

# Dutch Neutrality: Greedy, Easy or Just a Lack of ‘Dutch Courage’?

An examination of the opinion held by British newspaper’s on Dutch  
neutrality during the First World War.

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**Abstract**

An examination of Dutch neutrality through British newspapers to establish what if any was the prevailing opinion of the British press on the topic of Dutch neutrality during the First World War. The thesis answers the question 'Dutch Neutrality: Greedy, Easy or Just a Lack of 'Dutch Courage'?' by breaking the topic down into four case studies looking at the start of the war, issues with trade, the last year of the war and finally the Kaiser Affair. Through the use of a wide selection of British newspapers, the thesis examines how and why British opinions developed throughout the war. Concluding that although the British remained sympathetic and respectful of Dutch neutrality as the war progressed and pressure for victory grew papers became more critical of the Dutch.

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## **Prologue**

### **Introduction**

“Neutrality is at times a graver sin than belligerence”. This quote, attributed to American lawyer Louis D. Brandeis, highlights the difficulties that nations experienced when they decided to follow the path of neutrality during the First World War, as these countries were under pressure from the Entente and Central Powers.<sup>1</sup> Although he was an American, Brandeis shines a light upon the experience of the Netherlands during the First World War, as by pursuing neutrality the various belligerents could view them as being against their respective side. In 1914, as the other powers of Europe plunged into a war that would redefine their global positions at the cost of millions of lives, the Netherlands pursued a policy of neutrality. Although there were testing moments and calls from both sides of belligerents to alter this policy, the Netherlands was successful in its pursuit of neutrality, remaining so until the cessation of hostilities.

The First World War saw the major powers of Europe attempt to destroy one another on a scale never before seen. At the outbreak of war, the Netherlands found itself in a difficult position. War between Germany and Great Britain had long been a nightmare of Dutch politics, as they had close economic ties to both powers.<sup>2</sup> During the war, the Netherlands continued its policy of neutrality despite calls from Dutch civilians, politicians and military staff to join one side or the other. Within the Netherlands, it was believed that neutrality put the country on a higher moral ground than that of the belligerents. However, the maintenance of this neutrality was as much due to the actions of the British and Germans, as it was due to the actions of the Dutch government, as both powers could have gone to war with the Netherlands to further their own goals in the conflict, but the continuation of neutrality remained within their interests.<sup>3</sup>

Leading British diplomats believed the Dutch people saw their political and

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<sup>1</sup> M.I. Urofsky, *Louis D. Brandeis: A Life*, (Knopf Doubleday, London, 2009). 516.

<sup>2</sup> M. Frey, “Anglo-Dutch Relations During The First World War”, in *Unspoken Allies Anglo-Dutch Relations Since 1780*, Ed. N. Ashton & D. Hellema, (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2001), 60.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. M. Van Eysinga, “The Netherlands and the Law of Neutrality during the Great War.” *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 18 (1932): 66.

economic future bound up with that of Germany.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, despite pressure from both sides the Netherlands remained neutral. Dutch neutrality was much more militarised than that of other neutral states, as it found itself surrounded by the belligerents.<sup>5</sup> From the outbreak of war in 1914, the Netherlands had to maintain a standing army in order to protect its borders and deal with both military and civilian refugees resulting from the conflict. As a neutral country, the Netherlands took steps to make sure it did not favour one side over the other, rejecting offers from both sides. However, throughout the war, the Netherlands came under pressure from both Germany and the United Kingdom to join the war on their respective side or at least stop aiding the other. Feelings within the Netherlands were mixed on the best course of action, with some arguing to join the Germans as they felt that was where the future of the Netherlands lay, whereas others wanted to join the British in order to make Germany answer for the invasion of Belgium. Nevertheless, through much compromise and work the Netherlands was able to remain neutral until the end of the war.

The focus on the First World War has increased in recent years due to the end of the bipolar focus on the Cold War and the centenary of the initiation of conflict in 1914. Understandably, the majority of research and publications have been carried out on the belligerents, with much less attention being paid to the role of neutral powers. This thesis aims to examine the opinion of the British public on Dutch neutrality during the First World War. This will be accomplished by analysing the portrayal of Dutch neutrality in a wide selection of British newspapers from the time. By doing so, the thesis hopes to establish what the overall feeling towards neutrality was and whether this feeling evolved over time.

### **Research Question**

The overarching goal of this thesis is to determine the opinion the British public held on the topic of Dutch neutrality during the First World War. This will be

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<sup>4</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations", 59.

<sup>5</sup> W. Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality, The Netherlands Prepares for War, 1900-1925*, (Brill, Leiden, 2013). 290.

done to establish whether the Dutch were seen as cowards, profiteers, not truly neutral or rather following the path of least resistance. Newspapers will be examined as the press reflects the opinions of their readers and are therefore a useful source in the examination of public opinion. In particular during the early twentieth century newspapers were the main way in which people received the news and were a major force in shaping public opinion. Answering the following research question: Dutch neutrality: greedy, easy or just a lack of 'Dutch courage'?, the thesis has used a wide selection of contemporary British newspapers to examine the presented opinion and determine what view the British held on Dutch neutrality.

The research was accomplished by dividing the main research question into multiple sub questions, centered on four event-based case studies during and after the war. The first is around the outbreak of the war and looks into the newspapers' coverage of the Netherland's decision to remain neutral. The second case study looks into trading issues that affected press opinion on neutrality. This chapter examines the establishment of the NOT (Netherlands Overseas Trust), which regulated Dutch international trade during the war, the Sand and Gravel Affair, during which the Dutch were accused of breaking neutrality, as well as other reports on Dutch trade. The third case study somewhat mirrors the first, but instead examines the final year of the war rather than the first. The fourth and final case study looks into the Kaiser affair, during which the German Kaiser was given shelter in the Netherlands after Germany surrendered. This was a contentious issue in the U.K, as many felt the Kaiser should stand trial for his part in starting the war. Although occurring after the war this chapter still offers an insight into British public opinion on the Dutch during the war as current events can change the way people view the past. This thesis examines whether the affair had an effect on the opinion of Dutch neutrality, as it could have put forward the idea that the Dutch were not truly neutral during the war. As part of these case studies, this thesis analyzes a range of papers around the events and summarizes the opinion presented by each. By examining the opinion of a wide range of newspapers on specific events and times during the course of the war, the thesis has attempted to establish whether the opinion changed or rather remained the same. Additionally, it has

endeavored to determine if this change had any relation to the changing pressures put on the Netherlands by the belligerents as the war continued. The end goal of this thesis is to determine the British opinion on Dutch neutrality.

### **Explanation of Concepts**

This section will give a history of neutrality and its adoption by the Dutch, as well as why this neutrality was threatened by the warring powers.

During the First World War the Netherlands pursued a policy of armed neutrality under which it maintained a standing army to both protect its borders and deal with refugees displaced by the war. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the Dutch contributed to the establishment of a system of international laws to protect and uphold the rights and privileges of neutral states during times of conflict. However, these laws were often infringed upon by belligerent powers that felt the neutral state was overly favouring the side of their enemy.<sup>6</sup> The Netherlands had taken steps to create the legality of neutral states, constructing the Carnegie Peace Palace in 1913 and hosting peace conferences in The Hague in 1899 and 1907.<sup>7</sup> Although other neutral states like Switzerland and Sweden also pursued a policy of neutrality, Dutch neutrality was different due to the fact it had no natural defences like Switzerland's mountains or the Baltic Sea protecting Sweden. This meant that to ensure its neutrality the Netherlands needed to deter others from attacking by having a strong standing army. Whereas other neutral states did not need to place as much emphasis on defence for the Dutch it was paramount.

A neutral foreign policy was pursued by the Dutch for a number of economic, military and social reasons, which developed over the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nineteenth century had seen the Dutch cease to be one of Europe's leading nations with events such as the Napoleonic Wars and the secession of Belgium in 1839 depleting their power.<sup>8</sup> The Netherlands' position in Europe paired with the size and strength of its army

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<sup>6</sup> S. Kruizinga, 'Neutrality' in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Vol II*, Ed. J. Winter, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014) 542.

<sup>7</sup> M. Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918*, (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2006), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 26.

meant that they would not survive in a war against one of the major powers without support. However, the geographic position of the Netherlands between the great powers of Europe meant that it was unable to pursue an alliance with a stronger state, as it would risk its own survival by doing so. This was due to the fact that as an important trading hub, the great powers of Europe sought to limit each other from having too great an influence within the country. Although there had been a system of cooperation with the British in order to maintain the defence of its colonial holdings after the Boer War (1899-1902), the idea of an alliance with Britain was greatly opposed by many in the Netherlands due to strong anti-British sentiment throughout the populace caused by the Boer War.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in 1905, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands publically announced the Netherlands' need for neutrality, as it could no longer see Britain as their '*natural protector*'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, by the outbreak of the First World War, conditions had arisen creating a situation in which the Netherlands was more secure recusing itself from the system of alliances and treaties into which the other powers of Europe were so greatly entwined.

The decision to pursue a policy of neutrality was heavily influenced by economics. The Dutch owed much of their wealth to international trade, having one of the world largest merchant fleets. This trade would suffer in a war, as its ships would be threatened and its routes taken. Neutrality allowed for this trade to remain less hampered than it would have been in a state of war.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the reliance on both Germany and Britain as trading partners meant that they were not able to pick one side over the other. Finally, the Netherlands relied heavily on its colonies, specifically its holdings in the Dutch East Indies as a source of wealth. These holdings would most likely be damaged if not lost in war, which would be devastating to the nation's coffers. These economic factors therefore influenced the development of a neutral foreign policy.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>10</sup> N.C.F. van Sas, 'The Dutch and the British Umbrella 1813-1870' in *Unspoken Allies Anglo-Dutch Relations Since 1780*, Ed. N. Ashton & D. Hellema, (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2001), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 29.



Although influenced by military and economic concerns, neutrality eventually developed into a cornerstone of Dutch culture.<sup>12</sup> Many saw neutrality as a way of maintaining the Netherlands' image as a small but powerful nation, meaning nationalism and neutrality became intermingled, as being neutral became part of the country's national image. Neutrality was for the Netherlands by 1914 an extremely alluring option. It would protect its lucrative trade, ensure its security and place itself at least in its own eyes on the moral high ground within in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

During the war, neutral powers provided the belligerents avenues with which they could partake in espionage against one another.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, they provided a source of trade that the belligerents could benefit from. Although some materials were contraband and thereby illegal under international law during war, other resources could be traded without hindrance. While on occasion this trade led to accusations of impartiality, the Netherlands made attempts to ensure this trade remained neutral. However, the British often interpreted the definition of what constituted contraband differently to the Dutch. This led to issues such as the Sand and Gravel Affair, during which the British accused the Dutch of breaking neutrality by providing the German army with building materials. Additionally, neutral powers were often seen as opportunities for turning or even winning the war, as by entering the war these states would unlock new manpower and possibly open new fronts. These factors led the Entente and the Central Powers to seek to involve neutral states in the war.

### **Innovative Aspects of the Thesis**

This section explains how the thesis is innovative in a number of ways. Firstly, works on the Netherlands during the First World War are few in number compared to works on other European nations at the time. Furthermore, the vast majority of these works are only available in Dutch, with English works being limited to only a handful of academic publications. This division in language of

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<sup>12</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> H.P. Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I: Espionage, Diplomacy and Survival*, (Brill, Leiden, 2001),170.

publication paired with the limited number of works themselves means that the debate around the subject is relatively limited. This means that this thesis can have more of an effect within this debate, as there are fewer voices with which it must compete. The majority of literature on the topic focuses more generally on the experience of the Netherlands during the First World War as a whole, rather than just focusing on neutrality. Works like that of Abbenhuis mainly focus on the internal effect the war had on the Netherlands, but not into how the war changed the nation's perception abroad. This thesis is innovative in the sense that it only looks at issues that are related to the neutrality of the Netherlands and how the British perceived the country. Furthermore, by producing this work in English, it is well placed into the debate with a greater number of available readers and lower number of contesting arguments, thereby increasing the weight of its conclusions in the sense that it makes up a bigger part of the debate.

A further way in which this thesis can contribute to the wider academic debate, is the fact that its premise is seemingly unique, having never been examined in any published work to date. Historian Marc Frey cites *The Times* reporting on the Sand and Gravel Affair, but otherwise there has been very little use of British newspapers as a source for examining the Netherlands in the First World War. By examining the British opinion on Dutch neutrality, we are able to gain a greater insight into the thoughts and feelings of a nation at war seeing how they dealt with the strains and pressure put upon them. Moreover, by examining the British view of neutrality, we can gain insights into British decision-making in the build up to the Second World War, because if there had been a positive view on neutrality it may have had an effect on British actions in the post war years altering their approach to foreign policy perhaps even seeing support for a neutral Britain.

Several works have been produced on Anglo-Dutch relations throughout history. This work can to some extent contribute towards that debate, as the public opinion of the British public on the Netherlands would have had an effect on their relations. Moreover, there has not been a work that covers the perceived breaches in neutrality by the Netherlands during the war, which this thesis focuses on. Much of the published literature focuses on the neutrality as a whole, covering the internal actions of the Dutch state as opposed to how these actions

were perceived abroad. Furthermore, interest in the First World War has increased since the centenary anniversary of the initiation of hostilities in 1914 with a large number of works being produced. This thesis joins research into one of the war's biggest actors, the United Kingdom, with one of lesser focused upon actors, i.e. the Netherlands. This work can therefore be of use to both academics looking into the role of the Netherlands in the First World War, as well those looking into the British press during the war. Additionally, although the neutrality of the Netherlands is somewhat esoteric, through the use of case studies on specifically selected and described events, this thesis is able to present an argument that is digestible to readers without a prior knowledge on the history of Dutch neutrality or the war as a whole.

### **Nature of Sources**

This section details the sources used in the research of this thesis as well as the challenges that were encountered. The main source this thesis has utilised was contemporary British newspapers, as it is from these the thesis sought to establish the opinion of the British public. This thesis used archived British newspapers as its main foundation of primary sources. All of these papers are available in online archives, such as the British Newspaper Archive Database or the specific archive for each paper. One challenge with using newspapers as a primary source is the fact that different papers are produced for different reasons and audiences. For example, some papers aim to persuade readers of a particular point of view, whereas others may claim just to present the facts. These accounts of events are rarely complete, as they often lacked all the information that is now available. Furthermore, newspapers present a point of view and can often be biased in their reporting attempting to support their outlook. Likewise, newspapers are often written with the assumption the reader has some knowledge of the topic, as articles usually make up part of a larger report on the subject. This means that articles may omit or neglect certain facts and issues that can alter the modern reader's conclusions from the article. However, as this thesis is simply trying to determine the opinion these papers presented of Dutch neutrality, the historical accuracy of what is reported is not

necessarily relevant, as even if the papers were making false claims this will still have had an effect on opinion.

A further challenge is the sheer amount of sources available due to the vast amount of publications. This thesis seeks to overcome this by selecting specific newspapers focused around case studies to examine, thereby presenting an overall view of press opinion. Moreover, an additional challenge is that although a vast majority of newspapers from the time have been digitised, not all are available. However, due to the volume of content produced and the growing interest in the First World War, this thesis did not struggle to find an adequate number of sources from which to carry out research. In the early twentieth century Britain had a large number of daily newspapers, which were at the time the main source of information for the populace. Therefore, the information presented in the newspapers of the time gives us an insight into public opinion, as it was from these papers the public developed their opinions. These papers represent a wide range of class, political and regional backgrounds and therefore can provide an in depth view of opinion at the time.

