara, Public Health Officer of C.A. 609 Detachment,” 22 February 1945.

³⁶⁹ NIMH, *SHAEF/British Military Mission*, 486, inv. 12. “WALCHEREN ISLAND Dike Repairs” 14 March 1945, 1.

situation, regrets that the material and equipment required for the task cannot be found from military resources.”³⁷⁰ Instead, the Allies argued that the MG and the Dutch government “should take up the problem of the restoration of WALCHEREN ISLAND with the BRITISH and U.S. Governments, through normal governmental channels.”³⁷¹

Some authorities were unsure how best to proceed with reconstruction efforts, particularly the Dutch requests for material. R.L. Speaight of Foreign Office in London, for example, wrote that “SHAEF have refused to undertake the requirement as a military responsibility. It is true that the grounds for refusal quoted by the Dutch (that the material is not available with SHAEF) are bad; but it is still possible that the real grounds are good. Military responsibility in the matter is limited to ‘such repairs or maintenance as are necessary in the opinion of the Theater Commander to reduce the immediate military burden or to prevent disease and unrest prejudicial to the military operation’...SHAEF may well have decided that the large scale works contemplated by the Dutch do not come within this definition.”³⁷² Clearly, in the minds of some politicians in London, evacuation and reconstruction were mutually exclusive. Since SHAEF was a military authority and not a political one, its officials argued that reconstruction remains a political responsibility and not necessarily within the purview of the military.

In cooperation with the MG, the restoration of Walcheren was given to chief engineer, P. Jansen, who propounded a feasible program that included the types of resources and materiel required to close Walcheren’s broken dykes and reclaim the land. While Jansen managed to acquire some of the necessary resources, some of which were

³⁷⁰ NIMH, *SHAEF/British Military Mission*, 486, inv. 12. “Letter to Netherlands Minister of War O.C.A. van Lidth de Jeude from Maj.-Gen. J.K. Edwards, SHAEF Mission (Netherlands),” 18 December 1944, 1.

³⁷¹ NIMH, *SHAEF/British Military Mission*, 486, inv. 12. “Letter to Netherlands Minister of War O.C.A. van Lidth de Jeude from Maj.-Gen. J.K. Edwards, SHAEF Mission (Netherlands),” 18 December 1944, 1.

³⁷² NA, FO-371-49408 “Repair of Walcheren Dykes,” 17 January 1945.

taken from Belgium on the condition that the Dutch government would pay the Belgians in the near future, the Dutch still lacked important machinery and pumps.³⁷³ A key figure in supplementing reconstruction on Walcheren was Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and the British Foreign Office. Eden emphasized the exigency of providing Dutch officials with the appropriate materiel, although Walcheren was always deemed most important. He also suggested that the military was not pulling its weight, noting that “it was decided, that the Netherlands authorities [MGs] would at once take the repair works in hand, whereby both S.H.A.E.F. and the 21st Army Group would give their full assistance. However, neither S.H.A.E.F. nor the 21st Army Group dispose of the required materials. I have therefore been instructed and beg to approach your Excellency with the urgent request that His Majesty’s Government would, if possible, put the following materials at the disposal of the Netherlands Government, whilst at the same time providing for the necessary transport facilities from the United Kingdom.”³⁷⁴

The representative of the Foreign Office at SHAEF, Charles Peake, responded to Eden’s inquiries about the required resources and manpower and, in January 1945, made clear “that after full consideration it turns out that they are not at the moment able to help in finding the equipment the Dutch need. In view of the general situation in those parts and the very heavy demands now being made upon our reserves for priorities even more urgent, I fear I cannot quarrel with this decision but I will have the question kept under review in the hope that later we may find some means of meeting the wishes of the

³⁷³ NIMH, *SHAEF/British Military Mission*, 486, inv. 12. “Letter to Col. Ira Black and SHAEF G-5 from Lt.-Col. H.P. Bosworth,” 14 March 1945, 1.

³⁷⁴ The National Archives (NA, formally PRO), Foreign Office (FO) 371-49408, “Letter from Anthony Eden, 3 January 1945,” 1.

Netherlands Government.”³⁷⁵ The Allies would only be able to make limited resources available for reconstruction efforts while the war continued. For the Dutch, who had assumed that the Allied presence in the province after November 1944 implied a joint effort in reconstruction, the reticence of authorities to send resources and materiel in the immediate aftermath of battle was discomfiting.

The resources needed just to repair the dykes on Walcheren were extensive. The repairs required over 250,000 trees, mainly from Belgium, as well as 2000 tons of stone shipped in from Belgium each week in late December and January, and the use of several caissons during certain parts of the tidal cycle.³⁷⁶ But still, the UK contributed to Walcheren’s repair. The UK sent three stationary barge loading suction dredgers, one stationary pump-unit that could reclaim 1,000 cubic yards per hour, and two floating stone-transporter cranes with a capacity of carrying one ton each.³⁷⁷ Because of the deforestation caused by both German and Allied operations, and the destruction of Zeeland’s wooded areas, mainly on Noord- and Zuid-Beveland, the British government initiated a reforestation program that lasted until 1947.³⁷⁸ By February 1945, however, the major operations to evacuate civilians in completely inundated villages and to repair the largest sea dykes were complete. These were certainly fundamental to other post-war reconstruction efforts, which included the recovery of electricity, roads, railways, and other infrastructure.

In spite of the level of destruction inflicted on the region, the pace at which recovery took place in Walcheren was quite remarkable. By February and March 1945,

³⁷⁵ NA, FO 371-49408, “Letter from Charles Peake, 31 January 1945,” 1.

³⁷⁶ Gijss van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 566.

³⁷⁷ NA, FO 371-49408, “Letter from Anthony Eden, 3 January 1945,” 2.

³⁷⁸ See for example documentation from NA, FO 371-67850.

the major sea dykes at Westkapelle, Veere, and east and west of Vlissingen had been closed largely by local workers. When it comes to the reconstruction of other parts of the province, the Allied authorities were either less inclined or unable to provide the necessary materials, particularly during the later phases of the war. In January 1945, the Dutch ambassador to the United Kingdom requested that the people of the province could “take in hand the repair of the dykes,” but, like Eden’s request in the same month, asked the UK to provide the necessary materiel.³⁷⁹

In a dominantly agrarian economy many civilians and authorities expressed fear over the degree to which saltwater would affect the agricultural recovery of the province. One British engineer’s report on the situation in 1947 claimed that in some parts of the province “all vegetation is dead and a volume could be written on the time lag for new crops.”³⁸⁰ The salinization of the soil had great consequences for the local and provincial economy. In May 1946, one contemporary bemoaned the enormous task that lay ahead for Dutch farmers. He wrote “at present, the greatest handicap to the Dutch farmer is the shortage of machinery for soil cultivation—tractors, plows, harrows, cultivators, mowing machines, binders, and so forth.”³⁸¹

Yet, later that year, a report in the *Journal of Farm Economics* commented on the rapidity of agricultural recovery on Walcheren. The authors wrote that “common newspaper reports, at the time of the breaking of the sea wall...were to the effect that ten years would be required to bring back into production the land flooded by saltwater. In fact, however, around two-thirds of this land grew a crop of barley in 1946, or perhaps is

³⁷⁹ NA, FO 371-49408, “letter from Netherlands Ambassador, 3 January 1945.”

³⁸⁰ Brigadier E.E. Read, “The Saving of Walcheren,” *Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers* (W. & J. Mackay & Co., 1947), 22

³⁸¹ C.H.J. Maliepaard, “The Agricultural Situation,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 245, *The Netherlands during German Occupation* (May 1946), 53.

already seeded to alfalfa.”³⁸² Walcheren managed to produce one successful crop of wheat on reclaimed land in 1946, although other parts of the province were not as successful. The next most successful crop to grow in Walcheren’s previously salinized soil was alfalfa because of its tolerance to salt and partially because it can be grown without plowing.³⁸³ In a report written for British authorities in July 1945, the Commissioner General for Dutch Economic Recuperation claimed that “several hundred tons of ploughs, drills, mowers, and binders have been removed and partly identified in Germany,” and that Dutch agricultural recovery depended on the arrival of farm implements.³⁸⁴ As these contemporary reports suggest, the Allied destruction of Walcheren received particular attention in the UK and elsewhere. In a way, Walcheren became a rallying cry around which international support for reconstruction grew in the immediate post-war. “Walcheren, the great Dutch island that guards the shipping route to Antwerp,” one bulletin read in December 1944, “is one of the areas most severely affected by flooding.”³⁸⁵ The same bulletin claimed that “between 60% and 65% of the entire population of the Netherlands has been affected by the floods let loose by the enemy,” but did not mention how many lives were affected by Allied operations.³⁸⁶ The reconstruction and restoration of other parts of Zeeland, however, remained out of English-language headlines.

The operations to evacuate civilians and repair the dykes of Walcheren were immensely difficult operations for both Allied and Dutch authorities. Despite sporadic

³⁸² John D. Black et al. “The Reclamation of Flooded Areas of Holland,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 28, no.4 (November 1946), 1070.

³⁸³ John D. Black et al., “The Reclamation of Flooded Areas of Holland,” 1070.

³⁸⁴ NIMH, *SHAEP/British Military Mission*, 486, inv. 14. Report of Col. W. Chr. Posthumus Meyjes, Commissioner General for Netherlands Economic Recuperation, “The Desperate Economic Situation in the Netherlands,” 17 July 1945, 5.

³⁸⁵ No author, “Aid for Flooded Holland,” *The Science News-Letter* 46, no. 26 (Dec. 23, 1944), 412.

³⁸⁶ “Aid for Flooded Holland,” 412.

disagreement between SHAEF and the British Foreign Office, Allied assistance greatly expedited the process of recovery. While the dykes were largely repaired by the labour of Zeeland's civilians, they had been considerably aided by the materiel the Allies were able to dispose.

Damage Assessment and Rebuilding Homes

While both CA and MG officials worked to evacuate and transfer civilians from one part of the province to another from autumn 1944 to winter 1945, they also attempted to assess overall damages done to civilian property. While Dutch authorities canvassed for Allied support in Walcheren, the villages in other parts of the province received little attention. As early as 1941, the Dutch government had declared moral and economic responsibility for the reconstruction of property following the war. The government planned to compensate civilians for damages inflicted upon houses, businesses, and other private property. Compensation would be granted according to the value of properties or goods on 9 May 1940.³⁸⁷ Implementing this promise in practice, however, proved to be a chimera. In the immediate post-war period, provincial officials and civilians became increasingly disillusioned by the national government's promises. One pamphlet distributed around Walcheren read "the population of the severely damaged Province of Zeeland asks for your warm interest: her wishes relative to materiel recovery."³⁸⁸ But the Dutch government was also preoccupied with other issues, one of which was how they would approach the question of the Dutch East-Indies and other colonial possessions. It

³⁸⁷ Zwemer, *De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog, 1945-1950*, 455.

³⁸⁸ Zwemer, *De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog, 1945-1950*, 455. "De bevolking van de zwaar door oorlogsgeweld geschonden Provincie Zeeland vraagt uw warme belangstelling voor: haar wenschen ten opzichte van een bevredigend materieel herstel"

seemed to the Zeeuwen and provincial officials that both foreign and domestic authorities had ignored many of their requests. In this context, section IX of the MG in charge of public works oversaw the development of The Service of Reconstruction in Zeeland (*Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland*, DWZ).

In early February 1945, Dr. R.W. Graaf van Lynden of the DWZ compiled a preliminary report that detailed the extent of war damages in the province. It stated that some of the most severely affected towns in the province were found in the west part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and notably Breskens, Schoondijke, Oostburg, and Sluis, all of which were “almost entirely destroyed.”³⁸⁹ Breskens, for instance, had 1,000 registered homes before the war, 800 of which were totally destroyed by combat. Likewise, 460 of Oostburg’s 840 houses were completely destroyed and many more “serious” or “lightly” damaged.³⁹⁰ The author of the report indicated that a chief concern for Zeeuws-Vlaanderen was how agricultural work would resume, since most of the houses of those employed in the agricultural sector were either destroyed or damaged. “As soon as the supply of materials allows [the reconstruction of homes],” the report continued, “the rebuilding of farms there will have to be taken in hand strenuously.”³⁹¹ Like the evacuees of Walcheren and Tholen, many civilians from west Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen were evacuated to the eastern part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen leaving their homes, livestock, and businesses.

³⁸⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw,” 1.

³⁹⁰ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw,” Appendix 3 West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen.

³⁹¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw,” 1.

Assessments of Zuid-Beveland show that many towns on that island were also severely damaged. Only two of Ellewoutsdijk's 127 homes were undamaged, while Hoedekenskerke lost 16 per cent of its 380 houses.³⁹² Other villages experienced commensurable consequences as a result of fighting, and officials recognized that because Zuid-Beveland accommodated evacuees from Walcheren and Tholen, "it is highly necessary that at least the slight damage caused to roofs and windows will be repaired soonest [*sic*] possible."³⁹³ Noord-Beveland had not been subjected to intense fighting and was, for the most part, spared from war-related damage. For example, only 11 out of 970 houses in Kortgene were destroyed, a small price in comparison to other parts of the province.³⁹⁴ Walcheren's largest town, Vlissingen, paid a high price: 1,600 homes in the commune were completely under water, while 465 were partially inundated. For Vlissingen, "all other buildings in the town were damaged, some more, others less. Undamaged buildings were not to be found in Vlissingen."³⁹⁵ Tholen, however, was heavily damaged and inundated, but was too close to military operations in the winter of 1945 to be assessed by reconstruction teams.

The assessment concluded that "the state of things in Zeeland is serious. Thousands of families are accommodated in a most primitive way; hundreds of houses have to be rendered habitable and the materials to effect this in the simplest way, are

³⁹² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX "Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw," Appendix 2, Zuid-Beveland.

³⁹³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX "Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw," 2.

³⁹⁴ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX "Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw," Appendix 2 Noord-Beveland.

³⁹⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX G(1) "Rapport over den Wederopbouw van Zeeland," n.d., 1. "Tengevolge van het vernielen der zeedijken staan in de gemeente Vlissingen 1600 woningen in het permanent geïnundeerde gebied, en 465 in het periodiek geïnundeerd gebied... Alle overige panden in de gemeente werden beschadigd, het eene meer, het andere minder. Niet beschadigde panden zijn in Vlissingen niet meer te vinden."

lacking. They will therefore have to be supplied from elsewhere. For that purpose attempts are being made with the cooperation of many authorities; particularly efforts will have to be made, to obtain material (asphalt-paper, plastic glass) from England as otherwise the untenable conditions which now prevail in the domain of housing of the people and public health will continue this winter, while it will also be impossible to meet the demands made for the recovery of economic life.”³⁹⁶ Based on their assessment, the DWZ requested 82,000 windowpanes, 5,200 units of timber, 1,716 bricks, and about 1,000 kilograms of cement.³⁹⁷ As long as the war continued, however, the Allies could only offer the heavy machinery and implements used to repair the dykes on Walcheren. To be sure, towns and cities in the United Kingdom also required immediate attention. Whether or not the materiel listed by the DWZ was available at all is doubtful. The British believed what they had contributed was extensive enough; indeed, without it closing the dykes of Walcheren would not have been possible. Yet, despite Allied efforts, more aid was required for smaller-scale projects, such as home and property repair, than was available at the time.

Food Production and Economic Recovery

The people of Zeeland did not commiserate during the “Hunger Winter.” During the evacuations and the transportation of large numbers of civilians, the MGs began to assess the availability of foodstuffs in the province. In some areas like Tholen and Walcheren, the regional economy suffered considerably as arable land remained

³⁹⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw,” 3.

