

Zeeuws Vlaanderen in the post-World War II period (1944-1946)  
as seen and reported by Oog & Oor



Femke Koekkoek  
Academic Internship  
Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, Netherlands  
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Supervisors: Prof. Dr. A. (Arjan) van Dixhoorn (UCR)  
Dr. J.L. (Hannie) Kool-Blokland (Zeeuws Archief)

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“The spiritual and cultural life is quite good. The only cause for serious concern is the enormous dance rage. For many dancing has become a necessity of life! Organize a night, no matter what and no matter how high the entrance price, but make sure there is a ball afterwards and you are assured of success! But organize an evening without a ball, and the number of visitors is minimal! Very, very questionable! This will destroy the Netherlands!!!”<sup>1</sup> This description of the so called ‘danswoede’ in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen<sup>2</sup> is one of the many remarkable details from the archive of government service Oog & Oor.<sup>3</sup> This is also an example of how the history of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in the post-war period is beautifully captured by Oog & Oor.

Oog & Oor was founded by the Cabinet (main executive body of the Dutch government) of Prime Minister Schermerhorn (June 1945 – July 1946) in September 1945. This cabinet was installed after the previous one, the second Gerbrandy-Cabinet, had been more or less forced to resign by Queen Wilhelmina. According to her, the ‘true leaders’ of the Netherlands were not those who had been hiding away in England, but the ones who had been in the occupied land, or, preferably, had led the resistance movements.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is not so surprising that Schermerhorn, an ex-prisoner of the hostage camp in St. Michielsgestel and one of the leaders of the progressive movement, was chosen as the new Prime Minister. It was his job to guide the rebuilding of the country in the right direction, after the ‘Militair Gezag’ (military authority; MG) had been dismantled. This governing body was meant to take over the lead on the ground in the Netherlands in the chaotic period that was expected to follow the war. This chaotic period indeed came about, but it actually lasted longer than expected. Instead of being in function for only a couple of weeks, the Militair Gezag was taking over the local government for nearly half a year.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Geestelijk en cultureel leven is tamelijk goed. Alleen geeft het reden tot ernstige bezorgdheid, dat er zoo’n enorme danswoede is. Dit is voor velen een levensbehoefte geworden! Organiseer een avond, doet er niet toe wat en doet er niet toe hoe hoog de toegangsprijs is, maar... na afloop bal! En u bent verzekerd van succes!!! Maar, organiseer een avond zonder bal en het bezoek is miniem!!! Zeer, maar dan ook zeer bedenkelijk!!! Zoo moet Nederland kapot!!!” From: Zeeuws Archief, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, answer to question PV 15 in weekly report from C. Smies to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 march 1946.

<sup>2</sup> The most southern part of the Province of Zeeland, the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> “Oog & Oor” literally means eye and ear.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bosmans, *Staatkundige vormgeving in Nederland II: De tijd na 1940* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 17.

<sup>5</sup> F.J.F.M. Duynstee and J. Bosmans, *Parlementaire Geschiedenis Van Nederland Na 1945 Deel 1: Het Kabinet Schermerhorn-Drees* (Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), 18-19.

The Schermerhorn-Cabinet aimed for a clear understanding of public opinion and wanted to create a way in which it could communicate its plans more easily. With that in mind, Schermerhorn and his ministers founded the information service Oog & Oor. This article is largely based on the archives of this organization. The main question that it will seek to answer is: how was 'Oog & Oor' organized and what did its employees know about the situation in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen in the period of 1945-1946? In order to be able to answer this question the following sub-questions will be answered: how was the Oog & Oor archive organized? What was Oog & Oor exactly, when and why was it founded and liquidated, how was it organized and what did its information-system look like? Who were the most important figures in the organization, and who were the most important players in the district of Zeeland? What does it show about the conditions in Zeeuws Vlaanderen in the period that followed World War II? Were there any special cases and how were they dealt with by Oog & Oor staff?

In 1989, the Oog & Oor archive was sorted. Of the 7,5 meters, 1,125 were selected to be kept at the Nationaal Archief (National Archive) in The Hague, 4,125 meters to be sent to local archives of the corresponding district, and 2,25 meters to be destroyed. Before the 'reorganization' of the archive, it was organized alphabetically per sender or recipient. This original scheme was however not implemented consistently by those who sorted the archive, even though the initial plan had been to keep the alphabetical order in place. Instead, the archives were now organized by subject.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the documents that are used for this study can be found in the Zeeuws Archief (the Archive of the Dutch Province of Zeeland). Parts of the remaining Oog & Oor archive are kept at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague. In both cases, the documents were organized by the following rather general 'subject categories':

1. Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken (Incoming and outgoing documents)
2. Correspondentie met het centraal bureau te Amsterdam (Correspondence with the central office in Amsterdam)
3. Uitgane stukken aan correspondentschappen (Outgoing documents to correspondents)
4. Rapporten en verslagen (Reports and statements)
5. Agenda (Diary; administration of what letters were sent and to whom)

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<sup>6</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief van het districtsbureau Zuid III van de regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, 1945-1946* (Winschoten, 1989), 11-12.

This division in folders by 'subject', however, is the only form of organization of the Oog & Oor archive, both in Middelburg and The Hague. The documents were neither alphabetically ordered (as they used to be), nor chronologically. Moreover, some documents seem to have been put in the 'wrong' subject folder. For instance, quite some letters to and from correspondents ended up in the first folder, instead of in the third. The same applies to quite some letters to and from the central office, which would logically belong in the second folder. Some of the outgoing letters were even placed in the sub-folder with incoming letters. A sound logic in the organization of the archive was clearly lacking and for the sake of



traceability I was allowed by the archivists of the Zeeuws Archief to re-organize the archive by putting the documents in a chronological order.

In the time of Oog & Oor (that is, in the period between August 1945 and September 1946) the archives must have been much more organized. The inventory, created by Dick Hanlo (the district chief of Oog & Oor in the province of Zeeland), shows that he kept all incoming letters and copies of outgoing letters in a very neat 'archive.' He recorded all outgoing letters in his 'agenda,' which is written in what seems to be a book meant for the administration of the German army. This "Truppenkrankenbuch" is completely in German and consists of a large number of tables, in which all ill soldiers could be administrated. Hanlo used this book, probably because of the shortage of good paper in those days.<sup>7</sup>



**Figuur 1** First and second page of Hanlo's 'agenda,' an old 'Truppenkrankenbuch'

According to Lucas Hajema, one of the few historians that have studied Oog & Oor to

date, Oog & Oor was an idea of government commissioner Henk Brugmans and of C. Nicolai.<sup>8</sup> The latter was a former employee of 'Section XI,' the information service of the

<sup>7</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 5, Agenda of incoming and outgoing mail.

MG. Brugmans had been in the hostage camp in Sint Michielsgestel with Prime Minister Schermerhorn and shared with him the ideas for an active and direct information service.<sup>9</sup> The magazine of the Regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst (RVD; Government Information Service), *Commentaar*, announced on 15 September 1945 that Oog & Oor would be founded.<sup>10</sup> Oog & Oor was to a great extent inspired on and more or less a continuation of 'Section XI.'<sup>11</sup> Nicolai, a friend of Prime Minister Schermerhorn, was installed as the director of Oog & Oor. As proposed by RVD government commissioner Brugmans, Oog & Oor became part of the RVD. Both organizations were now part of the 'Ministerie voor Algemeene Oorlogvoering van het Koninkrijk' (Ministry for the Co-ordination of Warfare).<sup>12</sup> Even though they were separate bodies, the tasks and duties of both organizations were still to a great extent intertwined and they were still in close contact with each other.