### **Methodology of Research**

In terms of the methodology of research, this thesis has used a selection of both British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers from the First World War. These papers were used to examine the case studies that were highlighted from the secondary literature. These case studies being the outbreak of the war, issues with trade, the end of the war and finally the 'Kaiser affair'. The newspapers were selected to ensure that each political stance and region in Britain (Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England) was represented in order to portray the great portion of public opinion. Papers were accessed through their online archives and examined based upon events taken from secondary literature. The thesis has used the following papers plus others to cover a wide range of opinions throughout the research. As for representing the views of the right of the political spectrum, the thesis used right-leaning papers such as *The Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail*. As for left-leaning papers, the thesis used *The Manchester Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Daily Mirror*. These mainstream papers helped to give an idea of the overall opinion presented to the British

public. Furthermore, the thesis used the regional papers such as *The Liverpool Echo*, *The Western Times*, *The Belfast Newsletter*, *The Herald* and *The Scotsman*. These papers provided the thesis with a view into the regional opinion, as all the nations within the United Kingdom as well as both northern and southern England are represented.

However, the level to which each regional paper was used depended on whether they offered a substantially different view from that of the national papers. The thesis covered multiple articles from each paper around the listed case studies. A summary was produced of the paper's portrayal of the event, as well as highlighting any substantial deviations from the overall trend that emerges from the research. The main challenge with this method of research was the large number of sources examined as the thesis assessed multiple articles from each newspaper. Furthermore, it had to determine whether the articles were original to that paper or simply reprinted from other sources.

## **Chapter One: Historiography**

This chapter reviews the literature already produced on the subject of Dutch neutrality in order to summarize and critique the debates. Firstly this is done by explaining the emergence of the study and then moves onto a review of the works that have made contributions to the field.

In recent years, the history of the First World War has reemerged since the end of the '*bipolar world*' during the Cold War and the direct consequences of the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Study into the First World War traditionally revolved around that of belligerent nations, but in recent years works looking into the roles of neutral states have emerged.<sup>16</sup> The previous decade has seen works being published on the experience of neutral states such as Switzerland, Spain and the Netherlands, as well as neutrality in general. Recent years have seen increased interest in the topic within the Netherlands. Although, Study into the history of Dutch neutrality is somewhat hampered due to the loss of a vast amount of primary material lost to bombings and fires during the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> However, enough primary material has survived to provide a solid base for varied academic research on the topic. Still, a substantial number of sources showing the personal thoughts of leading decision makers have been lost, meaning this aspect of research is often somewhat imperfect.

The historical debate in English around the topic of Dutch neutrality is somewhat narrow, due in large part to the limited focus on the topic by only a handful of academics. Yet, in recent years an increasing number of publications have been produced on the topic of Dutch neutrality. Traditionally the focus on Dutch neutrality was used to provide an explanation as to why it failed in the Second World War rather than succeeded in the First.<sup>18</sup> The role of these neutral states is now being examined more and a debate on the causes of this neutrality is being discussed. This new focus was influenced by two factors, the first being the end of the Cold War causing a shift in focus towards other areas of history,

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<sup>15</sup> P. Kamphuis. Review Essay, *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 3 (2002): 865-66.

<sup>16</sup> Kruizinga, 'Neutrality', 573.

<sup>17</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 331.

<sup>18</sup> S. Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality: Diplomacy and Internment in the Netherlands during the First World War*, (Brill, Leiden, 2013). 186.

The second factor being the centenary of the war reigniting interest in the topic both in the Netherlands and abroad.

In 2002, historian Piet Kamphuis described the historiography of the Netherlands in the First World War as a "*neglected child in historiography*".<sup>19</sup> This has changed to some extent with works being released in recent years, having seen the end of the Cold War and the centenary of beginning of the war re-ignite interest into the history of the First World War in general. However, the number of works on the Netherlands during the war remains limited to this day. Historian Wim Klinkert, who himself has published on the topic, puts forward that a reason for this could be that traditionally, the military history of small states is often only marginally represented in history. Moreover, the majority of these works tend to be produced in their own respective language.<sup>20</sup>

However, as well as several shorter books and articles, two seminal works have been produced on the topic of Dutch neutrality. The first being *The Art of Staying Neutral* by historian Maartje Abbenhuis, the second being historian Hubert P. Van Tuyll's *The Netherlands and World War I: Espionage, Diplomacy and Survival*. These books demonstrate that rather than simply being bystanders, neutral powers were affected by and played a part in the war.<sup>21</sup> Both works contribute to the debate around Dutch neutrality, moving the history of the First World War away from exclusively examining the roles of nations that took part in the war. In addition to these two works focusing on the Netherlands during the war, another work has been produced which focuses on the Dutch East Indies during the war.<sup>22</sup> These combined works claim that rather than being merely a victim of international circumstances subject to its pressures and trends, neutral nations such as the Netherlands were in fact actors in their own right, pursuing goals and objectives of their own choosing. Furthermore, several shorter books and articles have been produced contributing to the debate examining specific aspects of the experience of the Netherlands, such as *Guarded Neutrality: Diplomacy and Internment in the Netherlands during the First World*

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<sup>19</sup> Kamphuis. Review Essay.

<sup>20</sup> Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> W. Klinkert, The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914–1918 (review). *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 4 (2008): 1308-1309.

<sup>22</sup> K. Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and The Great War 1914-1918*, (KITLV Press, Leiden, 2007).

*War* by Susan Wolf and *Defending Neutrality, The Netherlands Prepares for War, 1900-1925* by Wim Klinkert.

There is a debate amongst the main historians on the topic of Dutch neutrality over whether it was influenced by internal or external factors. Historian Marc Frey, who has written several articles and chapters on the topic, puts forward that Dutch neutrality was only achieved as it was allowed to do so by the belligerent powers.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, historians such as Abbenhuis and Van Tuyll put forward that Dutch neutrality only transpired due to the hard work of Dutch politicians and military personnel.<sup>24</sup> Abbenhuis does not contest that the belligerent powers decided the fate of Dutch neutrality, but does point out that Frey's conclusions overlook the domestic dimension of neutrality.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, within this debate there is a discussion over the extent to which military staff and politicians contributed to the neutrality of the Netherlands. There is a consensus amongst historians that Dutch neutrality was shaped by both internal and external factors, but a debate remains over the balance of these factors with historians such as Frey arguing more towards external causes and Abbenhuis and Van Tuyll putting forward internal factors played more of a role.

Van Tuyll's book focuses on the actions taken by the Dutch government during the war to ensure it remained neutral. His work concludes that the Dutch army was able to act as a viable deterrent to invasion by either the Entente or the Central Powers. Although small, the Dutch army, Van Tuyll claims, would have been able to withstand attacks long enough for support to arrive, thus negating the need to invade, as it would merely open a new front in the war.<sup>26</sup> This conclusion challenges the idea that Dutch neutrality was maintained by the decisions of the larger powers, as it further highlights the agency of the Netherlands as an actor on the global stage.

Van Tuyll's work seeks to dispel some of the misconceptions that have arisen due to the destruction of sources, such as private archives of leading politicians, as well as much of the archives of the Dutch and German armies. This lack of sources made it difficult for scholars to make in-depth examinations into

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<sup>23</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations".

<sup>24</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, "*The Netherlands and World War I*."

<sup>25</sup> M. Horn, Review Essay. *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1619.

<sup>26</sup> Van Tuyll. Van Serooskerken, "*The Netherlands and World War I*, 344.



the decision-making around Dutch neutrality. Furthermore, his work attempts to dispel the idea that small states are merely '*Footballs*' for larger ones to push around and control.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, he raises that lack of scholarship into the war maybe due to the Dutch attitude to the war itself. Many Dutch people viewed the war as damaging to the country. To many the prospect of victory for either side did not provide much succour. It was assumed German victory would lead to the end of Dutch independence, as German hegemony would threaten the Netherlands and Entente victory to more war, as the victorious powers would fight for power.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, after the war little scholarly effort was put into examining the role the Netherlands had played, as it was felt that it was a time of goods shortages and forced conscription that was not remembered fondly. Van Tuyl, like many other scholars on the topic, gives credit to a combination of political and military factors that made neutrality a success. However, he claims this was not always taken as the case with many taking a more '*idealistic nationalist*' approach, seeing the country's neutrality as a result of the fact that it had declared itself so, ignoring the effort and work that went into its maintenance.<sup>29</sup> This lack of interest in the reasons for the success of neutrality, he claims, was a failure on the part of the Netherlands, as it contributed to their failure to prepare for the German invasion in the Second World War. Van Tuyl divides the history of the Netherlands during the war into two different sections, the first of which he labelled 'strict neutrality' 1914-1916 the second from 1917-1918 he called 'narrow escapes'. Van Tuyl sought to show as the war progressed maintaining neutrality became increasingly difficult.

Prior to his book, Van Tuyl wrote an article on the mobilisation and work of the Dutch army as being a key factor in the success of Dutch neutrality.<sup>30</sup> The development of the Dutch army in the years before the war, he claims, influenced the Germans to remove the invasion of the Netherlands from the Schlieffen plan convincing Von Moltke not to cross Limburg province. Van Tuyl claims that Dutch military preparations such as the construction of fortress Amsterdam

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<sup>27</sup> Van Tuyl. Van Serooskerken, "*The Netherlands and World War I*, 331.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>30</sup> H.P. Van Tuyl. "The Dutch Mobilization of 1914: Reading the "Enemy's Intentions." *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (2000): 711-37.

were a major factor in the success of neutrality, as in order to survive the Netherlands needed either to deter invasion or protect itself through alliance. As alliance was not possible for a number of reasons, the only option left was to deter. By reading the intentions of its neighbours, the Netherlands was able to position itself into a more survivable stance by the beginning of the war shifting attention of aggressors away from itself.

Abbenhuis is perhaps one of the most prolific writers on the topic of Dutch neutrality, having published several articles and two books on the subject *The Art of Staying Neutral* (2006) and *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics 1815-1914* (2014). Her first book *The Art of Staying Neutral* focused exclusively on the Netherlands during the war where as her second focused on the history of neutrality in general in the century leading up to the war. Abbenhuis' book *The Art of Staying Neutral* utilises a wide range of military, economic and political sources to demonstrate the way in which the Dutch pursued neutrality in relation to the pressures the war put upon the country.<sup>31</sup> In this work Abbenhuis highlights the ability of the Dutch government to play both sides to maintain a carefully balanced neutrality. Abbenhuis also highlights the domestic pressure the Netherlands suffered due to the neutrality, which has been ignored in other works. For example, the constant mobilisation in what was technically a time of peace angered many in the country and the lack of supplies due to the international blockades as well as the censorship of the press led to a great deal of resentment amongst the people of the Netherlands. Abbenhuis raises these issues to show that the Dutch did in fact suffer as a result of neutrality, dispelling the idea of an '*easy neutrality*' showing the effort that went into its maintenance.

By examining the work of diplomats, politicians and military staff, Abbenhuis demonstrates the effort and skill that it took the Dutch to find a middle ground between the belligerents, when often it was these belligerents who were encroaching upon Dutch neutrality.<sup>32</sup> She states that although by the end of the war both belligerents seemed to place breaking Dutch neutrality on their agendas, the effect of the long war as well as the outbreak of the Spanish flu meant neither power had the strength to invade the Netherlands. This

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<sup>31</sup> J. Winter, and M. Abbenhuis, Review Article, *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 2 (2009): 460-62.

<sup>32</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 261.

contradicts Frey's assertion that neutrality only succeeded as the belligerents wanted it to do so. Abbenhuis concludes that the Netherlands maintained an '*equilibrium of neutrality*', but by the end of the war the country had lost a great deal of what had influenced it to pursue neutrality.<sup>33</sup> In her work Abbenhuis references Van Tuyll's work several times.<sup>34</sup> However, Abbenhuis puts forward that the First World War saw the legitimacy of neutrality decline, as neutral powers struggled to protect their rights against warring states.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Van Tuyll, Abbenhuis' work does not seek to explain the conditions that led to the German invasion in the Second World War or the apathy caused by neutrality. In fact, Abbenhuis presents much more of an image of a country in crises than Van Tuyll, claiming that the armistice of 1918 could not have come at a better time, as tensions in the Netherlands seemed to be reaching breaking point with economic troubles, mounting pressure from both Entente and Central Powers and growing frustration amongst the army over the constant seemingly unnecessary mobilisation. The armistice, Abbenhuis claims, stopped the country from boiling over. She is not suggesting that if the war had continued neutrality would have faltered, but rather the continued damage upholding it caused would have caused a national crisis.

Historian Kees van Dijk has produced a substantial monograph on the history of the Dutch East Indies during the First World War.<sup>36</sup> This study offers an insight into the effect the war had on the Netherlands' largest colony, as well as examining the economic factors behind neutrality. In the work he shows the Dutch fears of a possible Ottoman-German influenced Muslim uprising, as well as how the Dutch colonies were affected by the German U-boat war. Unlike Abbenhuis and Van Tuyll, he does not focus on the effect the military had on neutrality, rather paying more attention to economic and domestic factors. This book offers an interesting insight, as protection of the colonies was one of the leading factors in influencing the Netherlands to pursue neutrality. His work

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 267.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 262.

<sup>35</sup> M. Abbenhuis, 'Too good to be true? European hopes for neutrality before 1914', in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900- 1940*, Eds H.Amersfoort & W. Klinkert (eds.), (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 26.

<sup>36</sup> Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and The Great War*.

highlights the effect the war had on the Dutch colony, as changes had to be made to cope with the pressure put upon it by the war.

Historian Marc Frey has also made a contribution to the debate over Dutch neutrality through the publication of several articles and chapters. Frey's work focuses on the pressure put upon the Netherlands by the belligerent powers.<sup>37</sup> Frey argues that the international pressures played the largest part in the success of Dutch neutrality. He puts forward that the Netherlands was only allowed to remain neutral as the belligerent powers allowed it to do so, as it was against their interest to invade, because they had more to gain from the Netherlands being neutral. Like Van Dijk, Frey has written on the effect Dutch neutrality had on trade, which was one of the contributing factors to the Netherlands deciding to remain neutral. In his work he highlights how Dutch trade during the war at times threatened neutrality, as at times it caused the belligerents to feel the Netherlands was breaking neutrality. Frey highlights the Sand and Gravel Affair as being one of the major crises of Dutch neutrality.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Frey points out that often, belligerent powers ignored the legal status of the Netherlands and would act in their own self-interest, disregarding the status of the Netherlands if it stood in the way of their plans. Frey gives the example of the confiscation of nearly a third of the Dutch merchant navy in 1918 in order to meet Entente shipping needs.<sup>39</sup> Here Frey points out that rather than playing both sides as Abbenhuis and Van Tuyl suggest, the Netherlands had come short attempting to compromise with the British in order to avoid reprisals from the Germans. This undermines the view that the Dutch were able to pursue their own agenda.

In addition to the scholars listed above, another leading academic in the field of Dutch neutrality is Wim Klinkert. Having produced several chapters, articles and books of his own, Klinkert has also edited works in which the above scholars have appeared as well produced reviews of their work.<sup>40</sup> His most seminal work is his 2013-book *Defending Neutrality: The Netherlands prepares*

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<sup>37</sup> M. Frey. 'Trade, Ships, and the Neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War', *The international History Review* 19, no. 3, (1997), 541-562.

<sup>38</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations", 68.

<sup>39</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations", 71.

<sup>40</sup> Klinkert. *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918* (review). 1308.

