

Memorandum.

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1304
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Just as during the last great war so in the present one Holland will be obliged to be constantly on the guard. Even under the more civilized Hohenzollern rule her safety was often endangered, and no doubt that even Bismarck once had plans about the absorption of the Netherlands in to Germany, but the more ambitious and less intelligent Hitler, with his erratic and impetuous mind, is naturally even more inclined to be ready for an act of violence against the integrity of the small Dutch state.

It is not yet clear even today to what extent was Hitler ready to act violently against Holland on November 12th, but everybody agrees that the constellations were such that an attack looked very likely. I was less likely to admit in those days that Holland was in an imminent danger, and I had two reasons for having been cautious in my predictions. I did not expect an imminent invasion though I realized that the situation was very serious. My reasons were twofold for taking a less alarmist view than my colleagues: first, the Germans before attacking always try out what the enemy will do in case of an attack on her, and, second, because through my excellent connections here (Bob Casey is a witness for them) I always knew what the Dutch general staff was believing.

I still maintain that the November 11th in Holland was another May 21st, 1938, in Czechoslovakia. As you will remember, in May 1938 there was a sudden Czech mobilization and everybody believed that there will be war. But what was the May 21st in reality? It was to try out what the Czechs, the French and the British will do in case a threat of Germany against Czechoslovakia. The November 11th, to my mind, was the repetition of the very same process. What Germany wanted to see was, first, the movement of the Dutch troops in case of danger, ~~the~~ second, the movement of troops and diplomatic attitude of Belgium, third, the movements in Northern France and, fourth, the movements of the British airforce. And Germany attained her aim in the first three points, even if she did not in the fourth.

She discovered that the Dutch very rapidly could man the first lines of defences (the Maas and IJssel lines), that troops kept for nominal reasons on the Belgian frontier were hurriedly thrown to the East, that the pickets were ready to blow up mines should German troops enter Dutch territory, that the second line (Grebbe and Peel) were efficiently flooded at a short time's notice, ~~that~~ including even Bergen-op-Zoom, the way to Flushing which seemed to be the aim of the German "push."

Belgium's attitude left also no doubts. Belgium would intervene ^{de} intervene on the side of Holland. The movements in Northern France were also clear. Much heavy artillery has been brought already a few days before to this district and the sixteen French divisions and the British army showed moves which unmistakably told to the Germans that France would move across Belgium...

The Germans, however, remained in the dark about the British airforce's rôle in case of such an invasion. I myself am convinced that the British airforce will come to the help of the Dutch army in case of an invasion, but the British could cleverly camouflage their intentions and the Germans are still in doubt what Britain would do in such a case.

After this preliminary analysis let us go back to the history of those dramatic days. For two dramas were rolling next to each other in close connection: The German "invasion" plan and

the Venlo kidnapping affair. Undoubtedly a possible invasion of Holland^d was always hunting the mind of Hitler, and one must count with this at a later date, just as one had to count with the annexation of Austria and with the attacks on Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Dutch and the Belgians always realized this, and when the British-German feud became more intense, naturally the fears were constantly growing. Reliable reports from Berlin (from Dutch and Belgian sources) asserted that an invasion of Limburg was possible, that Germany may try to push through to the sea just through a small corridor, just ~~to~~ occupy Flushing and the mouth of the Maas and the Schelde rivers. These were essential for bases for German "pocket" submarines, while Flushing was to be used as an aerial base against England.

The Belgians were very nervous about these reports, the Dutch considerably less. The Dutch general staff thought that such a push on a narrow stripe would be too dangerous for the invading armies. A full invasion of Holland was certainly not planned, for all German troop movements were South of Emmerich and nothing against Groningen, Drente and ~~Over~~Ijssel. Nevertheless, owing to the various disquieting rumors the Dutch government issued a Royal Decree proclaiming state of siege in many hundred municipalities along the military inundating zones on November 1st.

Things now started to head for a climax. At the beginning of November (I think on the 4th when my automobile accident happened) an important German emissary came to see the King of Belgians. It was an important Nazi personality and yet one of the "serious" ones with old connections. He was certainly in an official mission, but it was one of those missions which could be denied if they failed. Then he was only a private person! This gentleman tried to find out what Belgium~~x~~ would say to a proposition of letting a slice of Northern Belgium which together with Northern Brabant and Zeeland in Holland would give Germany an exit to the sea. The king's answer was unequivocal, but it increased the fright of a very frightened man. Two days later King Leopold III. arrived in the Hague. As we know the visit ended in a peace proposal, but in reality the possible countermeasures to such German aims were quickly discussed.