On 4 November 1945, only two months after Oog & Oor's establishment, Oog & Oor and the RVD split up. From that moment on, Oog & Oor was officially a 'regeringsdienst' (government service) and was on equal footing with the RVD under the Ministry for the Co-ordination of Warfare. The reason given by the government was that Oog & Oor had been protected by the RVD for the first month, but was now independent enough to stand on its own feet.<sup>13</sup> Another explanation for this breakup, given by the Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, was the financial situation of the Schermerhorn-Cabinet. It had enormous financial problems, and it was probably easier to explain to the people that there were two government services that cost 1.3 million together, instead of only one.

Most questions are about Oog & Oor itself. Some think it is a sort of democratic Gestapo, others think it is an information service for everything. - H.J.M. Hanlo, 14 January 1946.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Other very important players in the debate are Arne Westerhof and J. Bosmans. The former wrote the book *Oog en oor: experimenteren met overheidsvoorlichting : historisch onderzoek naar de voormalige regeringsdienst Oog en Oor (1945-1946)* (Katholieke Universiteit, 1989). Bosmans wrote *De spionnetjes van Den Haag. De activiteiten van de regeringsdienst "Oog en oor,"* in "Onze Jaren 45-70" (Amsterdam, 1972, p. 91-93); Luuk Hajema, *De Glazenwassers Van Het Bestuur; Lokale Overheid, Massamedia, Burgers En Communicatie: Groningen In Landelijk Perspectief 1945 – 2001* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 5 and 105; Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Luuk Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 28; The archive of the Section XI of the Militair Gezag in Zeeland can also be found in the Zeeuws Archief, through inventory number 280 and request number 4301.

<sup>12</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> "Meeste vragen gaan over "Oog & Oor" zelf. Sommige denken dat het een soort democratische Gestapo of wel een inlichtingenbureau voor alles betreft." From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III,

This quote by H.J.M. Hanlo, district chief for Oog & Oor in Zeeland, shows that to many people the purpose of Oog & Oor was unclear. Oog & Oor had multiple official and unofficial tasks and duties. First of all, it was supposed to make the contact between people and the wide variety of government institutions easier and more transparent,<sup>15</sup> and thus guard against excessive bureaucracy.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it could be seen as a national ombuds-institution, where people could go if they had problems with the government.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, the Oog & Oor-personnel envisioned to raise public spirit. Next to those ‘noble’ initiatives, Oog & Oor also actually served as the “eyes and ears” of the government. Besides being the government’s “mouth” (providing information to the people), it was also supposed to gather information.<sup>18</sup>

### The organization of Oog & Oor

Dick Hanlo, the district chief of Zeeland, at first seems to have had a very romantic view of the duties of Oog & Oor. In a letter to C. Smies, one of his correspondents in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, he explains why they both have a rather honorable occupation. Between the lines one can read that rather than just giving his own opinion on Oog & Oor he is actually trying to convince Smies to work for Oog & Oor voluntarily. He explains that in both the U.S.A. and England the system of correspondents has played an extremely important role and that all of those correspondents were volunteers (i.e. unpaid). In the Netherlands, too, a large number of



Image 1: Map of the twelve Oog & Oor districts

Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, answer to question PV 50 in weekly report from H.J.M. Hanlo to centraal bureau dd. 14 Jan. 1946.

<sup>15</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Bosmans, *Staatkundige vormgeving*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 5-6; Bosmans, *Staatkundige vormgeving*, 29; Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 8-9; Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, nummer toegang 2.03.02, inventarisnummer 14.

correspondents had been appointed, who had already rendered their service to the government. According to Hanlo, the Dutch had to make great sacrifices to regain their freedom and it is the task of the correspondents to convey the opinion of this free people to its government.<sup>19</sup>

Oog & Oor was organized in twelve regional districts: three in the West (West-1, 2, and 3), three in the North (Noord-1 and 2, and Drenthe), two in the east (Twente and Oost), one in the middle (Centrum), and three in the south (Zuid-1, 2 and 3)<sup>20</sup>. Every district had a 'districtsbureau' or district office. Those district offices made use of a network of 'hoofdagentschappen' (main agencies) and informants, who were more 'in the field'.<sup>21</sup>

The 'Centraal Bureau' (central office) of Oog & Oor was located at Kalverstraat 111 in Amsterdam. The central office was divided in four main departments: 'Algemene Zaken' (general affairs), 'Bureau Pers en Publiciteit' (office for press and publicity; also called 'administratie en documentatie'), and 'informatie' and 'enquête' (inquiry).<sup>22</sup> J. de Graaff, who was also interim director, and W.G. van Maanen were co-heading the department of general affairs. The other three departments had only one chief: W. Dam was chief of information, G.H.C. Oosterhout chief of inquiry and J. van der Berg was chief of documentation.

Both the information and the inquiry department were entrusted with the task of gathering information, the most important difference between them being the way in which they acquired information. The information department's duty was to create more direct contact between the government and the people. Its task was to encourage people to send their complaints, wishes and ideas to the district offices, which, in turn, could send it to the authorities, if necessary.<sup>23</sup> In sum, the employers of this department were more or less the pigeons of the government: they simply received information, which they had to bring to the

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<sup>19</sup> "Reeds in de U.S.A. en in Engeland heeft het correspondentenstelsel een uiterst belangrijke taak achter de rug en is dit corps geheel uit vrijwilligers gerecrueteerd. Ook in Nederland is thans een belangrijk aantal correspondenten aangesteld, dat de centrale regeering reeds belangrijke diensten heeft bewezen. Het Nederlandsche volk heeft zijn vrijheid duur herkregeen. De correspondenten zijn er om de vrije meening van een vrij volk tegenover zijn regeering kenbaar te maken." From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Smies dd. 3 jan. 1946.

<sup>20</sup> Image taken from: Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> NA, Den Haag, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, nummer toegang 2.03.01, inventarisnummer 318, Stukken betreffende de instelling, samenstelling, werkzaamheden en opheffing van Kabinet Minister-President, guidelines, undated.

right authority. The department of inquiry, on the other hand was actively trying to get information from the people through questionnaires and interviews.<sup>24</sup>

To get a better understanding of the organization of Oog & Oor at a more local level, the archive of district Zuid-3, which covers the majority of Zeeland and a small part of the west of North-Brabant, has been studied. This district office was rather small compared to other district offices. Whereas the average number of employees per district office was approximately 13, the district office in Zeeland only officially employed four people. Every district had a ‘districtshoofd’ (district chief). The district chief of district Zuid-3 was H.J.M. (Dick) Hanlo, a 37 year old man from Arnhem, who had previously been working at the ‘Centrale Textiel Inspectie’ (Central Textile Inspection) in Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, very little is known about Hanlo or his antecedents.

Usually, as can be seen in the organizational structure of district Zuid-1, district offices – mimicking the central office – were divided in four departments. The organizational structure of district Zuid-1 can be deduced from the correspondence with this district: Hanlo was in close contact with the district chief. Joop Zwijenberg, the district chief of Zuid-1, was a good friend.<sup>26</sup> As opposed to Hanlo, who was more or less alone in his district office, Zwijenberg had to manage three department chiefs. In January 1946, Hanlo was finally no longer alone when P.M. Smallegange became the chief administration and documentation at the district office of Zuid-3.<sup>27</sup> He should not be confused with the former Nazi-mayor of Axel, who had exactly the same name.<sup>28</sup>

Just like other districts, but on a much smaller scale, Zuid-3 made use of agents and informants. It is important to notice the difference between an ‘agentschap’ (agent) and a correspondentschap (a ‘simple’ informant, correspondent). An ‘agentschap’ was a nearly full-time job that also involved leading an ‘advieskring’ (advisory council of locals). Hanlo’s agent in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen was one of only nine agents in the entire country.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, ingekomen stukken, job application letter from H.J.M. Hanlo to the RVD dd. 10 aug. 1945.

<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, it does not become clear from the letters how they knew each other.

<sup>27</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, weekly report from H.J.M Hanlo to centraal bureau dd. 28 jan. 1946.