³⁹⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4300 IX “Dienst van den Wederopbouw in Zeeland: Nota betreffende de urgentie van den herbouw,” 3.

inundated, farms were damaged, and livestock killed. But reports compiled by the *Kantoor van den Provinciaalen Voedselcommissaris voor Zeeland* (literally, Office of the Food Commissioner for Zeeland) on 29 November 1944, show that the situation facing the Zeeuwen in Noord- and Zuid-Beveland was different from that facing the central provinces.³⁹⁸ Under authority of the MG, authorities introduced the rationing of certain goods until regular-scale production could begin. The consumption of certain products was initially restricted to children and the infirm, and scarce products went to evacuation centers for distribution. The commissioner noted that foodstuffs like “bread and flour offer us no difficulties,” while the fields of Zuid- and Noord-Beveland continued to produce great quantities of potatoes.³⁹⁹ The flooding of Walcheren had a profound effect on meat and dairy products. This is one of the reasons why the MG emphasized the importance of evacuating cattle along with villagers from Walcheren. The commissioner wrote “butter or milk fat are two products that have given us the most difficulty” and therefore placed these items on the ration list.⁴⁰⁰

Comparing average diets based on caloric consumption before liberation and during the early weeks of November 1944 shows a decrease in the consumption of certain goods following the arrival of the Allies. According to one food distribution centre in Middelburg, the average daily caloric intake for a person from Zeeland before the war was 1,662 calories, while in the first weeks of November 1944 this number declined to

³⁹⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland,” 29 November 1944, 1-3.

³⁹⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland,” 29 November 1944, 1. “Brood en bloem bezorgen we ons geen moeilijkheden...Aardappelen is een product dat ons geen moeilijke momenten brengt.”

⁴⁰⁰ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland,” 29 November 1944, 1. “boter of vet en melk zijn de beideproducten die ons steeds de meeste moeite hebben gegeven.”

1,211 calories.⁴⁰¹ Rations of apples allotted to civilians, for example, went from 4,000 to 3,000 grams per person. In this sense, the end of war in Zeeland saw a decrease in the availability of certain goods. Salt, a staple product to preserve certain meats, was one item in very short supply. The commissioner noted that “the position of salt demands a rapid supply.”⁴⁰² Based on assessments of civilian needs, the provincial commissioner compiled a list of items required for the next six months while evacuation and preliminary reconstruction efforts took place. Among other items, this included 320,250 kg of beef, 3,116,750 liters of milk, 889,200 kg of salt, and 222,625 kg of laundry detergent. According to the MG, CA officials were obliged to transport these goods by cargo ship beginning on 9 December 1944 and, if rationed properly, would probably last until the war came to an end.⁴⁰³ Reports on the rationing situation in the southern Netherlands demonstrate that the initial scarcity of certain goods was assuaged by April 1945 and the daily caloric intake surpassed that of the pre-liberation level, reaching 1,763 per day.⁴⁰⁴ By the end of the war in the Netherlands, the daily caloric intake for Dutch civilians reached 1,912.⁴⁰⁵ This was accomplished by rationing out existing stores of items to create “uniformity” in consumption.⁴⁰⁶ The CA provided these foodstuffs and accomplished their objective.

The rationing of foodstuffs was one matter, but it is worth mentioning some of the challenges to providing fresh drinking water to evacuees and civilians. This required

⁴⁰¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “RANTSOENEN der gedistribueerde levensmiddelen met hun calorische waarde.”

⁴⁰² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland,” 29 November 1944, 2.

⁴⁰³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4297 “14 daags overzicht over de positie der voedselvoorziening in het bevrijde gedeelte der provincie Zeeland,” 29 November 1944, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ See for example ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI B “Rantsoenaanwijzing Periode 15 t/m 28 April '45,” 1-2.

⁴⁰⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4298 VI L(2), “Weekly Rations,” 27 May-9 June 1945.

⁴⁰⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4298 VI L(2) “Weekly Rations,” 14 February 1945.

immediate attention as well. Inundation had effectively wiped out the principal source of clean water on which some villages relied. The fighting had also broken vital watermains outside of Middelburg, which both CA and MG officials worked to fix on 5 January 1945. The burgemeester of Middelburg suggested constructing a new waterline to one in Ossendrecht in neighbouring Noord-Brabant some 60 kilometers away. In addition, repairs could be made to the damaged part of the existing waterline near the mill in St. Laurens, just outside Middelburg. The primary obstacle to repairing this vital infrastructure was the wreckage of a British tank lying on top of the broken watermain. Dutch authorities had requested the Allies move the tank, but no action was taken.⁴⁰⁷ Canadian CA officers were involved in similar repair projects, notably between Zuid-Beveland and Walcheren around 18 November 1944.⁴⁰⁸ The Canadian CA engineer specialist of 627 Detachment, Captain Kirkpatrick, went to Goes along with PMC Slot and agreed that repairing the watermain between Zuid-Beveland and Walcheren was essential. However, while he agreed that the supply of water in this sector required immediate attention, the repairs were to be done by the MG provided that the pipe could be supplied to them.⁴⁰⁹ Other problems, as H.P. Rickard identified in his earliest visits to the province, included the salting of all wells that were affected by flooding. In each scenario, the reconstruction efforts were dictated by the availability of resources and materiel.

While reports often commented on the availability of foodstuffs, documents from the food commissioner made little reference to the situation facing farmers and the

⁴⁰⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland inv. 4298 VI M, "report on Water supply for Middelburg submitted to 609 C.A. Det." 5 January 1945, 1.

⁴⁰⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland inv. 4298 VI M, "Repair of Water Pipe Line, S. Beveland and Walcheren to 2 Cdn Corps, 627 CA Det." 18 November 1944.

⁴⁰⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland inv. 4298 VI M, "Report of 627 C.A. Det.," November 1944, 1.

fishing industry. But it took considerable time to recover both of these sectors after the war. As a province situated in the North Sea, the fishing industry had long characterized life for many in Zeeland. During occupation, a number of factors considerably affected the industry, including the German decision to construct extensive coastal defenses, the restriction of civilian movement which often prevented fishermen from going out to sea, and finally, Allied bombardment and fighting. These factors significantly disrupted life for civilians, as well as local economies. To compensate for the consequences of occupation and war on the fish market, CA and Dutch officials agreed to supplement local food supplies by allowing fishing to begin as soon as the waters were deemed safe. The Allies had successfully demined the Schelde by 26 November 1944 and the first cargo ships were unloaded in Antwerp on 1 December, but military authorities continued to restrict mobility in other parts of the province that required minesweeping. Mines had shifted during the Allied bombardment of Walcheren and authorities still considered some of the coastal areas around Veere and Domburg dangerous.

Even before operations to defeat the Germans in Zeeland began, SHAEF sent a curious directive to all MG officers on 28 August 1944 anticipating some of the challenges to the recovery of fisheries in the region.⁴¹⁰ CA divided the regional fishing economy of the “Liberated Areas,” including parts of France and later Belgium, into three separate sectors: domestic fishing (*Binnenlandsche vischvangst*), coastal fishing (*Kustvischvangst*), and deep-sea fishing (*Diepzeevischvangst*), although Zeeland’s economy primarily relied on the latter two. In so doing, SHAEF and CA hoped to monitor better the movement of seagoing vessels and this was particularly important

⁴¹⁰ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C “Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces: Visscherij Contrôle,” 28 August 1944, 1-3.

while operations to defeat Nazi Germany continued. To accomplish this CA designated certain officers as “fishery officers” (*Visscherij-officieren*) who worked alongside local marine commandants as well as British naval liaison officers. These officers generally oversaw fishing activity in shipyards and harbours. Because of the damage caused by fighting, a certain number of harbours were immediately available to both the military and civilians, though the Allies often curtailed the use of these harbours for civilian purposes. CA designated the harbours in Tholen, Yerseke, Colijnsplaat, Veere, and Terneuzen as useable, while those at Vlissingen, Breskens, and Hansweert were partially useable.⁴¹¹ There were therefore few fully useable harbours and the ones available were used primarily for military purposes.

CA granted permission to begin fishing again in certain areas on 18 December 1944. Authorities imposed strict time limits, from sunrise to sunset, and CA “accepted that time will be lost as a result of this restriction on account of the effect of tides on navigation.”⁴¹² CA and MG officials tasked mayors and fishery officers with administering fishing permits to civilians. The commune issued permits based on individuals and not vessels, so both the master of each vessel and his deputy were required to carry permits. The CA officers emphasized that each vessel could only use one base or harbour and that each vessel needed to return to that base each afternoon and must “not have contact with the land at any other point. Vessels may, however, moor off SOUTH BEVELAND, for instance at YERSEKE, whilst awaiting favourable tides.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C “Letter to PMC from Afdeeling Visscherijproducten,” 5 January 1945.

⁴¹² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C, “609 Det. CA to PMC” 18 January 1945.

⁴¹³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C, “609 Det. CA to PMC” 18 January 1945.

Mussel extraction received particularly close attention from both CA and MG officials, which suggests that it was perhaps the most affected local industry during occupation. Since mussels had been a chief export from Zeeland to other parts of the Netherlands and Belgium for centuries, it was a key industry to rehabilitate. PMC Slot requested from CA a number of resources including 58,000 liters of diesel oil, 2,300 liters of kerosene, and 140 kilograms of waterproof grease, all of which would be allotted to the fishing industry. Given access to these resources, fishing companies and MG authorities estimated in January 1945 that Zeeland could produce a total of 6,000,000 kilograms of mussels and 3,000,000 oysters by March or April 1945.⁴¹⁴

While on its surface these measures aimed to recover local fisheries, the Allies were most interested in furthering military objectives and not necessarily returning fish production to preexisting levels. Allowing civilians to fish again, CA recognized, “will initially be able to meet civilian needs to reduce shipping and allied support.” The report also made clear that “where the amount of fish available is greater than necessary for civilian needs, or in case of emergency, fish can also be used to meet military needs.”⁴¹⁵ Barges and seagoing vessels were strictly monitored in the region, but particularly near the Oosterschelde where Allied seafaring traffic was most needed.⁴¹⁶ CA also noted that “it must be clearly understood by all applicants for passes that NO mine clearance has

⁴¹⁴ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C, “Memo to Maj. Potter (SHAEF G-5) from Cmdr. SLOT, Mil. Commissioner ZEELAND,” 12 January 1945, 1-2.

⁴¹⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C “Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces: Visscherij Contrôle,” 28 August 1944, 3. “b. De inheemsche vischvangst zal in eerste instantie beschikbaar zijn om te voorzien in burgerlijke behoeften ter vermindering van geallieerde scheepvaart en ondersteuning. In 't geval echter dat de beschikbare hoeveelheid visch grooter is dan noodig voor de burgerlijke behoeften, of in geval van nood, kan visch worden gebruikt om te voorzien in militaire behoeften.”

⁴¹⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C “Memorandum from Rickard regarding fisheries in the Oosterschelde,” 18 January 1945.

been carried out and vessels putting to sea can expect NO protection from Allied services.”⁴¹⁷ Here, too, recovery efforts could not be separated from military objectives.

By winter 1945, some civilians filed complaints with the PMC or DMC about Allied requisitioning of private property. One civilian, Adriaan de la Houssaije, from Vlissingen allegedly saw British soldiers drive away in his motor boat in November 1944, but it took until February 1945 to have his issue addressed. He filed his complaints with the MG, who in turn submitted the report to 612 Detachment of CA. The man wrote that “Owing to the fact, that even if I should now get back the total cost of the ship, I should not be able to get another ship for that amount, it is impossible for me to mention a sum that would represent the value of the ship, after depreciation, on the day of the loss. The ship is equipped with a worm-steering gear with a steering-wheel on deck.”⁴¹⁸ Given the resource pressure on the Allies in the winter of 1945, the ship described by this disgruntled civilian could have been requisitioned by Allied authorities for other military objectives. The evidence permits only speculation about the reason behind the requisition. While CA units dealt with civilian complaints, the MG continued to purge every sector of Nazi sympathizers and this included the fisheries. In Yerseke, for example, at least ten oyster farmers were identified and interned for collaborating with the Nazi regime.⁴¹⁹

Like the fishing industry, occupation and war had considerable consequences for agriculture in the province. The German use of land, the construction of airfields, and other defense-related changes made to the landscape affected farming and livestock. The

⁴¹⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C, “609 Det. CA to PMC” 18 January 1945.

⁴¹⁸ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 VI C “Report to the acting Chief Constable of Flushing,” 28 February 1945.

⁴¹⁹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4296 “Letter from Vereeniging tot Bevordering van het Oesterbedrijf (VEBO),” 7 February 1945, 1-3.

Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant, one of the most distributed daily newspapers in the province, covered a variety of stories about changes to agriculture in the latter years of the war. One of the most serious was the trade in contraband goods (*smokkelhandel*), or the black market. This is another case of continuity between the First and Second World Wars. As we have seen, black marketeering was certainly not isolated to 1945. In at least one case, a veterinarian in IJzendijke (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) reported a foal dead upon birth to regulate sales in the market, and probably also to avoid requisition orders from German authorities. By June 1944, as the Allies pushed further into France, the stories regarding illegal practice of cattle and livestock trade became more frequent.⁴²⁰ By November and December 1944, the livestock industry in Zeeland had suffered greatly, not only because the Allied bombardment of Walcheren had largely put a hold on agriculture, but also because the statistics regarding agricultural production and livestock were dubious. In this context, the MG section for economic affairs had to reconstitute agricultural and livestock production, as well as regulate a skewed agrarian market. Under authority of the MG, committees were established to assess the progress of recovery in agriculture, fishing, as well as the procurement of fuels.⁴²¹

Growing Discontent

From a military and strategic perspective, the possible failure to open the port of Antwerp by late autumn 1944 and early 1945 meant that operations in northwest Europe would have to come to a halt. In this sense, the Allies had everything to lose and, for that

⁴²⁰ See for example, *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, “Groote smokkelhandel in granen en vee,” 20 June 1944, 3.

⁴²¹ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland, inv. 4298 VI O, “Rapport over de Economische Adviescommissies van de Militairen Commissaris voor Zeeland,” 11 March 1945, 1.

reason, the most extreme measures were considered and eventually taken to neutralize Walcheren and other vital parts of the *Atlantikwall* in Zeeland. From a civilian perspective, however, news of “Mad Tuesday” on 5 September 1944 led many civilians just north of Antwerp to believe that the end of war was insight. The curious lull between 5 September and 3 October 1944 belied what lay ahead for the people residing at the mouth of the Schelde. Beginning with the flooding and evacuations of Walcheren, Tholen, and to a lesser extent Schouwen, it is understandable that, for many reasons, Zeeuwen greeted their liberators with a degree of reluctance. Evacuation and accommodation elsewhere in the province uprooted entire families, many of whom had never before left their islands. The efforts to assess and compensate civilians for damages appeared to be far too slow, while the Dutch saw Allied reticence to dispose resources and materiel as a sign that recovery would be an even longer process than they had initially anticipated.

