

ACTIVITIES AFTER THE FLOODS (V)

- 234 metres

Also the isle of Texel was among the areas which in the fatal night of the first of February were overtaken by the water. Here also dikes bursted and a polder was inundated and also here lives were lost.

H.M. the Queen, who in these days acquainted herself personally with the situation everywhere in the stricken area, visited Texel. The Queen proceeded to the threatened places and had herself amply inform of the bursts of the dikes and of the state of the repair work.

The "Eendracht polder" ("Union Polder") which is here flooded, occupies an area of 260 hectares.

With assistance of military men people worked energetically at the strengthening of the dikes, in connection with the new spring-tide. As a matter of fact this spring-tide has constantly occupied the minds everywhere.

On its eve in South Holland, for example along the Schieland High Sea-dike from Rotterdam to Gouda, flood-boards were placed on many places. In the fatal night of the first of February these boards have contributed to protect the province of South Holland from a disaster. They stopped the water of the Dutch IJssel.

At Capelle, Nieuwerkerk and Moordrecht, the inhabitants of the houses which are on the dike, placed the flood-boards, in order to prevent the rising water from streaming through their houses over the dike.

In the same time in the stricken area all repair work was inspired by only one thought: "The dikes have to stop the water when the spring-tide comes".

With technical means, wherever possible, and with bare hands, when it could not be done otherwise, all the dikes were heightened with sand-bags, with stones and with clay.

Thousands of citizens and military men have been working at it.

Hundreds of trucks have supplied the necessary things.

Remainders of old German bunkers were blown up in order to get the disposal of rubble and stones for filling up the holes.

And people continued working night and day.

In the past week we told you already about the active help from abroad, but not yet about the work of the Italians who have come to our country by a special train. That train stands at Zevenbergen and is serving as their headquarters. From here they go to the flooded polders in order to close the dikes. They are firemen and they brought their own working-stock (among which ladder-trucks, amphibian cars and radio-cars)

South of the Moerdijk near Klundert, the Italians have been working at the old sea-dike of the Dutch Deep, in order to stop the holes there before the spring-tide and they were successful. It is a welcome help which was offered spontaneously and which was very much appreciated.

Thanks to the favourable weather-conditions the spring-tide has not been high and it hasn't done much harm to the dikes.

There is also appreciation for the help which the Germans have given to our country and are still giving.

On Schouwen-Duiveland these men worked at the strengthening of the dike between Zierikzee and Brouwershaven, an inner dike which at the moment is of great importance, for owing to the breaches which are made into the outer dikes, it has turned into a direct retaining wall.

If this dike should burst Zierikzee would get into acute danger.

The water level in the flooded polders is still rising as there is getting in more flood-water through the enormous holes in the outer dikes than there is ebb-water going out.

Zierikzee, a comparatively small dry spot on all sides surrounded by the water, has been badly damaged. Especially in the neighbourhood of the harbour, the floods have worked havoc, by which a whole quarter of the town has become unfit for habitation.

Up to recently this battered Zierikzee had to house more than 4000 people.

The hygienic situations are bad. There is no water. Drinking-water has to be supplied by tankers, and distributed by tank-cars.

Neither there is any gas and the sewerage is not functioning anymore.

Owing to all this the public health is in great danger. This danger added to the dangers which a new dike-burst could cause, has led to the order for the evacuation of Zierikzee.

The authorities can't bear any longer the responsibility for the stay of all these people in this little town which has become so much smaller. Only the men who are needed for the repair work in the town and on the isle are allowed to stay, with their wives. And also one or two shopkeepers. All the others have to evacuate.

Many of them have left the town, however the greater part reluctantly. All these people had to evacuate already before: in 1945.

Now they have to leave behind again goods and chattels, this time under quite other circumstances, it is true.

It is not easy for them, nobody knows when he will be able to come back.

In some houses the domestic animals try to escape from evacuation. But the greater part is being taken.

Even the many stray-dogs are, if possible, rounded up and carried away, by policemen.

By launches the evacuees are brought off the harbour where bigger boats are waiting for them. These boats cannot put into the harbour any more, because it is getting silted by the strong tidal stream more and more.

At Zierikzee some thousands of people are staying behind.

At many places the water has already fallen. Here people are already constructing permanent dikes. Sand-dredgers are being used, strengthening the dikes with pumped sand and clay.

Elsewhere osiers are being supplied in quantities for constructing mattresses.

The repair work is under the guidance of Public Works.

There even are polders which have already been drained and in which people have started the clearing away activities.

Everything is covered with silt and mud, which have to be removed first.

In some houses the inhabitants have already come back. They work very hard in order to render the houses habitable again, and in order to remove the traces of the catastrophe.

In the drained polders normal life is gradually coming back.

Even the milkman is appearing again.

It is a beginning of recovery.

Within a measurable space of time we shall be able to see similar scenes everywhere in the stricken area.

Where now the youth is still skating, fertile fields will give their product again, cattle will pasture again and people will again find their subsistence.