<sup>28</sup> J. Wesseling, *De Geschiedenis van Axel* (Groningen: Uitgeverij J. Niemeijer, 1966), 455.



Correspondents, on the other hand, were much larger in number<sup>29</sup>. Correspondents were volunteers who would usually simply do their work for Oog & Oor next to their job.<sup>30</sup>

Hanlo's only agent was Dick Bouwense<sup>31</sup>. He was recently married and had a baby daughter (born in 1946).<sup>32</sup> Next to his work as an agent for Oog & Oor, he was also director of the office Zuid-Zeeland (the south of Zeeland) of the organization 'Stichting Herstel Zeeland' (Foundation for the Reconstruction of Zeeland), chairman of the Gemeenschap Oud-Illegale Werkers (G.O.I.W.; Community for Former Illegal Workers), mayor of Groede, and chairman of the council of trustees of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Previously, he had been one of the leaders of the resistance movement and because of that he had also



**Image 2 D.C. (Dick) Bouwense**

been one of the important figures of the MG. Bouwense officially became an employee of Oog & Oor on 1 January 1946, even though he had already worked for Oog & Oor for some months.<sup>33</sup> One month later, on 1 February, he already stepped down again, because he started working for 'Stichting Herstel Zeeland'.<sup>34</sup>

The other correspondents in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen were Mrs. N.J. Huisman-Wage, C. Smies, and A.P. Stallaert. Huisman-Wage was a housewife, mother of three children and wife of a garage owner (who died in March 1946) in Oostburg.<sup>35</sup> According to Bouwense, she had been active in the resistance movement.<sup>36</sup> She asked the RVD on 7 November 1945 whether it

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<sup>29</sup> In an official document of the Oog & Oor central office this number is even estimated at 2000 correspondents (and other volunteers): "De dienst omvat momenteel ca. 140 betaalde krachten over het gehele land, terwijl zeker 2000 burgers als correspondent of in anderen vorm belangloos den Dienst materiaal verschaffen enz." From: NA, Den Haag, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, nummer toegang 2.03.01, inventarisnummer 318.

<sup>30</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Image taken from: Jan P. Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950* (Vlissingen: Den Boer/De Ruiters, 2000), 105

<sup>32</sup> De Stem, geboorteadvertenties, pagina 4, dd. 17 Aug. 1946.

<sup>33</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondenten, H.J.M. Hanlo to D.C. Bouwense dd. 19 dec. 1945.

<sup>34</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgekomen stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 9 feb. 1946.

<sup>35</sup> De Stem, rouwadvertentie, 13 maart 1946.

<sup>36</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgekomen stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 26 nov. 1945.

would be useful to send them information.<sup>37</sup> Apparently the RVD tipped Hanlo about her (there is no letter about this in the archive) and she was hired. Before he decided to employ her as an informant, Nicolai sent one of her letters to his friend Joop Zwijnenberg to ask him whether he thought her to be suited for the job.<sup>38</sup> She turned out to provide Hanlo with some quite useful information about the problems with the ferry, the general conditions in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and the functioning of the mayors for example.

A.P. Stallaert was correspondent for Oog & Oor in Lamswaarde. He was also secretary of the G.O.I.W. in Hontenisse-Vogelwaarde and member of the provincial council and the council of trustees.<sup>39</sup> On 8 January Hanlo tried to convince Stallaert in a letter to become a correspondent for Oog & Oor,<sup>40</sup> but it is unclear when exactly he entered the service officially.



Image 3 C. Smies in 1973

C. Smies<sup>41</sup> was the first correspondent of Hanlo. He already agreed to be a correspondent of Oog & Oor in Axel on 28 September 1945.<sup>42</sup> He informed Hanlo that he did not have the intention to become a full-time correspondent,<sup>43</sup> because he wished to become mayor of Breskens, Groede or Aardenburg.<sup>44</sup> Hanlo advised against this, as those three municipalities were Catholic and Smies was a protestant.<sup>45</sup> Smies asked Hanlo to support him officially to become mayor, which Hanlo declined.<sup>46</sup> Later, Hanlo tried to calm down Smies when he was not appointed as mayor by saying that it had been the queen's choice.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>37</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, Mrs. N.J. Huisman-Wage aan Mrs. Seyfert (RVD), dd. 7 nov. 1945.

<sup>38</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Nicolai aan J. Zwijnenberg dd. 17 nov. 1945.

<sup>39</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, A.P. Stallaert aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 3 dec. 1945.

<sup>40</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentschappen, H.J.M. Hanlo aan A.P. Stallaert dd. 8 jan. 1946.

<sup>41</sup> Image taken from: Adrie de Kraker and Piet de Blaeij, *Axel 1944-2002: Een samenleving in verandering* (Terneuzen: Drukkerij Bareman, 2003), 83.

<sup>42</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 28 sep. 1945.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., dd. 13 nov. 1945.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., dd. 16 feb. 1946.

<sup>45</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentschappen, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 30 jan. 1946.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Smies dd. 19 feb. 1946.

One would expect that Hanlo would have spread his informants equally throughout the district. However, he did not have any correspondents in Brabant, or on the islands of Schouwen-Duiveland, Noord-Beveland and Zuid-Beveland. Almost all correspondents were located in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. Hanlo's only correspondent outside of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen was A. le Duc. He was the author of the weekly reports about the island of Walcheren and in particular the city of Middelburg, which is odd, given that Hanlo was residing in Middelburg himself. He is mentioned in an official personnel management document of the central office from which it becomes clear that he was officially employed by Oog & Oor as 'enquêteur' (surveyor).<sup>48</sup> Besides the weekly reports, Le Duc hardly ever wrote other letters to Hanlo, which is why the archive remains quite silent about him.

Having looked into the structure and the organization of Oog & Oor, it is interesting to see what its day to day business looked like. As far as one can tell from the archive and the correspondences it contains, Hanlo spent a considerable part of the day reading and writing letters, making phone calls, and sending Telex-messages. On top of that he tried to attend as many meetings of various local 'wederopbouw-stichtingen' (foundations for reconstruction) as possible. He was very limited in his movements, however: hardly anyone, Hanlo included, had a car or a permit to drive. Occasionally, he was able to visit other places in Zeeland.

Each week, Hanlo had to send a report about the state of affairs in his district to the central office in Amsterdam. Nicolai sent him strict and detailed guidelines on how to write those reports. He expected a report every week, before Mondays, preferably on Saturdays. Hanlo had to answer approximately 35 questions every week. In his report Hanlo should not repeat the entire question, but just the numbers of the question. The questions were divided in categories and the different categories had to be sent to different departments in the central office in Amsterdam.<sup>49</sup> The weekly reports describe one week, from Friday morning until Thursday night and were made on Fridays.

Hanlo gathered the information for his weekly reports in various ways. First of all, some of his informants (Bouwense, Le Duc and Smies) would send him weekly reports describing the state of affairs in their region. Moreover, he intended to do inquiries every now and then. He would send out his correspondents to ask local people about their opinion. In a

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<sup>47</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Smies dd. 16 apr. 1946.

<sup>48</sup> NA, Den Haag, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, nummer toegang 2.03.02, inventarisnummer 17.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., C. Nicolai to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 10 okt. 1945.

letter of 3 January 1946, Hanlo explains to Smies how these inquiries are done best. It is the aim that Smies asks people of different ‘categories’ (i.e. farmers, civil servants, doctors, students, etc.) about their opinion and that he writes a short report of his findings.<sup>50</sup> In the reports he should name their age, sex, occupation and if possible their religion and political preference. Hanlo adds to this that interrogated people are not supposed to get the impression that it is an official interrogation.