That military operations continued so close to the central part of the province meant that civilians were still not entirely safe. On 3 January 1945, for example, a group of a dozen farmers came under intense machine gun fire while working in the polderland just outside of Wilhelminadorp (Z.-Beveland). According to the police deposition, which was submitted to CA by the burgemeester of Kattendijke, a sixteen year-old boy accompanying the workers had been shot during the assault. The victim, Cornelis van der Hoeven, as well as the other witnesses claimed that the firing came from the Zandkreek, where they had noticed two British patrol vessels just before the incident. Shortly thereafter, two farmers, Gommert Lindenbergh and Abraham van de Velde, ran towards the seawall, where they saw the two British vessels sailing in the direction of Kortgene

(Noord-Beveland). The depositions highlight the frustration of the civilians who claimed that there were no Germans anywhere near either Zuid- or Noord-Beveland and simply wanted to work their fields. The victims, interviewed by police and represented by the burgemeester, claimed that the civilian casualty was a result of carelessness and negligence on the part of the Allied soldiers.⁴²²

The Allied response, which came several days after the incident, was short. Lt.-Col. R.W. P. Dawson of 4 Commando Bde. wrote: "I have investigated the crime myself, and so far as I can judge reasonable precautions were taken to fire the weapons out to sea. All craft comds have detailed instrs regarding weapons on coming into harbor, and I believe these to be complied with. I think it is reasonable therefore, to exclude any idea of negligence on the part of the craft comd or gunner concerned and to attribute the occurrence to accidental causes."⁴²³

This anecdote illustrates that the proximity of the military to civilians caused some friction between civilians and military personnel. Zeeland was not the only place where civilians and the military clashed.⁴²⁴ Similar issues caused waves of discontent among Belgian civilians.⁴²⁵ In this particular case, military objectives and patrols blended into the rhythm of civilian life while operations to defeat the German armed forces north of Zeeland continued. Other complaints, like those regarding lost baggage during evacuation procedures, outright refusal to comply with evacuation, or Adriaan de la Houssaije's requisitioned boat may have been symptomatic of a broader sentiment in the

⁴²² ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland inv. 4305 MZ S, "Politie-Rapport, Kattendijke," 3 January 1945, 1. See Appendix V.

⁴²³ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland inv. 4305 MZ S, "Letter regarding Injuries to Civilians, submitted by R.W.P. Dawson, Lt.-Col. to First Luit. J.J. Vriesendorp," 16 January 1945.

⁴²⁴ See for example, Geoffrey Hayes, "'Where are our Liberators?'" *The Canadian Liberation of West Brabant, 1944*, *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XVI, vol. ii (Fall, 1995), 61.

⁴²⁵ Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945*, 144ff.

extremely volatile period of 1944 and 1945. These instances demonstrate that any initial euphoria associated with liberation had subsided quickly and that recovery at the most basic civilian level was often hindered by Allied objectives and their presence. The liberation narrative of the Netherlands is almost entirely disrupted.

Conclusion

The evidence explored in this chapter highlights a variety of problems that the people of Zeeland faced from late 1944 to early 1945. After four years of occupation, which grew more stringent as the war progressed, civilians heard rumours about the Allied advance to Antwerp. This had led some to believe that a clear-cut liberation would soon follow. However, stiff German resistance to the Allied advance signaled to civilians that the war was far from over.

The traditional periodization of the Second World War from 1940 to 1945 is wholly unsatisfying to explain the wartime experiences of civilians in Europe. Recovery had begun in earnest in 1945-1946 and, even then, the ways in which reconstruction materialized were slow and uneven across the province. The central part of the province received the most attention, especially at the international level, because of Walcheren's administrative and economic importance, while the people of Schouwen-Duiveland waited until May 1945 for German occupation to end. Ending the war in 1945 ignores the immense problems posed by the war's aftermath and the many challenges faced by civilians in the post-war era.

CHAPTER VI

Rehabilitating a Rural Province in the Post-War World, 1945-1948

For most historians in the English-speaking world, the periodization of the Second World War is clear. The Allied victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945 meant that hostilities in Europe came to an end. While the repatriation of Allied soldiers from the continent and the United Kingdom presented each country with a set of challenges, the narrative of the Second World War, insofar as combat experience is concerned, understandably ends in May 1945. This, however, is not true for the histories of countries ravaged by the war, on whose soil intense battles were fought and whose lands, cities, and populations were devastated.

The decision to end this chapter in 1948 has been considerably influenced by French historian Henry Rousso, whose recent work on experience and memory in Europe has demonstrated the value of a concept he refers to as “*sortie de guerre*” (exiting wars). “Exiting wars” refers to processes during which local populations are left to conceptualize their own memories following the official and diplomatic declaration to end hostilities.⁴²⁶ Applying this notion to the context of Zeeland is apt. Although the hostilities of the Second World War in Zeeland ended in early November 1944, much of the region remained flooded until 1945. As we have seen, it took great efforts on behalf of Dutch and Allied governments to help Zeeland recover from the destruction brought on by liberation. A full “recovery” in all facets of civilian life was a chimera in 1945, something hoped for but in the end unrealistic.

⁴²⁶ See Chapter 1 in Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens. *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

This chapter, therefore, explores some of the problems associated with ending wartime narratives in 1945. It examines a number of themes that together demonstrate that Zeeland's war had not ended in 1945, but continued throughout the mid- to late-1940s. To use but one example, in 1946 the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* reported a number of children who had been killed by mines laid by the Germans during occupation.⁴²⁷ War was still very much a reality of everyday life. The destruction left behind and the contorted landscapes were a physical reminder to the civilian population. In short, the rehabilitation of Zeeland had only begun during this period and there was no ultimate conclusion to recovery during the 1940s.

In 1946, provincial authorities sought to expedite economic recovery in Zeeland by repairing and reopening vital lines of infrastructure, such as bridges connecting certain parts of the province, as well as rail lines that connected Zeeland to Brabant and Zuid-Holland. One article in the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* noted that authorities between provinces had worked to repair the Moerdijkbrug, an important rail and traffic bridge that connects Zuid-Holland to Brabant and Zeeland. The vital link was destroyed by the Germans to prevent the Allies from reaching Zuid-Holland in 1944. The article claimed that repairing the bridge would have great implications for many Zeeuwen, who could now visit Holland by either bus or train.⁴²⁸ Indeed, many articles published in Zeeland's daily newspapers explored the increasing relationship between Zeeland and

⁴²⁷ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, "Twee kinderen gedood door landmijnen," 2 January 1946, 1.

⁴²⁸ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, "De Moerdijkbrug opengesteld. Groote verbeteringen in verkeer tusschen Zeeland en Holland," 2 January 1946, 1.

other provinces, perhaps a result of worsening relations between Zeeland and the Allies.⁴²⁹

Jan Zwemer has demonstrated that the period between 1946 and 1949 was one characterized by infrastructure repair in Zeeland, all of which aimed to bring economic recovery. In 1947, Dutch authorities initiated projects to repair or build bridges over canals in Vlakte, Sluiskil, and Sas van Gent, as well as the bridge connecting Tholen. Construction on the bridge connecting Tholen, however, was delayed because of the particularly bad winter conditions of 1946-1947.⁴³⁰ One of the major recurring problems that hindered the recovery of infrastructure was the shortage of materiel. Many of Zeeland's harbours, such as those in Terneuzen, Vlissingen, and Breskens, were badly damaged. Resources and materiel were so scarce that even by 1948 Breskens' port, once a vital part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen's economy, was still undergoing preliminary reconstruction. No definitive work on the port, other than what the province referred to as "disaster recovery," had been completed. Likewise, the harbour Ellewoutsdijk still required attention in 1949.⁴³¹ The lack of attention, or simply the incapacity, to recover such provincial ports and harbours directly affected the rehabilitation of local economies. As Zwemer has shown, by 1946 Belgium had managed to ship about 200,000 tons of mussels from its ports.⁴³² Once strong producers and exporters of shellfish, the ports of southern and central Zeeland fell behind in the market because of a general and slow infrastructure recovery. Schouwen-Duiveland, the part of Zeeland not liberated until May

⁴²⁹ See for example, *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, "Rotterdam helpt Walcheren en W.Z.-Vlaanderen," 2 January 1946, 1.

⁴³⁰ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 400.

⁴³¹ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 402.

⁴³² Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 402.

1945, profited following the war from an influx of reconstruction materiel, likely because of its conflation with Zuid-Holland.

Despite modest progress to Zeeland's infrastructure, provincial newspapers characterized the postwar era as one of uncertainty for many civilians. It seemed to them that no matter how hard they worked to recover their lands, buildings, and lives in general, there was still much work to be done. Reflecting on what the new year of 1947 could bring the residents of Zierikzee in Schouwen-Duiveland, one daily newspaper spoke of still growing skepticism about the central government and its priorities, but also reminded its readers to persevere and continue working:

“The new year continues to force on [*sic*]. As all other years, 1946 is only a milestone in the [eirkelgang] of time, but not the end. Hand to the plow in the new year. That signifies the struggle against everything our national resurrection could inhibit and the continuation of all of what the hand begun in the past year. Do not follow misleading whispering voices, nor float away on a sea of sentiments, but continue in the clear awareness that our generation should prove to be able to pass on the good of this century to posterity”⁴³³

The authors concluded that for each civilian “the journey should be continued, a return is not possible.” They issued the rest of their message in a tone that blended Reformed rhetoric with a cautious optimism for recovery: “Everyone in each district must collect the building materials, which are used to offset [our] violated world. To this end, idealism

⁴³³ *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, “Op den drempel van 1947,” 1 January 1947, 1. “Het nieuwe jaar dwingt tot verder gaan. Als alle andere jaren is 1946 slechts een mijlpaal in den eirkelgang van den tijd, maar geen eindpunt. De hand aan den ploeg in het nieuwe jaar. Dat beteekent strijd tegen alles wat onze nationale herrijzenis zou kunnen remmen en voortzetting van alles wat de hand in het afgelopen jaar begon. Geen gehoor geven aan misleidende fluisterstemmen, geen wegdrijven op een zee van sentimenten, maar verder gaan in het klare bewustzijn dat onze generatie moet bewijzen in staat te zijn het goede van deze eeuw aan het nageslacht door te geven.”

is necessary and true idealism is often a sick plant (*een kwijnende plant*) in our lives.”⁴³⁴

Recovery, according to these authors, was both an individual and communal process, which could not always depend on provincial and national authorities.

Such widespread sentiments reflected a broader provincial feeling of disappointment in the slow pace of rehabilitation and one that questioned the priorities of the country. The tone of newspapers in the western part of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, for example, an area that was devastated as a result of both German flooding and Allied bombardment, was scathing. It adopted very little optimism found elsewhere. A similar reflection on the progress of recovery was published in a newspaper from Oostburg called *De Schakel* (The Switch). In January 1947, the authors wrote:

“When we look behind us, as we take stock of the past year, there is not much that pleasant memories can hide. The reconstruction of our region, which we announced with so much enthusiasm has not progressed very far. When the plan was published in 1946, we accepted it with cheerfulness and confidence. That plan was so beautifully put together, everything was thought out to the last detail, the number of laborers who were available and necessary could be found in beautiful tables, the amount of material that was necessary and available, one could see all the different areas divided, it was in a word a wonderful report. But

⁴³⁴ *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, “Op den drempel van 1947,” 1 January 1947, 1. De tocht moet worden voortgezet, een terug is er niet. Ieder in eigen kring moet de bouwstoffen verzamelen, die worden aangewend tot herstel dezer geschonden wereld. Daartoe is idealisme noodig en juist het idealisme is vaak een kwijnende plant in ons leven. De taak van wereldwijde betekenis, die in 1947 voor ons ligt is evenwel juist zonder idealisme niet te volbrengen. Het is nutteloos de keeren te tellen dat wij zijn teleurgesteld, wij moeten telkens weer met goeden moed op weg gaan.

what became of it? If this pace of reconstruction is maintained, we will all have to be very old to see any results.”⁴³⁵

The central point of this article criticized the priorities of the government, and notably those of the minister of reconstruction. But the authors also mocked the bureaucratic planning involved in recovery projects. The article echoed a sentiment shared by many civilians at the time, one that questioned the vehemence with which the Dutch government pursued their colonial possessions, particularly the Dutch East-Indies. “Surely there is a connection between the Indies and the construction policies,” the author alleged. This, for some at least, helped explain the slow pace of recovery in the province.⁴³⁶ The considerable expenditure the Dutch government devoted to reclaiming its colonial possessions will be explored in greater depth later. While rural regions of the country struggled to sustain themselves in the post-1945 era, the government prioritized reclaiming their international prestige following the emasculating experience of occupation at the expense of domestic issues.

In this context, by mid-1947, many Zeeuwen who were disenchanted by the government’s actions called for the decentralization of reconstruction efforts, placing more resources in the hands of companies, individuals, and the province. This came as

⁴³⁵ *De Schakel*, “Nieuwjaar,” 2 January 1947, 1. “Als wij achter ons zien, als wij de balans van het verstreken jaar opmaken, dan is er nog niet veel, dat prettige herinneringen achterlaat. De wederopbouw van ons gewest, die men met zooveel enthousiasme heeft aangekondigd is nog niet zoo heel hard opgeschoten. Toen het Bouwplan 1946 gepubliceerd werd, hebben wij dat met blijmoedigheid en vertrouwen aanvaard. Dat plan zat zoo prachtig in elkaar, alles was tot in de puntjes uitgekend, de aantallen werklieden, die noodig en beschikbaar waren, kon men in mooie tabellen vinden, de hoeveelheid materiaal, die noodig en beschikbaar was, kon men precies over de verschillende gebieden verdeeld aantreffen, het was in een woord een pracht rapport. Maar wat is er van geworden? Als dit tempo van wederopbouw wordt aangehouden, moeten wij wel heel oud worden, om de resultaten er van te zien.”

⁴³⁶ *De Schakel*, “Nieuwjaar,” 2 January 1947, 1. “De Minister van Wederopbouw, de man, die ons voorgehouden is als de man, die de zaak der opbouw aan kon, verlaat het schip, omdat hij het niet eens is met de Indische politiek der Regeering! Zeker is er verband tusschen de Indische en de opbouwpolitiek, maar dat verband is toch niet zoo groot, dat een Minister daar voor wegloupt. Het achter ons liggende jaar is voor het land van Cadzand geen opbeurend jaar geweest.”

former Minister of Reconstruction, Ir. Ringers, was replaced by L. Neher. The most widely distributed paper in Zeeland, the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, followed this development quite closely and claimed that “responsibility [for reconstruction] should lie in their own region.”⁴³⁷ The authors alleviatingly wrote “finally there is a new minister for reconstruction appointed to replace Ir. Ringers. L. Neherms, up to this point director of P.T.T., is the new administrator of the most important portfolio for the emergency areas.” “we will have to wait [to see] what he does in this capacity,” it continued reluctantly.⁴³⁸ Nonetheless, the appointment of a minister, not from the government but rather with experience in the business world, inspired a degree of confidence in Neher, who some thought could effect change in the process of recovery. The *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* took the opportunity to make clear what the Zeeuwen wished for when it came to Neher’s function as the minister of reconstruction. It first criticized the lack of comprehensive financial regulations governing compensation for private losses during the war. The paper claimed that “the long wait for Zeeland is fatal. In the great uncertainty that prevails there, the people dare not build.” Some civilians, therefore, thought that a “legal, final settlement should be established as soon as possible.”⁴³⁹

Fundamental to the issue of unsatisfactory war damage compensation at the civilian level was the centralization of reconstruction and recovery. Centralization of

⁴³⁷ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Zeeland wenscht decentralisatie van wederopbouw,” 3 March 1947, 1.

⁴³⁸ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Zeeland wenscht decentralisatie van wederopbouw,” 3 March 1947, 1. “Eindelijk is er dan een nieuwe minister voor de wederopbouw benoemd als opvolger van ir. Ringers. De heer L. Neher, tot dusver directeur der P.T.T., is de nieuwe beheerder dezer voor de noodgebieden allerbelangrijkste portefeuille en... wij zullen moeten afwachten, wat hij in deze functie presteert.”

