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A MOBILISATION TO REMEMBER: SOME REFLECTIONS ON MEMORY, NEUTRALITY AND THE AFTERIMAGES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE NETHERLANDS, 1918-1939

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Neutral memories of the First World War?

For historians, studying the First World War's memory –the changing ways in which 'average people' (usually not professional historians) understood the war and how those understandings in turn influenced culture, politics, societal norms and values, and even economics in the years and decades following its conclusion– has nearly eclipsed researchers' attention for the history of the war itself[1]. This 'mnemonic turn' or 'memory boom' was inaugurated in 1975 by the publication of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Following his example, many historians have focused on the production of literary and visual culture, highlighting the way artists took refuge in familiar tropes or, conversely, found new, usually abstract, ways to tell truths about the war, and their influences on the way the war existed in memory. The other major strand of Great War memory research focuses on the monuments erected and the commemorative meetings staged to commemorate the war dead within different social groups, such as families, professions, political

1. See HODGIN, K. and RADSTONE, S.: 'Introduction: Contested pasts,' in HODGIN, K. and RADSTONE S.(ed.): *Contested Pasts. The politics of memory*, London / New York, Routledge, 2003, pp. 1-21, on 2.

generations, ethnic and regional groups, social classes, and nations. Most of these studies focus on the interwar period, before the memory of the Great War became intertwined with that of the Second Great War[2].

Increasingly, following the example set by Jay Winter and Annette Becker, historians of the Great War's memory search for commonalities in the European experience of making sense of so much death. They find that, no matter what side people were on during the war, their postwar memories are infused with mourning and efforts to, somehow, make sense of it all[3]. In what is increasingly seen as a common European phenomenon, the European neutrals, however, are exempt. These countries were spared the mass slaughter of young men, and thus had no 'lost generation' (real or imagined) to memorialise, and no grief to find expression for.

This presents a curious contrast with the recent historiography of the European neutrals of World War I, which stresses not only the immense impact the war had on countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. The Dutch experience, for example, is characterised as warlike in a great many respects: the country mobilised an army of 200,000 men to defend its neutrality if worst came to worst, and kept this army at a war footing throughout the four and a half years of conflict. It briefly housed about a million Belgian refugees; tens of thousands stayed in the Netherlands for the duration of the war. Its economy experiences war-related booms and busts, and the government was forced to introduce food rationing schemes not unlike those in Germany in 1917[4]. Although something of a consensus has emerged on the impact the 1914-1918 conflict had at the time, most Dutch First World War scholars implicitly agree with Jay Winter and Annette Becker that the experience left no trace in the 'nation's [...] collective memory,' as it exists 'beyond [the] national sphere of remembrance.'[5] Since the Dutch did not experience war suffering and loss to a degree remotely similar to that affecting France, Britain, or Germany, there

2. On the book's impact, see SMITH, L. V.: 'Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory: Twenty-Five Years Later,' *History and Theory* 40 (2001), pp. 241-260; HEATHORN, S.: 'The Mnemonic Turn in the Cultural Historiography of Britain's Great War,' *The Historical Journal* 48: 4 (2005), pp. 1103-1124; GOEBEL, S.: 'Intersecting Memories. War and Remembrance in Twentieth-Century Europe, *The Historical Journal* 44:3 (2001), pp. 853-858.

3. WINTER, J.: *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European cultural history*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 9-10, pp. 227-228.

4. See e.g. KLINKERT, W., KRUIZINGA S. and MOEYES, P.: *Nederland Neutraal. De Eerste Wereldoorlog 1914-1918*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2014.

5. Citations from ABBENHUIS, M.: *The Art of Staying Neutral. The Netherlands in the First World War, 1914-1918*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, p. 14 and BRANDS, M.C.: 'The Great War die aan ons voorbijging. De blinde vlek in het historisch bewustzijn van Nederland;' in BERMAN, M. and BLOM, J.C.H. (ed.): *Het belang van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. De bijdragen voor het symposium op 22 september 1997 ter gelegenheid van de opening van de nieuwe behuizing van het Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie*, Den Haag: SDU Uitgevers, 1997, pp. 9-20.

was little, if anything, to remember. Neutrality, in other words, lacked the heroic or tragic qualities that are crucial to the formation of a collective memory of the Great War[6].

In this article, I posit that it is our current singular focus on the 'war dead' as the central focus of First World War memory formation rather than a lack of tragedy and heroism that makes it very hard for us to see how neutrals remembered their war. In doing so, I suggest that, memory researchers in general, and of wars and other calamities in particular, have limited themselves both conceptually and methodologically by focusing only on certain *kinds* of memory, and on certain *types* of sources. My thinking in this regard has been heavily influenced by sociologist Michael Schudson, who, provocatively, stated that memory researchers tend to suffer from the 'drunk-looking-for-his-car-keys-under-the-lamppost' phenomenon. By this he means that memory researchers tend look for public or collective memory at those places (or sites) where they most likely to find them, just like an inebriated person would look for his or her car keys primarily in places that are conveniently illuminated. In the case of memory researchers, the focus is squarely on sources that deal explicitly and 'self-conscious[ly]' with the past, such as memorials[7]. Pierre Nora famously called these types of sources *lieux de mémoire*, or 'memory sites': texts, rites, images, buildings, monuments, etc., designed to recall fateful events in the history of the community. These sites are not always active; texts and artefacts can be stored in archives, libraries or museums, monuments can be forgotten, but they can be 'activated' when they are dusted off, reordered and given updated meanings in the light of a new present (such as the Centenary of the First World War).

