

Dutchmen Fight for the Dikes

eyewitness account of holland's heroic struggle to hold off the stormswept north sea flood tides

"There is nothing exciting about a fight against the water . . . and seldom anything spectacular.

"Sometimes one can watch a dike break: first the water flows over the top, then pavement is slowly scratched away, the underlying material follows, and finally, with a waterfall-like effect, the dike breaks and the hole is widened and deepened by the water itself.

"But most the time the water rises imperceptibly, everywhere. And while you fight it, you curse the wind, the lack of organization, the cold hands and the wet feet—but never the

water. There is nothing to curse in water. It follows only one law—gravity. It has only one way to attack—against everything, always seeking out your weak points. You can only try to change your own weaknesses, and there is nothing exciting about that."

This is the story of a few frantic hours in the history of Western Europe. It's one man's account of Holland's fight against storm-driven water from the Atlantic ocean.

You read the newspaper accounts, the hundreds dead and the millions of dollars in damages. You probably had a mental picture of

dikes popping like overripe melons and flood water cascading into fields, sweeping away farms and inundating whole villages. Perhaps you wondered what it was like.

Dirk Schepers, now back in Holland after a three-year stint here at the University, was there. We gather he was out on Putten Island, fighting to hold the dikes. It must be a small chunk of land; we couldn't find it on a map. And naturally, it was only a small part of a very big battle.

But we imagine that wherever men gathered to fight for their land and country on the night of February 1-2, the description given by Schepers would have applied.

By Dirk Schepers

At 5 o'clock the student club was full of boys, most of them dressed in warm overcoats and rubber boots, some with spades in their hands. When a bus arrived, the student body president would ring a bell and call out the names of those who were to go. Group leaders were appointed and destinations given, mostly places that nobody had ever heard of before. There were far more volunteers than could be used and it was not until 7:30 p.m., when three busses arrived, that a large group could leave. They drove south in a sweeping rainstorm, the same one that was blowing the water of the North Sea down into the mouths of the Rhine, Thames and the Schelde rivers.

A Huge Funnel

The North Sea is a large funnel, carrying the water into the estuaries of the three great rivers. This wind, plus the fact that this was a leap tide and the water rose a meter higher than ever before, explains the situation.

Where the heavy protecting sea dikes had been broken, little could be done, for the land behind it was lower than sea level. And the inland dikes, those that had once been on the sea, had been neglected in the centuries of safety. Farmers had plowed up the sides of them and trucks, far heavier than the horsecars the dikes were built to carry, had simply pushed them down into the mud.

The sea dike on the island of Putten was broken on the south side, but there was hope that the hole could be filled before the whole island was overrun with salt water. The three bus loads of students were sent here to reinforce

a company of soldiers there who were strengthening the inland dikes behind the breach.

The Men Dug Clay

Strong military lights illuminated the scene where the men were digging clay and filling jute bags to be piled at the base of the dike at its weak points, two rows deep.

The storm wind blew straight across the flat land, carrying horizontal gusts of rain, and city clothes proved of little value. The only way to keep warm was to keep your back to the wind and work hard.

The clay stuck to boots and spades, but nobody complained—it would stick together equally well against the water that was to come in the morning.

A farmer came by and told us, almost incoherently, that his farm was under water. Groups of men walked over to see.

Far away, in the direction of the sea, we could see a faint light signal, an SOS. In a row boat with improvised oars and inexper-