⁴³⁹ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Zeeland wenscht decentralisatie van wederopbouw,” 3 March 1947, 1. “dat het lange wachten voor Zeeland fruikend is... n de allereerste plaats dient er dan op gewezen te worden, dat er nog steeds geen bevredigende financieele regeling is voor het probleem der schadevergoeding. Het is ons natuurlijk bekend, dat deze zijde van de wederopbouw tot de competentie van minister Lieftinck behoort, maar dit neemt niet weg, dat het lange wachten voor Zeeland fruikend is. Bij de groote onzekerheid, die er thans heerscht, durven de menschen het bouwen niet aan. Een wettelijke, definitieve regeling dient er zoo spoedig mogelijk te komen.”

government and bureaucracy ran counter to the political culture of local administration. Critics of the existing system of reconstruction claimed that the centralization of recovery efforts inhibited progress or, at the very least, that the government incorrectly prioritized post-war reconstruction projects. While the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* acknowledged that the government had aided the province in recovery projects, the authors maintained that “on the other hand, reconstruction that remains in bureaucracy is inhibited by an avalanche of forms, and prevented by too much government interference.”⁴⁴⁰ Instead, they advocated for a system in which “the responsibility for the implementation of the reconstruction should be located in the region where the recovery should take place. Lower administration, such as provincial administration and communal council, must obtain a leading role, especially when it comes to issues of urban plans.”⁴⁴¹ Finances governing reconstruction left out the commune and the burgemeester from allocating resources for reconstruction efforts.

In many ways, this system of allocating finances and materiel contradicted a political culture in many parts of the country, one in which the commune and provincial estates played a central role in decision making. It is hardly surprising that the perceived lack of attention the province received had newspaper editorials speculating about what role the central Dutch government should continue to play in provincial recovery.

⁴⁴⁰ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Zeeland wenscht decentralisatie van wederopbouw,” 3 March 1947, 1. “Maar daar staat tegenover, dat voorkomen moet worden, dat de wederopbouw vastloopt in bureaucratie, geremd wordt door lawines van formulieren, door een te veel aan overheidsbemoeienis.”

⁴⁴¹ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Zeeland wenscht decentralisatie van wederopbouw,” 3 March 1947, 1. “Er dient voor gezorgd te worden, dat de verantwoording voor de uitvoering van de wederopbouw komt te liggen in de streek, waar het herstel plaats moet vinden. Lagere organen, zooals provinciaal bestuur en gemeenteraad, dienen een leidende plaats te verkrijgen, speciaal als het gaat om het onderwerpen der stedeboekkundige plannen. Thans hebben de gemeenten te weinig invloed terwijl toch plaatselijke plannen plaatselijk dienen te ontstaan, onderworpen overigens daarna aan de goekeuring door het Rijk.”

British Aid in Post-War Zeeland

The previous chapter underscored some of the frustrations civilians in Zeeland had when it came to civil-military relations from 1944 to 1945. While the MG was often frustrated with the allocation of Allied resources during military operations in the Netherlands and Germany, it is important to note that the British effort to repair Walcheren's dykes was instrumental in Zeeland's recovery. The Allies provided necessary resources, such as three stationary barge loading suction dredgers, one stationary pump-unit that could reclaim 1,000 cubic yards per hour, and two floating stone-transporter cranes with a capacity of carrying one ton each, without which closing the dykes on that island would have taken much longer.⁴⁴² For civilians and Zeeland's authorities, this assistance was vital to expedite the province's recovery. Even after the war, when Allied troops were in the process of repatriation, the British Foreign Office remained involved in recovery efforts, if only as a nominal, political gesture. This, however, was an understandable position, as Britain was preoccupied with their own political and economic issues.⁴⁴³

On 28 May 1946, British ambassador to the Netherlands wrote to the Foreign Office about a newly established foundation in Zeeland called *Stichting Nieuw Walcheren* (Foundation New Walcheren). As part of reconstruction efforts, the organization dedicated itself to public works projects, including regeneration efforts to plant various trees and flowers. Because of the deforestation caused by the war, and the lumber required to repair all of Walcheren's dykes and other buildings, the organization engaged in a reforestation program. News about the project spread through the Foreign

⁴⁴² NA, FO 371-49408, "Letter from Anthony Eden, 3 January 1945," 2.

⁴⁴³ Judt, *Postwar*, 69-70.

Office and Prime Minister's Office, and soon the British had begun canvassing politicians and statesmen for donations to the "Walcheren Tree Fund." When told about the initiative, Prime Minister Clement Attlee quipped, "I rather like this idea."⁴⁴⁴

The Foreign Office proposed three ways the British government could contribute to the organization's mandate and the Tree Fund: personal cash contribution, personal visits to Zeeland, and a signed public appeal to the people of the UK. By 5 August 1946, the commander of the 52nd Lowland Division, which played a key role in the operations conducted by First Canadian Army, expressed interest in visiting Middelburg along with many veterans of the Schelde campaign. Municipal officials in Edinburgh and Glasgow also became interested in sponsoring Walcheren's Tree Fund. The commander of the 52nd Lowland Division, General Edmund Hakewell-Smith, argued that trees could be taken from Scotland and brought to Zeeland by the veterans themselves. By September 1946, the British Foreign Office and military had 236 trees to send, while the Air Ministry contributed 320.⁴⁴⁵

By October 1946, the British ambassador in Den Haag met with the editor of the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* and discussed the idea of a ceremonial planting. To bolster more support for the program, the Foreign Office contacted the *Daily Telegraph* and its agricultural correspondent to cover the development of the Walcheren Tree Fund. However, throughout the autumn and early winter of 1946, plans for the ceremony were losing momentum in the UK. On 23 December 1946, the air ministry threatened to withdraw its contribution of 320 trees unless plans to plant them were established immediately. The Dutch officials claimed that the earliest time for tree planting in

⁴⁴⁴ NA, FO 371-67850, "Memorandum on the Walcheren Tree Fund," n.d.

⁴⁴⁵ NA, FO 371-67850, "Memorandum on the Walcheren Tree Fund," n.d.

Zeeland was in either March or April 1947, mainly because the *Stichting Nieuw Walcheren* had experienced great difficulties in procuring enough trees in the province.⁴⁴⁶

The British officials also raised the idea that a special area in Zeeland be allotted for “British” trees around the coast of Vlissingen and Westkapelle, hoping that “the British area would become a permanent memorial to the interest shown by our country in the rehabilitation of the island.”⁴⁴⁷ This correspondence between British officials continued:

“the foregoing will show that, if these various plans materialise, the British participation in the tree-planting might prove of considerable political value; and the Ambassador suggests that, particularly if Lord Templewood’s scheme is a success, Mr. Attlee might feel able to spare a day to go over to the island and plant the first ‘British’ tree at the ceremonial planting in April...there is no doubt that if Mr. Attlee went over he would be most warmly received and his action very greatly appreciated. Alternatively, Mr. Attlee might feel able to show an interest either by subscribing to the fund which is being raised in the Netherlands or to the subscription list in this country, if one is opened.”⁴⁴⁸

The British hoped to memorialize their role on Walcheren through the initiatives established by the *Stichting Nieuw Walcheren*. They sought to create a memory very soon after the Second World War.

On 4 January 1947, the *Stichting* contacted the Foreign Office informing the British about upcoming events. The president of the foundation, G. Ballantyn, claimed that they were not going to replant trees that mixed styles, but sought unity in the types of trees that were being planted. Whether or not the trees contributed by the British

⁴⁴⁶ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from J. Addis, PM Office,” 27 January 1947, 1.

⁴⁴⁷ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from J. Addis, PM Office,” 27 January 1947, 2.

⁴⁴⁸ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from J. Addis, PM Office,” 27 January 1947, 2.

government and military were of the same type remains unclear. The locations for the replanting, perhaps unsurprisingly, were primarily in Middelburg and Vlissingen, although other communities would receive trees at a later date. The major problem preventing the reforestation program was the high level of salt content in the soil, which botanists and gardeners in the province claimed were still far too concentrated to support the growth of trees.⁴⁴⁹ In fact, a post-war study commissioned and published in 1947 claimed that without taking drastic measures the soil structure would not recover for about seven years. This is because, when soil is inundated with salt water, calcium ions are replaced by sodium ions, which results in the soil clumping in dry weather, while wet weather turns the soil into a pulpy substance.⁴⁵⁰ Additionally, Zeeland authorities had not yet approved plans to resettle refugees living in temporary homes in badly damaged towns like Westkapelle. Together these issues delayed the initiative.

The rest of the letter to the Foreign Office, written in poor English, tacitly compares the British involvement in reconstruction efforts with those of the Belgian government. Belgium played an extremely important role supplying raw materials to Zeeland in the immediate aftermath of the war, supplying some 250,000 trees and 2,000 tons of stone each week in late December and January to repair Walcheren's dykes.⁴⁵¹ Belgium also financed some of the reconstruction materials needed for other projects and was therefore a key player in Zeeland's recovery.⁴⁵² Following the war, Belgium established an initiative called "Plant a Tree in Walcheren," and had sent "numbers of

⁴⁴⁹ NA, FO 371-67850, "Stichting Nieu [*sic*] Walcheren tot Bevordering van Walcherens Welvaart," 4 January 1947, 1-2.

⁴⁵⁰ C. Dorsman, "Schade aan tuinbouwgewassen ten gevolge van inundatie met zeewater," *Tijdschrift over Plantenziekten* 53 (1947), 85.

⁴⁵¹ Gijs van der Ham, *Zeeland 1940-1945*, 566.

⁴⁵² See previous chapter.

considerable gifts—in Flushing the totally destroyed ‘Nollebosch’ is going to be replanted.”⁴⁵³ Ballantyn believed that

“if, on the English side English givers will get accord with the plan and give their approval to a representative object of replanting, it would perhaps be probable to make the replanting of Westkapelle, where in October 1944 the landing of British troops took place and where the first lapse in the dykes was thrown by the R.A.F., the result of British donations. If money comes...the replanting of the foot of the stroke of dunes between Westkapelle and Flushing could fall under it...in it would lay a project for England, in an equal value to the Nollebosch at Flushing, that would carry its name for any length of time and would bear a name in memory of England and its help.”⁴⁵⁴

While this might be an honest attempt to gain contributions from the UK, the letter gives the impression that the comparison between existing Belgian contributions and English ones was done to incite more action on the part of the British. On the British side, by February 1947, faith in the project had lost momentum. Lord Templewood resignedly wrote to the Foreign Office, stating “there is nothing more that I can do. I was principally interested in getting the R.A.F. to provide the actual trees. This idea seems to have been finally turned down. I doubt the advisability of trying to start a British fund. I do not believe any paper would take it up in present circumstances and, in any case, I fear that I could not involve myself in the project.”⁴⁵⁵ Bland’s response demonstrated a shared disappointment in the state of the initiative: “I entirely agree with what you say about the

⁴⁵³ NA, FO 371-67850, “Stichting Nieu [*sic*] Walcheren tot Bevordering van Walcherens Welvaart,” 4 January 1947, 1.

⁴⁵⁴ NA, FO 371-67850, “Stichting Nieu [*sic*] Walcheren tot Bevordering van Walcherens Welvaart,” 4 January 1947, 1.

⁴⁵⁵ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from Lord Templewood to Neville Bland,” 4 February 1947, 1.

inadvisability of attempting a nation-wide appeal, and you personally have certainly done more than your bit for Holland without undertaking any more.”⁴⁵⁶

It was clear to both of these statesmen that from the time that preliminary proposals for the Tree Fund had begun to implementing the plan, enthusiasm for the project in Britain had deteriorated. With interest dropping, the Foreign Office asked Dutch authorities what sum of money, representing a contribution to the Fund, would be suitable. British officials claimed that an amount of 25 pounds in the name of Prime Minister Attlee was fitting, while the Air Ministry would donate 75 pounds, although Attlee’s contribution was pending approval by the Treasury.⁴⁵⁷

The resigned disposition among British officials to contribute to the recovery of Walcheren might be explained by the damages caused by major floods in March 1947, when much of the Thames River valley was inundated. One official at the Foreign Office wrote “personally, I should not imagine that particularly at this time when a nation-wide appeal is being held in this country for the victims of our recent floods, there would be any great rush here to contribute towards a cause that most people have surely almost forgotten by now.”⁴⁵⁸ Once again, Britain had to dedicate resources to other tasks that were in its best interests. Despite the lack of interest among some British officials, Prime Minister Clement Attlee and his wife travelled to Walcheren and participated in the tree planting ceremony in autumn 1947.⁴⁵⁹ In practice, however, the contribution of the Prime Minister was much less than initially hoped for by the *Stichting* and was largely a public relations enterprise, likely because the Treasury reluctantly approved the funds to be used

⁴⁵⁶ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from Neville Bland to Lord Templewood,” 8 February 1947, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from T.L. Rowan,” 20 March 1947, 1.

⁴⁵⁸ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from Lord Reay to Mr. Penton,” 2 April 1947, 1-3.

⁴⁵⁹ NA, FO 371-67850, “Report from the Office of British Naval Attache,” 22 May 1947, 1.

for a foreign charitable cause when the Treasury would “consistently refuse to ordinary people” the type of donations given to Walcheren.⁴⁶⁰ Tied to the quarreling between the Foreign Office and the Treasury were the British austerity measures that limited the use of sterling in foreign markets. In the end, British aid to Walcheren following the Second World War was circumscribed according to broader economic conditions of post-war Europe. Attention from abroad was once again given to Walcheren at the expense of other parts of the province.

Rehabilitation through Reclamation? Zeeland and the Dutch East-Indies

For many decision makers in Den Haag, a national program of recovery implied a return to the Netherlands of the pre-1940 era. At the crux of national rehabilitation was the future of the Dutch East-Indies. Not only did recovery require the physical reconstruction of all facets of Dutch society, but there was also a degree of cultural or even psychological recovery that needed to occur within the political realm. The curious insistence to lay claim to existing Dutch colonies overseas is even more discomfiting when one considers the financial and materiel assistance still needed in Zeeland and elsewhere in the Netherlands.

Jennifer Foray has explored the place of the Dutch East-Indies in the culture of the occupied Netherlands and how Dutch politicians and civilians understood the future of their colonies. She argues that the “Indies question” had become one of the most important problems for the Dutch government in exile, even before the Netherlands had

⁴⁶⁰ NA, FO 371-67850, “Letter from MacAlpine (FO) to L. Rowan (PMO),” 24 April 1947, 1.

been fully liberated.⁴⁶¹ As she points out, during occupation clandestine newspapers consistently told their readers that the Netherlands needed to reconquer the East-Indies. One newspaper posed the question “should the Netherlands liberate and ‘reconquer’ the Indies, or ‘win them back for the Netherlands’.”⁴⁶² While the underground newspaper *Trouw* was circulated in very small numbers during occupation in Zeeland, and mainly in Zuid-Beveland, the occupation-era papers in Zeeland rarely discussed colonial matters. This, however, does not mean that civilians in the province did not discuss the future of the East-Indies. On the contrary, by the end of 1945, articles in most of Zeeland’s daily newspapers carried stories about the future of the Dutch colonies, especially the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* which was distributed in Middelburg, Vlissingen, Goes, Breskens, and elsewhere. This suggests that by 1946 civilians in Zeeland were to some degree exposed to discussions about the Netherlands and the colonial question.

In 1946, around 130,000 Dutch troops were deployed to the East-Indies and of that number some 20,000 came from Zeeland, most of whom volunteered for service.⁴⁶³ One volunteer from Tholen claimed that he wanted “to disarm the Japanese and to keep order” in the colony.⁴⁶⁴ Likewise, Piet de Kam, who had joined the OD in Zeeland during occupation and worked alongside Canadian troops as an interpreter in Zuid-Beveland from 1944-1945, was also sent to the Indies. Once the OD was disbanded, de Kam was named commander of the legal armed-organization, the NBS, like many other members of resistance movements. In 1945, de Kam and many other Zeeuwen prepared to set sail

⁴⁶¹ Jennifer L. Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 219.