Military preparations in Holland and Belgium were on the increase when the secret reports from Germany showed that more and more troops were brought to Western Germany near to the Dutch and Belgian frontiers. They included more than four motorized divisions, further cavalry at Cleve and strong engineering formations at Emmerich. Especially these engineering troops bothered the Dutch. These engineers ~~through~~ two bridges (pontoon bridges) across the Rhine. All this was very serious and yet even on the ninth November the Dutch general staff refused to believe in an imminent~~ly~~ danger. There were certain features in the German preparations which were unintelligible to the Dutch high officers, mostly trained in German military schools. The frontier of Germany with Holland in the Northern section was hardly manned. The Germans don't give such an opening to their enemies, as a rule.

At this juncture the Venlo affair pushed itself into the events. On the November 9th six armed Germans with automatic pistols, in typical gangster fashion, rushed across the Dutch frontier at Venlo and started to shoot against ~~xxxx~~ a Dutch automobile stationed only twenty yards from the frontier on Dutch territory. The Germans killed one or more of the occupants, pushed them back to the automobile and with a twenty yard long cable attached the car to an other automobile waiting on the German side and dragged the first car into Germany. The occupants of the Dutch automobile

were the Dutch chauffeur Lemmers, the Dutch first-lieutenant Klop, and the Englishmen Major Stevens and Payne Best. Major Stevens was head of the British secret service in Holland (passport control officer) and Mr. Best was also connected with the secret service. (The one was No.8., the other No.62.) Stevens was an extremely clever man, but rather romantic. He conducted negotiations with German high officers, industrialists etc. for possible peace arrangements. But in his romanticism he resorted to the obviously stupid means of using a beam wireless. This wireless was apparently spotted by the GESTAPO and they were listening in on the conversations. I am convinced that the arrest of Baron-von Hammerstein-Écquord (former chief of the German general staff), Marshall Blomberg and of other high officers was due to the carelessness of this secret service man.

Major Stevens had three previous meetings with emissaries from Germany about peace conditions, two in Arnhem, near the frontier but a place where kidnapping would have been impossible, and then in Venlo twice. On the second occasion the kidnapping occurred.

As the conditions of the British did not include the removal of Hitler, it gives room for speculation why then did the kidnapping happen? First, probably because Dr. Heinrich Himmler might have thought that his whole regime was in danger, second, because Himmler was looking for a good Reichstag fire and here was the possibility, by kidnapping Stevens and pushing everything that was happening on England and the British secret service, including the bomb outrage in Munich which was "unsuccessful" because the GESTAPO wanted the bomb to explode after Hitler left.

But let us return to the events in Holland. On November 9th all shipping on the Maas and on the river connecting the Maas with the Waal was suspended; several villages in the inundation area were flooded. On November 10th all army leaves were stopped. The Dutch police was armed with rifles and steelhelmets since the 6th because of the discovery of a putsch plan, behind which stood the German-influenced Dutch Nazis, under the leadership of Mussert and Rost van Tonningen, the former League's Commissar in Vienna. 60 persons, amongst them many officers were arrested (denied by Dutch, yet true!). The inhabitants of Baarn and Zeist were warned to be ready to evacuate their homes because of artificial flooding preparations. The U.S. and British Consuls gave warnings to their subjects to leave the country.

During the ~~night~~ eleventh November the military preparations of Germany looked very menacing and the Dutch and Belgians made such preparations which were necessary to reject an imminent attack on them. But suddenly during the Saturday night the tension eased and German explanations were given to Dutch correspondents and also to official persons that Germany had no aggressive intentions. On November 12th the Dutch Foreign Minister van Kleffens met the Belgian Foreign Minister Spaak in Breda while Queen Wilhelmina suddenly called the American Minister (Mr. Gordon) with whom ~~she~~ she negotiated for a half-an-hour.

This is an authentic account of what happened in Holland. Now what happened in Berlin? According to French and other sources Hitler decided to invade Holland. There was a big council of war on November 7th during which Hitler explained his aims. Brauchitsch allegedly opposed these plans, Goering was with Hitler, and Keitel agreed with Hitler that an invasion was feasible. On November 11th was then the decisive council at which now Goering, to remain in favor with the majority of army officers, also opposed the invasion of Holland. Only Keitel said that such invasion was possible.

Brauchitsch threatened with his resignation.

Such and similar stories came about the famous night of November 11th and owing to Brauchitsch threat to resign Hitler withdrew from his plan to invade Holland.

