

How the Germans were forced to agree to food drops by the Allies in Holland



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OPERATION VICTORY
THE END

Voedseldroppings zijn het neerwerpen uit vliegtuigen van voedselpakketten. In april/mei 1945, aan het eind van de Hongerwinter, vonden Geallieerde voedseldroppings plaats. Deze waren noodzakelijk omdat er vele honderdduizenden Nederlanders in West-Nederland al maandenlang verstoken waren van alle soorten van voedsel, kleding en hulpgoederen. De droppings hadden als naam *Operatie Chowhound*, door de Amerikanen, en [Operatie Manna](#), door de Britten.

In late March we received reports that the German High Command in Italy were putting out feelers with a view to the cessation of hostilities on that front. It was not, however, until April 13th that we received the first indications that the enemy on the Western Front were beginning to realise that the end was near. These first whisperings came from occupied Holland.

By this date the Second Army's offensive had reached the Weser river, and the great port of Bremen was almost in our hands. The Canadian Army were in possession of most of north-east Holland and by April 18th had reached the shores of the Zuider Zee.

The result of these operations was that the German garrison in Holland was cut off from their home base. It was, therefore, not surprising that [Seyss Inquart](#) began to experience a certain apprehension about the starving Dutch!

On the 13th we started to receive messages through Resistance channels saying that he was prepared to discuss ways and means of feeding the Dutch people. It was followed up by a visit to London of a Resistance leader who had managed to get out of Holland.

The whole matter was being handled by Eisenhower's Headquarters, and it was not until April 28th that the situation had clarified itself sufficiently to allow a first meeting to take place.

The Supreme Commander's Chief of Staff, [Bedell Smith](#), instructed me to hold the first meeting in the capacity of the Supreme Commander's representative.

My orders were to obtain agreement for the immediate entry of food, and also to sound the enemy as to the possibilities of the capitulation of the German Forces in Holland.

Various arrangements had to be made before the meeting could take place. A village school just on our side of the lines was selected for the conference, and agreement had to be obtained for a temporary truce on this particular sector of the front.

A rendezvous where the German plenipotentiaries were to be picked up was chosen, and eleven o'clock in the morning was fixed for the deliberations to start.

We had all our plans ready for feeding the Dutch directly the right moment arrived, and armed with this plan, and accompanied by a few experts from the staff, I flew off to the Nijmegen airfield early on the morning of April the 28th.

The Canadian Army sent cars to meet us here, and we drove through Arnhem to our destination. The commander of the 1st Canadian Corps had made all the arrangements, and he and Mann, Crerar's Chief of Staff, met me at the school, where we ran through the procedure for the coming meeting.

There was an atmosphere of subdued excitement around us, for it was obvious to everyone that something of great moment was taking place [..].

It had been arranged that the enemy delegates should be blindfolded when leaving the German lines, and that they should be driven in jeeps by a very roundabout way to the meeting place.

Eventually the convoy arrived with white flags flying on each car, and a rather miserable and cold-looking collection of Germans [..] got out who were then led into the school.

For this meeting Seyss Inquart had sent his right-hand man [Schwebel](#) and [Blaskowitz](#), the German Commander-in-Chief, was represented by one of his staff.



De Duitse delegatie onderweg naar Terschuur (Achterveld)

A few Dutch civilians had collected in the street, and seeing these uniformed Germans being escorted into the building, must have made them think they were witnessing the preliminaries to the end of their country's ordeal. The unusual silence brought about by the local truce must have appeared to them a significant factor.

I had arranged that the head civilian and the head soldier should be brought into the conference room to see me before the remainder were allowed in. The door opened and the two Germans stepped in, and after saluting I was amazed to see them put out their hands for a handshake.

This gesture I ignored [..], and merely returned their salute, and asked to see their credentials. These having passed inspection, I showed them my authority coming from the Supreme Commander.