⁴⁶² As quoted in Jennifer Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands*, 221.

⁴⁶³ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 253.

⁴⁶⁴ As quoted in Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 253. “de Jappen te ontwapenen en de orde te bewaren.”

from Vlissingen to the East-Indies as part of the 14 Infantry Regiment. Once in theatre, de Kam became part of the 8th Zeeuws Battalion, which saw action in southern Sumatra. In June 1948, the Zeeuws Battalion was repatriated and demobilized in Zeeland.⁴⁶⁵ As early as January 1946, the *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant* triumphantly declared that “order and security are restored” in the Indies. According to commentators, the view of the Dutch government had remained unchanged about the mandate in the colony and, by instituting military measures, stability had been secured.⁴⁶⁶ Once in theatre, the Dutch military performed a variety of functions that the government subsumed under the general mandate of “the recovery of order and stability” (*herstel van orde en rust*). The Zeeuws battalion provided medical attention, built bridges, cleared mines, and protected the civilian population from local gangs.⁴⁶⁷ In total, 6,189 men were killed in action in the East-Indies, about five percent of the Dutch troop strength.⁴⁶⁸

Jan Zwemer has argued that the military exerted strong pressure on Zeeuwen to sign up for service. According to some veterans, like Daan Dekker from Zaamslag (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), contracts stated that military service would only be required three months from liberation, or until August 1945.⁴⁶⁹ Zwemer has also rightly pointed out that in the immediate aftermath of the war in October-November 1944, during the evacuation and inundation period, many men in Zeeland were unemployed and service in the

⁴⁶⁵ NIMH, De Kam, 510, inv. Inleiding.

⁴⁶⁶ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Onze Indische Politiek. Orde en veiligheid worden hersteld—Gerechvaardigde Indonesische eischen worden erkend,” 2 January 1946, 1. “De regeering staat onveranderd op het standpunt, dat zij bij herstel van vrede en veiligheid, zoowel langs den weg van militaire maatregelen als door overleg een taak heeft te vervullen.”

⁴⁶⁷ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 256.

⁴⁶⁸ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 257.

⁴⁶⁹ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 254.

military guaranteed a salary and accommodation.⁴⁷⁰ This claim can be substantiated by looking at the origins of the first battalions sent east. Some of the first men repatriated in 1948 came from Zeeland and served with the Zeeuwse battalion. Less than one percent had come from Schouwen-Duiveland because it had not been liberated until May 1945. Thirty-nine percent of the troops came from Walcheren, where 20 percent of the population lived. Additionally, 24 percent came from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.⁴⁷¹ In this way, some of the earliest liberated areas in the Netherlands were the first regions from which volunteers to serve in the East-Indies were recruited. The lack of employment and the chaos that accompanied liberation often left no alternatives for many men in Zeeland.

The Dutch decision to send about 130,000 men to reclaim the East-Indies demonstrated that recovery in the Netherlands had more to do with the will of decision makers than the resources. When Indonesian leaders declared an independent republic in August 1945, leaders in Den Haag clung to the last vestiges of their pre-1940 world. Importantly, almost all of the great powers had begun the process of taking back their colonies. In 1946 and 1947, for example, Britain was fully engaged in both Palestine and India, as well as Burma and Malaysia.⁴⁷² Almost all of liberated Europe had in some form or another engaged in the process of decolonization and the ability, at least as far as politicians were concerned, to dispose of resources needed for every reconstruction project in their countries was unachievable. In this way, Zeeland's recovery, perhaps like

⁴⁷⁰ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 254. "In de evacuatie- en inundatieperiode was er immers in bepaalde delen van de provincie heel weinig werk voorhanden. Het verschil per streek blijkt bijvoorbeeld uit de herkomst van de 511 Zeeuwen die op 18 Februari 1948 met de 'Johan van Oldenbarneveldt' uit Indoënie terugkeerden. Het waren de overlevenden van het Zeeuwse bataljon 2-14 RI, allemaal oorlogsvrijwilligers. Amper een procent van hen was afkomstig van Schouwen-Duiveland, het deel van Zeeland dat pas in mei 1945 bevrijd was. Daar was dus nooit actief geworven."

⁴⁷¹ Zwemer, *Zeeland, 1945-1950: De wederopbouw van Zeeland na de oorlog*, 254-255.

⁴⁷² Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands*, 299.

many other rural provinces and regions, suffered because of broader post-war objectives, ones that often ignored reconstruction at the communal or provincial levels.

Conclusion

The periodization of the Second World War is problematic because it assumes that the conclusion of hostilities marked the end of war. This is perhaps not surprising given the dominant narrative of the Second World War. May 1945 marked the beginning of repatriation for Canadian and other commonwealth troops. Yet, ending the war so abruptly in 1945 does a disservice to the history of the regions on which we focus. A corollary of war is destruction, which almost always requires a significant degree of recovery and rehabilitation. For a variety of reasons, reconstruction efforts tend not to fit within an English-language narrative even though Canadian and British personnel played an integral role as Civil Affairs officers and worked alongside Dutch authorities. This chapter has demonstrated the problems associated with ending a narrative of the Second World War in May 1945 by highlighting the challenges the province of Zeeland continued to experience during the post-1945 era. The disappointment in the pace at which recovery materialized had vast implications for how Zeeland would come to remember this period of history. For Canadians and the British, the battle for the Schelde has been characterized as one in which a battered and resource-depleted Anglo-Canadian army prevailed over an increasingly vulnerable German enemy. In general, the Allied role in Zeeland is remembered as one that begins in September and ends in early November 1944. However, as this chapter has shown, public sentiment towards recovery

remained sour, while leaders in Den Haag invested more in the reclamation of their empire.

CHAPTER VII

Rehabilitating the History of Zeeland: The *Polderhuis Museum* and *Bevrijdingsmuseum*

Far too often historians associate recovery with the physical and tangible reconstruction of homes, businesses, and infrastructure damaged as a result of war. Martin Conway has referred to political reconstruction in post-war Belgium and some of the ways in which Flemings and Walloons worked to rehabilitate the linguistic divide after Nazi occupation.⁴⁷³ Yet, there is another important and much more amorphous stage of recovery that takes place long after war and initial reconstruction commences. The writing of a region's history is a form of rehabilitation that is sometimes overlooked by scholars interested in the corporeal process of dealing with war. In this way, the presentation of a narrative, history, or even stories at a communal level represents a form of cultural recovery. Following the Second World War, the German language adopted the cumbersome term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, literally "conquering one's past," to discuss the difficulties of dealing with Germany's very destructive and malicious wartime experience. Similar terms might exist in the languages of those countries or regions almost entirely destroyed from 1940 to 1945, but what matters here is that history is a form of recovery and Europeans have dealt with it as a process. It can provide comfort to the peoples seeking answers to very difficult, complex, and sometimes incriminating questions. History, when relying on the memory of a region as opposed to a cautious probing of contemporary sources, often affords insight into a completely different narrative than that which exists elsewhere.

⁴⁷³ Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium*, Introduction.

This final chapter explores the construction of memory in Zeeland as a way of dealing with the province's past. By examining the development of memory in two museums in Zeeland, this chapter demonstrates the communalization of history and memory, and that the narrative told by one museum in the province can be so vastly different from a history told just a couple dozen kilometers away. The first museum is the *Polderhuis dijks- en oorlogsmuseum* (Polderhouse, dyke and war museum) at Westkapelle, while the second is the *Bevrijdingsmuseum Zeeland* (Liberation Museum of Zeeland). This chapter does not claim that the two forms of memory are representative of a broader Dutch experience, but rather tries to illustrate the complexity of memory in this region. Before we investigate the construction of history using these two examples, some discussion about the differences of history, memory, and historiography are necessary.

History and Memory

Peter Moogk has claimed that of all countries liberated by Canadians during the Second World War “an exceptional relationship developed between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Canada” one which he refers to as “a wartime love affair.”⁴⁷⁴ Conventional wisdom, particularly in Canada, continues to reinforce the idea that there exists a special affinity for Canadians in the Netherlands. The Canadian government has called the liberation of the Netherlands in the spring of 1945 “The Sweetest Spring.” In this narrative, Dutch civilians pour into the streets of the Netherlands and shower the Allies, but especially Canadians, with kisses and whatever else civilians could offer.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Peter Moogk, “The Netherlands and Canada: a wartime love affair,” *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies* XXVII, vol. I (Spring 2006), 1-14.

⁴⁷⁵ See for example the official publication from the Canadian War Museum and Koninklijk Nederlands Leger- en Wapensmuseum (Delft), *The Sweetest Spring/Heureux Printemps/De Mooiste Lente* (1988).

Yet, Peter Schrijvers' recent research on the Allies in wartime Belgium demonstrates that after the initial euphoria of liberation subsided, significant conflicts between liberators and civilians began to surface. He therefore reassesses previous interpretations of Belgian-Allied relations from 1944 to 1945.⁴⁷⁶ In a similar way, we might question the pervasiveness of the "wartime love affair" between the Anglo-Canadian soldiers and the people of Zeeland. For instance, Dutch historians Ben Schoenmaker and Christ Klep have claimed that the operational advantages of inundating Walcheren were in fact quite minimal.⁴⁷⁷ Writing on the Allied assault on Walcheren, Tobias van Gent argues that "the truth of the matter is that the assailants were hindered more by the flooding than the defenders as the water made mobile warfare with tanks and armoured vehicles almost impossible."⁴⁷⁸ For the province of Zeeland, there exists a disconnected memory between the liberators and the local population, one that is much more complex "than cigarettes, sex and chocolate."⁴⁷⁹

These are just some of the ways in which historians have constructed a narrative of the Netherlands and the Second World War. But if history can be defined as the conscious selection, manipulation, and presentation of the past, then it is by definition only part of the story. What, then, is memory? Memories of the past are much more amorphous, particularly because they are rarely subject to any methodological rule typically associated with the writing of history. They almost always change over time. On

⁴⁷⁶ Peter Schrijvers, *Liberators: The Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴⁷⁷ Christ Klep en Ben Schoenmaker, red., *De bevrijding van Nederland. Oorlog op de flank.* (Den Haag 1995), 302-303; Tobias van Gent, "The Allied Assault on Walcheren, 1944," in *Building Liberty: Canada and World Peace, 1945-2005* edited by Conny Steenman-Marcusse & Aritha van Herk (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2005), 1-30.

⁴⁷⁸ Tobias van Gent, "The Allied Assault on Walcheren, 1944," 15.

⁴⁷⁹ Michiel Horn, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: The Canadian Army in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1981), 156-173.

the contrary, the memory of war particularly can be so disjointed, disparate, and multifarious as to render any single narrative inadequate. The key difference between history and memory, therefore, is a methodological one. History requires the use of contemporary sources and presupposes an impartiality of the subject on which one focuses. To be sure, some museums rely on historical researchers to provide content, but limitations and space in museums can influence to the extent to which research can be applied. But, as Dan Todman reminds us, perhaps incorrectly, “history is not what you thought. It is about what you remember.”⁴⁸⁰ The memory of certain events, such as the Allied role in the Second World War, is sometimes much more powerful and informative, especially among a general audience but also in the academic mainstream, than what actually took place. That the memory of liberation in the Netherlands among Canadians, for example, is celebrated is not wrong by any means, but it is certainly not wholly representative of Dutch experiences during the war. This problem likely stems from the language barriers between Anglo scholars and those in Europe, as well as distinct historiographies that are rigidly separated by those language barriers. One of the only ways English-language viewers, readers, and even scholars can access foreign narratives and histories is either through translations, which are usually circumscribed to very selective, key works and are very expensive, or through museums. In many ways, museums can have a much greater impact on viewers than any other medium, but the influence of a museum is limited by the fact that visitors must travel to distant locations, some of which are obscure or entirely unknown. This could very well be the case with Zeeland.

⁴⁸⁰ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, (London: Hambledon & London, 2005), xiii.

Jay Winter has rightly pointed out that there are “memory booms,” or periods during which generations choose to remember war. For the Second World War in the English-language world, he claims, a memory boom in the 1960s and 1970s was shaped by the veterans who had lived through the war and who became custodians of the memory associated with war. Whatever has been said about the Second World War, it must be affirmed by those who have experienced it. For example, when the Canadian War Museum installed a display questioning both the morality and efficacy of the strategic bombing campaign over Germany, veterans of the RCAF/RAF felt insulted because the exhibit cast doubt on whether the actions of Bomber Command were just.⁴⁸¹ The controversy, which was eventually brought to Canada’s Senate, demonstrated that the custodians of memory still possessed significant weight in what could be said about the war. To question traditional and nationalistic narratives was to question the sacrifices Canadians made in Europe. Whether the proposed exhibit would have generated such controversy in ten years from now, when veterans of the Second World War are no longer able to control the telling of history, is doubtful. In short, we remain in a period during which historians still cling to traditional narratives of wartime experiences, ones that usually emphasize the euphoria of liberation and an exclusively positive image of the liberators.

The Polderhuis and Memory in Westkapelle

⁴⁸¹ Interim Report of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, “AN ENDURING CONTROVERSY: THE STRATEGIC BOMBING CAMPAIGN DISPLAY IN THE CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM,” June 2007
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/391/defe/rep/rep16jun07-e.htm>, accessed 18 June 2013.

The history of occupation and liberation in Westkapelle is memorialized at the *Polderhuis dijk- en oorlogs* museum (Polderhuis Dyke- and War Museum), a deliberate choice which in itself highlights the connection between the town's history and its relationship to water. Visitors begin with prehistoric developments and the reclamation of land during the Middle Ages, but the majority of the museum's exhibits focus on occupation and liberation. Within the section on occupation, the panels give attention to flooding, bombing, and the consequences both had on the land. The occupation section primarily deals with Westkapelle's place within the *Atlantikwall*. One exhibit informs readers that in January 1941 the people of Walcheren worked to repair Vlissingen's airfield after the *Luftwaffe* bombed it by extracting large amounts of sand. Additionally, visitors are told that on 15 August 1943 an Allied bombardment destroyed the nearby village of Nieuwe-Abeele, mistaking it for Vlissingen's airfield.⁴⁸² On signage indicating key events in the chronology of the war, 3 October 1944 represents the terminal date on the placard, which reads "the RAF bombard the Westkapelle sea dyke."⁴⁸³ Events following that date are not listed. Later in the exhibit, visitors encounter another placard entitled "the Destruction" (*De Verwoesting*) on which more details about the bombardment on 3 October 1944 are given. It reads "Westkappelaars are tied strongly to their land and village...the bombardment lasts more than two hours; with new waves of attacks every quarter. The first bombs hit not only the dyke, but also a large part of the village. The mill *De Roos* of the Theune family is hit hard and crumbles. Some people in the basement are killed instantly. The exit is blocked by debris by fallen millstones. Just

⁴⁸² *Polderhuis*, "Om het vliegveld Vlissingen te herstellen, wordt overal op Walcheren zand gewonnen...Het dorp Nieuwe-Abeele wordt per ongeluk door geallieerden bombardement, het had het vliegveld Vlissingen moeten zijn."

⁴⁸³ All quotations from the *Polderhuis* taken from photographs taken at the museum by the author.

after one hour the flood water, coming through the dyke opening, flows through the village, drowning almost all the people in the mill. Only three of forty-seven people (2 adults and a baby) are barely rescued from the rubble. On the same day, 113 other people die in Westkapelle. The remaining inhabitants abandon the village and go to surrounding villages. Only a few remain behind.”⁴⁸⁴ The environment therefore plays a central role in the province’s memory of what the Allies call “liberation.”