*for War 1900-1925*.<sup>41</sup> This work is largely based on his doctoral thesis, with the addition of some sources and additional research.<sup>42</sup> Klinkert's work does not attempt to simply reiterate what Abbenhuis and Van Tuyll have already said. Rather, he uses the book to develop a closer examination of the role of the Dutch army in the maintenance of neutrality, using a large body of primary material.<sup>43</sup> In this work Klinkert agrees with Frey on the importance of the mobilisation of the Dutch army to work as a deterrent. His work also attempts to demonstrate the changes the war brought about to Dutch society, building on the theme that neutral powers were still very much affected by the war. The war forced the constantly mobilised Dutch army to keep pace with the rapid technological changes that were brought about by the conflict, such as the introduction of gas weaponry. Much like Van Tuyll before him, Klinkert examines the role of spies in the Netherlands and how this breach of neutrality was handled, but also utilised by the Netherlands in their own defence.<sup>44</sup> Klinkert has also co-edited a work on the position of small powers.<sup>45</sup> In this book Klinkert agrees with Abbenhuis in claiming that the age of total war saw neutrality fail, as countries could not maintain the neutrality as the progression of the war saw neutral powers having to put more and more effort to appease the increasingly frustrated belligerent powers who were looking for any advantage they could get in a war that was draining all they had.<sup>46</sup>

The historian Samuel Kruizinga has also produced several works on the history of Dutch neutrality and the history of neutrality in general. Furthermore, he has reviewed and critiqued several of the aforementioned authors in book reviews.<sup>47</sup> Like those before him, Kruizinga has examined how the Netherlands managed to remain neutral where other neutral countries ended up joining the war. He claims the historiography of the study is split between those claiming it was down to the leadership of the country with others claiming it was due to

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<sup>41</sup> Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*.

<sup>42</sup> S. Kruizinga, "Wim Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality: The Netherlands Prepares for War, 1900-1925*.(review article)" *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*. 129 (4), (2014), 83.

<sup>43</sup> Kruizinga. (Review article) Wim Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Klinkert, "*Defending Neutrality*, 167.

<sup>45</sup> H. Amersfoort, W. Klinkert, *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> T. Van Gent, "Herman Amersfoort, Wim Klinkert (eds.), *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940* (review article)", *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*. 127 (4) (2012), 2.

<sup>47</sup> Kruizinga. (Review article) Wim Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality*, 1-3.

circumstances.<sup>48</sup> He claims that historians all tend to look not only at what caused neutrality to succeed, but also who specifically helped as well. Kruizinga concludes that the history of neutral states is not homogenous, with each state having a different experience. Furthermore, he echoes Abbenhuis' claim that the First World War saw the decline of neutral states as the cost of maintaining an army capable of acting as a deterrent became too much for small states to accept.<sup>49</sup>

Susan Wolf, like Van Tuyll and Klinkert, has produced work as part of Brill's Series on the History of the Netherlands during First World War.<sup>50</sup> Wolf's work focuses more on the experience of the Netherlands during the war rather than its neutrality. However, her work does provide an interesting view into the difficulties the Netherlands had in maintaining this neutrality.<sup>51</sup> Like Klinkert, Wolf does not attempt to echo previous works; rather, she examines a core feature in the Dutch experience that was only briefly covered in previous works. A great deal of the book is devoted to the internment of troops from belligerent powers that by a variety of means ended up on Dutch soil. Wolf claims that the historiography of the Netherlands during the First World War suffers greatly from lack of scope. She claims that the majority of works only focus on the economic and legal effects of the war.<sup>52</sup> Wolf's work supports the premise that rather than being a powerless bystander to the war, the Netherlands acted, negotiated and worked on its own behalf, furthering its interests and maintaining its neutrality through compromise and constant renegotiations.

To summarize, the debate around Dutch neutrality is over what caused it to be successful. Some historians claim it was external pressures and actions of larger powers that determined the success of Dutch neutrality. Other historians argue that Dutch neutrality was a result of internal factors and although conceding that the overall fate was determined externally, the internal factors played a major role in ensuring its success. Within this debate there is a

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<sup>48</sup> Kruizinga, 'Neutrality', 574.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 575

<sup>50</sup> Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality*, 186.

<sup>51</sup> M, Abbenhuis, "Guarded neutrality: diplomacy and internment in the Netherlands during the First World War/defending neutrality: the Netherlands prepares for war, 1900-1925 (review)", *First World War Studies*, 6, no.2, (2015), 203-217.

<sup>52</sup> Wolf, *Guarded Neutrality*: 185.

discussion over the agency of smaller neutral states in determining their global role. Some historians state that far from being powerless, small states were able to affect change and were able to pursue their own goals. Conversely, other historians put forward that these small states were merely powerless actors to be pushed around by larger states. Works looking into neutrality help to develop a greater history of total war, showing the effect total war had on states that were outside its reach. These works provide a view into countries often left out of the grand historical narrative due to a perceived lack of involvement in events due to their neutral status. Although not as influential as major powers such as Germany, France or Great Britain, the overall effect the Netherlands had on the war is more substantial than is traditionally claimed. Although the works listed above provide a substantial base of secondary literature on the Netherlands during the First World War, the limited number of works means there is still potential for a more in depth debate to emerge.

## **Chapter Two: Chaos and Carnage: Need we all go down to Armageddon?**

This chapter examines the opinion held by British newspapers on the neutrality of the Netherlands during the opening months of the First World War, from its outbreak on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July to the end the year on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. Although Britain entered the war on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, the chapter begins on the date Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia and the Netherlands declared its neutrality. The chapter seeks to establish what, if any, was the prevailing trend of opinion expressed on Dutch neutrality within the British newspapers.

Furthermore, the chapter seeks to identify and explain any notable outliers to this trend. The focus of British newspapers on the Netherlands in these months revolved mainly around the issues of trade and its effects upon Dutch neutrality, control of the Scheldt, the German invasion of Belgium and the perceived pro-British sentiments held by the Dutch. Additionally, there were several articles that detailed the lengths to which the Netherlands went to maintain its neutrality, such as the Preussen affair or the steps taken by the Dutch army in the defence of neutrality. Although being produced relatively frequently, reports on the neutrality of the Netherlands rarely made the front page. Usually, reports on the Dutch were placed later on in the paper amongst reports from correspondents around the world. This, understandably, was due to the main focus and interest being in articles on the war with occurrences in the Netherlands being of less interest to the general public. Often the same or similar articles were published from shared correspondents or in syndicated newspapers. However, a substantial amount of articles and editorials were published about the Netherlands during this time, both in national and local papers.

During this period Britain prepared itself for total war, with the mobilization of its armies, mass recruitment across its vast empire, development of a wartime economy and the repurposing of its industrial power for arms production. Britain's armies were already in battle on the continent and were experiencing growing losses as the year came to a close. Furthermore, the British Navy was engaged in an extensive economic blockade against Germany. In



September 1914 the Allies halted the German advance through France during the first battle of the Marne, beginning the stalemate that would continue for the next four years. The idea of a quick war or being in Berlin by Christmas was slowly becoming less and less likely; as the year drew to a close, trench warfare had become the established order on the Western Front. The closing months of 1914 saw the fall of Antwerp to the German army and mounting losses on both sides, as the nature of industrialized war became increasingly apparent. By the end of the 1914, the war seemed to have no end in sight, yet spirits in Britain remained resolute.

### **Confusion at the Start**

In the opening weeks of the war, there was a great deal of confusion and panic due to the rapid pace at which events unravelled. There were rumours, miscommunication and lies around the chaos caused by the war's beginning, as the Germans pushed through Belgium into France. This panic was reflected in the newspapers, as in the start of August there were conflicting reports of breaches of neutrality and the true intentions of both belligerent and neutral powers.

At this time, there were conflicting reports of Dutch neutrality being breached, like that of Belgium. For example, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1914 the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported on its front page that Germany intended to respect Dutch neutrality without question.<sup>53</sup> However, the next day the same paper reported that there were unconfirmed claims that German troops had broken Dutch neutrality at Delfzijl.<sup>54</sup> This was a false claim, yet was placed on the front page of the paper. No further information was given in the article as to the events; it only stated that the Netherlands was now alone in Europe, as they had yet to join a side. Although inaccurate, these reports do demonstrate the opinion of British newspapers on the topic. Both of these articles made the front page, showing that the position of the Netherlands was of some concern to the public as the papers found it noteworthy. Conflicting reports of this nature were

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<sup>53</sup> 'Martial Law Declared', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 03/08/1914, pg 1.

<sup>54</sup> 'Germans Reported Over Dutch Frontier', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 04/08/1914, pg 1.

common in the opening weeks of the war, as rumours spread that the Germans intended to cross Limburg or take the Scheldt.

British papers such as *The Scotsman* on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August confirmed Dutch neutrality by printing the declaration made by Queen Wilhelmina and the parliament from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August.<sup>55</sup> These early reports expressed little opinion, but merely confirmed that the Netherlands intended to remain neutral. However, as the German invasion of France and Belgium progressed into mid-August, the chaos that ensued prompted newspapers to claim that like Belgium, the Netherlands had also been breached. For example, *The Birmingham Daily Post* on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1914 reported that the French ministry of War had claimed that Dutch neutrality had been breached by German troops.<sup>56</sup> Whereas, *The Western Daily Press* of Bristol in the South West of England printed the Dutch declaration of neutrality on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1914, reiterating the confirmation Dutch neutrality.<sup>57</sup> Other papers also published this declaration throughout August, and false reports of Germany breaching Dutch neutrality such as that in *The Sheffield Independent* on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August or *The Birmingham Daily Post* on the 8<sup>th</sup> became less common.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the Irish newspaper *The Weekly Freeman's Journal* also reiterated the continued neutrality of the Netherlands which no German troops had breached.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the majority of other articles on Dutch neutrality, this one was placed on the front page of the paper. The content of the article was similar to those printed in other papers at the time, yet was put in a place of greater importance. This may be due to the opposition in Ireland to what some Irishmen saw as a war which had little to do with them. As this was a weekly paper, the decision to place the article on the front page demonstrates the importance of the piece. The fact that papers continued to report the confirmation of neutrality throughout August suggests that it was seen as somewhat important that the public was clear on the position of the Netherlands. Additionally, unlike the article on the front page of the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, this article was not sensationalist like

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<sup>55</sup> 'Dutch Neutrality', *The Scotsman*, 05/08/1914, pg 7.

<sup>56</sup> 'Dutch Neutrality Violated', *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 08/08/1914, pg 8.

<sup>57</sup> 'Dutch Neutrality', *The Western Daily Press*, 14/08/1914. pg 6.

<sup>58</sup> 'Heroic Defence of Belgium', *Sheffield Independent*, 06/08/1914 pg 1.

<sup>59</sup> 'Flying into Holland', *The Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 15/08/1914, pg 1.

that of the reports of a supposed German invasion, but rather was a report based on confirmed facts and sources.

Although a number of British papers printed the declaration of Dutch neutrality on the on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, and several more printed the speech given before the Dutch parliament by Queen Wilhelmina reiterating her country's position, questions over whether this neutrality would be respected by Britain and Germany continued for the remainder of the year. While on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August the *Sheffield Independent* reported that the British government intended "scrupulously to respect" Dutch neutrality, reports on the possibilities of not doing so continued.<sup>60</sup> Though there was some confusion over the Dutch position in the war, the majority of articles at this time expressed concern for the safety of the Dutch hoping that sufficient preparations were being made in order to safeguard the country from what the papers saw as a likely German attack. Very little opinion was given on the neutrality of the Netherlands apart from that of respect for its existence and fear for its survival. However, it is possible that this fear for the Netherlands was merely another way by which papers could vilify Germany.

### **The Scheldt**

One of the leading topics of discussion regarding Dutch neutrality centred around the control of the Scheldt. The Scheldt is a Dutch controlled estuary that connects the Belgian port of Antwerp to the North Sea and runs through Dutch territory. Dutch sovereignty over the estuary had been established during the creation of the state of Belgium in the Treaty of London in 1839. Under the treaty, Britain had the right to enter the Scheldt in aid of Belgium. However, this right did not apply to Britain if it was a belligerent at the time, as this would break Dutch neutrality, which took precedent over the treaty. Therefore, once Britain entered the war in order to aid Belgium against the German attack, they were unable to use the Scheldt to send troops to Antwerp. This fact was not widely known or at least not well understood by the British press. Therefore, some papers called into question whether Britain would use the Scheldt, as they

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<sup>60</sup> 'Germany's Claim', *Sheffield Independent*, 10/08/1914, pg 5.

were unsure of the legal precedent. This was a major topic for the British press at the time with articles published which explained the strategic importance of the estuary, as well as the history of Dutch control over it. The reason for this focus was the fact that British use of the Scheldt would allow the Entente to send the British Expeditionary Force to Antwerp to fight the German forces. It is clear that the Scheldt was a key issue for the British at the time and was bound to have shaped British public opinion of the Dutch. Regardless of the British government indicating its respect for Dutch control of the Scheldt, newspapers across Britain continued to report on the possibilities control of the river provided for either side. Newspapers from across the U.K published articles questioning whether Dutch sovereignty would be respected or in fact if it was even legitimate. Furthermore, reports of German and British ships in the river and worries that the German army intended to breach Dutch neutrality in order to fully utilise the newly captured Antwerp were common in papers throughout the final months of 1914.

*The Times*, also known as *The Times of London*, was (and still is) one of the largest national newspapers in Britain at the time. Throughout 1914, *The Times* published a number of articles on Dutch neutrality. Apart from a suggestion on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1914 that the Dutch control over the Scheldt estuary may not be legitimate, *The Times* presented a positive and respectful view of Dutch neutrality throughout the year.<sup>61</sup> The question of sovereignty arose, as access to the Scheldt would have allowed British troops easy access to reinforce Antwerp and the rest of Belgium, which at this point was in the grips of the German invasion. Here, *The Times* suggested that the British would possibly break Dutch neutrality in order to aid the Belgians, as they believed it their legal right to do so under the treaty of London. However, this theory that the British may breach Dutch neutrality was quashed only five days later on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, when it was published that the British government suggested it intended to respect Dutch control of the river.<sup>62</sup> By the end of August 1914, *The Times* claimed its

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<sup>61</sup> 'The Control of The Scheldt', *The Times*, 06/08/1914, pg 5.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Control of The Scheldt', *The Times*, 11/08/1914, pg 6.

respect for Dutch neutrality and sympathized with the difficulty experienced by the Dutch people.<sup>63</sup>

*The Times* was by no means alone in its focus on the Scheldt issue. *The Birmingham Daily Post*, along with several other papers, quoted a report from the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* on the growing fear held by the German high command that the British may attempt to 'force the Scheldt', thereby breaching Dutch neutrality.<sup>64</sup> The article went on to say that this idea of a British invasion might be an attempt by the Germans to damage Anglo-Dutch relations by making the Dutch anxious of a possible threat. The article, although pointing out that this action would breach neutrality did not go so far as to criticize the idea. This lack of criticism suggests that although respecting Dutch neutrality, the paper views the neutrality as being not as important as winning the war, as they were not willing to discard it completely. However, most papers agreed with the government's aim to respect Dutch neutrality. There was a consensus amongst the papers that Britain's reasons for entering the war were the same reasons that ensured they respected Dutch neutrality. This was because Britain had entered the war to defend what the German chancellor referred to as a 'scrap of paper' (the Treaty of London) from German aggression. Therefore, Britain could not also herself stomp on the treaty by violating the rights of the Netherlands.

Newspapers at the time reflected that both sides suspected that the other might breach neutrality of the Netherlands in order to further their own goals in the war. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1914, the *Falkirk Herald* published an article from the *Daily Chronicle's* correspondent to the Netherlands.<sup>65</sup> The correspondent was reporting on the anxiety felt by the Netherlands over rumours that the British intended to sail up the West Scheldt in order to assault German held Antwerp. This article expressed the opinion that the Dutch were anxious; as they would much rather have Germany break Dutch neutrality, as they have no interest in fighting their dear friends the British. The article claims that the Dutch public were saying, "if only the Germans would be the first to infringe our neutrality, then we are free to welcome England".<sup>66</sup> The correspondent gave the opinion

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<sup>63</sup> 'The Position of Holland', *The Times*, 26/08/1914, pg 9.