My version, however, is different. Putting two and two together I think this is what happened. Hitler always had in mind the invasion of Holland-- this must be taken as granted. But owing to the complete miscalculation of the Fuehrer on Poland he was quite at a loss what to do. He thought he can "sell" peace to England and France after the Polish conquest. The truth is that Hitler has not even yet given up the idea that he can make peace with England and France. All the German emissaries here approach us the American correspondents, just trying to frighten with the danger of Bolshevism all over the world, Germany will go Bolshevik if there is no peace until the spring, etc. This is why I don't believe that Hitler was really ready to invade Holland: even he realized that this would be the end of any hope for early peace (though one time he hoped that if he can get Holland, he can drive a bargain with England when he restored it).

The idea of the invasion of Holland and Belgium was certainly brought up, and he certainly has not given it yet up. But first he must be fully convinced that all his peace efforts are broken, and then he will invade Holland.

The threat was to frighten Holland and England, and to try out whether Belgium would come to the help of Holland. Moreover, he also wanted to see the reaction in neutral countries. Unfortunately the United States did not react sufficiently, but the reaction of Spain and Italy was very powerful and this helped tremendously. It especially helped Brauchitsch who argued that an invasion of Holland would mean Germany's defeat because Belgium would open the door to the French and the English airfleet would come to Holland's help. As things are at present, without the British airforce Holland could not resist Germany for any length of time. Holland sadly neglected her defences. She has no airforce at all, and no artillery. The story is this: The Dutch general staff wanted to buy guns from Schneider LeCreusot years ago. Then the Minister of Finance intervened and said that Holland had too much good money blocked in Germany. To relieve the blocked money they were to buy armaments in Germany. Krupp refused to supply, but the Reinische Metallwerke in Duesseldorf accepted the order. It is needless to say that the guns were never delivered and so Holland is without any real artillery.

But they have good forts, now they brought during the last three months their defences up to date; the water defence system is excellent though unfortunately the Germans through their spies know all details of it. (The German legation here has one Minister, five Counsellors, and 45 exterrit. members of the Legation! this not including the Consulate!) But the Germans, even if unable to go through cross-country because of the water, developed a remarkable technic of quick mending of roads and bridges and they would invade by road. This was their technic in Poland, too. But in Poland there was no airforce to oppose the German, and thus the airforce could reduce all obstacles in the way. Should Britain not come to the help of Holland, then the German airforce and artillery could wipe out within a few days time all the forts and pillboxes, and under their protection the bridges and roads could be mended. But if the British airforce comes to the help, the situation will change immediately. Then the Germans first have to defeat the British airforce which they probably cannot do. Otherwise the roadmending will be harrassed and their progress will be impossible.

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Brauchitsch and the generals fully realized that, first, their advance in Holland may be checked by the British airforce, second, to take on Belgium and Holland together (and Belgium would come to Holland's assistance, even if Holland would not come to that of Belgium's) would mean to add 1,200,000 enemy forces (and the Belgian army is good), and, third, the incoming French army may turn the German invasion back and drive the Germans across the frontier at places where the Westwall (Siegfried line) is not yet complete.

Thus for the time being Adolf is completely at a loss what to do. He tries everything and threatens everywhere. He threatened to invade England, but this goes very slowly for the English could get only about a few hundred Germans over, in form of prisoners-of-war. The annihilation of British ports does not go, even if they boasted with it. But there is the British airforce in the way. Oswald Garrison Villard of good old proGerman fame told me when he came from Germany: "Fodor we are all sunk. The Germans are building 60,000 airplanes, and 400 submarines." I said: "This is indeed terrible. But wherefrom are they taking the rawmaterials, the pilots and the submarine crews." (Commander Stone, the American naval attache in Paris told me that it takes four years to train a submarine crew.) I did not tell to Villard that I still remember when he came out from Russia in 1921 he said to me: "Fodor, we are sunk. The Russians are building 50,000 airplanes. Europe is lost, the U.S. is lost." Perhaps Dorothy Thompson still remembers it, for she was present at the conversation. (in fact it took place in her house).

Thus the Germans threaten everywhere. They bully Holland, Sweden, Belgium, Rumania, and now threaten that the Russians will invade Turkey. Frighten everywhere, but also checkmated everywhere. Nevertheless, if Hitler will see that his situation is desperate, he may really do two things in early next year (February-March): either attack Holland (and thus court open defeat), or will try to make outright cooperation with Russia by going Bolshevik. This is not out of question in case of a gangster who just wants to save himself and his own clique.

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