This over, I ordered in the remaining officers, and the conference started. On our side of the long table there were the

following amongst several others: [Galloway](#), who was head of the organisation which was to feed Holland; the Canadian Corps Commander; the Canadian Army Chief of Staff, a sailor from SHAEF, and a staff officer from the 2nd Tactical Air Force.

I started with a little speech in which I explained the situation as we saw it; that Germany had failed in her duties as the occupying power, and the Dutch population were seriously short of food. I said I understood that the German High Command were now willing to allow us to send in food in order to save the Dutch nation from starvation.

This being so, General Eisenhower was prepared to help, but the Allied plan must be accepted, and we must be certain that the food would reach the Dutch and not be taken by the Germans.

My opposite number across the table, Schwebel, was one of the most revolting man I have ever seen [..]. A plump, sweating German who possessed the largest red nose I have never seen, the end of which was like several ripe strawberries sewn together [..].

With him he had Naval, Air and Army representatives as well as a food expert, and a Dutchman was also included in the party. Schwebel explained that he could make no definite commitments until the proposals had been examined by Seyss Inquart, but that generally speaking the situation was as I had described it.

I then said that we would explain the main points in our plan, and demanded that these be examined by his experts in the interval before the next meeting. And that the next conference should be attended by Seyss Inquart himself, Blaskowitz, and sufficient experts to ensure that matters would be finalised with out further delay. If we were to save the people from starvation there was not a day to lose.

We then went through the plans for the introduction of food. The German delegation took many notes, and occasionally raised questions, such as an objection to the air dropping scheme. The Dutchman appeared most astonished and delighted at the comprehensiveness of our proposed assistance.

After considerable pressure Schwebel agreed to the next meeting taking place on April 30th, in two days time.

There was considerable discussion as to where this should be. The Germans wanted it to be held on their side of the line, but I refused to agree to this, pointing out that as we were undertaking a commitment which by all the rules of war should have been theirs, therefore they must conform to our wishes [..].

In the end they agreed to meet once again in the school [at Terschuur]. The only concession I made was that the next party need not be blindfolded. Having arrived at these decisions we had an interval for some sandwiches whilst documents were drawn up in English and German embodying the agreement reached.



Terschuur (Achterveld) waar de delegatie vergaderde

A little later I asked Schwebel to come back to the conference room as I had another matter to discuss. I wanted him by himself, but he insisted on bringing the Army representative with him. I realised that these men would not have the necessary authority to discuss the question of a truce, but on the other hand it was useful to test their reactions.

We had received some reports from the Dutch Resistance that suggested the German High Command in Holland realised the hopelessness of their position, and so I approached the matter from this angle.

Having stressed the fact that they now were isolated from Germany, and that resistance in that country appeared to be collapsing, I pointed out how difficult the feeding of the Dutch would be if hostilities continued. For our part we were prepared to hold fast on the line of the Grebbe and Eem Rivers.

As I expected, I got very little result, and Schwebel looking rather uncomfortable and glancing repeatedly at the soldier next to him, said he was not empowered to discuss such matter, he agreed, however, to convey my remarks to his chief.

There appeared no point in continuing the conference and so as soon as the documents were ready, and had been agreed to by both parties, they were signed, and we departed on our respective ways. On my return to our Main headquarters near Krefeld, I rang up Bedell Smith and Montgomery and told them what had taken place.

Bedell Smith said that he would be attending the next meeting himself, and asked me to come along as well. Our representation on the 30th was very much larger than on the 28th, for it was necessary to have all the experts with us on this occasion, in order that everything could be settled on the spot.

Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands joined the party, and it was a good sight to see how delighted the Dutch people were to have a glimpse of him once again. Some of them lent out of their

windows shouting “How’s the Princess? It's good to see you again, Give our love to Juliana”. It was all quite touching and very friendly.

On the arrival of the Germans, this time led by Seyss Inquart, who was accompanied by Blaskowitz's Chief of Staff, the meeting started. After his opening remarks Bedell Smith asked me to go through the proceeding plan in general. This I did, explaining the various methods which we had prepared, and the amount of food that was available.



