The policy of the Dutch Government towards Curacao and the other islands of the Dutch West Indies has not been a particularly liberal one. Practically all of the islands receive little rain and are more or less barren. Curacao itself has rain only during six weeks of the year and while this contributes, together with the trade winds which blow constantly in the same direction, towards making it a healthful place to live, the question of food supply is a serious one.

The question of water is the most important. All the houses have tiled roofs of tile imported from Holland, and the water falling in the short rainy season is gathered in tanks attached to each house, and the watertank is as important a part of the house as any. As the majority of the houses are necessarily small, the water which can be gathered is not sufficient for the average household although the greatest economy is practised in the use of it. Except by the wealthy, this rain water is used only for drinking and cooking purposes. All over the island Artesian wells have been sunk, but the water secured even from the deepest is brackish and unsuitable for drinking purposes. It can however be used for irrigation purposes and over the island here and there are veritable oases surrounding delightful country houses which have been built by the wealthy Curacaoans. By means of irrigation, they are able to cultivate in these restricted areas, around the kintas, banana, date and coconut palms, fig trees, mango trees, the nispero and a few other tropical fruits, and these supply a fairly adequate amount of fruit. There is, however, no grass and no vegetation, and the only cattle to be found are a few cows which are fed on forage imported from Venezuela and Colombia, from the other West Indies or the United States. There was a project for many years of building a huge dam at a naturally convenient spot and to sink deep artesian wells from which pure water could be secured. But the sinking of these wells involved an expenditure which the local people could not consider and which the Dutch government was never willing to make. It is but unfortunately true that the Dutch government maintains the old attitude towards colonies, that they must be productive and not a source of expense. Their Dutch West Indies have never been productive to them but have required a slight expenditure by the home government. They have therefore refused to do anything to develop the resources or the possibilities of the island, while their policy towards the East Indies, which are a source of riches, has been much more liberal. If the government were willing to spend a fair amount of money, Curacao could be made one of the most productive of the West Indies, as it is now one of the most delightful and salutary as to climate.

The food of the people consists mainly of corn meal
which is imported almost entirely from the United States. Certain large fish are caught, the meat of which is for the most part very rough, but in some instances palatable. Cattle is imported from Venezuela and Colombia and generally slaughtered the day it is consumed. Platanoes and brown sugar are imported from northern South America, and the negroes for their meat are confined almost entirely to fresh or dried goat meat. The white population supplements the food supply with canned goods and canned fruits of a wide variety, imported principally from the United States. All the white flour and all the corn meal have been imported for years from the United States.

During the first years of the war, when the United States was not a participant, white flour and corn meal kept coming in uninterrupted quantities, but with the entrance of the United States into the war, food control came into effect and out of a clear sky came the announcement that corn meal and white flour could no longer be sent to Curacao. This was not in any way a discrimination against the island, for it was a general measure and applied to the British and French West Indies as well as to the Dutch, but those islands were not struck so severely as they were to a certain extent self-supporting and could substitute other articles at least for wheat flour. There was great danger, however, that Curacao would be in great distress and there would be practically famine or at least much suffering among the negroes who comprised over 90% of the population. I therefore brought these facts to the attention of our Government, and the food administration immediately took cognizance of the special situation and issued orders that the usual supply of corn meal and white flour was to proceed but that the consul was to act as the agent of the food administration at Washington and see that these did not go to enemy and/or unfriendly destinations.

In addition to my already heavy duties, for the carrying out of which I had practically no staff, I now had to issue quite an amount of licenses for the withdrawal of the flour and corn meal. While it was a rather onerous task, the measure proved to be a most effective one in aiding us to control certain situations, in that part of the world. The people as a whole were intensely grateful for these special considerations which they received from our government and accentuated that friendly feeling which already existed towards us. During all the time that I had to control the issue of the flour and corn meal there was not a single instance of our confidence or trust being misused. This control over the staff of life enabled us particularly to hold a weapon over the schooner traffic between
Curacao and the other West Indies and the main land of South America. The crews of these schooners subsisted almost entirely upon corn meal and when they realized that their existence practically depended upon us, and that it was within the power of the consul to cut off their food at any time, it made it possible to control passenger travel over these schooners which we could not have exercised in any other way, and also enabled us in certain instances to keep track of enemy owned or enemy destined merchandise.