<sup>64</sup> 'Forcing the Scheldt', *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 23/12/1914, pg 5.

<sup>65</sup> 'Holland and Britain', *Falkirk Herald*, 22/08/1914, pg 7.

<sup>66</sup> 'Holland and Britain', *Falkirk Herald*, 22/08/1914, pg 7.

that the Dutch are pro-British and that the army would more likely revolt than fight the British. However, the correspondent writes that the British should respect their friends' wish for neutrality and not force them into a war.<sup>67</sup> This same article was also printed in the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* on the 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>68</sup> Here it can be seen that the newspapers were expressing the opinion that Britain and the Netherlands are friends and that Britain has no interest in dragging its friend unnecessarily into the war.

Although it is now known that the British did consider 'forcing the Scheldt' but decided against it, the Germans, rather than invade, only asked that the Dutch simply defend the mouth of the river against the British.<sup>69</sup> However, at the time papers presented the Germans using the river to attack Britain as a very real possibility. Even though a vast number of papers cite Dutch control of the Scheldt as the main reason for Britain's inability to reinforce Antwerp, the Dutch were never portrayed negatively by British papers. Rather, the papers presented this fact as merely an unfortunate occurrence, but made no blame against the Dutch whom they often perceived to be victims much like the Belgians in the aid of whom the British entered the war. The idea of Britain being the defender of small states seems to extend over the neutral Netherlands regardless of its position in the war. Furthermore, papers often used the Scheldt issue to vilify Germany who they assumed would use the river to attack Britain and expressed fear for the safety of the Netherlands from German attacks.

### **Invasion of Belgium and the Fall of Antwerp**

Due to the country's proximity to the fighting, the German invasion of Belgium and the siege of Antwerp prompted a substantial number of articles on Dutch neutrality. For example, the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* pointed out that the three most northerly forts defending the city were only two kilometres from the Dutch border. Therefore, an attack on them may cross into the Netherlands.<sup>70</sup> The Scotsman and multiple other papers echoed these points at the time, expressing

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. pg 7.

<sup>68</sup> 'Holland and Britain', *Linlithgowshire Gazette*, 21/08/1914, pg 4.

<sup>69</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 100.

<sup>70</sup> 'Dutch Neutrality', *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 21/08/1914, pg 5.

fears for the safety of the Dutch state.<sup>71</sup> Opinion at the time seems not to have been judging the Netherlands for its neutrality, but rather concern for the safety of the country in wake of German aggression. This fear for the Netherlands' safety is seen clearly in the *Preston Herald*, a paper from the northwest of England in its report on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1914, that a German invasion of the Netherlands seemed highly likely.<sup>72</sup> This, the paper claimed, was due to the movement of German troops to the Dutch border paired with the desire of the Kaiser to use Antwerp as a base to attack England. Here the opinion on Dutch neutrality was that it needed to be defended and that a neutral Netherlands was good for the British continuing the opinion of Britain as the defender of small nations.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1914, the *Western Mail* of Cardiff published a cartoon with the caption "Kindly walk into my parlour says the spider to the fly".<sup>73</sup> The cartoon depicts the German Kaiser portrayed as a spider sitting inside its web. In the cartoon the spider is inviting an innocent fly, whose wings read "Belgian fugitives", into its web.<sup>74</sup> The fly sits above a signpost labelled Holland. In the background of the picture, there are two cities. The city behind the German spider is labelled Antwerp and is in flaming ruins at the centre of the German web, whereas the other city behind the fly remains serene and peaceful. The cartoon portrays the ongoing negotiations between the Dutch and German governments over the refugees caused by the battle of Antwerp. Although no decision had been reached at the time of publication, the cartoon highlights the danger the papers felt the Dutch were in, as they are so close to the German spider's web and are in danger of being pulled into its trap. Here again, we see the papers express concern for the safety of the Dutch and vilification of the Germans for their perceived lack of respect for Dutch neutrality. Eventually the refugees returned to Belgium when the fighting moved on, but a great deal remained in the Netherlands throughout the war. As to whether this concern for the safety of the Dutch state was genuine or rather another method to vilify the Germans, is unclear. However, regardless of the motives behind this opinion, it

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<sup>71</sup> 'Dutch Anxiety', *The Scotsman*, 21/08/1914, pg 5.

<sup>72</sup> 'Sinister Suggestion in German Move', *Preston Herald*, 31/10/1914. pg 4.

<sup>73</sup> 'Cartoon', *Western Mail*, 16/10/1914, pg. 18.

<sup>74</sup> See appendix.

can be seen that papers expressed concern for the safety of the Netherlands and its neutrality, seeing it as in danger and in need of protection.

After the fall of Antwerp to the German army on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1914, a substantial number of papers expressed concern over the effect the German control of the city will have on the neutrality of the Netherlands. More and more stories began to emerge on what German intentions for the city were. Many newspapers felt that German control of the city was useless as long as Dutch neutrality was respected. This was due to the fact that the Germans wouldn't be able to utilize Antwerp, which Napoleon had described as a pistol pointed at the heart of Britain, without using the Scheldt.<sup>75</sup> As discussed previously, papers feared for Dutch neutrality as they felt Antwerp was of no use without the Scheldt. Therefore, the papers were worried that this may have prompted Germany to invade the Netherlands in order to fully utilise the Belgian port.

### **Trade**

Towards the end of 1914, the focus on Dutch neutrality moved away from the topic of Antwerp and the Scheldt and towards German-Dutch trade. More specifically, the focus pivoted onto how to deal with the fact that the Netherlands was able to act as a source of supplies for Germany. One of the key goals of the British during the war was to force the Germans into capitulation through economic warfare. The implementation of a naval blockade was used to cut off supplies from Germany, making waging war increasingly difficult. However, the position of the Netherlands as a neutral country meant Germany was able to purchase supplies from Dutch merchants in order to make up for shortages caused by the blockade. Although the NOT (Netherlands Overseas Trust) was established in November 1914 in order to prevent breaches in neutrality arising from trade, there were still several perceived breaches in the early months of the war.<sup>76</sup> Several papers quoted transport expert former deputy M. Papelier, who whilst writing in the French newspaper *Le Temps*, claimed that the presence of the Netherlands meant famine could not be relied upon as a force to push

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<sup>75</sup> 'The "Pistol" in German Hands', *Daily Mail*, 12/10/1914. pg. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Greater focus on NOT in the next chapter.



Germany out of the war.<sup>77</sup> Papelier went on to claim reports that espoused that Rotterdam had become a veritable German port.<sup>78</sup> The idea that Rotterdam was a German port due to its value to German businesses was also echoed by the *Hull Daily Mail*, which claimed that the assurance provided by the supplies of Rotterdam allowed Germany to invade France.<sup>79</sup> The papers praised the Dutch state for its part in up-keeping neutrality, but were somewhat critical of the Dutch merchants whom they perceived to be at least growing rich from the war and at worst aiding the enemy in the prolongation of the conflict. Towards the end of 1914, although the papers' opinion of the Dutch government remained the same, they began to increasingly criticize Dutch merchants. However, little evidence exists to support these criticisms. *The Daily Mail* went so far as to claim the trade provided by the Netherlands was the only reason why Germany had respected its neutrality.<sup>80</sup> Although being critical of the fact Germany gained supplies from the Netherlands, *The Daily Mail* did not in the article wish for the neutrality to be broken. Again, Dutch neutrality was used to criticise Germany rather than question the Netherlands, although the view of the Dutch merchants as greedy seems to be emerging.

### **The Preussen Affair**

A great deal of attention was paid by the British press to the arrest of a German naval captain whose vessel 'the Preussen' was interned at Sabang Bay in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>81</sup> Captain Lupcke and wireless operator Voltze were arrested due to a concealed wireless radio on board the ship hidden within the mast. The concealment and use of such a device, which was discovered during an inspection of the interned vessel, was a clear breach of Dutch neutrality, as interned ships had their communications cut in order to halt their participation in the war. This story received a great deal of coverage in the British press from the arrest of the two sailors, to the announcement that they would stand trial in Medan. The *Birmingham Mail* ran the topic under the title "More German

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<sup>77</sup> 'Good-bye You Fellows!', *Hull Daily Mail*, 30/09/1914, pg 1.

<sup>78</sup> 'German Supplies From Rotterdam', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 30/09/1914, pg 3.

<sup>79</sup> 'Rotterdam a German Port', *Hull Daily Mail*, 01/10/1914, pg 4.

<sup>80</sup> 'Our Correspondent Amongst the Ruins of Reims', *The Daily Mail*, 22/09/1914, pg 5.

<sup>81</sup> 'German Naval Loss', *Newcastle Journal*, 19/10/1914, pg 5.

Trickery" covering the story showing the Dutch help against the Germans.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the *Newcastle Journal* titled the article "German Naval loss" reporting as if this action was a victory for the British, writing as if the ship had been lost in battle listing its tonnage and guns and value to the enemy. The sheer amount to which the story was covered in the British press suggests an appreciation of the Dutch in what the British would have seen as aiding in the war effort. All of the articles mentioned the criticism of the German actions by Dutch papers at the time and listed the removal of the ship from German use as a positive in the war effort. Although little opinion was given on these events, the manner in which they are reported suggests an appreciation for Dutch neutrality so long as it worked towards British interests. Furthermore, it shows the papers were of the opinion that although neutral, the Dutch were still anti-German.

### **Pro-British Dutch**

*The Scotsman* gave the opinion that the Dutch are a shrewd and level headed people not wanting war with the British, as it would see the end of the colonies to which they are so dearly attached.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, *The Scotsman* also put forward that the Dutch pursued neutrality in a manner that must be commended.<sup>84</sup> The paper gave the opinion that the Dutch were handling the difficult position into which they have been put quite well. The only criticism the paper presented was that some Dutch merchants are using the situation to get rich and that Germany was able to gain supplies through the Netherlands. However, these are seen as a minority. Additionally, *The Nottingham Evening Post* put forward in October that the Dutch, although not wanting war to come to their country, sympathised with the plight of Belgium. Furthermore, the paper claimed the Dutch were happy to have "an England" to defend them from Germany.<sup>85</sup> Again, here we see papers putting forward the opinion that Dutch neutrality is respected and although the Dutch do not want war if they had to enter they would much rather do so on the side of the British. Whether this is true is unclear, as, as discussed in the previous chapter, opinions of both

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<sup>82</sup> 'More German Trickery', *Birmingham Mail*, 18/10/1914, pg 5.

<sup>83</sup> 'German Propaganda in the Netherlands', *The Scotsman*, 07/10/1914, pg 8.

<sup>84</sup> 'Hollands Neutrality', *The Scotsman*, 18/11/1914, pg. 9.

<sup>85</sup> 'Looking to England', *The Nottingham Evening Post*, 28/10/1914, pg. 3.

belligerents were mixed and neutrality was very much supported by the Dutch public. Additionally, this reporting of pro-British sentiment may possibly have been fabricated or overstated in order to boost wartime morale and further the idea that the world was against the Germans.

### **Sale of Zeeland**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1914, some British papers ran an article calling for the sale of the Dutch province of Zeeland to Belgium in order to help Belgium in the war. The Dutch media heavily criticized this article. So much so, that it prompted the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey to criticize the article and reiterate British support and respect for Dutch neutrality.<sup>86</sup> The *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* published the comments of the editor M. Charles Boissevain of the Dutch newspaper the *Algemeen Handelsblad*.<sup>87</sup> In this article, Boissevain criticized the British press for the suggestion that Britain should buy or lease the Dutch province of Zeeland to open a new frontier with Germany. He went on to claim that although the British government showed great respect and understanding for the position of the Netherlands, the press did not. The British press, he claimed, should mirror the respect shown by the Netherlands and not publish works that could offend or provoke neutral powers, as the Netherlands remained impartial to belligerents. These reports were not widely distributed and the British government never considered the suggestion of the purchase of Zeeland. However, it shows that although the British press were mostly respectful of Dutch neutrality, it did not necessarily always accord it with the due level of respect and that the Dutch press was not pleased with the actions of their British counterpart.

### **Editorials by Robertson-Scott**

The British press understood the difficulties the Netherlands faced in maintaining its neutrality. For example, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1914, *The Observer* printed an article detailing the extent to which Germany was going to

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<sup>86</sup> 'A Regrettable Article', *Manchester Evening Post*, 19/10/1914 pg. 3.

<sup>87</sup> 'Hollands Neutrality: British Press Criticized', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 17/10/1914, pg 3.

sway the Netherlands to its side.<sup>88</sup> This article listed the methods such as the use of fabricated news and German-run papers to sway Dutch public opinion. It gave the example of the campaign run by German academics to ingratiate themselves with their Dutch counterparts in the hope to sway their point of view. This article, like many before it, expressed the opinion that the Dutch, although neutral, were in danger of German aggression. It was common in the papers at the time to view Germany's breaching of Belgian neutrality as an example of its lack of respect for the sovereignty of any small state. This was supported by the fact that Britain was often portrayed as the defender of small states. Therefore, although neutral, the papers viewed the Netherlands as being under British protection. For example, *The Manchester Guardian* echoed the view that, although neutral for its own protection, there was a great deal of anti-German sentiment in the Netherlands.<sup>89</sup> In the article, the correspondent made the guess that only one in twenty Dutchmen supported the German cause, with the most support being in Rotterdam due to the city's close economic links to Germany. The correspondent claimed that people support the Germans only as it was the source of their income.

*The Observer* and *The Manchester Guardian* both presented a view of Dutch neutrality which shows it as being the country's just and admirable choice in the face of an aggressive and threatening Germany that has shown its disregard for international law and the sovereignty of small nations. In his piece in *The Observer*, British author on the Netherlands J.W. Robertson-Scott expressed his view that the Netherlands entering the war would not necessarily benefit Britain, as it may put the Dutch ports under German control.<sup>90</sup> Although the position of the Netherlands at the time may have benefited Germany slightly more than it did Britain, it was far preferable to the British than the Netherlands being in German hands be it through conquest or alliance. The position of the Netherlands as a neutral was advantageous to the British, as the Germans required Dutch cooperation more than the British due to Germany's reliance on Dutch imports. Therefore, the limitations upon Dutch trade caused by neutrality were less of an issue than they were for Germany. The article by Robertson-Scott

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<sup>88</sup> 'Kultur Campaign: German Efforts to Win Holland'. *The Observer*, 01/11/1914, pg. 11.

<sup>89</sup> 'Neutral Holland', *The Manchester Guardian*, 06/10/1914 pg. 3.

<sup>90</sup> 'The Attitude of Holland by J.W. Robertson-Scott', *The Observer*, 15/11/1914, pg. 5.

went on to list the reasons why the author believed the Netherlands would remain neutral and supported the country's choice to do so.

Earlier in November 1914, Robertson-Scott wrote an article in *The Observer* in which he defended Dutch neutrality asking is there "no virtue in peace?"<sup>91</sup> Although going on to say that the Netherlands entering the war would be of great boon to the allied war effort, he did not criticize the country's choice to remain neutral given the danger presented and lack of legal responsibility to do otherwise. In response to anyone who believed that the Netherlands should enter the war immediately, the author posited that anyone calling for this knows nothing of the Netherlands. Robertson-Scott then went on to ask if all the countries of the world need to go down to Armageddon without cause. This article could be seen as somewhat anti-war, were it not for the fact the author included the phrase without cause, as this allowed the British action as they entered to defend Belgium. Here the opinion of Dutch neutrality was considerate as the author felt there was no cause for the Dutch to break their neutrality. Furthermore, the article is again respectful but again is cautious of German intention towards the country.