The primary theme interwoven throughout this form of memorialization is human tragedy and despair. *Polderhuis* visitors are steered through the course of events, but almost always within the framework of *De Verwoesting*. For example, after listing details about the Allied landing on Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland, placards list the degree of destruction inflicted upon their village. “Before the three bombardments there stood 650 houses, afterwards only about 50 were inhabitable. The seawater, that the bombardment let free, brings new misery” and concludes that “the fighting and the shelling of 1 November ensures that afterwards no building can be found unscathed.”⁴⁸⁵ When it comes to providing a timeline of Allied advances through Walcheren and Zuid-Beveland, one placard laconically reads: “1 November 1944, liberation.” Directly beside the title is “Feest?” (*party?*), questioning the local reaction to what the Allies typically refer to as

⁴⁸⁴ *Polderhuis dijk- en oorlogsmuseum* “Westkappelaars zijn heel sterk aan hun grond en dorp gebonden...Het bombardement duurt meer dan twee uur; elk kwartier komen er nieuwe aanvalsgolven. De eerste bommen treffen niet alleen de dijk, maar ook een groot gedeelte van het dorp. De molen De Roos van de familie Theune wordt zwaar getroffen en stort in. Sommige mensen in de kelder zijn op slag dood. De uitgang is versperd door puin en de omlaag gevallen molenstenen. Als na een uur het vloedwater door het ontstane dijkgat het dorp instroomt, verdrinken vrijwel all mensen in de molen. Slechts drie van de zevenenveertig mensen (2 volwassenen en een baby) worden ternauwernood uit de puinhopen gered. Op dezelfde dag komen ook 113 andere mensen om in Westkapelle. De overgebleven inwoners verlaten het dorp en gaan naar de omliggende dorpen. Slechts enkelen blijven achter.”

⁴⁸⁵ *Polderhuis dijk- en oorlogsmuseum* “Voor de drie bombardementen staan er in Westkapelle 650 woningen, daarna zijn er circa 50 nog enigzins bewoonbaar. Het zeewater, dat na de bombardementen vrij spel heeft zorgt voor nieuwe ellende. Niet verwoeste huizen worden door het langdurige die het zeewater weten te doorstaan, bieden een treurige aanblik. De gevechten en de beschietingen van 1 November zorgen er vervolgens voor dat in Westkapelle geen onbeschadigd pand meer gevonden kan worden.”

liberation. To conclude the liberation section of the *Polderhuis*, one placard provides a list of every citizen from Westkapelle who died because of the Allied bombing and flooding, along with their age and photograph.

The majority of the exhibit, however, devotes space to the reconstruction phase of the province's history, which is perhaps the most important part of the town and province's history. The sections that deal with the Allied assault on Walcheren and Zeeland occupy a small part of the museum's exhibit. Here, the most apparent, and perhaps most important theme of the museum, is the ability of the people to rebuild following such a destructive process of liberation. Visitors then move on to a section entitled "Life Goes On" in which recovery and reconstruction forms the most important part of the narrative. The most striking aspect of this exhibit is the almost complete absence of any discussion of Allied assistance and the CA officers who worked alongside Dutch authorities from October 1944 onward. Instead, the exhibit tells the story of recovery in Westkapelle and Walcheren as one initiated, supported, and completed by the Zeeuwen and Dutch people. A placard reads "Walcheren is reclaimed. The land and its people, however, have suffered under the sea. Every farmer has damage done to buildings, business inventories, crops and his livestock. Walcheren becomes a desolate barren plain, with remains of trees and shrubs, which have almost without exception not survived the salt water."⁴⁸⁶ In this section, too, visitors are guided through a life-sized "Bruynzeel" emergency home, in which many villagers were housed after the

⁴⁸⁶ *Polderhuis dijk- en oorlogsmuseum* "Walcheren is drooggevallen. Het land is en de bevolking echter hebben onder de zee geleden. Elke boer heeft schade aan gebouwen, aan de bedrijfsinventaris, aan gewassen en aan zijn veestapel. Walcheren is een troosteloze kale vlakte geworden, met resten van bomen en struiken, die vrijwel zonder uitzondering het zoute water niet hebben overleefd. Om Walcheren weer 'aan te kleden' wordt er een Boomplantdag georganiseerd. Overal op Walcheren worden bomen geplant, vanuit de rest van het land gefinancierd. Prinses Juliana plant de eerste boom in Westkapelle op 4 November 1947. Een jaar later plant haar moeder, koningin Wilhelmina, de eerste boom van het Wilhelminabos, ten zuiden van Westkapelle."

bombardment. In 1945, the commune requested the Dutch government provide 200 emergency homes placed throughout the town. The last home of this type was removed in 1963. When it comes to closing and repairing the dykes, a small book containing English-language information is located near the end of the exhibit. Even here the Allied contribution to reconstruction efforts, so exigently requested by Anthony Eden and others, remains absent. The page devoted to “Closing the Dykes” notes that “in the period between 18 May 1945 to 2 February 1946 (almost 9 months) around 4 million m³ of sand, 1 40,000,000 kg of rocks, 3,600,000 bundles of wicker were used. In addition to the many hands, huge machinery was involved in carrying out the repairs. This included 12 suction dredgers and 20 tugs. For the first time ever caissons (huge submersible concrete structures) were used to close off flow channels.”⁴⁸⁷

The materiel and the CA units sent to the region from the Allies have little place in the narrative of reconstruction. The type of memory and the story of the *Polderhuis* offer a stark contrast to how liberation is remembered in the Anglo-Canadian tradition in which liberation is almost exclusively associated with euphoria among local population. But the version told in Westkapelle underscores the human and environmental toll, and suggests implicitly that the processes of liberation, which also required substantial reconstruction, were more costly for the region than four years under Nazi occupation. In a publication commissioned by the *Polderhuis*, Thijs Weststrate writes “Although the invasion succeeded and Walcheren was liberated, the situation after the liberation was simply disastrous. In a couple weeks 184 inhabitants perished in Westkapelle, almost 8% of the entire population, and more than 80% of the village was destroyed. There was no

⁴⁸⁷ *Polderhuis dijk- en oorlogsmuseum*, Photo of placard taken by author in May 2012.

family in the village that was not in any way a victim of the war.”⁴⁸⁸ The history of liberation as constructed in this town in Zeeland emphasizes the damage and enormous scale of reconstruction and recovery, with particular attention given to the environmental consequences. It says little of any euphoria of a local population after Nazi Germany’s capitulation in 1944. The narrative described here affords important insight into an alternative form of remembrance than other forms of commemoration in the Netherlands or Canada. It also shows how human actors, regardless of nationality, appear less important than the environment.

Adding to the complexity of memory in this particular part of Walcheren is the recent announcement to internationalize the existing narrative at the *Polderhuis*. In a joint effort between the German *Bundesarchiv* and the Imperial War Museum in London, the *Polderhuis* museum hopes to gather stories from both Allied and German perspectives on the bombing and fighting on Walcheren. The changing nature of memory in this location is compounded by the memorial to the British 4 Commando Brigade who stormed Westkapelle’s beaches on 1 November 1944. Unveiled in 1961, it features a Sherman tank, which sits atop the dyke that Bomber Command breached in October 1944, only meters away from the *Polderhuis* museum. Interestingly, the final line on the epitaph reads “Walcheren can resurrect,” once again commemorating Walcheren’s commitment to regeneration.⁴⁸⁹ In the museum’s dominant narrative, however, the British have largely been written out.

⁴⁸⁸ Thijs Weststrate, *Slechts enkelen wenschen een zolderkamertje: Westkapelle en de wederopbouw 1945-1963* (Vlissingen: ADZ, 2007), 6. “Hoewel die invasie slaagde en Walcheren bevrijd werd, was de toestand na de bevrijding kortweg rampzalig. Er waren in die paar weken 184 inwoners van Westkapelle omgekomen, bijna 8% van de hele bevolking, en meer dan 80% van het dorp was verwoest. Er was geen familie in het dorp die niet op een of andere manier slachtoffer was geworden van het oorlogsgeweld.”

⁴⁸⁹ Polderhuis Westkapelle, Dijk- en Oorlogsmuseum, *Memoria Walcheren 40-45: Een Overzicht van Oorlogsmonumenten en Restanten van de Atlantikwall* (Westkapelle, EFRO: 2007), 16.

Bevrijdingsmuseum Zeeland

Compared to the wartime experience of Westkapelle and Walcheren, the town of Nieuwdorp just 25 kilometers away on Zuid-Beveland emerged from liberation with minimal damage (See Appendix IV). For that reason, the message presented to visitors in the *Bevrijdingsmuseum* greatly differs from that at Westkapelle. Unlike the *Polderhuis*, which explores the periods before and after the Second World War, the Liberation Museum specifically focuses on the period from 1940 to 1948, offering very little context to the Nazi Invasion in May 1940 and almost no information about the reconstruction process. In 2010, the Liberation Museum received the status of a “registered museum” and was listed on the register of Dutch museums.⁴⁹⁰ Before this time, however, it was considered a local and regional museum relatively unknown outside of the Commune of Borsele, in which the town of Nieuwdorp is located, and the province. Although the museum lacks an explicit mandate, the information provided on its website suggests that the museum purports to be provincial in scope and not necessarily communal.⁴⁹¹ The museum claims “The Liberation Museum Zeeland takes us back to an extraordinary piece of Zeeland’s history. During the Second World War Allied Soldiers, sailors and airmen of various different nationalities united in the fight against the German occupation forces. This resulted in large numbers of dead and wounded on both sides. The local population in Zeeland also suffered heavy casualties.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, “Bevrijdingsmuseum,” 21 October 2010, 1.

⁴⁹¹ The name of the museum, Liberation Museum Zeeland, and the slogan “Hét oorlogsmuseum in de Provincie Zeeland” suggests that it is provincial in scope and mandate.

⁴⁹² See homepage of the *Bevrijdingsmuseum*, <http://bmzeeland.nl/index.php/en>, accessed 21 June 2013.

Visitors begin in the basement (*kelder*) of the museum. Images and video offer footage of the Battle for the Schelde, as well as aerial bombardment of the province, while interviews are overlaid to provide commentary about individual experiences. The civilians, presumably either witnesses or veterans of some kind during occupation, discuss their memories of the war in October-November 1944. Because of the multinational nature of the interviews, since the interviews are given in French, German, and Dutch, the message of the video once again emphasizes the human and physical tragedy of the war. Curiously, it does not explicitly condemn Germany's occupation forces. In this way, the lack of context provided at the museum presents a confusing narrative for visitors unfamiliar with the development of the war in the Low Countries.

Visitors leave the basement to explore two additional floors, each floor "leading the visitor step-by-step to the liberation of Zeeland."⁴⁹³ The main floor briefly outlines the German occupation forces, but presents the period through the materiel left behind. In this sense, the experience of occupation is told through a variety of artifacts found and donated by residents from nearby villages and communes. In addition to items such as a Hitler Youth dagger, various helmets, and other Nazi miscellanea, the exhibit presents information about resistance to the Nazi regime and briefly discusses the Jewish experience in the Netherlands during occupation. Later, on the opposite side of the exhibit, the narrative focuses on the *Atlantikwall* and the German attempts to defend Zeeland's air space against Allied heavy bombers. The main floor, therefore, provides some sort of context for the final stages of Zeeland's experience during the Second World War—the Allied assault and the Battle for the Schelde.

⁴⁹³ Visitor information, *Bevrijdingsmuseum*, <http://bmzeeland.nl/index.php/en>, accessed 21 June 2013.

The final stage in the museum's narrative almost exclusively deals with the Anglo-Canadian forces of First Canadian Army, as well as the Polish units under the command of the Canadians. This section invests a sizable portion into the Canadian attempts to gain the Zuid-Beveland Canal, but especially the Sloedam, which was extremely costly for Canadian troops. Here the exhibit also devotes space to the 52nd Lowland Division. This part of the exhibit includes an interactive, touchscreen map that explains the operational details of the Battle and pinpoints where both belligerents engaged one another in fighting. Following this section, visitors briefly encounter placards about liberation in Zeeland. Unlike the *Polderhuis*, however, very little space is dedicated to inundation and damages. One placard reads "Inundation—living and fighting on flooded land." The placard continues,

"Inundation is an important characteristic of the battles fought in the western part of the Netherlands. Long before World War II it was a well-known defence tactic in the Netherlands...In 1944, the Germans order large-scale inundations of Schouwen-Duiveland and in West Zeeland Flanders, as part of their *Atlantikwall*. A brand new form of inundation, which was certainly not unquestioned, is the inundation by the Allies of Walcheren Island, which took place in October 1944. This inundation causes a host of problems for the Germans at Walcheren Island. Many of their inland bunkers are flooded and the communication lines go down. Yet the Allies themselves are also hindered by the inundations. Important German coastal batteries that control the West Scheldt are now difficult to reach, so that risky landing operations are called for. It takes until 1946 for the holes in the

dykes to be repaired and for Walcheren Island to become fit for habitation again.⁴⁹⁴

This effectively marks the end of the narrative involving the Allied assault and the Battle for the Schelde. Reconstruction and recovery do not occupy an important position in the story the Liberation Museum tells. While this narrative considers the operational efficacy of inundation, it does not give any indication of the lengthy recovery process and the civilian experience in the post-war world.

The final section of the Liberation Museum focuses on Zeeland's contribution to the reclaim the Dutch East-Indies. As we have already seen, Zeeuwen had played a considerable role as part of the Dutch attempt to bring law and order to the Dutch East-Indies from 1946 to 1948. That the last exhibit in a museum dedicated to the liberation of Zeeland explores Zeeland's contribution in the process of reestablishing colonial power is most perplexing, but it does indicate the place of the Dutch East-Indies in the collective memory of some Zeeuwen. Roughly 20,000 men from the province volunteered to serve in the east and it represents one way that this rural Dutch province contributed to the international events of the post-war era. In a period during which Zeeland was economically destitute, flooded and destroyed, highlighting something less dismal in the history of the province is important. By placing emphasis on something believed to be positive, Zeeland's experiences in the Dutch East-Indies are explored against the backdrop of liberation by displacing and even juxtaposing the conditions facing civilians in the province.

The two museums demonstrate not only the complexity of history and memory, but also that two different narratives in extremis exist concomitantly. The ways in which

⁴⁹⁴ Photograph of placard taken by author on 12 June 2012.

these two museums choose to tell their history are so vastly different from one part of the same province to another, let alone from province to province. At the crux of the communalization of memory is a choice to emphasize parts of history at the expense of others. It highlights that the process of war, destruction, and recovery was never a unified process and developed unevenly from one region of the province to the next. It also illustrates how individual choice in narrative selection shapes the construction of memory. More importantly, the liberator as an actor is presented differently at the *Polderhuis* and Liberation Museum. While in Nieuwdorp the Allies appear as heroes fighting valiantly to open the port of Antwerp, the *Polderhuis* gives less attention to the liberator. When the museum at Westkapelle presents the Allies, it is not necessarily in a favorable light.