Prince Bernhard drove up in the Mercedes (with Allied star) that previously belonged to Seyss Inquart...

There was the dropping from the air; supply by ships to Dutch ports; and the movement of food by rail, road and canal. Then there were the medical arrangements for those who were in various stages of starvation. Bedell Smith asked Seyss Inquart if the plan in outline was agreed to and, if so, could the detailed examination commence.

The German appeared satisfied, and so the meeting broke up and various syndicates were formed for examining each particular problem. There was a Naval syndicate for dealing with the question of sailing ships into Dutch ports. The selection

of ports, the routing, piloting through the minefields were some of the matters that had to be settled.

Then the Air syndicate had to read agreement about the dropping zones, and the routing of the aircraft. The control of the enemy's anti-aircraft defence was also an important factor. Steps had also to be taken to ensure that the food when dropped would reach the Dutch people.

We insisted that the greatest measure of freedom must be given to us for these humanitarian missions. And only after a great deal of pressure on our part [...] did the enemy agree to this. And so on-all over the schoolbuildings these small syndicates could be seen discussing their particular business.

In most cases the members of the syndicates were drawn from British, Dutch and German representatives. Hatching this scene I found it difficult to believe I wasn't dreaming [...], for all intents and purposes it reminded me off a staff college exercise with the syndicates arguing amongst themselves as to the best way of solving the particular problem.

The result of all these deliberations was most encouraging, and it looked as if we could start the very next day with the entry of food. The Germans agreed to give us all information as to mines in the canals, and said they would repair as soon as possible the bridges to allow through road and rail communication.

The Canadian Corps Commander then dealt with the question of neutral zones in order to allow the food traffic to move in safety. The finalised front line for both sides was also agreed to and plotted on our maps. Each agreement was committed to writing and signed by those concerned.

Several Dutchman had arrived with the German delegation, and it was a delight to watch their pleasure at having contact with the Allies and the outside world after all this time. They now saw

the end of their sufferings, and they couldn't believe that we were prepared to help to such a large extent.



The delegation at the De Moespot school building in Terschuur (Achterveld)

I am sure Galloway and those of his staff who witnessed their simple joy must have felt amply rewarded for all their labours in connection with the feeding arrangements. During the time the detail was being worked out Bedell Smith decided to tackle Seyss Inquart concerning the question of a general truce, and capitulation [..].

He collected a small party for this purpose, which as far as I recollect consisted of Strong, the Head of SHAEF Intelligence, Prince Bernhard, Williams and myself. Again relying upon my memory, I believe Seyss Inquart attended this meeting alone.

We all sat down in a small huddle around the table and then some drinks and sandwiches were brought in. Bedell Smith poured out the German a stiff glass of gin, and we then all helped ourselves. After this the serious business started.

Eisenhower's Chief of Staff explained that his Chief was most disturbed at the plight of the Dutch people, and that he held the German Command directly responsible for any disaster that might befall them. He then went on to describe the general situation. He said that it was only a matter of weeks or perhaps days before Germany must admit complete and absolute defeat.

To this Seyss Inquart said, "I entirely agree." This rather surprising admission [...] prompted Bedell Smith to suggest that the time had therefore come for the Germans in Holland to give up and so avoid unnecessary bloodshed and suffering. He pointed out that there was nothing the German garrison could now achieve as they were cut off from Germany.

In reply Seyss Inquart said that he had received no orders which would allow him to take such action, and in any case it was for the Commander-in-Chief, Blaskowitz, to initiate a matter of this sort. To this Bedell Smith said, "But surely, Reich Kommissar, it is the politician who dictates the policy to the soldier, and in any case our information points to the fact that no real Supreme Headquarters exists any longer in Germany to day."

The German rather avoided answering the question and merely said, "But what would future generations of Germans say about me if I complied with your suggestion what would history say about my conduct?"

It was then that Bedell Smith got really tough [..]. "Now, look here, Reich Marshall" - he called him this by mistake- "General Eisenhower has instructed me to say that he will hold you directly responsible for any further useless bloodshed.