Naturally, the type of 'memories' uncovered through the study of these sites are not the only ones. Jan and Aleida Assmann introduced a useful distinction between 'cultural' and so-called 'communicative' memory. Whereas the first is concerned with Nora's 'memory' sites, the second comprises of everyday communications about the meaning of the past, ranging from passing references in conversation to private thoughts recorded in diaries. Although there are obvious difficulties in studying this type of memory –whose sources cannot be found anywhere near a conveniently-illuminated lamppost– their study might yield real benefits. Cultural

6. Most explicitly in VAN TUYLL VAN SEROOSKERKEN, H. P.: *The Netherlands and World War I. Espionage, diplomacy and survival*, Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2001, p. 332; VAN GINKEL, R.: *Rondom de stilte. Herdenkingscultuur in Nederland*, Amsterdam, Bert Bakker, 2011, pp. 16-20, 43; MEEK, H.: 'Mobilisatie- of wapenstilstandsherdenking. Publieke oorlogsherinnering in het interbellum in Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 124:1 (2011), pp. 48-63.

7. See e.g. ASSMANN, A.: *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, München, Beck, 2006, pp. 21-60.

memory 'sites' are, to my mind, not necessarily evidence of memories widely shared, or even active. Rather, their creators, financiers or commemorative committees might be more concerned with externally reinforcing a certain vision of the past: one could argue that the First World War Centenary of 2014-2018 features prominent examples of the external reinforcement of certain 'memories' of the Great War[8].

This article, thus, has three interrelated goals. First of all, it will offer some thoughts on how to study the communicative as opposed to the cultural memory of the First World War, in order to approximate its contours. Then, it will apply the methods suggested to a number of case studies, all related to the memory of the war (or rather, its outbreak) in the Netherlands. And finally, it will offer some suggestions as to how neutral communicative memories of the war might compare to current cultural memory research, which has emphasised a pan-European memory experience characterised by death and mourning.

Using newspapers as sources of commemorative memory

A key problem in studying communicative memory is its fleeting nature. In contrast to cultural memory, whose sources are usually cast in stone, committed to paper, or painted on canvas, communicative memory is usually considered to be the stuff of family dinner conversation, of small talk between friends, and other forms of communication that are only rarely recorded or even shared beyond a small circle. Private diaries might contain clues, but –even if they are saved for posterity– are the expressions of individuals and usually contain little information of how widely a certain memory is shared, if they contain overt passages on how or what someone remembers in the first place. I posit that, although it might be impossible to penetrate the living room conversations of the interwar years, we might get a glimpse by studying newspaper articles related to the war and distil from them clues pointing to the shape and substance of the stories of the war as it evolved after November 1918.

First of all, journalists frequently invoke the past even when their primary job is to engage with the present. They do so, suggests Jill Edy, in three different ways. They engage in 'anniversary journalism,' meaning that they commemorate a certain historical event. Secondly, they use historical analogies to 'attempt to make

8. Similar arguments have been put forward by the 'Popular Memory Group.' See ASHPLANT, T.G., DAWSON G. and ROPER, M.: 'The politics of war memory and commemoration. Contexts, structures and dynamics,' in ASHPLANT, T.G., DAWSON G. and ROPER, M. (eds.): *Commemorating War. The Politics of Memory*, London / New York: Routledge 2000, pp. 3-85, on p. 13.

the past relevant to the present by using the past event as a tool to analyse and predict the outcome of a current situation.' Thirdly, they use history to contextualise the present, in order to present a logical narrative in which a selected past serves as the starting point for events in the present[9]. In our case, newspapers might select certain First World War events for commemoration, present (aspects of) the war as key causality components between the past and current issues, or explain the present by pointing to its wartime origins. Journalists' uses of the past in narratives about the present are doubly important, since they base their standards of newsworthiness –and thus their selection of the stories they tell– to a very large degree on what they believe their audiences will find relevant. This means that in talking about the past, they have to consider who their audiences is and what they care about. In our case, if journalists talk about or reference the war, they need to explicitly consider their audiences' war experiences, prior knowledge about the war and expectations about the selection of war-related news stories. Thirdly, newspaper stories, and the connections between present and past made therein, are 'the stuff of social talk.' Narratives presented in newspapers are often retold by readers, who use them to either help form or strengthen their own views or opinions. In this way, even those who have not read the stories themselves are included in the dialogues about the past it created and for which it helped shape the parameters[10].