The museums explored above are constructions of memory as envisaged long after hostilities came to an end. They must be understood as histories *as conceived by subsequent generations*. It is important to note, however, that almost immediately following the Battle for the Schelde, the British Allies hoped to construct a number of monuments to honor the sacrifices of their soldiers, only a handful of which materialized. In August 1945, for example, one officer from the 52nd Lowland Division submitted a request to the Dutch authorities, asking PMC Slot to “examine the local supplies of stone and select that most suitable for construction of a memorial in the form of a SCOTTISH cairn, not more than 3’6” in height and 6’ diam at base.”⁴⁹⁵ In addition to Allied demands to create a series of monuments in the region, the Dutch also requested assistance to preserve some of their own landmarks and historic sites. In at least one case, civilians

⁴⁹⁵ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland 4300 IX H, “Advice on construction of Memorial Cairn,” 7 August 1945, 1.

tried to take debris from fallen buildings to repair homes and other property. As a result, CA officers posted notices that warned civilians “This Building is an HISTORIC MONUMENT: All military personnel will co-operate in protecting it against defacement. No material or article of any sort will be removed from the premises except by a responsible Allied or Dutch Authority for safekeeping.”⁴⁹⁶ The protection of historical sites, such as churches and cathedrals, was a chief concern for many authorities in the province. In another instance, civilians in Middelburg became aware of a stockpile of ammunition and explosives in an old home called the *Gouden Poorte*, at which point they informed the authorities. MG and CA officials recognized the danger and had the materials removed before they were accidentally detonated.⁴⁹⁷

Conclusion

The two, and often diverging, narratives presented at Westkapelle and Nieuwdorp are apt to begin a study of the construction of memory and the narration of history. Neither wholly satisfies the complexity and enormity of the recovery process in the province. Both, however, underscore the uneven ways reconstruction affected the way people remember the events from 1944 to the 1960s. The two museums also show how towns and villages in the province have tried to tell a simple and straightforward story at the expense of the multifaceted and difficult nature of reconstruction. In some ways, both museums explore a part of their past to comfort the villages or communes of which they are a part. At Westkapelle, the onus of reconstruction is placed on the civilians

⁴⁹⁶ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland 4300 IX H, “Notice. This Building is an HISTORIC MONUMENT,” n.d.

⁴⁹⁷ ZA, 280 Militair Gezag voor Zeeland 4300 IX H, “Letter from PMC Zeeland to F. Fr. Wuthrich,” 25 January 1945, 1.

themselves, demonstrating among the Zeeuwen a degree of stoicism and perseverance in light of incalculable resource, materiel, and manpower challenges. The narrative at the *Polderhuis* is therefore one of pride, self-reliance, and a commitment to local recovery, which might account for the general absence of CA assistance. At Nieuwdorp, on the other hand, a narrative of recovery occupies very little space. Instead, the museum focuses the Battle for the Schelde and largely exists to showcase the material culture left after the war. The marked shift in emphasis can be explained by the lack of damage inflicted upon the village during fighting in 1944. As a result, reconstruction is of minor concern, and the museum employs the word “liberation” in a way typically associated with the euphoria of civilians upon the capitulation of the Germans and not unlike the way readers in the English-language conceptualize the term. The English rendering of the word “liberation” comes closer to “emancipation,” denoting a relinquishment of legal, social, and political restraints. On the other hand, the *Polderhuis* uses the word sparingly and does not correlate liberation with a euphoric period or great relations between the Allies and the Dutch, but rather a period of intense chaos, environmental damage, and civilian casualties.

An additional issue surrounding museums is the commercialization of memory. Some museums exist not only to tell one part of a region or town’s history, but also to attract visitors and increase profits. At Westkapelle, the museum might be less attentive to German occupation since the town brings in a great number of German tourists, many of whom vacation on Walcheren. On the other hand, most of the artifacts donated to the Liberation Museum in Nieuwdorp have dictated what message the museum offers. The museum in that town, therefore, might be designed to tell a particular story because the

creators had precious few options in its exhibition development. Either way, a museum that stresses the great sacrifices made by Canadian, British, and Polish troops, as well as Dutch civilians, appeals to a much different demographic.

The “wartime love affair” or “Sweetest Spring” narratives, described by Moogk and celebrated between governments, are not necessarily wrong since they do apply to other parts of the Netherlands. They are not, however, representative of Zeeland’s experiences in the autumn of 1944. That war continued unabated for over half a year after Walcheren and many other parts of the province were badly damaged ensured that recovery would be extremely slow. In many places, a “wartime love affair” could not exist because of the circumstances of destruction and reconstruction—evacuation procedures, for example—did not foment love. In other parts of the Netherlands, liberated in spring 1945, the end of hostilities ushered in a wave of optimism and enthusiasm, typically in places that the Allied did not completely raze. In towns like Breskens, Schoondijk, Westkapelle, or Vlissingen, enthusiasm for the Allies *at the time* is questionable. Whether or not subsequent generations of politicians, museums, and civilians have chosen to reconstruct a history in which all Zeeuwen enjoyed the presence of Allied troops is an issue related to generational shifts. This is part of the historical rehabilitation process and an essential part of cultural recovery.

CONCLUSION

The twentieth century brought fundamental changes to the people of Zeeland. From the Napoleonic era onward, the Kingdom of the Netherlands clung to its neutrality as a way to ensure its survival in an era of nationalism and continental expansion. The country came close to war in 1914, when the vital waterways around the province attracted the attention of both Imperial Germany and the United Kingdom. The civilians around the Schelde heard the sounds of the Great War, experienced some of its resource constraints, and the people coped with the influx of Belgian refugees. All of this had a profound impact on how the people of Zeeland understood their position in a rapidly changing world. Above all, the First World War reinforced the importance the Dutch government placed on neutrality. While the conflict had been the most destructive and costly for Zeeland's neighbours, the Dutch emerged relatively unscathed. That they did so convinced some politicians that the Netherlands could navigate even the worst of conflicts by reaffirming their neutral status. However, despite the country's neutrality, the central and provincial governments controlled the economy from the Great War to the interwar period. During the 1940s, civilians once again came under the control and influence of a strong bureaucratic administration, albeit an external one.

The first signs of industrialization in the interwar years also changed the province. The islands of Zeeland remained isolated, but transport by rail began to transform the economy in the 1920s. During this era, the people of Zeeland began to negotiate with the outside world. Newspapers carried stories about the economy outside of Europe and, as industrialization continued in the province, their position in Europe became less isolated.

With the industrialization of the province came increasing connections with a broader economy. This meant that they were not exempt from the boom and bust of the 1930s.

The economic challenges of the 1930s made farmers and businessmen question the abilities of the provincial and national governments to improve their conditions. In this way, the people of the Netherlands began negotiating with new ideologies. In the search for better socio-economic conditions in the dominantly agrarian economies of Europe, some turned to burgeoning political ideologies like communism and National Socialism, whose promise of change and prosperity attracted some Zeeuwen. By the mid 1930s, newspapers in the province highlighted political developments in Germany and the expansionist rhetoric of Hitler's Nazi regime. The politicians and military commanders in Den Haag, however, believed that in the event of another war Hitler would respect Dutch neutrality as the Kaiser did in 1914.

Dutch historian Hermann von der Dunk reminds us that all of these changes wrought by the Great War, industrialization, and negotiating with the outside world are necessary to understand the shock of May 1940, occupation, and war.⁴⁹⁸ When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, politicians and the military were flatfooted, for they lacked the imagination to entertain the possibility of a war on Dutch soil. They lacked the imagination necessary to understand that Nazi Germany would not respect Dutch neutrality. Perhaps more importantly, though, the Great War and government measures imposed to assuage the financial crises of the 1930s offered the only points of reference to frame the experiences of the 1940s.

⁴⁹⁸ Hermann von der Dunk, "The Netherlands and the Memory of the Second World War," *European Review* 4, 3 (1996), 222.

Zeeland's geographic position and topography shaped the course of war in 1940. Fighting continued on Zeeland's soil two days after General Winkelman's formal capitulation, while the various islands hindered the German advance. These same islands offered auspicious positions for the German occupiers. The land dictated the ways in which the Germans occupied Zeeland and where they would build defensive positions. It also influenced how civilians would endure, negotiate, and participate in the war. While in other parts of the country, the Nazi regime conscripted Dutch civilians for work far removed from their provinces, the people of Zeeland often worked where they lived, exemplified by the construction of the *Atlantikwall* in the Schelde. For these reasons, the initial occupation was benign. The benign occupation gradually became more restrictive according to the broader contours of the war, which reached an apogee in autumn 1944.

In addition to topography and geographic position, Zeeland's demographic features influenced occupation experiences. The predominantly Reformed communities of the province understood occupation and war in covenantal terms; negotiating with the outside world, industrialization, and modern amenities helped lead to a divine punishment. Resistance in the province also hinged on the environment. On the sparsely populated islands, resistance to the regime was extremely challenging. Small pockets of resistance formed throughout occupation, but their abilities were limited and began as the Allies pushed out of Normandy in the summer of 1944. In a dominantly agrarian economy, few individuals possessed the skills to build and operate clandestine radios to contact Allied armies and intelligence networks in the United Kingdom. For this reason, the actions of the OD and of people like Piet de Kam were extraordinary. However, the lack of resistance must be understood in context. German sanctioned work projects

provided many civilians in the province with wages to support families and, by 1941, it appeared as though Germany had won the war. In this way, the pragmatic approach to occupation the Zeeuwen adopted is not surprising and represents another way the people negotiated occupation.

As the occupation progressed so too did the demands of the Nazi regime in the Netherlands. Many families on Walcheren were uprooted because of coastal defense construction and other factors. Nonetheless, the people of this province endured occupation with a great deal of stoicism. This period of occupation can best be described as an accommodation based, in part, on the region's experience of neutrality during the Great War and the economic crises of the 1930s.

The province of Zeeland once again became a focal point among Allied commanders, following the rapid Allied advance through France in the summer of 1944. By September 1944, Allied armies had successfully captured the port of Antwerp. While some of the French ports on which the Allies had previously relied were damaged because of either fighting or weather, the port of Antwerp was in prime condition. Convinced that a narrow-front strategy and the penetration of the Reich near Arnhem could end the war quickly, Montgomery launched Operation "Market Garden" on 17 September 1944. At the same time, the Allies assigned an increasingly long list of tasks to First Canadian Army, while resources and personnel were diverted from the Canadians. The exigency of resupplying First Canadian Army and other elements of 21 Army Group fomented a debate between Eisenhower and Montgomery at the strategic level. Eventually, Eisenhower convinced Montgomery that clearing the approaches to Antwerp was absolutely integral to the future of European operations. SHAEF declared

in early October 1944 that operations to clear the Schelde and open Antwerp would receive full attention. After witnessing the German army hastily crossing the Schelde over the course of two weeks in September, the people of Zeeland believed the war was coming to an end, and perhaps it would come just as easily as it did elsewhere in Belgium.

The strategic necessity of Antwerp is necessary to understand the extent to which the Allies went to clear the approaches. The exigencies of resupply in northwest Europe trumped the consideration of civilian casualties and damages. Here we need to suspend our knowledge of what transpired following November 1944. To Eisenhower and other leaders, there was a very real possibility of operations coming to a complete halt if they could not open Antwerp's port. The push into the Netherlands would not have been possible after November 1944 had it not been for the operations in Zeeland.

As this study has highlighted, the military exigencies in October and November 1944 had immense and unprecedented consequences for civilians in Zeeland—even once hostilities in the province had ended. Aside from comparatively small battles between Dutch and German forces in May 1940, this region had not witnessed war since the early 1800s. Invasion and occupation had sent the Zeeuwen into considerable shock. Whether people accepted occupation as a divine punishment or accepted it for more pragmatic reasons, this period had a considerable effect on Zeeland's people. Even more long-lasting, however, was the Allied bombardment and flooding.

To be sure, flooding was not a new phenomenon for people living in the region, as many Dutch historians have pointed out.⁴⁹⁹ But the Allied attempts to sink the island of Walcheren, and to a lesser extent the German use of flooding, embodied something new. It represented the first time modern warfare and air power coopted to mobilize water as a weapon. It also marked the first time when modern technology brought war to the region. Flooding had been used in the Low Countries as a form of defense as early as the sixteenth century, but no one had ever used aerial bombardment to destroy and flood swathes of Dutch territory. During the Great War, some newspapers displayed a great deal of consternation about the use of aircraft over their territory. From a civilian perspective, some might have never seen aircraft before the 1940s. Still others barely left their communes in the 1920s and 1930s. This was yet another instance in which Zeeland negotiated with the outside world. In this way, the flooding of Walcheren and the damages as a result of war represented something entirely new, something that had an indelible physical and psychological impact upon this region.

The environmental impact of occupation, war, and reconstruction is a recurring theme in this study. Topography governed the development of occupation and the way in which the Allies attacked German armed forces. In 1947, one Canadian official explained how the environment had shaped Zeeland's culture:

“In the struggle against the sea and the great rivers, the Netherlands have waged an offensive as well as a defensive war, for a large part of the country has been reclaimed from the sea and any relaxation of effort means flooding and disaster.

This dual struggle has left its mark on the character of the people who possess a

⁴⁹⁹ For example, Michiel Kagchellend en A. Kagchellend, “Pennestrijd over een watersnood: een cultuur-historisch onderzoek naar de receptie van Keert u tot Hem die slat (1825),” *Tijdschrift voor Waterstaatsgeschiedenis* (1992), 58-68.

love of freedom and a strong aversion to any form of regimentation or direction. Stolidness, determination, stubbornness, serenity, and a certain stiffness are characteristic qualities. To Netherlanders, life is a serious and earnest affair; humour is not lacking but there is considerably less frivolity than in the average English-speaking character. The average Netherlander is neither rash nor impetuous; he is provident—quite often to the point of parsimony, and has a high regard for cleanliness, neatness and orderliness—without unreasoning submission to authority.”⁵⁰⁰

While no doubt patronizing the general population, this statement highlights how the rhythm of coastal life and the province’s topography have made an impact upon the culture of the Zeeuwen.

This study has also highlighted the chaotic nature of reconstruction and recovery efforts. In the immediate aftermath of battle, and as Hitler’s forces readjusted their lines along the Maas, the Allies were unable to dispose many resources. Nonetheless, without Allied Civil Affairs and the large machinery supplied by the Allies the most pressing problem—closing the dykes on Walcheren—would not have been accomplished as easily. CA and MG officials worked in concert to assess damages as best as possible in late 1944 and early 1945. Canadian reports on CA involvement highlight how different the situation in the Netherlands was compared to that in either France or Belgium. In the 1960s, Donnison, perhaps the only historian to compare CA missions in Western Europe, argued that the Dutch government required what was ultimately a Dutch CA organization because of the degree to which Nazi sympathizers remained in politics. Additionally, the

⁵⁰⁰ CMHQ-172, “Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government, Part IV: Civilian Morale,” 30.

Dutch government established the MGs because they had no historical reference point and no experience in how best to recover almost every sector of the country. With two mirroring institutions, CA and MG officials often possessed the same portfolios. While resources were still difficult to obtain from SHAEF, the Allies were fundamental to initial reconstruction projects, including evacuating much of Walcheren and Tholen, and transporting civilians to Zuid-Beveland. While the Allies were responsible for extensive damages to the region, they also provided fundamental manpower and materiel after the campaign to open up Antwerp had ended.

Like any occupation, civilians resisted some of the measures CA and MG authorities implemented. Villagers evacuated from Walcheren often refused to leave their homes and many complained about lost baggage and other administrative problems. When Allied troops shot sixteen year-old Cornelis van der Hoeven or stole a boat from a man in Vlissingen, civilians voiced their discontent to burgemeesters and other authorities. These types of complaints highlight the growing discontent civilians experienced as a result of the Allied presence in the province. These illustrate the propensity for tension inherent in civil-military relations.

For the duration of the war and throughout 1946-1947, recovery projects continued. As Chapter VI demonstrates, the most vital sectors of Zeeland's rural economy—agriculture and fisheries— began to receive attention. In order to accomplish this, however, infrastructure like railways and bridges needed to be restored. During this period, civilians also became increasingly irritated by the lack of assistance from the Dutch central government, despite promises to compensate civilians for the loss of property and income. Instead, the government sought to reclaim its colonies, but invested

most heavily in the Dutch East-Indies. This was central to the rehabilitation of Dutch political culture.