One of the very few questionnaires that were carried out was an inquiry about the radio broadcasts of the RVD. Instructed by Hanlo, Smies asked many different people about their opinion. It is interesting to see how these different people give rather similar responses to the question of what they think of the broadcast. The overall message is that they like its positive spirit, but that they feel that it is too positive. Many people think that the situation is often portrayed so much different than it is in reality. A couple of the respondents talked about propaganda and one respondent even called it ‘Nazi-methods’. The people in Walcheren seem to be a little bit more positive than the people from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen,<sup>51</sup> but this seeming difference in response might be due to the fact that the questionnaire was carried out by different people. Smies was unable to find enough people willing to answer his questions so he decided to put on the radio-broadcast in a local café where he polled the opinion by simply listening to the reactions.<sup>52</sup> The responses in Zeeuws Vlaanderen are therefore possibly more honest. It is unclear from the archives how the interviewer in Walcheren proceeded.

Another source of information for Hanlo were the letters that people sent to his district office. Often, people thought Oog & Oor was only an institution that helped them find their way around in the vast bureaucratic landscape, and were completely unaware of the fact that next to that, Oog & Oor was also founded to *gather* information. The information it gathered was mostly information about public opinion, but also ‘inside information’ if the government asked to do so. It was also supposed to report corruption and ‘ambtelijk wangedrag’ (misbehavior of civil servants), and the reaction of the people towards government policy.<sup>53</sup> In

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<sup>50</sup> “Het is niet de bedoeling dat de ondervraagden de indruk krijgen dat het hier om een officiële enquête gaat.” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Smies dd. 3 jan. 1946.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., H.J.M. Hanlo to centraal bureau dd. 15 feb. 1946.

<sup>52</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 4 jan. 1946.

<sup>53</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 8-9.

order to function as an ombudsman, it also had to get its information through other, more official ways.

Every week, Hanlo sent reports to the central office in Amsterdam. They were then used by the management to create a sort of super report. These comprehensive reports contained the most important points from every district and were sent to the Prime Minister (or rather, his secretary, Mr. Vriesendorp).<sup>54</sup> An inspection of the reports that were sent to the Prime Minister by the Centraal Bureau shows that only very little from Hanlo's weekly reports was used<sup>55</sup>.

Very little is known about what Hanlo or any of the other employees of Oog & Oor thought about their results. There was hardly any reflection or self-reflection. Smies confesses that he sometimes finds it hard to stay objective and then accidentally gives his own opinion too.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he wonders whether his reports are of any use,<sup>57</sup> especially because they are much too bureaucratic in his opinion. He makes snappy comments on the fact that he has to send a nearly empty report most of the times, as not much changes.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, some of the employees of Oog & Oor seem to be very convinced of the success of Oog & Oor. In a report to C. Nicolai one of the employees in Nijmegen writes that Oog & Oor can always show how successful it is in case of critique on the government service. This person believes that there is a great need for objective information services: "At least we can point at our great necessity, because of the existing need for pure information services."<sup>59</sup> Even though this might be slightly exaggerated, it is true that Oog & Oor was a success in some way. Looking at the numbers, one can see that there was a demand for the services of Oog & Oor. In the first three months after its establishment, the district office of Zeeland alone already received 63 visitors, 181 incoming letters and 160 incoming phone calls.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, ingekomen stukken, J. de Graaff to all district chiefs dd. 19 Apr. 1946.

<sup>55</sup> NA, Den Haag, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, nummer toegang 2.03.01, inventarisnummer 318.

<sup>56</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 12 apr. 1946.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 17 jan. 1946.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., dd. 1 mrt. 1946.

<sup>59</sup> "Dan kunnen wij in ieder geval wijzen op onze noodzakelijkheid, door de behoefte, welke er bestaat aan zuivere inlichtingen-bureaux"; ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 1, Algemeen rapport 1945-1946, Districtsbureau Zuid-1 aan C. Nicolai dd. 13 nov. 1945.

<sup>60</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, Telex van H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Nicolai dd. 13 dec. 1945.

Moreover, there were some actual ‘success stories.’ In February 1946 Hanlo made a reports of cases in which Oog & Oor had a decisive role.<sup>61</sup> That is, before the intervention of Oog & Oor, some individuals were not able to accomplish a certain thing, which they were able to very soon with the help of Oog & Oor. Examples are a farmer who got 200 chicks, the wife of a Jewish shopkeeper who got a permit to run the shop, and the wife of a soldier who finally received her ‘kostwinnersvergoeding’ (household allowance) after the intervention of Oog & Oor. Hanlo also effectuated that the pontoons of the ferry docks in Vlissingen, Breskens en Kruiningen were repaired, so that they no longer did damage to any cars.<sup>62</sup> In these cases, it almost seems as if Oog & Oor was working in the absence of a functioning provincial administration, yet from the correspondences it becomes clear that there was a provincial government and that there was a Queen’s commissioner at the time of Oog & Oor.<sup>63</sup>

Many people, especially in the province,<sup>64</sup> were very content with the service, but it is still arguable whether Oog & Oor can be considered successful and it received a lot of critique. On 1 October 1946, Oog & Oor was officially liquidated, but many district offices had already disappeared in the months before.<sup>65</sup> It had been decided that the organization would only be temporarily,<sup>66</sup> but its liquidation was expedited when the Second Chamber of the Parliament had the opportunity to criticize government policy for the first time since the end of the war in January 1946.<sup>67</sup> Information services (i.e. The RVD and Oog & Oor) became the burning issue and the opposition was extremely critical.<sup>68</sup>

The system of Oog & Oor did not only cost too much,<sup>69</sup> but it was also a gossip-organization: the margin between ‘explaining government policy’ and propaganda was too thin, according to the opposition leaders.<sup>70</sup> At a certain point in the debate, references to Goebbels and even Hitler were made.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Oog & Oor was said to be unnecessary,

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<sup>61</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo to C. Nicolai dd. 27 Feb. 1946.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., P.M. Smallegange aan Centraal Bureau Oog & Oor dd. 3 mei 1946.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 2 Feb. 1946; ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan Provinciaal Bestuur van Zeeland dd. 16 Oct. 1945.

<sup>64</sup> Duynstee and Bosmans, *Het Kabinet Schermerhorn-Drees*, 158.

<sup>65</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>68</sup> Duynstee and Bosmans, *Het Kabinet Schermerhorn-Drees*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Bosmans, *Staatkundige vormgeving*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 29.

constitutionally illegal, and much too bureaucratic.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly enough, parties that were usually diametrically opposed to each other, such as the Catholic and the socialist party, were suddenly working together against the Cabinet,<sup>73</sup> in which ministers of the RKSP (Catholic), the SDAP (social-democratic), and the NVB (progressive liberal), as well as five party-less ministers seated.<sup>74</sup> After this avalanche of criticism, a committee of inquiry was set up, the ‘commissie-Van Leuven Goedhart’. This committee concluded that Oog & Oor should be dismantled and that the RVD could stay and should be centralized and brought under the authority of the Prime Minister. Meanwhile in District Zuid-3, Hanlo was rather upset, because he felt that he was not informed in time by the central office about the plans for the liquidation of Oog & Oor. He had to read in the newspapers that the organization he was working for was going to be liquidated.

### **Zeeuws Vlaanderen as seen and heard by Oog & Oor**

Travelling through Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, one will see predominately flat grasslands. In summertime, there is a certain beauty about this landscape, in wintertime it is a bare plain, which offers no distraction. The people are usually not interested in scenic beauty and are thus inclined to seek amusement in the towns or at the hearth. Both options are substantially rare in the region of West Zeeuws Vlaanderen. The villages and towns are transformed (...) into bare mud pools, the main roads of the towns look like the streets of a hastily built concentration camp. Where once stood shops and often characteristic and antique cottages, are now shape- and colourless barracks and wooden structures with mud puddles and pale clay in between. There is no beauty or recreation in this barren land of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.<sup>75</sup> – H.J.M. Hanlo, 20 November 1945

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<sup>72</sup> Centrale Archief Selectiedienst, *Plaatsingslijst van het archief*, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Hajema, *Glazenwassers*, 30; Bosmans, “Beide er in en geen van beide er uit: De rooms-rode samenwerking,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 96 (1981): 205, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.2240> 1945-1952.