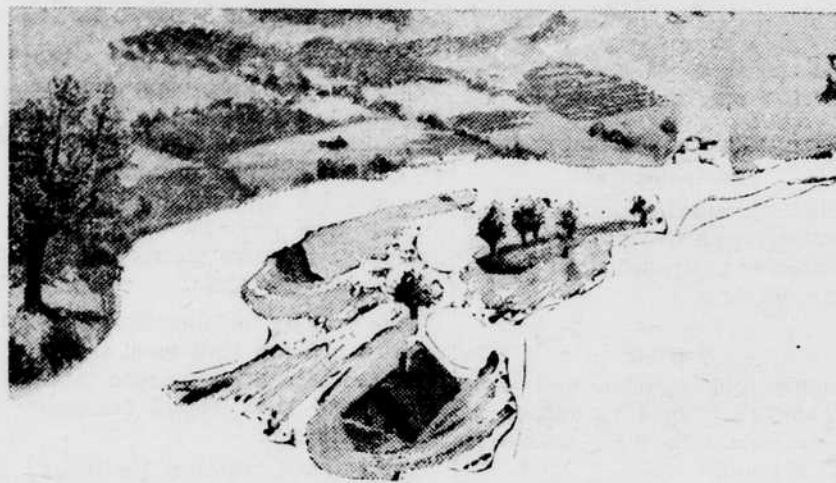
enced men, an attempt was made to get to it. A farm family there had had just enough time to go upstairs when the water broke through, and now the outgoing tide was carrying the house away with it.

A House Disappeared

The people of one farm got safely into the boat, but another farm house crashed into the water before it could be reached. One fellow was found clinging to a piece of wood, but no more . . .

The victims were brought to the village cafe where a continuous stream of men came in to drink hot coffee, dry their feet in front of a blazing stove and pass out again to the dike. Girl volunteers were distributing food. Children lay asleep on bags of hay.

Close to the cafe was the village hall where the mayor was directing the fight. He had a map showing where the dikes were, but not how high they were. Who in ordinary days would have cared about a difference of a few feet in height anyway?



Plans Announced for Red Cross; Students Asked to Contribute

Final arrangements are now being made for the annual Red Cross fund-raising campaign to be held March 2 through 5, general chairman Pat Ruan, has announced.

All house representatives for the fund drive will meet Monday at 3:30 p.m. at Delta Gamma, Miss Ruan said. Information and procedures to be followed during the drive will be given at that time. Each living organization will select a house representative this weekend to collect money during the four day drive, she said.

Students will be asked to contribute a dollar to the campaign. Those contributing that sum will receive a membership card in the

1953 Red Cross. Those promising to donate a dollar will receive a pledge card, to be exchanged for the membership upon payment of the dollar.

The goal set for the university will be announced next week, Miss Ruan said. Progress reports will be published in the Emerald, and the living organizations leading in the drive will also be acknowledged. Faculty contributions are being handled by Karl Onthank and will be added later to the University total, she said.

Members of Kwama, sophomore women's honorary, and Skull and Dagger, sophomore men's honorary, will speak in living organiza-

tions on the purpose of the drive and the importance of contributing. Flying speeches will also be given throughout the week of March 2.

Creative Arts Petition Deadline Advanced

Deadline for petitions for the general committee and sub-committees of the Campus Creative Workshop has been extended to next Wednesday at 5 p.m., Valerie Cows, general chairman, has announced.

Petitions may be obtained in rooms 301 or 310 in the Student Union, and turned in at the same places.

TREAT FOR THE ARMY!

Washington to Host Phi Beta Entertainers

Thirteen members of Phi Beta, national women's honorary in music, speech and drama, will leave Saturday by Army transport plane to spend the weekend in Washington, D. C., as guests of the United States Army.

As part of the Phi Beta National Army Collaboration program, the girls will present a variety show in several army bases and hospitals in Washington, D. C.

Directed by Joanne Forbes, junior in speech, the show will consist of specialty musical numbers and a college skit centered around the theme, "Men."

Performing in the program will be Marilyn Patterson, junior in speech; Judy Ellefson, sophomore in music; Jeanette Stone, senior in music; Tamson Breese, sophomore in music; Pat Hartley, senior in music, and Jackie Madigan, senior in music.

Allison LeRoux, freshman in journalism; Mary Sweeney, freshman in music; Janis Evans, senior in music; Joyce Skinner, junior in music; Lou Ann Wolf, junior in music, and Sally Hayden, junior in business. Exine Anderson, faculty adviser for the group, will accompany the women.