Practically every steamer that called at Curacao took bunkers, usually coal, and this coal was supplied by two bunkering firms at the port, both of which secured their coal in the United States. We were therefore the sole suppliers of coal and immediately after our entry into the war, we began to ration and control fuel in the same way as food stuffs through the War Trade Board at Washington. The consuls acted as the agents of the War Trade Board and in practically every instance a steamer other than of allied nationality which desired bunkers at Curacao, had to apply at the American Consul. In case of allied vessels, the Consul was authorized to grant the license for the coal without telegraphing to the War Trade Board in Washington, but in case of neutral vessels the application for bunkers, with a description of the contemplated voyage was telegraphed, and on the receipt of the authorization the bunkering firm was given the necessary permit by the Consul to supply the vessel. The vessel, however, undertook on the receipt of the bunkers, not to carry any merchandise of enemy ownership or of enemy destination and to carry any passenger whose passport did not have the visa of the American Consul. Through the means already explained, the Consulate was able to keep track of the merchandise in which there was enemy interest at the port, and when the Bills of Lading were presented with the manifest of the cargo to be taken on, these were scrutinized and if there was any shipment which was under suspicion, or concerning which we were not absolutely sure, the vessel's agents were informed and the cargo could not be taken on, as otherwise we would have refused to sign the manifest and issue the license for the bunkers, thus effectively tying up the vessel. This particular work was very heavy and exhausting, especially as it required very careful knowledge of the ownership and real destination of cargo, and the refusal to permit a certain shipment to go forward could work serious injury to innocent parties. In those days the prices of coffee, sugar, hides, coco and similar products had greatly increased and the profits to the owners were enormous and the freights paid on the cargo were similarly exaggerated. I believe, however, that we succeeded in doing this rather delicate work to even the full satisfaction of the owners of the neutral ships concerned, although I can remember still the visit which a number of Dutch steamship owners made to me from Holland for the express purpose
of intimidating me. When I told these gentlemen of certain things which I knew concerning them and their operations, and that if I so desired I could have put them on the British black list at any time and put them definitely out of business, and that I would not do so unless I had their word that they would discontinue certain practices, they wished very heartily that they had stayed at home. The profits involved in shady dealings were frequently enough to make a man rich in one voyage and there were responsible merchants who were not unwilling to take these risks and some of them got away with it.

In order to control the coal, it was necessary, of course, for us to know exactly how many tons each of the bunker suppliers had and we checked the amount which went on board the steamers bunkering, so as to see that they received the exact amount under the license. When the bunker supplier himself needed coal, he could not place his order and receive shipment until we had approved it and until he had given his written agreement not to sell without our approval. Shortly after the bunker licensees went into effect, one of the bunkering firms came to me and said that they were keenly desirous of doing the right thing, but that they were in a dilemma. As I was confident that they wanted to be honest, I asked them to explain the situation, which he said was highly confidential. He then explained to me something as follows:

"What are we going to do in a case like this. For years the ships of a certain Spanish line have been coming in here and they have been getting their coal from us. The Chief Engineer and the Captain sign an order on us for twelve hundred tons of coal and we get paid for that amount by the line. In reality, however, we deliver only 900 tons to the ship which are all that is necessary for the voyage and we pay to the captain and the chief engineer the cost of the 300 tons for which the line pays us but which we do not supply. This craft is entirely legitimate and we are obliged to countenance it to keep the business. Now what are we going to do ? You know to a ton how much coal we have and how much we supply to the ship. How are we going to account for these 300 tons, which according to the license we do not have, but which we still have in our pile."

This form of craft was unknown to me, but I informed my caller that while I hated to disturb any existing arrangements, and while it really had nothing to do with the war, the master and engineer would have to devise some other way of getting
their craft, but that if the license was for eleven hundred tons, the ship would have to take that amount and that no accounts would be rendered except for exact sums authorized and supplied. I do not know how they arranged it, but have no doubt that it was worked out in some way.

On one occasion a Dutch passenger steamer, bound from New York to Rio de Janeiro, was held at Curacao for six days with some eight hundred passengers on board waiting for the coal license to arrive. It was held up because the captain of this steamer had been suspected of carrying messages between South America and New York for the German Minister in Rio de Janeiro. There appears to be but little reason to believe but that he was guilty, but the license finally arrived and the vessel continued its journey. Outside of this instance, the licenses always arrived promptly and vessels were not delayed.