<sup>74</sup> Duynstee and Bosmans, *Het Kabinet Schermerhorn-Drees*, 77.

<sup>75</sup> “Wanneer men West Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen doorkuist, ziet men hoofdzakelijk vlak weide- en bouwland. ‘Zomers is er een zekere schoonheid in dit landschap, ’s winters is het een kale vlakke, die al zeer weinig afwisseling bied [sic]. De bevolking heeft in den regel reeds weinig belangstelling voor natuurschoon en is dus geneigd amusement te zoeken in de bebouwde plaatsen en anders aan de huiselijke haard. Beide mogelijkheden bestaan in W. Z.Vl. nagenoeg niet. De dorpen en steden zijn herschepen (...) in vlakke modderpoelen, de hoofdstraten van de plaatsen gelijken op een straat uit een inderhaast gebouwd concentratiekamp. Waar eens winkels en vaak karakteristieke en antieke huisjes stonden staan nu vorm- en

This description of the devastated landscape of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen by Dick Hanlo shows that through the eyes and ears of Oog & Oor, Zeeuws Vlaanderen in the period after the Second World War comes to life quite vividly, and is a fine addition to the existing dry, purely informative texts. Even though the archive is not very extensive, it contains a wide variety of different issues such as the issue of a possible annexation by Belgium, the fight for a cinema, problems with housing and transportation, and the infamous Axel murder case.

After my first flying visit to this area, a sense of shame came upon me of sleeping in a decent bed and enjoying some comfort. One must have seen the misery in order to be able to judge it.<sup>76</sup> – H.J.M. Hanlo, 11 November 1945

As opposed to the rest of the Netherlands, Zeeland was already officially free in October 1944. Whereas the western parts of the Netherlands struggled through the ‘hongerwinter’ (hunger winter), Zeeland, even though it was free, possibly struggled even more, as in some areas many towns were almost completely destroyed, large areas were completely flooded and the distribution of provisions was slow. Vlissingen had the ‘honour’ to be the most devastated city of the Netherlands, in which only one house had not been hit by bombs, bullets or other splinters flying around.<sup>77</sup> The Scheldt-area (which covers the whole of Zeeland) was part of the German ‘Atlantikwall’ and was strategically important to the Germans, which meant that the concentration of soldiers in Zeeland was high, the fights were intense and the sacrifices made large.<sup>78</sup> Many houses and buildings were destroyed, transportation was barely available, there was an ongoing debate about who had been ‘good’ and who had been ‘bad,’ and there was no distraction in the form of amusement. Some of the inhabitants of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

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kleurlooze barakken en getimmerten met daartusschen modderplassen en vale kleigrond. Er is geen schoonheid en recreatie meer in dit barre land van Zeeuws Vlaanderen-West.” ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, *Voorstel tot het oprichten en in exploitatie nemen van een bioscoop in West Zeeuws Vlaanderen door de regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst*, H.J.M. Hanlo to P.F. Standaert dd. 20 Nov. 1945.

<sup>76</sup> “Na mijn eerste oppervlakkige bezoek aan dit gebied kwam een gevoel van schaamte in mij op van in een behoorlijk bed te slapen en eenig comfort te genieten. Men moet de ellende gezien hebben om er eenigszins over te kunnen oordelen.” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan C. Nicolai dd. 11 nov. 1945.

<sup>77</sup> Jan J.B. Kuipers and Robbert Jan Swiers, *Het verhaal van Zeeland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 266.

<sup>78</sup> Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 79.



felt that the situation in Belgian was way better than in their region and they speculated about a Belgian annexation.

In fact, the ‘annexatie-gedachte’ (annexation-sentiment) was discussed over and over in Hanlo’s correspondences. Apparently, many people in (especially western) Zeeuws Vlaanderen were extremely unhappy with the conditions in their region. They felt that the Dutch government had forgotten about them and believed that the reconstruction measures did not go fast enough. According to them, it would be much more beneficial to be part of Belgium, as the connections with Belgium were much faster and closer. “The ethos in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen stays poor. The reconstruction works is so slow, that one cannot see any progress and it costs a lot of money. Many eyes look are looking or are beginning to look desirously at Belgium.”<sup>79</sup>

It is not surprising that people from Zeeuws-Vlaanderen looked to Belgium eagerly: H. Bruining, employee of the ‘Ministerie voor algemeene oorlogvoering van het koninkrijk’ (Ministry for the Co-ordination of Warfare), told Hanlo that he had seen that a few dozen ‘zeer smaakvolle arbeiderswoningen’ (very neat houses) were built, just across the border with Belgium, that allegedly costed 30,000 guilders (converted from Belgian francs) each.<sup>80</sup> Bruining did some research and found out that those were the only houses of this kind in the entirety of Belgium. He therefore believed that it had to be a form of propaganda.<sup>81</sup> When one passed the border near Sluis, one could see that Belgium looked much better and much more developed. Moreover, the wages were higher in Belgium than in the Netherlands. These things were giving the impression that everything was better in Belgium.<sup>82</sup>

Through the weekly reports of Bouwense and Hanlo, one can clearly see how this annexation-thought (seemed to be) increasing and decreasing over time. In November 1945

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<sup>79</sup> “In Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen blijft de stemming slecht. De opbouw gaat zoo langzaam, dat men geen vooruitgan ziet en kost handen vol geld. Veler oogen blijven of gaan verlangd naar België zien.” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Weekly report 11-17 mrt.

<sup>80</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, “Enkele opmerkingen over Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen,” n.d.

<sup>81</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, Dr. H. Bruining aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 3 dec. 1945.

<sup>82</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, “Enkele opmerkingen over Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen,” n.d.

Hanlo speaks of a small, but well-trained group that wants to join Belgium.<sup>83</sup> He claims to have received this information from the leader of this group, who is a well-known citizen of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and whom Hanlo promised to keep anonymous. Hanlo suspects that the group has links with the *Gemeenschap Oud-Illegale Werkers* (G.O.I.W.; Community for Former Illegal Workers; the resistance movement).<sup>84</sup> This is the only time that Hanlo, or one of his informants speak of an organized group. Hereafter, they only mention a more general feeling or tendency, which probably means that the annexation sentiment was not strong enough to materialize into an organized pro-annexation group.

Of Hanlo's correspondents, Bouwense is the one who most regularly discussed the annexation-issue. In the fall and early winter of 1945, many people talked about annexation, with the eye on what promised to be a tough winter. Bouwense was annoyed that the government did not take the annexation-‘movement’ seriously.<sup>85</sup> He deemed it necessary that the government knew what was going on: “It is essential that the government becomes aware of the highly dangerous tendency towards annexation that is developing.”<sup>86</sup> This is a rather radical way to put it, and in some later letters he tries to be slightly more nuanced. He explains that besides the pro-annexation group, there is a majority of people that want to stay loyal to the Dutch government.<sup>87</sup>

At the end of January 1946 he wrote that “now winter is slowly coming to an end, optimism gains ground again. The people here in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen had a great anguish for the winter, yet now, at the start of February, they are regaining their energy. (...) The annexation-thought in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is diminishing.” Because they ‘survived’ the winter they had dreaded so much, people have gained a much more positive attitude and the direct urge to join Belgium has lessened.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, if people would want to join Belgium,

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<sup>83</sup> “de groep [is] nog betrekkelijk klein, doch goed geoefend;” Zeeuws Archief, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan directie van regeringsdienst Oog & Oor dd. 14 nov. 1945.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 18 dec. 1945.

<sup>86</sup> “Het is echter noodzakelijk dat de regeering ervan doordrongen wordt dat zich op dit gebied een uiterst gevaarlijke tendenz [sic] aan het ontwikkelen is.” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 26 nov. 1945.