Specific features of the Dutch press landscape during the interwar years serve to increase its utility for the purpose of uncovering something of the communicative memory contours of the interwar period. Primarily, Dutch newspapers emerged, after 1918, as 'by far the most important mass medium' of the country. The public's insatiable demand for the latest war news had caused a significant market expansion, whilst the constant barrage of partisan press reports and opinions from the belligerent countries created the need for increased editoralisation and interpretation. After the war, Dutch newspapers continued to prosper due to population and economic growth, whilst the new media of the day (newsreels and the radio) were

9. EDY, J.: 'The presence of the past in public discourse,' in HART, R. and SPARROW, B., (eds.): *Politics, discourse and American society: New agendas*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001, pp. 53-70; OLICK, J. K.: 'Reflections on the Underdeveloped Relations between Journalism and Memory Studies,' in ZELIZER, B. and TENEBOIM-WEINBLATT, K. (eds.): *Journalism and Memory*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 17-31, there pp. 24-27.

10. TWOMEY, JANE L.: 'Searching for a Legacy. The Los Angeles Times, Collective Memory and the 10th Anniversary of the 1992 L.A. 'Riots,' *Race, Gender & Class* 11:1 (2004), pp. 75-93, there pp. 79-80; NEIGER, MOTTI, EYAL ZANDBERG and OREN MEYERS: 'Reversed Memory: Commemorating the Past through Coverage of the Present,' in ZELIZER, BARBIE and KEREN TENEBOIM-WEINBLATT (eds.): *Journalism and Memory*, pp. 113-127, on pp. 116-117.

mostly kept at by introducing stylistic and content innovations. In the early 1920s, for example most newspapers introduced bolder headlines, more white spacing and other methods of capturing the public's attention and imagination. Other innovations included the inclusion of news photographs and more diversified and specialised editorial strategies, with a greater emphasis on *faits divers*, sports and scoops. Market growth seems to have capped around 1929 when total newspaper circulation reached about two million copies –on a total population which increased from 7.9 to 8.9 million during 1929-1939.

Moreover, a significant section of the Dutch press enjoyed very close ties to political and/or social-cultural organisations. For example, the board of the social-democratic daily *Het Volk* ('The People') was elected by the Dutch social-democratic party, which meant that its opinions, especially on economic and political matters, usually echoed those of the party establishment. Newspapers that self-identified as Catholic willingly submitted to censorships by the Dutch bishops, indicating that in cultural, philosophical or ethical questions it followed the line set out by them and politically supported the catholic party. The Protestant press, meanwhile, was as divided as the Protestant movement at large was in the Netherlands. Each Protestant newspaper catered to a particular ecclesial strand of Protestantism –the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands being the largest two– which means that, although they shared important aspects of their worldview, they could and did disagree on matters both political and spiritual. Liberal parties and socio-cultural organisations were dead set against any formal links with the friendly press, but this does not mean that some newspapers did call themselves explicitly liberal and tended to view matters of politics and economics through. In addition to the section of the press that were tied –to varying degrees of strength and intensity– to socio-political organisation, about half of the Dutch newspaper press (measured by circulation) did not closely identify with a church, a political party or a circumscribed societal worldview. This 'neutral' section of the press, who supplied about 47 per cent of the total newspaper circulation in 1939, refrained from voicing *a priori* opinions based on political, economic and/or religious conviction, and instead either refrained from comments on or reserved the right to change their minds on these 'fundamental issues'[11].

All of this suggests that the Dutch press, perhaps even more so than those in other countries, had a very clear idea of who its audience was and developed a keen

11. This section and the last based on VAN VREE, F.: *De Nederlandse Pers en Duitsland 1930-1939. Een studie over de vorming van de publieke opinie*, Groningen, Historische Uitgeverij 1989, pp. 37-185; WOLF, M.: *Het Geheim van De Telegraaf*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2009, pp. 170-225; WIJFJES, H.: *Journalistiek in Nederland, 1850-2000. Beroep, cultuur en organisatie*, Amsterdam, Boom 2004, pp. 141-178, citation on p. 149.

notion of their own role in shaping said audience's opinions. This significantly affected news selection, as Frank van Vree has shown in his classic study on Dutch reactions to the Nazi regime in the 1930s[12]. As newspaper editors and journalists were at least partly responsible for spreading ideological messages touching the core of the political and/or religious convictions of their audiences, they considered their central task to be (in the words of Doe Hans, Chairman of the Dutch Association of Journalists) to offer 'guidance,' and 'as a consequence, leadership' to their readers. This notion was widely shared, even among journalists of neutral newspapers, and resulted in a widely shared emphasis on self-control and promoting decency and civil responsibility[13].

The differing socio-cultural, political frameworks which are central to the newspapers' news selection and reporting mean that when they are talking about the Great War, they are referring to an essentially contested and constantly shape-shifting event, which journalists break up into pieces and then reorder to fit into certain narratives connecting it to their vision of the present. These narratives, in turn, are codetermined by and commercial surroundings of their authors. Wolfgang G. Natter has called these narratives 'belated representations,' which are 'engaged in a wider, belated, and inter-discursive battle for control over [...] events, dates, and symbols.'[14] Communicative memory, as expressed in Dutch newspapers, found its expression in differing belated representations of the war. The battle between these different representations –which shifted over time– was waged in newspapers who catered to a wide variety of, usually quite clearly defined, audiences, and were all very outspoken about their aims in 'educating' their public, using their interpretations of history as a key tool to do so.