You have lost the war, and you know it [..]. And if, through pigheadedness, you you cause more loss of life to Allied troops or Dutch civilians, you will have to pay the penalty. "And", continued the Chief of Staff, "you know what that will mean; the wall and a firing squad."

Seyss Inquart slowly turned his watery eyes towards us and said rather quietly and slowly, "I'm not afraid, I'm a German."

That ended the meeting, and with stiff formality we parted. I very much doubt whether any of us then realised that the end was quite so near [[May 5th Wageningen](#)]. The next day the aircraft started dropping supplies and there were no regrettable incidents. Also Galloway began to move the food in by the other routes.



About 1.000 tons per day by road started at once, and it was agreed that five ships could be accepted at a time, starting on May 5th. The Germans also undertook to have cleared the

rivers, and canals of obstructions to allow barges to sail by the same date. So at long last happier days had started for the suffering Dutch.



VOEDSELCONFERENTIE IN ACHEVELD OP 28 EN 30 APRIL 1945

De volgende militairen en burgers namen deel aan de op 28 en 30 april 1945 gevoerde besprekingen, ter leniging van de hongersnood van de bevolking in de provincies Noord- en Zuid-Holland en Utrecht.
Aan een onvoorwaardelijke capitulatie wilde men van Duitse kant niet denken.

Aan geallieerde zijde:

Catale, luitenant Engelse leger
Crerar, Henry, opperbevelhebber legerkorps Canada
Faulkner, schout bij nacht
Foulkes Charles, luitenant-generaal legerkorps Canada
Goodden, kapitein, tolk
Galbride, brigadier Canada, vervoerslid
Galloway A, generaal-majoor, transportregelaar
Geddes Andrew, luchtmacht commandant, Engeland
Guinand Francis, generaal-majoor namens veldmaarschalk Montgomery, Engeland
Kitching, brigade-generaal chef-staf van luitenant-generaal Faulkes, Canada
Smith Walter, luitenant-generaal, delegatieleider, vertegenwoordiger van de opperbevelhebber generaal Dwight Eisenhower, Engeland
Soesiaparow Ivan, generaal-majoor, waarnemer namens de USSR, Rusland
Strong Kenneth, generaal-majoor, hoofd van de geheime dienst van het geallieerde hoofdkwartier SHAEF
Tedman P.H., luitenant-kolonel Canadees legerkorps
Weidemann J., luitenant-kolonel Canadees legerkorps
Williams E.T., brigade-generaal, secretaris
Zenkovitsch, I, kolonel, gedelegeerde namens de USSR, Rusland

CONFERENCE AT ACHEVELD, 28 AND 30 APRIL 1945

On 28th and 30th of April 1945 the next officers and civilians took part in the negotiations at Achteveld, to relieve the famine of the population of the western part of Holland.
The Germans refused to consider an unconditional surrender.

Aan Nederlandse zijde:

Prins Bernhard, bevelhebber der Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten
Hirschfeld H.M., secretaris-generaal ministerie van handel en nijverheid
Houten C. van, luitenant-kolonel, chef-staf van Prins Bernhard
Louwes S.L., directeur-generaal voedselvoorziening
Vlugt A.T.L. van de, consul-generaal van Finland
W. Banning, M.J.L. Dols J.J. van der Gaag, Lierse, S.J. Lint, L. Neher, J.J. Oyevaar, H.J. van den Roemer, C.J. van Schelle, H.H. Wemmers

Aan Duitse zijde:

Grobe, majoor
Massow von, Oberstleutnant, tolk
Münscheberg, generale staf, persoonlijk ondertekenaar
Plocher H., generaal-majoor
Plutzer F.
Reichelt P., luitenant-generaal, chef-staf generaal Blaskowitz
Schwebel Ernst, beauftragter Zuid-Holland, persoonlijk ondertekenaar
Seyss Inquart Arthur, Reichskommissar voor het bezette Nederlandse gebied
Groep Achteveld 1939-1945
Onthuld 18 mei 1994