### **Conclusion**

From examining the newspapers, it appears that in 1914 the opinion of Dutch neutrality was a mix of either positive admiration or fear for the country's future. A great deal of attention was paid to the threat Germany posed to the Netherlands, with many papers seeing Britain as the defender of neutral powers and a friend of the Netherlands, regardless of any formal treaty or alliance. Often, the Dutch were portrayed as victims of an ever-growing German menace that had no respect for the laws of international society or sovereignty of small states. It can be frequently seen that opinion towards the Dutch was done to vilify the Germans, presenting an image of a pro-British country trapped by the menace of Germany forced into neutrality to protect itself. Although some attention began to be paid towards the role of trade, opinions amongst the British press were largely positive and respectful. At this time the British press

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<sup>91</sup> 'The Dutch and Their Critics by J.W. Robertson-Scott', *The Observer*, 01/11/1914 pg 5.

did not seem to view the Netherlands as being greedy, cowardly or merely following the path of least resistance. They accepted the threat Germany posed to the country and understood the Netherlands' reasons for remaining out of the war.

## **Chapter Three: Losing Patience and Cautious Mistrust**

### **Opinion on Dutch Trade**

This chapter examines the opinion of British newspapers on Dutch neutrality by examining the way in which trade issues were reported during the war. Trade was a major factor for the Netherlands during the war, as it was one of the most important ways through which the Netherlands interacted with the various belligerents. The war placed a great deal of restrictions upon the ability of the Netherlands to pursue the free and open trade to which it was accustomed to and depended on. This difficulty arose from a British policy of economic warfare to choke Germany of its supply of vital resources, the aim of which was the starvation of Germany to a point of capitulation. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Netherlands had acted as a pipeline from which Germany gained supplies, through ports such as Rotterdam. Additionally, prior to the war, the Netherlands, with its heritage of maritime trade, was a leading hub in global commerce. However, the outbreak of war saw the introduction of blockades and embargos as well as the loss of Dutch shipping to mines, U-boats and confiscation for supposed impropriety, all of which had a profound influence on the ability of the Netherlands to conduct the trade upon which it had become so reliant. This chapter examines the establishment of the Netherlands Overseas Trust (NOT), the on going reports of British goods such as cotton and linseed oil reaching Germany, and the Sand and Gravel Affair of 1917. This has been done to demonstrate the growing critique held by British papers on the issue of trade and establish what opinion prevailed on Dutch neutrality. The chapter aims to determine if the Dutch were seen as greedy, or merely trying to make the best of a bad situation.

From the start of the war, monitoring the trade of neutral nations was paramount on the British agenda. Initially, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1914, the British demanded that any Dutch import which the British labelled as contraband should not be allowed to be traded with Germany. The Dutch, however, denied this, as they felt it went against their neutrality, due to the fact the British and Dutch definition of contraband varied considerably with cotton

and linseed oil being of the main examples. However, the Netherlands was in a difficult position and would have to compromise to survive. Although Germany was one of her chief importers, this trade was heavily reliant on strong links with its colonies, as well as the wider maritime trade network. Yet, these links were impossible to maintain without at least tacit British support, due to the superiority of British naval power. Ideally, the Dutch wanted to continue trade throughout the war with as little change or inconvenience as possible. However, they understood this would not be possible given the pressures both sides placed upon them. Therefore, the Netherlands took steps to ensure that Dutch trade remained neutral and would take into consideration the demands of both sides, while attempting to remain balanced. Favouring one side over the other would be disastrous, both economically and politically.

Still, unlike the trade of other neutral nations such as Sweden or America, the geographic position of the Netherlands made ensuring neutral trade problematic. The extensive border with Germany, paired with the recently German occupied Belgium, meant smuggling was an issue throughout the war. Jointly, Germany and the Netherlands had close economic ties prior to the war. These ties did not instantly vanish at the conflict's outbreak and many private individuals and firms in the Netherlands were still economically dependent on trade with Germany. Additional difficulties arose from the 1868 Treaty of the Rhine also known as the Mannheim Act. The act established fair and equal treatment for sailors on the river as well as insuring free use of the river to all signatories.<sup>92</sup> Under the Treaty, the Netherlands and Germany had a pre-existing trade agreement, which placed restrictions on the level of control that could be placed upon trade. The river Rhine, which provides the German industrial heartland with an accessible route to the Dutch port of Rotterdam, made the Netherlands a high priority for British control early on in the war.<sup>93</sup> The Allies wanted to ensure that neutral powers would not act as a work around for embargoes on belligerents. Therefore, certain goods were marked as contraband, making them illegal to trade under international law. Britain understood the value the Netherlands held for Germany with it being described as the an

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<sup>92</sup>History of the Organisation, CCNR, (<http://www.ccr-zkr.org>), accessed 09/17/2017.

<sup>93</sup> Kruizinga, 'Neutrality', 565.



“inexhaustible source of German wealth” by lawyer Leonard A. Magnus in his contemporary work *Pros and Cons in the Great War: A Record of Foreign Opinion With A Register of Fact*.<sup>94</sup> This work, produced in 1917, highlights the British opinion of what the Netherlands represented to Germany. Both its proximity to and close ties with Germany meant that Dutch trade during the war was under more restrictions than other neutral powers.

The issue of trade became increasingly prevalent as the war progressed. Neutral nations saw an increasing number of Allied regulations each year. This increase was due to greater pressures on the Allies to find some way of winning the war. Mounting losses, shortages at home and an ever-growing pressure to win the war lowered allied tolerance for perceived impartiality. Although adhering to Allied demands to the best of its abilities, the British consistently increased its demands on the Dutch government. Furthermore, when control of the allied blockade transferred from the British to the Americans in 1917, the Dutch were subject to even stricter regulations. The Allies placed quotas upon the Netherlands, reducing its imports to pre-war levels aiming to prevent any surpluses reaching Germany. Although smuggling was an issue, the Netherlands went to great lengths to limit this illicit trade, but it remained an issue in the British press.

### **The Netherlands Overseas Trust**

The *Nederlandsche Overzeseese Trustmaatschappij* or rather *The Netherlands Overseas Trust* (NOT) was established in November 1914. The NOT was created out of leading banks, trading houses and shipping companies in order to regulate the trade between the neutral Netherlands and the United Kingdom during the war.<sup>95</sup> The Trust's aim was to ensure no imported goods were allowed to pass through the Netherlands into an enemy state. This essentially put Dutch international trade under private regulation, ensuring the Dutch government could maintain its neutrality.<sup>96</sup> All imports to the Netherlands were consigned to

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<sup>94</sup> L.A. Magnus LLB. *Pros and Cons in the Great War: A Record of Foreign Opinion With A Register of Fact*, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, London, 1917) 109.

<sup>95</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 119.

<sup>96</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 139.

the Netherlands Overseas Trust to prevent exportation to Germany.<sup>97</sup> In order to gain a licence for importing goods, merchants had to go through the Trust. By putting this trade under the control of a quasi-private organization, the Dutch were able to avoid breaking neutrality. This was because if the Dutch government had taken the same measures as the NOT, it could have provoked Germany by breaching the 1868 Treaty of the Rhine.<sup>98</sup>

Although a neutral organization, The Netherlands Overseas Trust was not perceived as such by Germany, which viewed the NOT as simply another weapon in the British arsenal, as many in Germany felt the NOT overly favoured the British.<sup>99</sup> However, the NOT was not always viewed as neutral by the British either. Throughout the war, much like its mother country, the NOT was forced to walk a difficult line to achieve neutrality. While its main focus was on the U.K, it had to ensure its actions conformed to international law. Despite not having official ties to the Dutch government, the NOT did have the approval of the cabinet.<sup>100</sup> In order to adhere to international law, the NOT was a private organization. This allowed it the freedom to act without the country being accused of un-neutral acts. The importance of the NOT should not be underestimated. For example, historian Hubert Van Tuyll accredits the NOT with being the main reason the Netherlands stayed out of the war.<sup>101</sup> However, Van Tuyll also puts forward that the British government did not trust the NOT or the Dutch government and placed ever-growing demands upon them. This, he claims was achieved by ensuring the Dutch “danced to British commands”, so therefore the British continued to support Dutch neutrality.<sup>102</sup> This lack of trust is reflected in newspapers at the time, who kept a watchful eye on the Netherlands to ensure it was not aiding the Germans.

Though papers such as *The Manchester Guardian* accredited the Netherlands Overseas Trust with fulfilling its purpose to the best of its ability, concerns still remained that goods were making their way into Germany.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>99</sup> 'Threats to Holland', *Portsmouth Evening News*, 15/11/1916, pg 4.

<sup>100</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 120.

<sup>101</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 139.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>103</sup> 'Cotton Shipments to Europe', *The Manchester Guardian*, 09/07/1915, pg 9.

Papers at the time would rarely if ever criticize the Dutch government as a whole. Rather, they would insinuate guilt for specific individuals or institutions. For example, a great deal of focus was paid to the fact the House of Commons questioned the integrity of the board of the NOT, querying whether the board was respectable and trustworthy.<sup>104</sup> Although it was confirmed that the aforementioned gentlemen were in fact reputable, the fact that this question and its response was published in several papers suggests a possible cautious mistrust of the NOT. The Sunday Times, who questioned why the British government placed so much trust into the NOT, also expressed this mistrust in the members of the board.<sup>105</sup> Although not yet directly accusing the Dutch of breaking neutrality through its trade with Germany, papers were anxious that it was a possibility. This anxiety came from the fact that the papers understood the power the Dutch held to undermine the allied war effort. This was because Germany was heavily reliant on the Netherlands as a source of supplies. Therefore, by favouring Germany the Dutch could severely harm the allied war effort. Regardless of the fact that the Dutch had given their word and the assurances were made in establishing the NOT, papers remained suspicious of the Netherlands. In 1916, *The Daily Mail* went further than suspicion and accused the NOT of failing to secure complete control over Dutch imports. *The Daily Mail* postulated that the NOT's mismanagement had allowed contraband goods to reach Germany, which undermined the allied blockade.<sup>106</sup> *The Daily Mail* also claimed there to be several loopholes in the scheme and called for a new agreement to be reached that was more favourable to the British. This supports the idea that the British press was mistrusting of Dutch neutrality when it came to trade.

Alternatively, *The Economist* presented a much more positive view of the NOT than that in *The Daily Mail*. *The Economist* described the NOT as "a stroke of genius", accredited to Dutch sagacity and that its unofficial nature meant it was well suited to the task of ensuring Dutch trade did not break neutrality whilst also keeping both sides happy.<sup>107</sup> In addition, *The Economist* put forward that

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<sup>104</sup> 'Netherlands Overseas Trust', *Birmingham Mail*, 04/11/1915, pg 5.

<sup>105</sup> 'The Government Evasions', *The Sunday Times*, 11/07/1915 pg 10.

<sup>106</sup> 'Blockade Leak', *The Daily Mail*, 18/02/1916, pg 5.

<sup>107</sup> 'The Netherland Overseas Trust', *The Economist*, 01/04/1916, pg 6-7.

Dutch trade in the war would total around two hundred million pounds so far. However, the paper did not raise this point to say the Dutch were being greedy. In fact, the article claimed that Dutch trade during the war was not profit seeking, but merely that it acted as compensation for the amount the war was costing. This, the article claims, was because the war had ruined the lucrative tea, diamond and tobacco trades. Furthermore, the cost of the loss of these trades was compounded by the cost of constant mobilisation. The article concluded that the Dutch were well within their rights to seek out new forms of income and the NOT ensured the country maintained its neutrality while doing so. In contrast to *The Daily Mail*, *The Economist* offered a positive view of Dutch neutrality. Far from criticising the Netherlands for using the war to make a profit, *The Economist* sympathised with the country's plight and commended it for the work it had done so far, whereas, *The Daily Mail* offered a far more negative view of the NOT's work, accusing the Trust of ineffectiveness. This, however, was not always the view of *The Daily Mail*. In 1915, although prefacing that the NOT was by no means watertight, the paper claimed the NOT's work to date had been "satisfactory".<sup>108</sup> This change in view supports the idea that as the war progressed, Britain became less and less positive about neutrality as pressure grew to win the war. It is clear from the papers at the time that a shift in opinion was occurring, as papers were less lenient with the Netherlands than they had been previously.

In July 1915, *The Dundee Courier* put forward that it felt the NOT was doing a good job in maintaining the neutrality of the Netherlands and that the trust remained a necessity for the remainder of the war.<sup>109</sup> This point was also raised in *The Scotsman*. However, unlike *The Dundee Courier*, *The Scotsman* put forward that the fact that a large number of directors of the NOT had strong business ties to Germany was somewhat problematic.<sup>110</sup> For example, a number of the board were involved in the Coal industry which had strong ties to Germany. The article suggested that a weak point of the NOT could be that several of the directors held business interests in Germany which could sway their opinion. It speculated that this connection to Germany might affect the

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<sup>108</sup> 'Plan to Stop Enemy Cotton', *The Daily Mail*, 23/06/1915, pg 9.

<sup>109</sup> 'Straight Trading by Neutrals', *The Dundee Courier*, 16/07/1915, pg 4.

<sup>110</sup> 'Exports to Neutrals', *The Scotsman*, 03/12/1915, pg 10.

Trust's ability to act in a neutral manner. Although the NOT worked hard to ensure neutral trade, accusations that the NOT was not fulfilling its brief continued throughout the war. Though not always portraying the NOT as in the wrong, the sense that they could be doing more to prevent this trade was prevalent amongst British papers. The idea that the NOT was good but not good enough, was dominant in many of the reports at the time.

To summarise, British opinion on the Netherlands Overseas Trust developed over time. As the war progressed and pressures on the allies mounted, papers began to be less and less accepting of perceived or actual mismanagement by the NOT. 1915-1916 saw papers express some concerns; for the most part they were satisfied with the Trust's work. However, by 1917, things had come to a head and patience with the trust declined significantly. By 1917 relations with the British government and the NOT had worsened.<sup>111</sup> This time saw the Sand and Gravel Affair, unlimited U-boat war and control of the blockade transfer from the British to the Americans, who had only just recently entered the war. This change in administration had a pronounced effect on the NOT, as it was not prepared or established to deal with the Americans, who had a far stricter goal for economic warfare. Although papers accepted that the Dutch were neutral and attempted to achieve neutrality in its trade, the papers were very critical when it was perceived that the NOT had failed to do so, constantly checking and examining the Trust.

### **Linseed Oil**

A further trade issue that was prevalent in papers at the time was the trade of linseed oil. Linseed oil is a plant extract, which can be processed to create glycerine, a component in the manufacturing of explosives. The British government prohibited the exportation of linseed oil as of the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1915. However, prior to its prohibition, papers had called upon the government to halt the trade, as it was feared that it was aiding the enemy. Often reports on the linseed trade would present Dutch neutrality in a positive light, not openly questioning the intentions of the Netherlands as a whole. The blame would

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<sup>111</sup> S. Kruizinga, Netherlands Overseas Trust, [http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands\\_overseas\\_trust\\_not](http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/netherlands_overseas_trust_not) accessed on 23-3-17.

usually be placed upon the British government or upon merchants carrying out the trade. For example, in December 1914 *The Scotsman* ran an article accusing the British blockade of being inefficient.<sup>112</sup> The article claimed that British linseed oil was being transported through the Netherlands to Germany for the production of explosives. *The Scotsman* claimed that not only had sale of linseed oil from Britain to the Netherlands increased, but so too had sales from the Netherlands to Germany. Although not outwardly accusing the Dutch of selling British goods to the Germans it was implied. Moreover, the paper argued that the trade created a surplus, meaning the Dutch could sell more of their own linseed to the Germans under the assurance it could be replenished from trade with Britain. The paper accused the NOT of not doing enough to prevent the trade and claimed a large profit had been gained from this illicit trade. However, although displeased with the actions of the NOT, the article concluded "Holland had her fair share, now our national interest ought to come first".<sup>113</sup> Rather than accusing the Dutch of being greedy, this demonstrates a pro-Dutch sentiment or at least sympathy, as although claiming the Dutch had aided in the production of German explosives, the paper recognized that the British government had failed to take sufficient action to stop them. Therefore, they could not totally blame the Dutch.