As a first foray into analysing the communicative memory of the neutral Netherlands in the interwar period, the remainder of this article will deal specifically with the memory of the outbreak of the war as represented by Dutch newspapers. The outbreak of the war was invariably the subject of anniversary journalism: key events from July and August were selected for commemoration. Tellingly, however, these expositions were also used to commemorate the significance of the event, and included references to specific and selected aspects of the wider war. In dealing with the outbreak of the war, newspapers often, and explicitly, engaged in attempts to use the past to analyse the present and predict the future, and to contextualise current events.

12. VAN VREE: *Nederlandse Pers*, 355.

13. HANS, DOE: 'De tegenwoordige positie der pers,' in *De Journalist. Orgaan van den Nederlandschen Journalistenkring* 528 (1936), pp. 121-123, there p. 122.

14. NATTER, WOLFGANG G.: *Literature at War 1914-1940. Representing the 'Time of Greatness' in Germany*, London/New Haven Yale University Press, 1999, p. 17.

The next two sections of this article will feature two illustrations of this evolving discursive battles between different 'belated representations' of the war, and my analysis of how these battles might point the way to the general contours of its communicative memory. By way of case study, I will present my findings on newspapers retrospective pieces, news selection and editors' commentaries on the occasion of the decennary of the outbreak of the Great War in July and August 1924, and during the same two months of 1939, when stories marking the twenty-fifth year since the outbreak of the Great War took on new levels of poignancy as a second Great War broke out.

Separating war from mobilisation. The Decennary of 1924

The decennary of the war was certainly not the first time Dutch newspapers paused to take stock of their wartime experiences. In 1923, for example, the war years played a key role in newspapers' coverage on Dutch Queen Wilhelmina's 25-year jubilee. In retrospectives of her reign, and in reports on the speeches made during the many festivities, the Great War featured prominently. Most newspapers emphasised Dutch united support for the monarchy in general and the ruling house of Oranje in particular, which supposedly found its truest expression in the stoic unity portrayed by the country in the dark days of July and early August 1914. This connection had been made first and foremost by the chairman of the Jubilee Committee, who, at the height of the festivities, addressed his Queen on behalf of a grateful nation[15]:

> Your Majesty! Your people will never forget, that at the first sign of trouble, you rushed to the seat of government, to take an active part in the difficult work of defending the independence of our dear fatherland; how you by your Royal example inspired all of us to work together towards this common goal. In those days the Dutch people, more than ever before, felt one with each other and with Orange, and knew that at that moment an unbreakable bond had been forged between the Netherlands and Orange [...].

The theme of national unity in the face of a nearly insurmountable challenge, and the image of a Dutch people united behind Queen and Government to protect its neutrality proved such an attractive one, that the national organisation committee of the 1924 commemoration copied it wholesale. The committee, consisting of a group of former military men led by lt.-gen. (ret.) W.H. van Terwisga, quickly decided to focus the commemorative efforts on the mobilisation of 1914 as a triumph of national unity. This theme is apparent even in the commemoration programme[16].

15. NA 2.21.261/74: Draft speech C.J.K. van Aalst, s.d.

16. NA 2.04.26.02/566: Correspondence J.C.M. Ruys de Beerenbrouck / Van Terwisga, s.d. and 3 June 1924.

On 30 July 1924 municipal officials were instructed to print and display a prepared manifesto by the Committee, in which Dutch citizens were sternly instructed that the timely and efficient Dutch mobilisation of 1914 had kept the country safe from invasion and thus from the horrors of war. This success was the result of the unity of the Dutch populace, the faith they, justly, placed in their military and political leaders, whose wise council made the country's survival possible, and the sacrifices made by the mobilised soldiers, who often spend years of their lives on the ramparts of the neutral Netherlands, ever ready to lay down their lives for queen and country. Tellingly, the act of displaying a manifesto in public echoed the way most Dutchmen were made aware of their country's mobilisation on 31 July 1914. Ten years, later, that moment was marked by the tolling of bells all over the country, followed by public gatherings to honour the mobilised of 1914-1918. To further underscore the unity of the country, the Dutch Prime Minister, J.C.M. Ruijs de Beerenbrouck, addressed the nation via 'wireless telephone.' Receivers installed in every municipality allowed all Dutchmen, simultaneously and together, to hear their Prime Minister echo the central message of the commemoration committee: the mobilisation was the crowning achievement of the Dutch people's willingness to set aside their differences in the face of a common threat. On 1 August 1914, representations of local mobilised soldiers' clubs attended a ceremony in The Hague, at the site of the monument, unveiled in 1921, to the 'Mobilisation of Army and Fleet.' There, War Minister J.J.C. van Dijk once again emphasised how Dutch military preparedness had saved the Netherlands from disaster in August 1914[17]. Here we have the official line, which contained elements of a military lobby to curb defence cuts by emphasising that Dutch neutrality is necessarily *armed*, attempts to allay fears that the Netherlands might be drawn into the German-French conflicts regarding the Ruhr, and, perhaps most importantly, conscious efforts to emphasise the least problematic aspects of the war for commemoration. If we were to focus purely on the Dutch cultural memory of the Great War, our conclusions would end here.