<sup>87</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Weekly report Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen dd. 16 jan. 1946.

<sup>88</sup> “Nu de winter zoo zachtjes aan ten einde loopt wint de optimistische stemming weer veld. Men had hier in de Zeeuwsch-Vl. een groote angst voor den winter, doch nu Februari alweer begint keert de energie onder de bevolking weer terug. (...) De annexatiegedachte in West-Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen neemt af.” From: ZA,

that would be out of an economic, not a political reason. “De mensen voelen zich Nederlander” (the people feel Dutch).<sup>89</sup>

However, at the slightest provocation, the potential annexation became a hot topic again.<sup>90</sup> The meeting of the Catholic agricultural organization of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, for example, caused a new impulse to the debate.<sup>91</sup> The chairman of this meeting asked the attendants whether they would be in favour of annexation or not. According to Bouwense’s report, 60% of the present Catholic farmers was pro-annexation. Bouwense also reports that 95% would be in favour of annexation, if the Dutch government would continue to ‘neglect’ Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.<sup>92</sup> The annexation-sentiment then grew in strength again: of eight surveyed farmers, six were advocates of annexation. The other two were opposed, although not very confidently.<sup>93</sup> They were motivated by the bad connection with Walcheren and the rest of the region, the shortage of people (in particular benevolent civil servants), the slow reconstruction process.<sup>94</sup>

Many of Bouwense’s observations were taken over almost literally in Hanlo’s weekly reports to the central office in Amsterdam. Hanlo reports as well that he had initiated an inquiry into the nature and the extent of the annexation-question,<sup>95</sup> but the outcomes of this investigation, if existing at all, are not to be found in the Oog & Oor archive at the Zeeuws Archief. Even though Bouwense often complained that the government did not do anything for the people in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, it was actually paying attention to the annexation case. The secretary of Prime Minister Schermerhorn, W.G. Vriesendorp, thanked Hanlo for his report and informed him that the “Raad voor herstel en Wederopbouw” discussed the situation in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and promised to start with the reconstruction of houses in

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Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Weekly report dd. 31 jan. 1946.

<sup>89</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, “Enkele opmerkingen over Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen,” n.d.

<sup>90</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Weekly report Zeeuws Vlaanderen dd. 14 feb. 1946.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Weekly report Zeeuws Vlaanderen dd. 7 feb. 1946.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Report ‘Annexatie bij België’ dd. 8 feb. 1946.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Weekly report 11-17 mrt.

<sup>94</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 mrt. 1946.

<sup>95</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Weekly report 11-17 feb.

West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and to improve the boat-, telegram-, telegraph-, and telephone connection with the wider region.<sup>96</sup>

Hanlo put a lot of effort in arranging a cinema in Oostburg, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. He deemed this of utmost importance, because Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and especially the devastated area in the West were isolated from the rest of Zeeland and the Netherlands, and lacked any form of entertainment. In an undated ‘voorstel tot het oprichten en in exploitatie nemen van een bioscoop in West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen door de RVD’ (proposal for the RVD to found and exploit a cinema in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) Hanlo writes that “in the entirety of West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, with a population of over 27,000 souls, there is only one single possibility to go to the movies, in an itinerant cinema that has its permanent stand in Sluis (located in an remote corner of the area).” Hanlo advises to quickly found a cinema to show the goodwill of the government. In the proposal he describes the devastated state of the area and the enormous need for ‘distraction.’<sup>97</sup> “The need for a centrally located cinema is high (...) If the RVD were to take initiative in this case, the popularity of the government would rise one stone in this region.”<sup>98</sup>

Already on 11 November 1945 Hanlo pointed out the necessity of a cinema in Zeeuws Vlaanderen in his letter to the central office of Oog & Oor.<sup>99</sup> On 20 November he attended a meeting of the ‘advieskring voor Zeeuws Vlaanderen West’ (advisory committee for West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) and everything seemed to be settled.<sup>100</sup> The same day, Hanlo investigated the possibilities of a cinema in Oostburg, which had a cinema before the war and is the most central place in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. He pushed the director of the Luxor

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<sup>96</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, W.G. Vriesendorp aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 6 apr. 1946.

<sup>97</sup> “Nu is er in geheel West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen, met een bevolking van meer dan 27.000 zielen, slechts één gelegenheid om films te zien en wel in een rondreizende bioscoop met als permanente standplaats Sluis (gelegen in een uithoek van het gebied).” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, voorstel door H.J.M. Hanlo, n.d.

<sup>98</sup> “De behoefte aan een centraal gelegen bioscoop is nijpend (...) Wanneer hier de R.V.D. het initiatief nam maakt in dit gebied de regeering zich met een slag populair.” From: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, voorstel door H.J.M. Hanlo, n.d.

<sup>99</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan directie van regeeringsdienst Oog & Oor dd. 11 nov. 1945.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., H.J.M. Hanlo aan directie van regeeringsdienst Oog & Oor dd. 20 nov. 1945.

Theater in Terneuzen, Mr. Standaert, to open a cinema there.<sup>101</sup> Apparently, Standaert took this request seriously. He informed Hanlo on 5 January that he had been promised that he would be able to use the old gym in Oostburg, but that he had not heard anything for months since then.<sup>102</sup> Bouwense told Hanlo that this was not Standaert's fault, but rather Sjef van Dongen's, the mayor of Aardenburg and a local 'hero'. He was promised the gym, but the 'Rijksgebouwendienst' (Government Building Agency) had not given official permission to use it yet.<sup>103</sup>

In the meantime, Hanlo had been in contact with Mr. Maat, employee of the Philips-company in Eindhoven, who promised his help to acquire a projector.<sup>104</sup> On 8 January 1946 Hanlo asked A.M. de Clerq, architect of the 'Rijksgebouwendienst' to design a cinema for Oostburg.<sup>105</sup> De Clerq responded, however, that he can only start once he has a permit. Without one, he was not allowed to do anything.<sup>106</sup> On the same day, Hanlo asked van Dongen, to keep an eye on the case.<sup>107</sup> Apparently, Standaert did not get a permission to use the gym in Oostburg. Instead, Van Dongen and Standaert now had the plan to build a temporary cinema with barracks. In March, Van Dongen informed Hanlo that he tried his best, but that he needs Hanlo's help, especially with acquiring the barracks from the 'barakkencomissie' (barrack-committee, a government institution that is in charge of material distribution for barracks). Van Dongen wrote that he is aiming to get the barracks for free, because if they would have to pay money for them, it would not make sense to put any more effort in the case, as it then becomes way too expensive.<sup>108</sup>

Apparently, Hanlo also tried to convince his colleagues in Amsterdam and The Hague of the need for a cinema. The 'advieskring voor Zeeuws Vlaanderen West' (advisory committee for West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) even sent a letter signed by all its members to the

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<sup>101</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan P.F. Standaert dd. 20 nov. 1945.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., ingekomen stukken, P.F. Standaert aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 5 jan. 1946.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 jan. 1946.

<sup>104</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentenschappen, W. Maat aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 23 nov. 1945.

<sup>105</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan A.M. de Clerq dd. 8 jan. 1946.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., ingekomen stukken, A.M. de Clerq aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 19 jan. 1946.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan J.A.M.C. van Dongen dd. 8 jan. 1946.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., ingekomen stukken, J.M.A.C. van Dongen dd. 19 mrt. 1946.

central office of Oog & Oor on 16 November.<sup>109</sup> On 6 March Jan de Graaff, chief general affairs of the central office, notified Hanlo that he has consigned the case to Landré and Vriesman (both employed by the RVD),<sup>110</sup> which is slightly odd, as Nicolaï, the director of Oog & Oor, has already officially transferred the ‘problem’ to the RVD on 30 November 1945.<sup>111</sup> Even though he asked Hanlo to bring Standaert in contact with Vriesman, Hanlo still seems to want to keep matters in his own hands.