The *Birmingham Daily Post* reported that the Dutch import of linseed oil had increased by over one thousand times from only eighteen tonnes between 1913-1914 to over nineteen thousand tonnes between 1914-1915.<sup>114</sup> However, this article did not accuse the Dutch of selling linseed oil to the Germans, but the increase strongly suggests that this was the case. This highlights that the British papers had mistrust for Dutch neutrality when it came to trade. Likewise, in 1917 the NOT placed limitations on the amount of glycerine (a product derived from linseed) that could be sold to Germany. This was reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette* which highlighted that although these limitations were broken, only individuals were fined for breaches. The article expressed a negative opinion about the individuals, but remained positive about the NOT.<sup>115</sup> This negative

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<sup>112</sup> 'Exports to Neutrals', *The Scotsman*, 03/12/1915, pg 10.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pg 10.

<sup>114</sup> 'Dutch Imports of Linseed Oil', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29/04/1915, pg 5.

<sup>115</sup> 'Glycerin for Germany', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14/11/17, pg 2.

opinion of individuals rather than the entire institution was common in papers at the time.

### **Cotton**

Another issue of trade which concerned the British press at the time was that of the cotton trade. Many papers questioned whether or not cotton should be marked as contraband. By marking it as such, Britain could further limit its export to any country, neutral or otherwise. Moreover, in questioning the position of cotton, remarks were made about the Netherlands and its role in aiding Germany. *The Manchester Guardian* put forward that stopping the trade of cotton with neutral countries such as the Netherlands would be ridiculous.<sup>116</sup> Although there might be some small amount of smuggling, the paper trusted the Netherlands to keep the materials for their own use. However, in July 1915, *The Times* published a letter to the editor that claimed cotton, which had not been branded as contraband, was having a major effect on the war, as it was used in the production of arms, uniforms, and medical supplies. The author of the letter went so far as to say that not only was this cotton issue responsible for the fact the Russian army was in retreat, but also that if cotton had been marked as contraband, he believed the British would have been fighting on German soil already.<sup>117</sup> This is a strong sentiment, as although not openly expressed it can be inferred that he believed the Dutch to have played a part in ensuring the fact Germany was doing so well in the war. Previous to this letter, there was a letter from an anonymous Frenchman under the pseudonym "A Neutral", who questioned why the British allowed cotton through the blockade given its importance to the German war effort.<sup>118</sup> It is questionable as to whether these authors' claims are correct, as they both attach a large importance to the role of cotton. It does, however, show strong feelings over the assumed actions of the Dutch, as no British goods were allowed to pass through The Netherlands into Germany, as doing so would be a clear breach of neutrality. Yet it is assumed by the authors that the Dutch were passing on materials nonetheless.

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<sup>116</sup> 'Cotton Shipments to Europe', *The Manchester Guardian*, 09/07/1915, pg 9.

<sup>117</sup> 'Cotton and Rubber for the Enemy', *The Times*, 21/07/1915, pg 8.

<sup>118</sup> 'Our Allies and Cotton', *The Times*, 20/07/1915. pg 7.

Although both of these articles were extremely critical of the British government and insinuate that the Dutch may be allowing cotton to pass into Germany, at no point did they criticize the neutral country. In fact, the blame appears to have fallen completely upon Britain for its failure to mark cotton as contraband, and not on the Dutch who assumedly were involved to some extent in the trade, yet shared no part of the blame. This is similar to the reporting on linseed, where the Dutch aren't necessarily blamed, but rather the situation was seen as a failure on the part of the British. This was a common theme in the papers at the time. Blame would be placed on the British for not setting good enough restrictions rather than the Dutch for simply following what international law allowed. If the Dutch were blamed for the trade, it was never outright and any blame that occurred was usually only levelled at individuals, not the entire country.

Breakdowns of overall Dutch trade statistics appeared in several papers throughout 1915, such as the *Liverpool Echo* and *The Farringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*.<sup>119</sup> These breakdowns did not offer any opinion, but merely listed the figures allowing the reader to make their own conclusions. The figures themselves often show an increase in goods from pre-war levels. Although it is implied the Dutch were not acting fairly to the British, there was no outright accusation. Rather, it is more of an impression that this is a situation that needs to be monitored. The Dutch were within their rights to trade certain items with Germany, but this trade, no matter its content undermined the allied blockade. Even if the item had no relation to the war, the fact that it was imported allowed for more resources to do be devoted to the war. Furthermore, although the Netherlands refused to completely halt food exports to Germany for both reasons of economics and neutrality, however, they did agree to limit the food trade to pre-war levels. The British accepted this, as although Germans could still obtain food, they were not able to use the Netherlands to make up for shortages caused by the war. These reports demonstrate that the implication that the Dutch were undermining the blockade was common amongst papers at the time adding to the negative opinion of Dutch merchants.

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<sup>119</sup> 'Dutch Trade', *Liverpool Echo*, 04/12/1915, pg 3; & Dutch Trade With Germany, *Farringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette*, 19/06/1915, pg 7.



### **Sand and Gravel Affair**

The latter quarter of 1917 saw what was arguably the greatest crisis Dutch neutrality had to face, bringing it almost to the point of war. On the 17th of October 1917, the British newspaper *The Times* published an article titled "A Check on Un-Neutral Acts".<sup>120</sup> In this article *The Times* accused the Dutch government of breaking neutrality by allowing German materials destined for military use to be transported through the Netherlands into occupied Belgium. The article is critical of Dutch actions and moves away from its traditional sympathetic view towards a more stern approach. Dispute over this trade led the British to cut Dutch access to the undersea cables, essentially isolating the Netherlands internationally. This was a major blow for the Dutch, as a main factor in their decision to remain neutral was the protection of its colonies, which they were now unable to contact. *The Times* reporting on these events was far from its usual respectful view of the Dutch neutrality and openly criticised the Dutch government rather than the norm of selecting individuals or groups.

However, the materials that caused such issues were not guns, munitions or weapons of any kind, but rather common sand, gravel and scrap metal. These items may seem harmless or even useless in the scale of a war that saw thousands die every day. But in fact, to the Entente powers these materials were just as nefarious as any weapon or bomb, for they were used to build military roads, railways and in the construction of the defences of places that lived in infamy in the minds of the Entente, such as Passchendaele and Ypres, as well as the construction of the defences on the Hindenburg Line (which the Germans withdrew to in early 1917). It was losses such as those at Passchendaele and Ypres that led British diplomat to the Netherlands Sir Francis Oppenheimer in his memoirs to accuse Dutch foreign minister John Loudon of being responsible for the shedding of more English blood than any Dutchman in history.<sup>121</sup> This, Oppenheimer claimed, was due to the fact the Dutch allowance of such a trade permitted Germany to construct much stronger defences than would have been possible if the Netherlands had maintained its strict neutrality. Seminal historian

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<sup>120</sup> 'A Check on Un-Neutral Acts', *The Times*, 17/10/1917, pg 9.

<sup>121</sup> F. Oppenheimer, *Stranger Within*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1960), 294.

on Dutch neutrality Maartje Abbenhuis argues that out of all of the strains put upon Dutch neutrality during the conflict, the Sand and Gravel Affair was the closest the Netherlands came to entering the war.<sup>122</sup> This is reflected in *The Graphic*, which claimed that although unlikely, Britain should be prepared for the Dutch to enter the war on the side of the Germans.<sup>123</sup> This period was the first time the British press began to see the Netherlands as a possible enemy rather than merely a potential victim of Germany. *The Graphic* described neutrality as being a source of wealth for the Dutch. This goes against earlier reports such as that in *The Economist* which recognized the difficulty caused by neutrality. An opinion of the Dutch as greedy is clearly presented in papers at this time. Here it can be seen that the British press dropped its friendly approach towards Dutch neutrality adopting more of a stern view. *The Graphic* raised that until this point the British had treated the Dutch with "tenderness". However, now the Dutch were seen as in the wrong and no longer would Britain be as lenient or accommodating or sympathetic, as the British saw felt the Dutch were not maintaining neutrality.

Shipments of sand and gravel were by no means a new phenomenon. They had been a regular occurrence since 1915.<sup>124</sup> But, by 1917 both belligerents were becoming increasingly desperate for some new advantage in the war. This crisis emerged just after the first battle of Passchendaele in October 1917, which had seen allied casualties reach upwards of thirteen thousand over the course of a few days.<sup>125</sup> Resentment over helping construction of German defences would have been high usually, but after such a bloody battle the British would have been more adamant about their objections. In the eyes of the British the Dutch were profiting from the blood of British soldiers, as they had indirectly contributed to the strength of German defences. The British government saw the situation as a neutral nation allowing a belligerent to transport materials of war through neutral territory. The *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough* claimed that the British had given the Dutch a chance to explain or rectify the situation, neither of

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<sup>122</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 135.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Drift in Holland: Will The Dutch Have to Take Sides in The War?', *The Graphic*, 10/11/1917. pg. 10.

<sup>124</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 213.

<sup>125</sup> G.P. Kingston, *History of the 4th (British) Division 1914-1919*, (London, London Press, 2006), 347.

which was done.<sup>126</sup> The article, which covers one of the most contentious points in the history of Dutch neutrality, remained relatively cordial towards the Dutch, which at best could be seen as incompetent or cowards, unable to ensure their own neutrality against German pressure. At worst, they were seen as actively aiding the Germans in the slaughter of allied troops, be it merely through greed or a more nefarious motive. The response of the Dutch government was to limit the amount and use of the sand and gravel to civilian use only. This, however, was not satisfactory to the British, who argued determining the use of the material once they reached Belgium to be impossible.

During this time the tone with which the British press discussed Dutch neutrality became much less tolerant. Papers began to criticise the Dutch and warn that war with Britain would not be in the Netherlands' best interest.<sup>127</sup> Earlier in the war, the British took the approach that although the Dutch had made a profit from this trade, as long as it stopped they would not hold any ill will. However, this trade of sand and gravel was serious enough for the British government to take strict action and the British press began discussing the effect a war with the Netherlands would present.<sup>128</sup> The overall view of Dutch neutrality at this time was quite negative. However, even though a lot of these papers presented a negative view of the Dutch neutrality, not all placed direct blame on the Dutch. For example, many still maintained that the fault lies with the Germans who pressured the Dutch into the trade. This could be seen as claiming Dutch neutrality was out of cowardice, as they could not resist Germany. However, most papers didn't place blame on the Netherlands for not opposing the Germans, as it was understood this would be disastrous.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, in terms of viewing Dutch neutrality as either being easy, greedy or just having a lack of courage, reporting on trade seems to air more towards the side of greed, at least as the war progressed. British newspapers were aware of the difficulties placed upon the Netherlands and didn't present an image of the Dutch having an easy time due to neutrality. In fact, the press was quite

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<sup>126</sup> 'Sand, Gravel and Copper', *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 13/11/1917, pg 2.

<sup>127</sup> 'The Anglo-Dutch Difficulty', *The Western Daily Press*, 16/10/1917, pg 4.

<sup>128</sup> 'The Anglo-Dutch Difficulty', *The Western Daily Press*, 16/10/1917, pg 4.

sympathetic to Dutch issues caused by the war, but patience for these difficulties only went so far as to accommodate the Dutch as long as it was in British interest to do so. Furthermore, this patience dwindled as the war progressed and pressure rose in Britain. Although there are examples of the Dutch as acting in a somewhat cowardly fashion, overall the British press remained relatively positive maintaining its position of focusing the majority of blame on Germany rather than the Netherlands. The British were positive about the establishment of NOT and were satisfied with its work for the most part up until 1917. The cotton and linseed trade issues, although highlighting times in which the Dutch possibly broke neutrality, didn't spark much major criticism on the whole from the press. Although some articles presented these trades as significant factors in the war, they did not put any blame on the Dutch. This acceptance of Dutch trade may have arisen from the shared culture of Britain and the Netherlands as trading nations. Alternatively, it is possible that in its self-perceived role of the defender of small nations Britain did not want to be seen to be limiting the Netherlands too much. This being due to the fact that it could play into the German narrative that the British entered the war for economic motives. However, by 1917 there was a shift in opinion as pressure rose on the allies. This time saw papers become less sympathetic towards the Dutch and increasingly critical over any perceived breach in neutrality.

## **Chapter Four: 1918, A Sharp Note to Holland**

By January 1918, the Entente and Central Powers were more desperate than ever to see the war come to a close. 1917 had been a turbulent year, with the Entente seeing its ally Russia back out, whilst America stepped into the fray. Germany had declared unrestricted U-boat warfare that was decimating international shipping. Casualties had amassed on both sides, yet the stalemate continued. January of 1918 found the Netherlands much in the same state as it had been at the close of the previous year. Tensions were high, supplies in demand and relations with both the Entente and Central powers on the edge over the Sand and Gravel Affair.<sup>129</sup> As the war drew to its eventual conclusion, pressure continued to be placed upon the Dutch state as it worked as ever to ensure its neutrality. This chapter examines the British newspapers' reporting on Dutch neutrality in 1918 up until the end of the war in November. This has been done to determine whether the growing pressure of the war had an effect on the opinion of Dutch neutrality. The chapter does this by examining the issues around Dutch shipping, continued concerns for the Scheldt and the safety of the Netherlands from Germany.

### **Dutch Shipping**

Perhaps the most significant issue of Dutch neutrality covered by the papers in 1918 was the Allied decision to confiscate Dutch merchant ships. The winter of 1917 had seen a great strain placed upon Allied shipping. Although the convoy system had somewhat alleviated the devastation caused by Germany's unrestricted U-Boat war, a considerable tonnage of shipping was still being lost each month.<sup>130</sup> During the first six months of the unrestricted U-boat warfare over half a million tonnes of shipping was lost each month.<sup>131</sup> The U-boats had also left a considerable number of Dutch ships stranded in Allied ports, as they sought safe harbour. Growing shortages in Europe, paired with the need to transport American forces to the Western Front placed a great deal of pressure

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<sup>129</sup> See chapter three.

<sup>130</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations", 71.

<sup>131</sup> A. Kramer, "Blockade and Economic Warfare.", in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Vol II*, Ed. J. Winter, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014), 486.

upon the Allied governments. This increased demand for transportation led to a drastic intensification of the pressure placed upon neutral shipping.<sup>132</sup> Although deals had been made with other neutral powers, the Dutch government had resisted allowing the charter of its merchant fleet. This was because the Dutch feared helping the Allies would put them at risk of harsh reprisals from the Germans. However, under international law, warring powers had the right to confiscate neutral property in times of dire emergency. Therefore, in March 1918 after negotiations had failed the Allies, confiscated one hundred and thirty-two Dutch ships in allied ports constituting one-third of the Dutch merchant fleet.<sup>133</sup> This arrangement, although criticised in the Dutch press, was accepted by the Dutch government, as it felt if they had given the ships willingly it could have further antagonised the Germans and led to greater demands.