Dutch newspapers, however, put their own spin on the commemoration, signalling that communicative memory confirmed to different patterns. First of all, in stark contrast to official commemorations which focused purely on the Dutch situation, local as well as major national newspapers all selected the international situation of the Summer of 1914 for commemoration, describing the events of July and early August as a slow march into war and destruction. In doing so, newspapers, also commemorated themselves. The largest newspaper of the Netherlands, the non-affiliated *De Telegraaf*, for example, printed a special issue consisting mostly of

17. Chronology from *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 28-07-1924: 'Herdenking mobilisatie 1914. Overzicht.'

verbatim copies of articles from ten years hence, giving their readers a sense of the developing international crisis, the mobilisations, the last desperate efforts to maintain peace, the panic that enveloped the Netherlands as it became clear that war was inevitable, and ending with measures taken by Dutch parliament to secure food, quell the disturbed financial markets, and mobilise the armed forces to protect its neutrality. Careful not to pass any judgement on who was responsible for the war, *De Telegraaf* highlighted not only that it was more than capable of reporting the news in the most difficult of circumstances, it also effectively contrasted the horrors of war and the anarchic chaos of the international situation of 1914 with the situation of the Netherlands. Stricken by (understandable) panic at first, effective government measures brought the situation under control and created the preconditions for neutrality: national unity, expressed in national mobilisation[18].

Other newspapers, covering almost the entire Dutch societal-political spectrum, stress the dichotomy between chaos and unity even more. In their reports on the commemoration, they highlight its solemn, serious nature, and remind readers that the war cost so many so dearly, even in the Netherlands. Those who did their national and moral duty by reporting for mobilisation, paid a heavy price: their health suffered from poor living conditions and the strain of living with the constant threat of invasion hanging over their heads. However, most newspapers emphasise that the mobilisation had been a force for good. Even though the official line –that mobilisation had kept the country safe– is openly questioned, it is remembered as a pure expression of national unity and, conversely, as a mechanism which literally brought the Dutch together. The theme of mobilisation as both the result and engine of national unity is repeated in the liberal daily *Het Vaderland*. In a retrospective, the newspaper commented that the mobilised Dutch army, even though it could not hope to best its British or German counterparts, was nevertheless of 'great moral value.' '[O]ur boys went, [...] unsure of their fate, willing to sacrifice themselves valiantly' for the sake of others. Their courageous efforts made the country truly 'as one, from Dollard to Scheldt.'

The catholic daily *Het Centrum* ('The Centre') offered a similar analysis. It cited extensively from one of the eloquent speeches made by the Franciscan monk Borromeus de Greeve, one of the best-known orators of Dutch Catholicism, on the occasion of the Decennary, in which he indicated that mobilisation increased love of Fatherland through hardships shared with people from all over the country, and, through the bonds forged in wartime between Queen and Army, with the monarchy. He ended his speech with a prayer, meant to once more underscore national unity:

18. *De Telegraaf*, 01-08-1924, special issue; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28-07-1924 Avondblad, 'Voor tien jaren!.'

'We want to keep the Netherlands, we want to keep Limburg, we want to keep Zeeland, and we want to keep the house of Orange'[19]. This prayer –which reads more like a list of demands– is significant, since it is one of the few direct references to historical events unrelated to the mobilisation. In early 1919, the Netherlands experienced an annexation scare when fears that Belgians would demand Dutch territory (notably Limburg and parts of Zeeland province) at the Versailles Treaty, compounded by Protestant Dutch fears that their catholic countrymen would side with their annexationist coreligionists.The socialist *Het Volk*, too, seemed to join in the choir singing the praises of mobilisation as a unifying experience. The editorial board commemorated the common man's mobilisation by printing their recollections of 1914-1918. A typical fragments reads[20]:

> Those wonderful days that brought us together, that made us traverse the four corners of our country, the spark of heroism in our eyes, laughter at our lips, poisonous profanities ever at the tips of our tongues, hearts full of bitterness and souls that cursed our new state of slavery, in which we could not yet see the beauty.

The anti-militaristic overtones ('state of slavery') are even more pronounced in *Het Volk*'s reports on the official commemoration. Noting that '[a] few toffs with high hats and some gaudy officers were firmly in charge'[21], *Het Volk* criticised this elitist celebration of the 'cruel date' of 1 August 1914 (when mobilisation had officially begun), which 'plucked' ordinary workers 'from their labours,' leaving behind their 'women and children in squalor and agony,' while being forced to waste away their days guarding the borders, confined to a 'stupid existence of doing nothing and wasting the days away.' Noting the enormous economic impact of mobilisation –although the government did pay mobilised soldiers, this usually was insufficient to compensate for income lost– and the fact that, in some cases, mobilised soldiers were still owed back pay, *Het Volk* quoted a former soldier as saying: 'And if I ruminate on those days once more, I say, and many will say it with me, I do not wish to partake in any commemoration, and do not wish to remember!'[22]. Reports by the communist *Tribune* on local commemorations are even more scathing. A reporter attended the Hilversum ceremony where the 'riff raff' had come to hear pious priests and military men thank 'God, the Queen and the Army' for keeping the Netherlands safe, but left halfway through: 'We had enough. We let the gentlemen and their flock

