



War over Holland

May 1940: The Dutch struggle

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Tholen



Introduction

The previous day the city of Tholen had been successfully defended against the first mild assault by the German formation opposing the Dutch companies that had taken a stand along the brown flood called Eendracht. Overnight the forward position on the east side of the Eendracht had been evacuated to the west bank.

The defence of the island still mattered to the Allied cause, for a German occupation of Tholen could jeopardize the Allied forces at Zuid-Beveland [although this would soon change]. Nevertheless, no reinforcements were received by the defence. The 450 men Dutch force - quite lightly equipped with heavier weapons - was on its own.

Renewed German offensive action



Situation map of the Tholen and St. Philipsland battle-zones (May 1940)

since the Zanddijkline had fallen the day before.

Yet again a potent defence deserted ...

About 1300 hours the Dutch formations along the Eendracht started to fall back to the west coast. A considerable part of the Dutch force [about 250 men] was able to evacuate from Tholen to Schouwen-Duivenland, but the force defending the northern shore, equipped with the only two guns on the island and some other smaller units, fell in German hands during their quest finding shipping space in the small port of Stavenisse.

The suddenly appearing Germans had crossed the Eendracht at around 1600 hours after they had found out that the Dutch had left their trenches. They quickly organised a pursuit and went straight to the far western point of the island to browse the western coast in order to counter any possible French landing attempts. These scouting parties intercepted the Dutch soldiers that had not yet been able to find a shuttle to Schouwen-Duivenland.

Aftermath

Tholen itself had not suffered too much from the straddled gun fire of the few present German 10,5 cm howitzers. Remarkable was the fact that numerous projectiles did not detonate. The reasons for this are unclear. Perhaps a poor batch in the German arsenals (they were still many grenades in stock for the older FH.16 howitzer that were applied for the FH.18 howitzers too), but possibly the Tholen soil may have played a role in absorbing impact in such a way that percussion fuses did not ignite. The undetonated shells continued to pose a threat though. Apart from some destroyed or heavily damaged houses, the small town was covered in glass of broken windows. But that was about it. No civilians had been killed.

Again the Germans proved well prepared for the Dutch geographical challenges. Within two hours after their crossing of the Eendracht some boats were supplied by their engineers and loaded with infantry shuttled over the guns of AR.677. These guns were quickly deployed near Stavenisse in order to be able to counter any upcoming Allied landings or shipping activity. Tholen had become German territory as off 1800 hours.

St. Philipsland - a small peninsula just north of Tholen - had already seen the first German patrols on the 15th. One may remember the duel fought between the HrMs Hydra and some German AT guns that had ended with the loss of the ship. At the 16th the Germans deployed quite a considerable force west of the small village Anna Jacoba, close to shores of the Zijpe. Somehow they expected the French to counter their progress, but the French were only occupied saving their bacon in Zeeland.

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