The British press paid a great deal of attention towards this shipping issue with reports at the time expressing mixed opinions on the Dutch. Articles were run covering both the negotiations and on the confiscation and its aftermath. For the first time during the war, papers expressed openly negative opinions about the Netherlands. For example, the *Army and Navy Gazette* was harsh in its view of the Dutch, positing, "the Dutch were the only neutral power to have exhausted Allied patience".<sup>134</sup> The paper claimed that the Netherlands had unduly favoured Germany over Britain during the first two years of the war. Therefore, it felt that the confiscation of shipping was more than just. The paper also expressed the opinion that the Dutch had abused the goodwill of the British and that Britain's treatment of the Netherlands had been as fair as the German treatment had been tyrannical. One explanation for this spike in negative opinion was the fact that the Allies were desperate to win the war. Russia leaving the war had freed up a substantial number of German troops that would now be directed to the Western Front. Without the American reinforcements that would not arrive until 1918, Allied forces feared Germany would break the stalemate. These strong words in the paper reflected the desperation felt by the papers, as previously they were very positive about the Dutch. The paper concluded that the Allies could not allow the Dutch to continue in the view that Germany be

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<sup>132</sup> Frey, "Anglo-Dutch Relations", 71.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>134</sup> 'Holland and The Allies', *Army and Navy Gazette*, 23/03/1918, pg 8-9.

allowed to prosper from Dutch neutrality to any extent, whilst the Allies cannot benefit at all without international law being used against them.<sup>135</sup> Here it can be seen the paper is breaking from the view expressed earlier in the war that the Dutch were pro-British. This idea that the Dutch favoured the Germans more was quite common in newspaper reports around the shipping issue. *The Dundee Courier* expressed a negative opinion of the Dutch running an article titled "Discriminating Dutch Neutrality".<sup>136</sup> The paper claimed that the Dutch were helping the Germans and that times were too serious to respect what it called "sham neutrality".<sup>137</sup> This again is a harsher view of the Netherlands as previously; although papers accused the Dutch of helping the Germans, it was often followed up with an explanation that this was due to overwhelming pressure. In these articles however, this was not the case.

However, not all papers held such a negative opinion of the Dutch. For instance, *The Manchester Guardian*, although somewhat critical of the Dutch, sympathised with their situation, claiming that the Dutch were in a difficult position being pressured by both Britain and Germany to change their trade to favour the other less.<sup>138</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* put forward that although Britain was anxious, it should not put undue pressure on the Dutch.<sup>139</sup> However, *the Manchester Guardian* was not completely without blame towards the Dutch. The article claims that by leaving its ships idle the Netherlands was aiding the German war effort, as this disruption of shipping had been the goal of the U-boat war.<sup>140</sup> Conversely, not all papers expressed a negative view of the Dutch. Other papers such as the *Daily Record* continued to respect the Dutch espousing that the Dutch situation had never been one the British could envy.<sup>141</sup> This report was also run in the *Leeds Mercury*, which put forward that Germany was making demands of the Netherlands which could not possibly be met. Therefore, a diplomatic crisis was imminent.<sup>142</sup> *The Western Morning News* reported on the event sympathising with the Dutch position, noting that the confiscation was a

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<sup>135</sup> 'Holland and The Allies', *Army and Navy Gazette*, 23/03/1918, pg 8-9.

<sup>136</sup> 'Discriminating Dutch Neutrality', *Dundee Courier*, 16/03/1918, pg 2.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, pg 2.

<sup>138</sup> 'Holland and the Allies', *The Manchester Guardian*, 19/03/1918, pg 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, pg 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, pg 4.

<sup>141</sup> 'Germany and Holland', *Daily Record*, 24/04/1918, pg 2.

<sup>142</sup> Germany and Holland, *Leeds Mercury*, 24/04/1918 pg 2.

low point in relations between the Netherlands and the Allies. Not all papers were outraged by the shipping issue, some merely reported the facts and reiterated the Dutch were within their rights to refuse and that neutrality must be maintained at any cost.<sup>143</sup> However, although papers sympathised that the Dutch were in a difficult position, none felt the British were acting out of line or offering the Dutch anything less than a fair deal.

The issue of shipping remained a point of contention between the Allies and the Dutch for the rest of the war. In June, the *Aberdeen Evening Express* ran an article titled "Sharp notes to Holland", in which it laid out several grievances the British had with the Dutch state.<sup>144</sup> The article claimed that the recent refusal of the Dutch to recognise captured German ships as British was another example of the Dutch abusing international law. The paper accused the Dutch of making up laws to purposefully harm the British war effort. This, the paper claimed, would have a detrimental effect on The Hague's credibility as a centre for international law. Additionally, the paper remained angry over the continuation of the Netherlands allowing Germany to transport goods through the country. Here again, it is clear that 1918 saw a great deal of negative opinion about Dutch neutrality, as papers believed the Dutch were favouring the Germans over the British. During this time papers paid little attention Dutch efforts to mediate the situation and lacked the sympathy for the Dutch that had been present earlier in the war.

### **The Scheldt**

As discussed in the second chapter of this work, the Scheldt was an extremely important issue for the British press due to the tactical implication it had to the Germans. These concerns had continued throughout the war and up to 1918. British newspapers kept a careful eye on the Scheldt and reported any possible breaches or abuses. For example, several articles were printed over the aftermath of a small naval battle that had recently occurred in which it was believed German destroyers might have crossed into Dutch waters whilst

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<sup>143</sup> Stop the Press, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 21/03/1918, pg 3.

<sup>144</sup> Sharp notes to Holland, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 15/06/1918, pg 2.



retreating.<sup>145</sup> Papers such as the *Belfast Newsletter* reported the discussion of the issue in the House of Commons arguing that the Scheldt must remain neutral.<sup>146</sup> The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* also expressed concerns over the Scheldt, arguing that as the war progressed Germany's ability to resist its temptation to take the Scheldt weakened.<sup>147</sup> The Scheldt remained important to the British; regardless of the assurances made by the Dutch that it would be kept closed to all involved in the war, the British press maintained a watchful eye on the estuary.

### **Concerns for Dutch safety**

Papers also ran several articles expressing concern for the safety of Dutch neutrality. *The Telegraph* reported on a German plot to weaken Dutch neutrality in order to bring the country into the war.<sup>148</sup> The paper put forward that the Germans were purposefully increasing their demands upon the Dutch in order to weaken their neutrality. The paper ran this report to highlight the danger the Netherlands was in and espoused its support for continued neutrality. Concern over the pressure under which Germany was placing the Netherlands was prevalent enough to prompt two follow-up articles to the original. *The Telegraph* later went on to claim that the Germans were attempting to restart the sand and gravel trade and it was rumoured an ultimatum of either give into German demands or war had been placed before the Netherlands.<sup>149</sup> The paper expressed a great deal of concern for the Netherlands and again it can be seen papers forwarded the narrative of an innocent Holland at the mercy of German aggression. The final of the three articles written on the crisis claimed that the situation remained unclear but expressed concern for Holland.<sup>150</sup> The article mentioned the German demands for the recommencement of the sand and gravel trade, as well as requests to use Dutch railways to reach Belgium. Although granting either of these requests would be in breach of Dutch neutrality, at no point did they criticise the Dutch for discussing the requests. The three articles viewed the Germans as plotting, menacing and threatening the Dutch, continuing

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<sup>145</sup> 'The Scheldt', *Evening Despatch*, 03/07/1918, pg 1.

<sup>146</sup> 'The Escape of German Destroyers', *Belfast Newsletter*, 04/07/1918, pg 2.

<sup>147</sup> 'Why is Germany Picking Quarrel with Dutch', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 24/04/1918, pg 1.

<sup>148</sup> 'German Plot Against Dutch Neutrality', *The Telegraph*, 22/04/1918, pg 8.

<sup>149</sup> 'German Menace to Dutch Neutrality', *The Telegraph*, 24/04/1918, pg 5.

<sup>150</sup> 'German Threat to Dutch Neutrality', *The Telegraph*, 25/04/1918, pg 7.

to express the opinion that the Dutch were in danger but not placing any blame on the Dutch for its part.

*The Telegraph* was by no means the only paper to express concern for the safety of the Netherlands. The *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* also expressed concern for the Netherlands in light of the German demands.<sup>151</sup> The papers reported that during discussions over restarting the sand and gravel trade Germany moved several divisions to the Dutch border to threaten the Dutch. Reports such as this had been prevalent throughout the war and demonstrate the anxiety the British press felt for the Dutch. Moreover, the paper claims that the Kaiser was anxious for an excuse to invade.<sup>152</sup> *The Scotsman* also reported of German threats to attack the Dutch, reporting that German troops would cross the border and occupy parts of the country if negotiations did not go well.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, the *Sunday Post* accused the German government of bullying the Dutch and expressed concern over how long the Dutch could withstand the pressure.<sup>154</sup> Although the accuracy of these reports is unclear, they do show continued concern for the well-being of the Netherlands. Additionally, although reports of this nature were relatively common throughout the war, usually the motive was down to German treachery or barbarity, yet now the motive seems to be the growing desperation of the Germans. However, regardless of German motives, it is clear the British press still had deep concerns for the safety of Dutch neutrality. These concerns seem to have deepened as the war continued, as the British understood the damage the Dutch entering the war would do.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, 1918 was a tumultuous year for Anglo-Dutch relations and saw flaring tempers over key issues. Although the same issues such as the Scheldt and the safety of the Dutch remained in the forefront of reporting throughout the war, a sense of desperation and anxiety was present that was not there in articles from the previous years. The British press continued to respect the

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<sup>151</sup> 'The Dutch German Crisis', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 27/05/1918, pg 5.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, pg 5.

<sup>153</sup> 'Germans and Dutch Flanders', *The Scotsman*, 13/05/1918, pg 6.

<sup>154</sup> 'Germany and Holland', *Sunday Post*, 12/05/1918, pg 2.

Dutch, but it is clear from the reports that their patience was growing thin and there was a deep reluctance to accept any possible impartiality. This period saw the press move away from the opinion of the Dutch as pro-British. Rather, now the press felt the Dutch over-favoured the Germans, and while paying lip service repeating that they respected the position of the Dutch, there were still harsh criticisms of the Dutch that had not been present in previous years of the war. This fits in Hubert Van Tuyl's theory that the war can be divided into two distinct sections: before and after 1917 as the pressures of war grew and patience weakened.<sup>155</sup> It is clear from the papers that patience was running out with both sides wanting to win more than ever and if that meant damaging relations with the Dutch, so be it. The articles on the confiscation of shipping contain perhaps some of the strongest opinion expressed by papers during the war and highlight the extent to which the Allies needed the ships. Therefore, it can be argued that although the overall opinion remained as usual positive and respectful of Dutch neutrality, cracks were starting to appear as the pressure of the war grew.

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<sup>155</sup> See historiography chapter one.

## **Chapter Five: Wilhelm, Wilhelmina and the Hangman's Noose: The Kaiser Affair**

### **Background to the Affair**

On the 9th of November 1918, two days before the armistice that brought about an end to the First World War, Kaiser Wilhelm, emperor of Germany, fled to the Netherlands. An action, which many German soldiers before him had attempted, only to be at best interned by the Dutch, or at worst executed under court martial by the Germans. During the war, the Dutch authorities had interned four thousand five hundred German soldiers.<sup>156</sup> They had ended up in the Netherlands either through desertion, mistake or were forced to do so in the course of retreat. Upon arrival German troops were disarmed, arrested and sent to camps. These camps often suffered from lack of food, supplies and overcrowding. The desertion issue had been such that the Germans had erected an electric fence on the Dutch-Belgian border to prevent desertion, amongst other prohibited cross border activities such as smuggling.<sup>157</sup> In the days leading to the Kaiser's flight, reports of mutinies, protests and what seemed to be the beginning of a revolution similar to that in Russia had reached German high command at the Belgian town of Spa.<sup>158</sup> These reports reached German leadership at a tense time indeed. The situation on the Western Front for the Central Powers was very challenging. Although achieving substantial success in the Michael offensive early on in the year, advancing almost forty miles into France and taking almost one hundred thousand prisoners, this success was not without cost. Operation Michael had been devised by German high command as their attempt to finally break through and win the war. Although it had been quite successful, by November these gains had all but been lost to allied counter offensives. These counter offensives led to the German military command to conclude that it was no longer confident in its ability to continue the war. It was in this untenable situation that Kaiser Wilhelm was advised by his commanders

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<sup>156</sup> Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral*, 110.

<sup>157</sup> 'Electricity as Frontier Guard: Death Dealing Wire Fences', *Illustrated London News*, 02/10/1915, pg 13.

<sup>158</sup> N. J. Ashton & D. Hellema (2000) 'Hanging the Kaiser: Anglo-Dutch relations and the fate of Wilhelm II, 1918-20; *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 11:2, 53-78, 55.

to abdicate his throne. *The Times* reported that the Kaiser's decision to flee to the Netherlands was reached, as it remained his only option.<sup>159</sup> Wilhelm was never again to set foot in the country over which he had ruled and subsequently lost. Rather, like many a disillusioned German soldier before him, he traveled to the Dutch border in search of sanctuary. After being held at the border whilst the Dutch cabinet decided what to do with him, he was allowed to enter. It was here he remained until his death in 1941 at his home in Doorn near Utrecht. His death occurred ironically whilst the Netherlands was under German rule.

Queen Willemena's acceptance of the Kaiser and subsequent protection from extradition was a topic of debate in the British press. This was because it was the view of many, including King George that the Kaiser deserved to stand trial. Many believed that the Kaiser's role in both the start and continuation of the war were tantamount to criminal and that for these amoral actions he deserved to be tried and punished. These demands, however, were never to be met, due to a combination of political pressure and lack of Dutch cooperation. Van Tuyll put forward that the decision to allow the Kaiser entry was not an easy decision to make for the Dutch Government at the time, due to the fact that it threatened to make them appear pro-German, of which the Dutch had already been accused.<sup>160</sup> However, a debate exists amongst historians over whether or not Queen Willemena or the Dutch government was aware of the Kaiser's arrival beforehand. Some historians claim that the Kaiser's decision was not made until the afternoon before his arrival, meaning there would have been no time to prepare on the part of the Dutch. Others assert the Kaiser had made clear his intentions in the days prior, when Dutch military officials had visited him in Belgium. Therefore, the true circumstances behind the Kaiser's flight to the Netherlands have been described by some as a "historical mystery".<sup>161</sup> However, although the truth of the Kaiser's flight may be somewhat different than is traditionally believed, the papers at the time presented the truth as it was viewed by the world in the waning days of what had been history's bloodiest conflict so far. The truth being the now ex-Kaiser was taking shelter within the territory of the neutral state.

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<sup>159</sup> 'The Kaiser Explains', *The Times*, 17/01/1919, pg 5.

<sup>160</sup> Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken, *The Netherlands and World War I*, 273.

<sup>161</sup> Ashton & Hellema, 'Hanging the Kaiser', 55.

It was believed by some, that the Kaiser's presence so close to the German border would both threaten the newly formed government of the Weimar Republic, as well as act as a gathering point for monarchists across Europe. It was therefore agreed that Wilhelm be moved away from the border, which arguably is difficult in a country so small yet it was achieved satisfactorily to all parties by his placement in Doorn. However, the Kaiser's presence in the Netherlands put the country once more into a difficult position. Although the war was over, the Netherlands once more found itself under international pressure. As discussed above, many in the Netherlands and abroad wanted the Kaiser to be put on trial for his perceived crimes, some even going so far to say that he should be hanged. This chapter examines the reaction of the British press to the Kaiser crisis from its beginning in 1918, to the following years, when the debate over the Kaiser continued and the Dutch refused to extradite him. Papers at this time, although not directly discussing Dutch neutrality, provide an insight into British sentiment towards the Dutch, as the Kaiser and what was to be done with him was a contentious issue for many in Britain as well as abroad.