Recovery typically implies physical and tangible reconstruction, but it can also include the writing of one's history or the construction of memory. This is a form of reconstruction that takes place long after the cessation of hostilities, but one that is an inherent part of Henry Rousso's concept "exiting war." Although amorphous, memories serve to simplify and to communicate difficult experiences of the past. Because of how disparate each part of the province was, and how civilians experienced occupation and war in dramatically different ways, memory of this period remains communalized. The way in which different villages and towns narrate this period differs as one moves from one part of the province to the next. Chapter VII demonstrates this communalization of memory by focusing on two museums, but the idea might also apply elsewhere. The *Bevrijdingsmuseum* in Nieuwdorp, a village that emerged from the war with little damage, depicts the Allies in a celebratory way. In Westkapelle, however, the overriding message is one of human tragedy, despair, and the stoicism of the villagers to persevere. Neither the Allies nor the German occupiers figure prominently in the narrative.

The communalization thesis offers stark contrast to the way the majority of Canadians remember the liberation of the Netherlands. The Canadian narrative begins in April-May 1945, long after operations in Zeeland, and emphasizes the euphoria of a destitute, starving, and largely urban population. That the Canadian government granted the Ottawa hospital in which Princess Margriet was born as extraterritorial to retain Dutch citizenship is well known to Canadians. While this is not necessary wrong, it is by no means representative of the Netherlands as a whole. But, how many Canadians are

aware of the level of destruction inflicted upon this region in autumn 1944? The former narrative serves to gloss over the painful and destructive process of “liberation” in Zeeland. An analysis of the communalization of memory in Zeeland demonstrates that the word “liberation” requires deconstruction. It highlights the profound effects the Second World War has had on this part of the country. In this way, rather than speaking about *liberation*, historians need to consider *liberations*—as a way to appreciate the complexity and variegated experience inherent in the process.

By examining this region’s history from the early to mid-twentieth century, this study has shown how the people of Zeeland have navigated a period of enormous political, economic, and cultural transition. It has also identified considerable continuity in economic and political experiences between the First and Second World Wars. The Zeeuwen began negotiating with the outside world through the Great War and increased industrialization in the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1940s, the people of this region were presented with an unprecedented set of choices. Yet, it was liberation, not occupation, that proved most destructive and which proved the greatest departure from any other part of the early twentieth century. The destruction of Allied liberation in 1944 represented the breaking point in Zeeland’s history. From Nazi occupation to war, destruction, and reconstruction, the people of Zeeland accommodated each phase of their wartime experience by remaining steadfast in their stoic commitment to recovery and regeneration. In each of these phases, the people had embodied Zeeland’s provincial motto: *Luctor et Emergo*, I struggle and I emerge.

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APPENDIX I
Populations of Selected Towns, 1899-1930

Population of Towns (1899)	
Breskens	1957
Goes	6923
Middelburg	18,837
Terneuzen	8174
Vlissingen	18,893

Population of Towns (1909)	
Breskens	2198
Goes	7620
Middelburg	19,564
Terneuzen	9329
Vlissingen	21,363

Population of Towns (1920)	
Breskens	2451
Goes	7848
Middelburg	18,605
Terneuzen	9770
Vlissingen	23,025

Population of Towns (1930)	
Breskens	3003
Goes	9124
Middelburg	18,395
Terneuzen	10,458
Vlissingen	21,716

APPENDIX II
Net Profit or Loss of Agricultural Firms in Zeeland According to Hectarage, 1928-1934⁵⁰²

	10-20 Hectares (HA)	21-50 HA.	51-100 HA.
1928	+ 71 florins per HA	+ 81 florins per HA	+ 84 florins per HA
1929	+ 56 fl.	+ 12 fl.	+27 fl.
1930	+ 41 fl.	- 28 fl.	- 3 fl.
1931	- 43 fl.	- 51 fl.	- 30 fl.
1932	- 34 fl.	- 22 fl.	- 20 fl.
1933	+ 34 fl.	+ 40 fl.	+ 44 fl.
1934	+ 40 fl.	+ 49 fl.	+ 81 fl.

⁵⁰² Adapted from de Bree, *Zeeland, 1940-1945*, 17. He employed statistics produced by the accounting office of the *Zeeuwsche Landbouwmaatschappij (ZLM, Zeeland Agricultural Society)*.

APPENDIX III
Defense Sectors (*Verdedigingssectoren*)⁵⁰³

*Küstenverteidigungsabschnitt (K.V.A)

K.V.A. A1—Walcheren and both Bevelands, as well as the area around Hujbergen (Noord-Brabant)

August 1942-October 1942	39. Infanterie-Division
October 1942-June 1943	65. Infanterie-Division
June 1943-January 1944	19. Luftwaffen-Feld-Division
January 1944-July 1944	165. Reserve-Division
July 1944-November 1944	70. Infanterie-Division (bo)

K.V.A. A2—from Terneuzen to the south of Blankenberge

June 1942-September 1944	712. Infanterie-Division
September 1944-November 1944	64. Infanterie-Division

K.V.A. A3—south of Blankenberge to the French-Belgian border

August 1941-November 1942	306. Infanterie-Division
November 1942-February 1943	39. Infanterie-Division
February 1943-January 1944	171. Reserve-Division
January 1944-August 1944	48. Infanterie-Division

N.B. the line from K.V.A. A2 to A3 pushes inland 20 kilometer.

Along the *Hauptlinie* (H.K.L.), by September 1943 was as follows:

Manpower

KVA A1 16,917 (total)	57(distance/coast)	7,950 (total)	139(per km)
KVA A2 11,902 (total)	45(km)	6,695 (total)	149(per km)
KVA A3 26,171 (total)	47(km)	14,800 (total)	315(per km)
Total: 54,990	149(km)	29,445(total)	198(per km)

⁵⁰³ Hans Sackers and Hans Houterman, *Atlantikwall in Zeeland en Vlaanderen*, 8-9.

APPENDIX IV
List of Civilian Casualties in Selected Towns of Zuid-Beveland⁵⁰⁴

Town	Dead	Severely Wounded	Lightly Wounded	Total
Rilland	15	4	20	39
Waarde	6	2	2	10
Krabbendijke	10	7	12	29
Kruiningen	2	-	-	2
Yerseke	4	1	2	7
Hansweert	?			
Wemeldinge	7	5	70	82
Kapelle-Biezeling	16	-	-	16
Schere	1	-	-	1
Kloetinge	3			3
Kattendijke	?			
Wilhelminadorp	1	-	1	2
Goes	11	6	8	25
's Heer-Hendrikskinderen	1	2	-	3
's Heer-Arendskerke	3	-	-	3
Lewedorp	3	1	3	7
Nieuwdorp	2	3	2	7
Wolphaartsdijk	?			
's Heerenhoek	?			
Borselle	10	3	2	15
Heinkenszand	8	7	4	19
Driewegen	11	3	3	17
Ellewoutsdijk	2	2	1	5
Ovezande	2	1	5	8
Oudelande	11	2	2	15
Hoedekenskerke	26	2	-	28
's Gravenpolder	?			
Kwadendamme	?			
Nisse	3	3	3	9
's Heer-Abtskerke	?			
Baarland	3	2	2	7

⁵⁰⁴ NIMH, *De Kam*, 510, inv. 13. "Rapport betreffende de werkzaamheden der O.D. in het District Zuid-Beveland gedurende het tijdvak 29 October t/m 11 November 1944," Bijlage D—Slachtoffers.

APPENDIX V
Aerial Photographs, October-November 1944



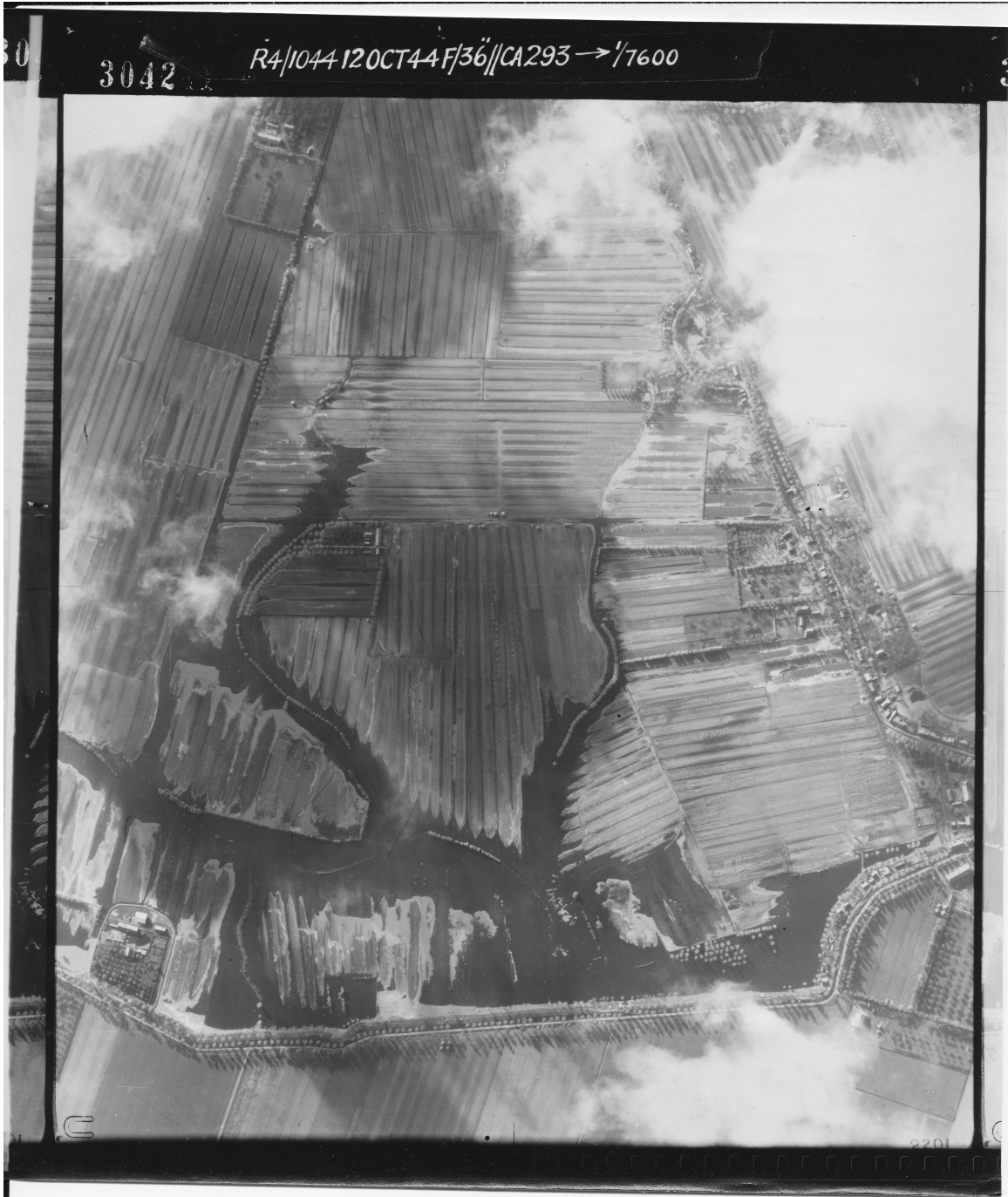
Figure 1.1 Westkapelle (Walcheren), 28 October 1944



Figure 1.2 Breskens (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen), 12 October 1944



1.3 An inundated village likely near Veere (Walcheren), 3 November 1944

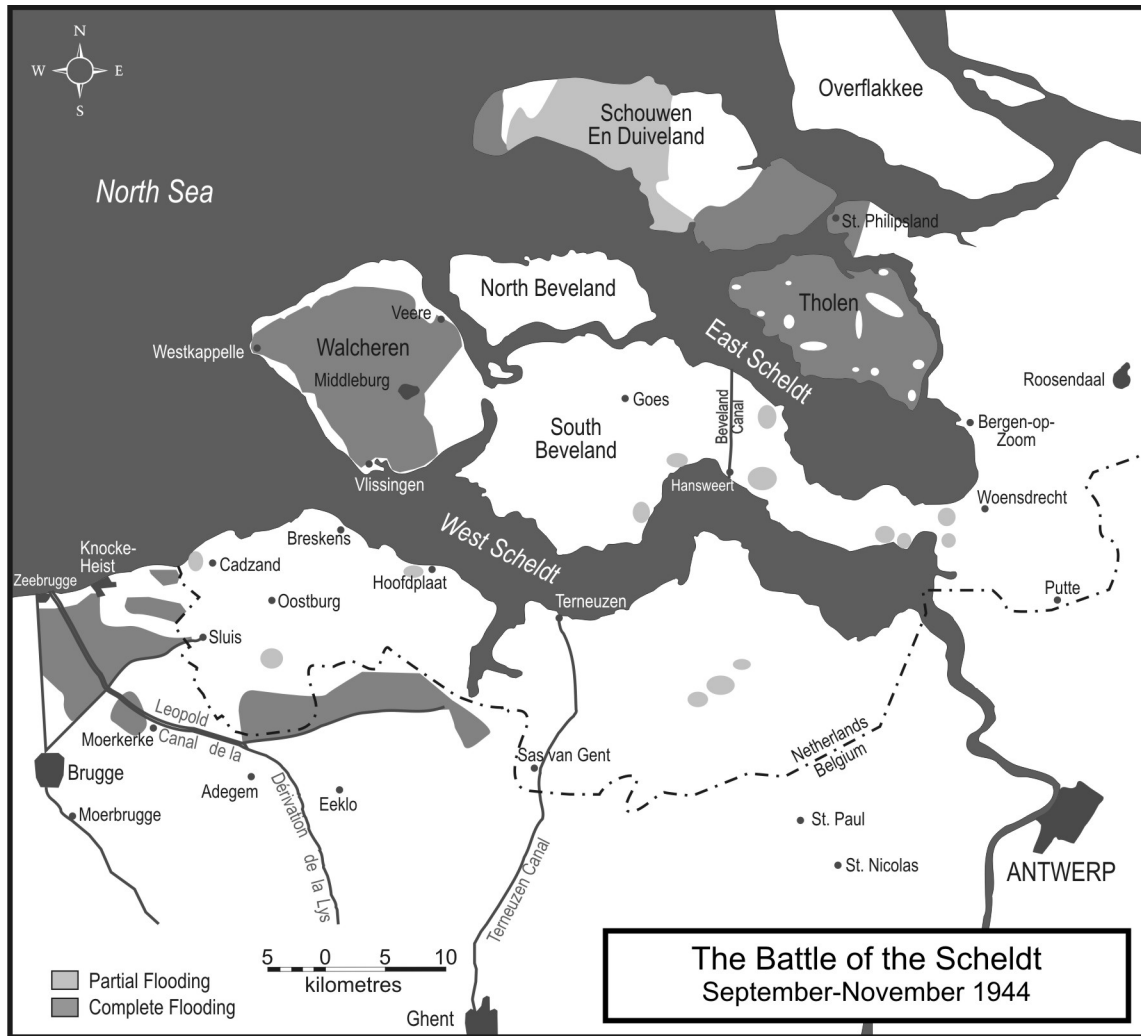


1.4 German "Controlled" flooding outside Oostburg (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen),
12 October 1944.



Figure 1.5 “Controlled” Flooding in Zeewo-Vlaanderen, 11 September 1944

APPENDIX VI Map of Zeeland Indicating Some Flooding



APPENDIX VII

Map of Walcheren, October 1944