19. *Het Centrum*, 01-08-1924, 'Herdenking Mobilisatie. Klokgelui en Redevoeringen.'
20. *Het Volk*, 31-07-1924, 'Herdenkingsnotitie van een landstormman.'
21. *Het Volk*, 02-08-1924, 'De mobilisatie-herdenking. Een nationale betooging van 3000 man. Een tuiltje chauvinisme.'
22. *Het Volk*, 01-08-1924, 'Brief van een oud-landweerman.'

be to enjoy their patriotic music'[23]. In keeping with their disdain for the official line, left-wing newspaper reports constantly emphasise the low level of popular participation in the commemorations. Other newspapers, however, claim the opposite.

Reacting to socialist and communist news reports, the local *Middelburgsche Courant* refutes reports of workers' disinterest in the commemoration, accusing the Left of using the solemn occasion for propaganda purposes. In doing so, it draws readers' attention to the failed socialist revolution of November 1918, when the majority socialists attempted to copy their German colleagues' example. Arguing that socialist agitation 'which ate away our country's discipline' caused a temporary breakdown in, and then a reaffirmation of national unity –as the revolution failed to gain much traction and was, in effect, 'cancelled' by the socialists– they accused *Het Volk* of having learned nothing. Once again, six years on, they were undermining national unity in refusing to honour those who were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend neutrality and country[24].

Despite the differences of opinion on the nature, impact, and meaning of the Dutch mobilisation, socialist, communist and 'bourgeois' analyses of the European political landscape, which invariably accompanied commentaries on the commemoration of the outbreak of war and the start, were surprisingly compatible. Although nearly all newspapers on the left credit the mobilised Dutch army with enormous bravery, not all are convinced that it, as the committee's official communique claimed, is primarily responsible for maintaining Dutch neutrality during the war. Consequently, only a few newspapers (most notably the catholic *De Tijd* ('The Times') echoed the official commemoration committee's call for more defence spending or, indeed, shared their reasoning that only a modern Dutch army could secure Dutch independence and neutrality if one of the international hot spots (the occupation of the German Ruhr by Belgian and French forces seemed particularly dangerous) erupted into another world war[25]. Most others, however, argued international cooperation within the framework of the League of Nations, and disarmament were the only way to secure a peaceful future for Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular[26].

What tentative conclusions can we draw from this overview of Dutch 'belated representations' of the outbreak of the war? First of all, there seem to be three main narratives of the outbreak of war. All of them share the view that the First World War

23. *De Tribune*, 04-08-1924, 'Hilversum. Mobilisatieherdenking.'
24. *Middelburgsche Courant*, 31-07-1924, 'Een stille herdenking.'
25. *De Tijd*, 04-08-1924: 'Haagsche brieven.'
26. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 31-07-1924, 'Herdenken en vooruitzien;' *De Telegraaf*, 01-08-1924, 'Naar betere toekomst.'

was a global disaster, that the Netherlands is lucky to have been spared the death and destruction that accompanied it, and that the Netherlands therefore had a war experience quite distinct from that of the belligerents. Two of the three narrative strands, shared by most Dutch journalists, focus on recasting and compressing a complex Dutch First World War experience into an *Augusterlebnis* untainted by hatred of the enemy or lust for conquest, but animated by pure love of Fatherland. There is some discussion on whether Dutch mobilisation functioned as the deterrent that the official commemoration want it to be –with some papers, friendly to the government, claiming it did, but most denying it– but everybody sees great worth in it nonetheless. A third narrative runs counter to this interpretation, which is understandable given the isolated political position of communists and, following the aborted 1918 revolution, the Dutch socialists. Their papers paint a picture of misery and squalor, of misguided and mindless militarism and nationalism.

From one mobilisation to the next. Twenty-five years after, 1939

In late July and early August 1939, newspapers once again commemorated the outbreak of war. Superficially, they did so in similar ways as fifteen years earlier. First of all, they commemorated their own role, by once again reprinting news articles from their own pages on national and international events leading up to the declarations of war, the start of Dutch mobilisation, and the horrors of war the Dutch were saved from. Other journalists recalled their own mobilisation experiences[27]. In all those stories, the Dutch reader is, once more, reminded of the seemingly-unpredictable nature of the events leading up to war, and of the panic that engulfed their countrymen[28]. Accounts of Dutch mobilisation once again take central stage, as newspapers report on the local and national commemorations staged by the National Confederation 'The Mobilisation Cross,' which took its name from the commemorative medal created by the 1924 commemoration committee. Local newspapers extensively report on local branches, where, interestingly, the solemn and sombre tone of 1924 seems to have made way for nostalgia for merriment and nostalgia. Reports on the Rotterdam branch' commemoration activities starts off on a familiar tone: speeches by retired generals on the unbreakable bond between Queen, Nation and Army, the Dutch coming together as one in the early days of mobilisation, and the dettering effect Dutch mobilisation had had on the belligerents. New was the