### **An Assumedly Unwelcome Arrival**

In the days following the end of the war, papers reported on the Kaiser's presence in the Netherlands under such headlines as "William The Bandit" in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, and 'Exit Tyrannus' in *The Globe*.<sup>162</sup> However, although vilifying Wilhelm, referring to the Kaiser as a bandit and tyrant, these articles did not present the Netherlands as being guilty by association. Indeed, the animosity felt towards the former German emperor does not appear to have spread towards his new host. In fact, again papers can be seen to be expressing concern for the Netherlands, much the same as they had during the war. *The Globe* raised the concern that the Netherlands was both too weak and too close to Germany to act as a jailor for the Kaiser, as did the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, which reported that the Kaiser was a danger to both the Netherlands and the wider world.<sup>163</sup> This being due to the fact that he was a focal point around which

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<sup>162</sup> 'William The Bandit', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14/11/1918, pg 1.

<sup>163</sup> 'Exit Tyrannus', *The Globe*, 12/11/1918, pg 2.

discontent and revolution could once more fester.<sup>164</sup> Concern for the Netherlands and in turn the newly reached peace was a common trend in papers at the time. For example, *The Belfast Newsletter* also saw the Kaiser as a danger to the Netherlands and called for his communications to be cut.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, asking the question "what will be done with the Kaiser?", the *Western Gazette* placed no blame on the Netherlands for granting asylum to the fleeing German leader.<sup>166</sup> In fact, like many papers at the time, it recognized and sympathized with the difficulty faced by the Dutch government. Rather, once more it can be seen that papers maintained their position that the Netherlands was a victim of German action.

As was common in papers at the time, any negative opinion on the Netherlands was reserved solely for merchants and businessmen, rather than the government. For example, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* reported that the Kaiser planned for Germany to retain control of Antwerp. This, the paper claimed, was largely supported by Dutch shipping and business magnates, whom reportedly were largely under German influence.<sup>167</sup> Papers did not blame the Netherlands for harboring the Kaiser in 1918. Rather, papers sympathized that the country was once more forced into a difficult position by the Kaiser's actions and expressed concern for the continued safety of the Dutch state. *The Nottingham Evening Post* reprinted reports by the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* that the Kaiser was unanimously unwelcome, although the Dutch government would not admit it openly.<sup>168</sup> This was the case in many papers at the time, printing articles that presented the picture of the Kaiser as being an unwelcome and unpleasant guest. The *Leeds Mercury* ran the news that the Kaiser, unlike the Dutch public, was not subject to any rationing or restriction.<sup>169</sup> In fact, the paper went as far to claim his diet was comparable to that he experienced at his royal palace prior to the war. The *Leeds Mercury* can be seen to have presented the story that the Kaiser was abusing his host's good graces and went unscathed as the innocent Dutch people suffered. Although the Dutch government itself made

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<sup>164</sup> 'Kaiser to be interned', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 12/11/1918, pg 1.

<sup>165</sup> 'Ex-Kaiser's Communications Must Be Cut', *The Belfast Newsletter*, 13/11/1918, pg 6.

<sup>166</sup> 'What Will be Done With the Kaiser', *Western Gazette*, 15/11/1918, pg 3.

<sup>167</sup> 'Ex-Kaiser Still Plotting', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 04/12/1918, pg 2.

<sup>168</sup> 'William The Bandit', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11/11/1918, pg 1.

<sup>169</sup> 'The Kaiser in Holland', *Leeds Mercury*, 19/12/1918, pg 7.

no comment over its feelings towards the Kaiser's presence, papers at the time printed the calls from Dutch people in the U.K who demanded the Kaiser not be granted asylum.<sup>170</sup> No comments were made that the Dutch had accepted the Kaiser out of any pro-German sentiment. Rather, newspapers at the time accepted that the Kaiser was an unwanted, inconvenient guest whom had forced himself upon the good graces of the neutral state. Although concerns remained that the Kaiser might have attempted to escape the Netherlands, the articles were written as a warning to the Netherlands to protect itself rather than being a criticism of the Dutch state as a whole.<sup>171</sup>

### **Calls for extradition**

Article 227 of the Treaty of Versailles, written in June 1919, called for the tribunal of Kaiser Wilhelm, requesting the Dutch government surrender him to the allies in order for the proceedings to take place. Point 4 of Article 227 of the Treaty of Versailles read: "The Allied and Associated Powers will address a request to the Government of the Netherlands for the surrender to them of the ex-Emperor in order that he may be put on trial."<sup>172</sup> These demands, however, were never to be met. The Netherlands not being a signatory to the treaty meant it was not legally mandated to adhere to its demands. Furthermore, Dutch law protected the Kaiser under his right to seek asylum. This left few options through which the allied countries could put pressure on the Netherlands. Allied governments dispatched a note requesting Wilhelm's extradition to the Dutch government on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1920. This request was refused on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the same month, as was the subsequent follow up.<sup>173</sup> However, although the Netherlands refused to extradite the Kaiser, there was no significant backlash against the Dutch in the British press. For example, the *Western Times* reported that the Netherlands was merely adhering to its own laws by offering the Kaiser protection.<sup>174</sup> *The Times* reported that the Dutch did not protect the Kaiser through loyalty or respect for him. Rather, they did so as there existed no

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<sup>170</sup> 'Hollanders In London Demand Surrender to Justice of the Hohenzollern Bandit', *Dundee Courier*, 14/11/1918, pg 1.

<sup>171</sup> 'Warning to Holland', *The Globe*, 27/06/1919, pg 1.

<sup>172</sup> Treaty of Versailles, Article 227. Paris, 28/06/1919.

<sup>173</sup> 'The Netherlands Refusal', *Nottingham Journal*, 05/11/1920, pg 5.

<sup>174</sup> 'Why Holland refuse Allies demands', *Western Times*, 26/01/1920, pg 4.



precedent under international law through which he could be tried.<sup>175</sup> For the most part during the war papers had remained respectful of Dutch sovereignty and law and the Kaiser crisis did not alter that stance. During this time papers remained respectful of the Dutch despite the refusals to extradite the Kaiser.

Prior to the dispatch of the extradition requests, several papers claimed there would be no objections on the part of the Dutch. The *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, echoed reports made in *The Daily Telegraph*, that the membership of the Netherlands in the League of Nations meant there would be no issue in the Kaiser's extradition.<sup>176</sup> The *Western Morning News* also printed an article covering the French paper *Le Matin's* discussion with a French government official over the punishing the Kaiser and other key German officials. From this discussion *The Western Morning News* claimed the prospects of seeing the Kaiser punished is possible and concluded that no legal barrier existed to prevent such actions from occurring.<sup>177</sup> A significant number of papers assumed that the Netherlands would adhere to allied demands and submit the Kaiser to their custody. This, as has been discussed, was not the case, yet there was little if any backlash against the Dutch by the British press. This acceptance of the Dutch decision demonstrates the respect shown for the Dutch that was present in most of the reports during the war.

Although some papers made the claim that there was no legal barrier for the Netherlands releasing the Kaiser to allied custody, other papers such as *The Scotsman*, disagreed. *The Scotsman* had reported that it was unlikely the Dutch would accept the request before the note requesting extradition had been dispatched.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, other papers ran several articles prior to the allied request asking why no demands had been made to The Netherlands. For example, the *Lancashire Evening Post* and *The Manchester Guardian* reported that the Netherlands had no objection to discussing the Kaiser question, but they did print that the extradition of the Kaiser seemed incompatible with an independent Netherlands.<sup>179</sup> These reports offered no opinion on the Dutch

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<sup>175</sup> 'The Kaiser's Trial', *The Times*, 03/01/1919, pg 5.

<sup>176</sup> 'The Powers and Ex-Kaiser', *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16/04/1919, pg 7.

<sup>177</sup> 'No Legal Bar to Punishment', *Western Morning News*, 21/01/1919, pg 5.

<sup>178</sup> 'Extradition of Ex-Kaiser', *The Scotsman*, 17/01/1920, pg 9.

<sup>179</sup> 'No Formal Request Yet to Holland', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 07/01/1919, pg 5.

position; merely, they conveyed that the Dutch were within their rights to protect the Kaiser. Furthermore, while the Kaiser was presented as the architect of the atrocities in Belgium and France, which appalled many in the Netherlands during the war, this does not seem to have been used against the Dutch in their decision to protect the Kaiser. In fact, the heated language and emotion that had been common in the reports prior to the Dutch refusal had disappeared. Papers accepted the Dutch choice and made no attempt to chastise the Netherlands. Be it before or after the request for extradition, British papers remained respectful of the Dutch choice to follow its own law.

### **Hanging Wilhelm?**

The question what to do with the Kaiser started immediately after his arrival in the Netherlands. *The Daily Mirror* reported that the French government had raised the prospect of publicly hanging the Kaiser and other German leaders.<sup>180</sup> It was suggested that he could either be hung in Paris or on Trafalgar Square, London. Reports on the Kaiser's flight were mixed in with jubilant declarations of the end of the war. Although it was definitely a heated topic for the British press, initial reports of the Kaiser's flight and the prospect of hanging him put no blame on the Dutch. Indeed, for the most part his presence in the Netherlands seemed relatively inconsequential to his future punishment, as papers did not believe he would be there in the long term. Papers such as *The Globe* ran articles explaining the possibilities facing the Kaiser.<sup>181</sup> The paper, like many others at the time, assumed that the Dutch would hand over the Kaiser as requested. *The Globe* reported of plans being made to draft battleships for transporting the Kaiser to Britain, as well as discussing the possibility of holding the former emperor at the tower of London. This assuredness that the Kaiser would stand trial and be punished was so much so that it was used as a political rallying call. British prime minister Lloyd George, in fact, advocated for seeing Wilhelm put to death by hanging. The prime minister had used the term "hang the Kaiser" during the general election of December 1918. In fact, some credit the slogan with helping Lloyd George win the election; whereas others put forward that the

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<sup>180</sup> 'Crown Prince Escapes?', *Daily Mirror*, 14/11/1918, pg 3.

<sup>181</sup> 'No Death Penalty for the Wilhelm II?' *The Globe*, 04/07/1919, pg 1.

prime minister's use of the phrase was merely to win over the general public.<sup>182</sup> However, regardless of the political viability of hanging the Kaiser, punishing the Kaiser clearly remained a key issue in the British *Zeitgeist*.

However, putting a head of state on trial, let alone hanging one was, and remains, to be a difficult prospect. This stems from the fact that as a head of state one has the right to declare and wage war on other states. This meant there was a difficulty in reaching consensus over what to do with the Kaiser, as world leaders did not want to hamper their abilities by setting a new precedent. Additionally, King George and President Wilson both opposed the prospect of sending Wilhelm to the gallows, as they felt it not would aid in the peace process. This paired with the lack of cooperation from the Dutch, allowed the situation to go on unresolved until the Kaiser's death, although the sentiment remained there was no substantial movement behind the desire to see Wilhelm executed. Although the goal of seeing the Kaiser put to the gallows was not destined to reach fruition, no negative opinion about the Netherlands for its part in the affair was expressed in the newspapers.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, although the British government placed the Netherlands under international pressure by requesting extradition, it had no overall effect on the perception of Dutch or its neutrality in the British press. When the Kaiser first fled to the Netherlands, the British press saw it as yet another injustice forced upon the Dutch by the Germans. Rather than accusing the Dutch of pro-German sentiment as had sometimes occurred during the war, the British press rather acknowledged the difficulties such an unwanted guest could cause and wished the Netherlands well, with seemingly genuine concern for the nation's safety. Although some papers debated over whether or not the Netherlands would extradite the Kaiser, its refusal to do so was not met with either scorn or derision. Moreover, once again, papers demonstrated their continued respect and sympathy for the Netherlands, shying away from any open criticism of the Dutch, much as they had during the war. Finally, although passions around the

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<sup>182</sup> Ashton & Hellema, (2000) Hanging the Kaiser, 58.

Kaiser remained high especially surrounding the debate calling for him to be put to death, this passion was not transferred onto the Dutch for their part in its prevention. In fact, papers at this time seemed far more accepting of the Dutch than had been the case during the closing months of the war. Dutch neutrality was no longer questioned, as it was clear the Kaiser was an unwelcome arrival. Slowly but surely, the papers moved past the issue and turned their focus onto other matters.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion of Thesis**

In conclusion, British newspaper's opinion of Dutch neutrality remained mostly positive throughout the war. Although not always clearly expressing an opinion, more often than not any opinion that was expressed was generally positive with the British showing a great deal of respect for the Netherlands. Early on in the war, there was a great deal of concern for the Netherlands, as papers felt it was in danger of being overrun by a villainous Germany. Papers paid a great deal of cautious attention to German intentions towards the neutral state as they saw the advantages that control over it would bring to Germany. During the first two years of the war, any negative opinion of Dutch neutrality was directed towards merchants in cities such as Rotterdam whom papers believed to be betraying neutrality in order to make a profit. This, however, did not mean the papers held the opinion that the Dutch were neutral because of greed. Rather, many papers appreciated the economic difficulty the war placed upon the Dutch and sympathised with their right to recoup losses. However, as the war progressed and pressure grew, newspapers became less and less tolerant of any impartiality on the part of the Dutch. Events such as the Sand and Gravel Affair in 1917 and the shipping crisis in 1918 were such times. Here it can be seen that tempers flared and strong words were used as papers felt the Dutch were not maintaining neutrality.

There was no noticeable difference of opinions between papers, which for the most part offered a uniform opinion. Furthermore, at no point did the papers espouse that they desired the Dutch to be anything more than neutral, often expressing great respect for the Netherland's decision to do so. Papers throughout the war were concerned that the Netherlands would fall to Germany and often positioned Britain as the natural defender of the Dutch, regardless of any official treaty. There was an idea common in many papers that the Dutch were pro-British and merely maintained neutrality, as they understood they would not be able to withstand an attack from Germany. However, this argument was not put forward to portray the Dutch as cowards, but rather, the British press accepted it as they saw Germany as a great menace. In fact, during times of the war in which the papers viewed the Dutch as overly favouring the Germans,

it was usually put forward that this impartiality only occurred due to overwhelming pressure from the German state. Papers never called for Dutch neutrality to benefit the British more in return rather they merely expected it to be fair. However, an argument can be made that the establishment of the NOT and agreements made over trade did overly favour the British, yet papers ignored these facts as they did not fit into their larger narrative of the Netherlands being a victim of German oppression. Respect for Dutch neutrality was such that even after the war, when the Netherlands offered asylum to Kaiser Wilhelm, papers remained respectful and considerate towards the Dutch. Rather than hammer the Dutch state for not giving in to Allied demands to hand over the Kaiser, papers explained the legal right of the Netherlands not to do so and made no negative comment on their choice.

Therefore, in answering the question as to whether Dutch neutrality was seen as being easy, greedy or a lack of Dutch courage the answer is surprisingly none. Rather, the papers saw the Dutch for what they were, a small state trapped between the great powers of the world, which at the time were intent on destroying one another. Adrift in such tumultuous seas, the Dutch endeavoured tirelessly to avoid being pulled into the war, at times drifting too close to one side always in danger of crashing completely. The opinion towards the Netherlands is summed up best by J.W Robertson-Scott who was discussed in the second chapter of this work. Scott asked if all the countries in the world needed to go down to Armageddon without cause. By this Robertson-Scott meant that the British did not want the Dutch to do anything more than remain neutral. Rather than fitting into Brandeis' view that neutrals become the enemy of all, papers felt the Netherlands was just in its neutrality. Scott's description aptly sums up the view of the Netherlands, as the British press did not consider them an enemy, but nor did they call upon them to join the war. Instead the British viewed the Dutch state with a mix of respect and caution.

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## Appendix

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