On 22 March, Hanlo asked De Graaff whether he would be able to arrange barracks for the cinema.<sup>112</sup> J.J. Vriesendorp, the secretary of the ‘Raad voor Herstel en Wederopbouw’ (Council for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) in The Hague agreed with Hanlo that a cinema is absolutely needed and had arranged that a barrack for the cinema will be sent to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.<sup>113</sup> On 10 May De Graaff announced that Mr. Wils, working for the ‘barakkencommissie’ (barrack-committee), would pay a visit to Zeeuws Vlaanderen. By that time, Hanlo seems to have given up. Instead of a cinema, he thought of launching a local radio station.<sup>114</sup> In the end, Standaert was able to rebuild a cinema, the *Ledeltheater*, at the end of 1946<sup>115</sup>. It is unknown whether Oog & Oor or the RVD were further involved in the process.

One of the reasons that the people in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, and in particular West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, were so dissatisfied was the fact that the reconstruction of houses was going very slowly. During the bombardments at the end of the war, when West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen was in the frontline, most of the towns and villages in this area were completely turned into ruins. From a bar chart about the destruction in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen can be concluded that Breskens was by far the most damaged town in the region. About 65% of the houses were

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<sup>109</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, Advieskring voor Zeeuws Vlaanderen West aan Centraal Bureau regeeringsdienst Oog & Oor.

<sup>110</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, ingekomen stukken, J. de Graaff aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 6 mrt. 1946.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., C. Nicolaï aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 30 nov. 1945.

<sup>112</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan J. de Graaff dd. 22 mrt. 1946.

<sup>113</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, J.J. Vriesendorp aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 24 apr. 1946.

<sup>114</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, J. de Graaff aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 8 10 mei 1946.

<sup>115</sup> “Historie,” *Ledeltheater*, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://www.ledeltheater.nl/historie>.

‘totally destroyed,’ another 15% heavily damaged and the rest ‘lightly damaged.’ Oostburg, Schoondijke and Sluis were also severely affected. In the rest of the villages in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen ‘only’ a quarter of the houses or less had been totally destroyed. But in these villages too, almost none of the buildings remained completely undamaged.<sup>116</sup>

Upon request, the Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (CBS; Central Bureau of Statistics) sent Hanlo some demographics about Breskens. On 1 January 1944 there were still 3,361 people living in Breskens. Precisely one year later, there were only 820 people. In the bombardment of 11 September 1944 about 250 people had died and most likely the majority fled the town. After the war, in 1946, there are more people again: 2,058. The decrease in the number of houses between 1944 and 1946 is shocking. Of its approximately 850 houses, only 225 houses were still habitable after the war. That meant that an average 9 people lived in one house in 1946.<sup>117</sup>

The government had promised to build temporary houses,<sup>118</sup> but according to the inhabitants of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen the construction process was much too slow. In May 1946,



Figure 4 Temporary house in Eede

about one-and-a-half year after the war had ended in Zeeland, quite some temporary houses had been built, but not enough to answer the immense need for houses. To take the example of Breskens again: in May 1946 ‘only’ 169 houses had been built,<sup>119</sup> which was by far not enough to provide every family with a house again. What is more, people complained that the houses were

<sup>116</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, Bijlage van “Enkele opmerkingen over Zeeuwsch Vlaanderen” n.d.

<sup>117</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, CBS aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 13 dec. 1945.

<sup>118</sup> Image taken from Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950*, 424.

<sup>119</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan J.J. Vriesendorp dd. 21 mei 1946.

ugly: “On top of that, people from Holland stated that they had never seen as ugly temporary houses as they had seen in West Zeeuws-Vlaanderen.”<sup>120</sup>

Another very important reason (next to the housing problems) that the inhabitants of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen envied the Belgians was the fact that Zeeuws-Vlaanderen was very isolated from the rest of the Netherlands, whereas the connections with Belgium were good. The isolated position of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen had a couple of causes. First of all, transportation by car was often problematic, as one did not only need a car, which was already extremely hard to acquire, but also gasoline and a permit to drive (not simply a driver’s license). Even Bouwense, a well-known figure in Zeeuws Vlaanderen, had difficulties to get a permit to drive his car.<sup>121</sup> The district office received numerous complaints about the ‘Rijksverkeersinspectie’ (National Transport Inspectorate), which was slow and seemed overworked<sup>122</sup>. Public transportation was not to be trusted either: the tram connections between west and east Zeeuws-Vlaanderen were mostly not working, and if they did, a journey often took very long.<sup>123</sup>

The connections between the towns and villages in Zeeuws Vlaanderen itself were already rather bad, but the connection between the region and the rest of the Netherlands was even more problematic. The ferry between Breskens and Vlissingen, the *Koningin Emma*, was replaced by the *Koningsplaat*, which, according to the mayor of Breskens, was a disaster. The ship in question was known as a rickety boat and it would cause even more isolation of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, said the mayor.<sup>124</sup> Bouwense explained to Hanlo that “elke deskundige de *Koningsplaat* een gevaarlijk schip [noemt]” (every expert calls the *Koningsplaat* a dangerous ship).<sup>125</sup> On top of that, the pontoon boat at which the ships arrived was too deep in

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<sup>120</sup>“Bovendien verklaren lieden uit Holland, dat zij nog nooit zulke leelijke noodwoningen hebben gezien als in West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen.” Fro: ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 mrt. 1946.

<sup>121</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 14 dec. 1946.

<sup>122</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, Week report of H.J.M. Hanlo to Centraal Bureau dd. 29 Nov. 1945.

<sup>123</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, CBS aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 15 dec. 1945.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., K. Maas aan Heeren gedeputeerde Staten van Zeeand, dd. 10 jan. 1946.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 9 feb. 1946.



the water, which caused damage to the cars when leaving the ferry.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, there was no place to hide from the weather when one was waiting for the ferry.<sup>127</sup>

Next to the problems with transportation, the phone-, telegraph-, and telegram connections were very poor. At a certain point Bouwense apprised Hanlo that one of his telegrams took 25 hours to go from Vlissingen to Breskens. He said that “de telefoon en telegraafverbindingen met West Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen droevig [zijn]” (the connections are ‘sad’). After nine o’clock at night no phone calls could be made, but often it was already impossible to do so after eight.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the connection was so bad that the phone calls often changed into ‘telefoongegil’ (phone screaming), as Hanlo calls it.<sup>129</sup>

Almost inevitably Hanlo heard about the ‘Axel murders’ too. These murders were more or less a ‘public secret.’ That is, everyone knew about them, but no one wanted to talk about it. Very close to the end of the war, in 1944, two ‘meisjes’ (girls), or rather: one girl, Debora van Es, aged 18, and one woman, Marie Antheunis, aged 40, had been captured and murdered. Until today, it remains unclear who was responsible for those deaths, but it was (and is) evident that the resistance movement was involved. Both bodies were found in early 1946 and a criminal investigation was started. By Spring it was an ongoing issue. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1946, Hanlo asked Smies for information about Miss Marie Antheunis. The only information he had gathered, was that she had allegedly been detained for a long time for a minor offense she committed during the German occupation. Moreover, there were supposedly not enough opportunities for her to defend herself.<sup>130</sup> It is interesting that Hanlo simply assumed that the women were still being held at that point in time, even though their whereabouts were unknown.

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<sup>126</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, N.J. Huisman-Wage aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 19 feb. 1946.

<sup>127</sup> Zeeuws Archief, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 11 jan. 1946.

<sup>128</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, D.C. Bouwense aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 6 mrt. 1946.

<sup>129</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 2, Correspondentie met het Centraal Bureau te Amsterdam, uitgegane stukken, H.J.M. Hanlo aan Centraal Bureau dd. 7 nov. 1945.