27. E.g. *Leeuwarder Courant*, 05-08-1939, 'Mobilisatie-herinneringen III.'
28. E.g. *Het Vaderland*, 01-08-1939, 'Deze week... in 1914. Wat Het Vaderland toen aan zijn lezers berichtte;' *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 02-08-1939, 'Van Overal. Augustus 1914: De Wereldoorlog brak uit;' *Limburger Koerier*, 04-08-1939, 'Nederland eensgezind;' *De Banier*, 01-09-1939, 'Een zwarte dag: 1 augustus 1914. De oorlog begon, waarin 17 millioen dooden vielen.'

extensive praise for wartime Generalissimo Snijders, who had died in May 1939. However, from the reports it is clear that the highlight of the programme was the entertainment, which featured the 'Amsterdam Mobilisation Choir' singing (risqué) wartime songs, the well-known music hall husband-and-wife duo Koos Speenhoff and Cesarina Prinz, and comedians Corrie Vonk and Wim Kan[29]. The change in tone is perfectly exemplified in an interview with a retired Cmdr. Van Leer in the local *Limburger Koerier*[30]:

> Of course times were hard and service was rough back then, but luckily it is the pleasant things that human memory best preserves: [...] good comradeship, the jokes and the fun, that fantastic bar around the corner where they served a great local beer, and where the local girl flashed you her most beautiful smile. Perhaps now she has a daughter of her own, who now smiles the same smile for a younger generation of soldiers.

Van Leer's mention of a 'younger generation' of mobilised soldiers is indicative that, despite the nostalgia, the commemorations took place in the context of a rapidly deteriorating international situation. Following Nazi-Germany's dismemberment of rump Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the air was rife with tension and, in stark contrast to 1924 –when the threat of a new world war breaking out over the Ruhr was distant and, to most, unrealistic– everyone expected a new conflict to come sooner rather than later. A journalist at *Het Vaderland*, for example, reminisces that in late July and early August 1914 people were utterly overwhelmed and faced situations they had never imagined possible, 'but now we are mentally prepared for the worst to come at any moment.'[31]

When the Dutch army was once again issued general mobilisation orders on 28 August 1939, effective the following day, comparisons between the two seemed to become even more prevalent. The weather, for example, become a talking point in various newspapers, with journalists remarking on the poignancy that both in 1914 and 1939, the sky was clear the day mobilisation was officially announced, but that soon dark clouds gathered and the rumbling of coming thunderstorms could be heard: an apt metaphor for the coming of war[32]. Other 1939 events also lent themselves to

29. *De Gooi- en Eemlander*, 01-08-1939: 'Herdenking van de mobilisatie 1914. Door den nationalen bond «Het Mobilisatie Kruis»'; *De Tijd*, 01-08-1939, 'Herdenking van de mobilisatie 1914'). See also *Nieuwsblad van Friesland*, 11-08-1939, 'Vijf en twintig jaar geleden: Kun je nog zingen, zing dan mee!': fragmenten uit 'Het gezangenboek van den veldprediker.'

30. *Limburger Koerier*, 01-08-1939, 'Grenswacht 1914.'

31. *Het Vaderland*, 01-08-1939, 'Herinneringen aan de laatste-Juli- en begin-Augustusdagen 1914,' door D.S.v.Z. A similar sentiment is echoed in *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, 09-09-1939, 'Herinneringen aan Augustus 1914. Hoe men op de gebeurtelijkheden van die dagen reageerde'

32. *Utrechts Volksblad*, 29-08-1939, 'De mobilisatie. Tijdens wolkbreuk afgekondigd;' *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, 04-09-1939, 'Een bewogen Zondag'

comparisons with 1914: once again, mobilised soldiers had to say goodbye to their loved ones, facing uncertainty in the comradeship of their new mates[33]. Once more, Dutchmen on holiday abroad and foreign holidaymakers rushed home, creating long traffic jams at the border[34]. And, just like in 1914, British and German representatives in the Netherlands both pledged to honour the country's neutrality[35].

With the realisation that war is coming again, something of the seriousness with which the mobilisation of 1914 was treated in 1924, which seemed almost wholly absent just a month earlier, returns. Gone are the frivolous details of flirting with girls and drinking beer. 'Those were four tough years, sir,' a former soldiers tells the *Limburger Koerier* of the Great War years. 'We were all overcome with joy when it finally ended'[36]. The connection between the dangers of neutrality watch in past and present were made painfully clear when, on 8 September 1939, minesweeper *Willem van Ewijck* struck a mine and sank, with the loss of all thirty hands. The lead-in to the article reporting the news of the disaster in *Het Vaderland* features a description of the Den Helder naval monument, unveiled in 1922 and dedicated to those who defended the nation and its neutrality at sea during the Great War, noting that to the many names inscribed at its base thirty new ones will have to be added.