<sup>130</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 3, Uitgane stukken aan correspondentschappen, H.J.M. Hanlo to C. Smies dd. 7 feb. 1946.



**Figure 1** Front of the pamphlet made and distributed by Mr. C.B. Antheunis, father of Marie.

information. Interestingly, Smies assumed that the father of Marie Antheunis had already written to Hanlo, which does not seem to be the case (there is no letter of him in the archives). Smies used a very fitting proverb to convince Hanlo not to meddle too much in the case: “the more you stir in it, the more it will stink.”<sup>133</sup>

Hanlo forwards Smies’ letter to a certain Mr. Groffen in Middelburg on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1946, and he adds to it that he is also not convinced of Miss Antheunis’ innocence so far.<sup>134</sup> The same day he receives more information about the case from Smies, including a pamphlet distributed in Axel and surroundings by the Antheunis family. This pamphlet caused

In his response, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1946, Smies made clear that to him it was evident that both ‘girls’ were ‘guilty’. He wrote: “even though I do not have any evidence [*sic*], it is clear that Ms. Marie Antheunis has done many things with the Germans.”<sup>131</sup> He thought that the people who could possibly testify against Antheunis were afraid. He said: “People who could possibly testify do not want to face inconveniences!!!”<sup>132</sup> He declared that he refused to believe that Marie Antheunis was imprisoned because of a simple offense, but he added to this that he doubted whether she was actually still imprisoned. He suggested Hanlo to ask the P.O.D. (Politieke Opsporingsdienst; political investigation service’) or the local Gendarmerie for more

<sup>131</sup> “Hoewel ik geen bewijzen heb, staat het wel vast [*sic*], dat Mej. Marie Anth. zeer veel zaken met de Duitschers heeft gedaan.” ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 feb. 1946.

<sup>132</sup> “Menschen die zouden kunnen getuigen, willen niet in onaangenaamheden komen!!!” ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 16 feb. 1946.

<sup>133</sup> “Hoe meer men er in roert, hoe meer het st...;” Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentschappen, H.J.M. Hanlo to W. Groffen dd. 19 mrt. 1946.

a lot of bad blood in Axel. In the pamphlet, Mr. Antheunis, the father of Marie, calls for information about the ‘sadistic’ murder of his daughter, accusing the Militair Gezag and the Orde Dienst of murder.<sup>135</sup> It is interesting to notice that Mr. Antheunis already speaks of murder, although neither the women, nor their bodies had been found yet. Smies remarked that even though everyone talked about it, no one took the part of the Antheunis family. He then tries to express the public opinion on the case. He writes that “many suspect that this is not only about the question of Miss Antheunis and Van Es, but that this is also a premeditated smear campaign of those in favour of the Germans.” They thought this ‘gang’ of ‘moffengewroet’ should be acted against.<sup>136</sup>

On the 25th of February 1946, Hanlo received a clarifying letter of the editors in chief of newspaper “De Stem.” Mr. Groffen, who was probably closely related to this newspaper, had shown Hano’s letter to the editors in chief. It seems as if the editors took Hanlo’s letter to be a response to an article they had published on the case on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1946, even though Hanlo had written his letter one day before this article was published. The editors explained to him that they did not try to exculpate the women (Antheunis and Van Es) in their article, as they too were convinced that the two women were guilty, be it one more than the other. Rather, they wished to show the wrongness of leaving the parents completely uninformed of the terrible fate that had befallen their daughters. The editors especially judged the fact the offenders (who are still unknown to date) had tried to hide this cruel and verdict-less execution.

In an undated (probably 27th of February, according to the agenda<sup>137</sup>) answer to Smies’ letter of the 19th of February 1946, Hanlo informed Smies that he had great interest in the case of Miss Antheunis. He wrote that he would very much appreciate it if Smies could keep him posted on the state of the investigation. Hanlo also asked Smies whether he knows what the reason for the alleged execution could have been.<sup>138</sup> A couple of days later, on the first of March 1946, Smies wrote to Hanlo that the two women had been buried earlier that week. Their bodies had been exhumed at the “Groot Eiland,” a small ‘island’ in the middle of

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<sup>135</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 19 feb. 1946.

<sup>136</sup> “velen vermoeden, dat dit niet enkel de kwestie van Mej. Antheunis en Van Es betreft, doch dat dit een opgezette hetze is door de vrije Pro-Duitschers c.s.”; ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 1, Ingekomen en uitgegane stukken, ingekomen stukken, C. Smies aan H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 19 feb. 1946.

<sup>137</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, Request number 5, Agenda of incoming and outgoing mail.

<sup>138</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentschappen, H.J.M. Hanlo to C. Smies, feb. 1946.

East Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1946.<sup>139</sup> Smies said that he could not give any further information, as it would largely be based on rumours, which he wished to refrain from spreading. Once again, he advises Hanlo to ask some local authorities, such as the P.O.D., the Gendarmerie or the public prosecutor in Middelburg. After this, the both of them seem to have forgotten about the case, as there is no single mention of the case in their correspondence anymore. Moreover, Hanlo probably did not follow up on Smies' advice to ask the P.O.D., the Gendarmerie or the public prosecutor, as the agenda does not contain records of any letters sent to one of these authorities. The last one to mention the case is Bouwense in his week report on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1946. He wrote that articles about the case in newspaper *De Stem* were grist to the mill of the 'not-so-good-Dutchmen.' To Bouwense, too, it was clear that the two women "belonged to the category of 'moffenmeiden'."<sup>140</sup>

Later, it became clear that Antheunis and Van Es had been taken captive on a farm occupied by the Orde Dienst (resistance group) on 'Dolle Dinsdag,' early 1944. Allegedly they also spent some time imprisoned in the town hall of Axel, where they were probably tortured and potentially even sexually abused, before they were murdered and buried.<sup>141</sup> This case shows that it must have been extremely hard to define who had been 'wrong' or 'right.' Even though Antheunis and Van Es clearly did not get a fair trial, still many, including Bouwense, Smies and the editors of *De Stem*, seemed to find these murders more or less 'fair punishment.'

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<sup>139</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 3, Uitgegane stukken aan correspondentenschappen, dd. 16 mrt. 1946; VPRO *Het spoor terug*, "De afrekening 9: Moord in Axel," [http://www.vpro.nl/speel~POMS\\_VPRO\\_383769~de-afrekening-9-moord-in-axel-het-spoor-terug~.html](http://www.vpro.nl/speel~POMS_VPRO_383769~de-afrekening-9-moord-in-axel-het-spoor-terug~.html).

<sup>140</sup> ZA, Regeringsdienst Oog en Oor, Districtsbureau Zuid III, Regio Zeeland, 1945-1946, inventory number 430, request number 4, Rapporten en verslagen, D.C. Bouwense to H.J.M. Hanlo dd. 7 mrt. 1946.

<sup>141</sup> De Kraker & De Blaeij, *Axel 1944-2002*, 20-22.

## **Conclusion**

It is surprising that an organization like Oog & Oor left such an extensive archive in such a short period of time. Even more surprising is that so little has been written about this institution and that there are but a handful of historians that deemed it interesting enough for study. Because Oog & Oor was an organization that was aiming at understanding the world around it, and gathering information about it, this archive could not only provide researchers with interesting material to investigate the organization and the structure of Oog & Oor itself, but, zooming out, it could also serve as a sort of time-traveling magnifying glass. Through the letters in this archive, and thus through the eyes of various individuals of that time, it is possible to picture the period just after the Second World War in ways that go beyond the reach of more traditional post-war political and social history. This paper ‘only’ deals with the district office of Zeeland, but similar studies could be done for other provinces and for the rest of the Netherlands. In this way, it is not only an interesting source for historians that want to study the post-war period, but also for those that are fascinated by the history of information gathering and intelligence services. Although Hanlo remains slightly mysterious, it is certainly worth it to get to know him and his colleagues through the archives of Oog and Oor.

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