None of the editorials seem to regard Dutch belligerency in a new world war as a serious possibility, but rather prepared Dutchmen for a return to the 1914-1918 days of mobilisation and watchful neutrality[37]. Most likely, the editors seem to have opted deliberately for a calming tone in order to instil confidence in their readership. They did so by stating how much better the Dutch were prepared for what was coming than they were in 1914, for example by reporting very favourably on the speedy success of the 1939 Dutch mobilisation, completed within a day. In 1914, the conservative-liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* stated (falsely), it took a full week of chaos and panic before the army was in position[38]. In stark contrast to August 1914, parts of the Dutch army reserves had already been called up in April 1939 in a so-called 'pre-mobilisation,' and before the rest were ordered to barracks

33. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 03-09-1939, 'Anders - en toch hetzelfde;' *De Tijd*, 30-08-1939, 'Fotoreportage;' *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 03-08-1939, 'Zooals in 1914! Soldatencourant voor de grenstroepen.'

34. *De Tijd*, 28-08-1939, 'Hollanders keeren terug.'

35. *Het Vaderland*, 28-08-1939, 'Een historische parallel. Naar aanleiding van mededeeling van den Duitschen gezant'

36. *Limburger Koerier*, 09-09-1939, '1870-1914-1939. Drie generaties, drie mobilisaties'

37. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28-08-1939, 'Nederland weerbaar!;' *Leeuwarder Courant*, 26-08-1939, 'Voor het thee-uur.'

38. Cited in *Limburger Koerier*, 09-09-1939, 'Uit de Pers. Onze mobilisatie.' See also *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 09-09-1939, 'Mobilisatie.'

advance warning had been given just prior to the weekend, giving, journalists noted, mobilised soldiers ample time to say their goodbyes[39]. Further accounting for the differences between '14 and '39, journalists point to the increased use of motorised transport, telephone and telegraph, the pre-mobilisation, and years of planning and preparation. This extended, newspapers noted, to the tiniest of details: the outbreak of the Great War saw serious disruptions in the Dutch football league since teams had to drop out as their players were mobilised, but for the Second Great War the Royal Dutch Football Association announced that the new season would continue as planned, although without the possibility of promotion of degradation[40]. Journalist, most of all, took note of the general calm demeanour, which contrasted sharply with the panic of 1914: people know what is expected of them and what to expect. They had time to prepare, and knew from either first- or second-hand experience what a prolonged period of mobilisation looks like[41]. The *communis opinio*, as expressed in the vast majority of Dutch newspapers seems to be: we are even better at mobilising, and therefore at staying out of Great Wars, then we were in 1914.

Similar sentiments are expressed when newspapers comment on more specific aspects of the 1914-1918 war, which are invariably seen in relation to the country's current situation. Economics never really featured much in the commemorative coverage in 1924, except in Socialist newspapers who stressed the enduring economic difficulties of mobilised soldiers. Nevertheless, both the number and the depth of the articles printed on the economic situation of the Netherlands on the eve of a new world war, comparing it to the country's state both in July 1914 and during the world war, suggests a readership that actively remembered them. Just as the mobilisation of 1939 was seen to compare favourably to that of 1914, so the economic situation, according to the mainstream press, has improved immensely. In contrast to the deteriorating food and raw material situation during the Great War, the Netherlands is, in key foodstuffs, either 'self-supporting' or has amassed enough stock to see it through another great war[42]. Newspapers are especially keen to point out that the Dutch Government has amassed plenty of grain, and assure consumers that Great War-era price hikes and ever smaller rations will not be repeated[43]. Other articles on the economics of mobilisation strike a similar tone: although the

39. *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 02-09-1939, 'Los en vast.'
40. *Het Vaderland*, 28-08-1939, 'De competitie van den K.N.V.B.'
41. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 03-09-1939, 'Mobilisatie-indrukken uit 1914.'
42. *De Tijd*, 05-09-1939, 'Haagsche brieven. In oorlogstijd. Vergelijking tusschen 1914 en nu.'
43. *Het Vaderland*, 14-09-1939, 'De graanvoorziening baart minder zorg dan in 1914;' *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*, 12-09-1939, 'Onze oogst van dit jaar. Productie telt de helft van onze behoefte;' *De Tijd*, 11-09-1939, 'Groote vooruitgang sinds 1914. Voor suiker, brandstoffen en zuivel self-supporting.'

Netherlands can never be completely self-reliant on its own food production, the Dutch are well prepared and will barter what they cannot produce themselves[44]. Moreover, the government is prepared; with the experience of both the Great War and the economic crisis of the 1930s under its belt, it is more than ready to deal with a new extended period of armed neutrality[45]. Even the reaction from the stock markets in Amsterdam and Rotterdam –which nosedived and had to be suspended at the outbreak of the Great War, threatening the entire financial system and adding to the wartime panic– is noted to be muted, another indication of Dutch practical and mental preparedness, according to newspapers[46].

A second key difference between '14 and '39 remarked on by Dutch newspapers concerns the position of socialists. Newspapers from nearly the entire political spectrum, and from the local to the national, stress the need for unity, often explicitly referring to the '14 mobilisation as a case in point. Speeches made by Dutch parliamentarians in July and August of 1914 are extensively cited, and the reader is reminded time and again how national unity was such an integral aspect of Great War-era armed neutrality[47]. Luckily, stated the liberal *Algemeen Handelsblad*, the country was more united now than ever. Since 10 August 1939, a unity government headed by D.J. de Geer which, for the first time, included socialists, was in office. The editorial reminded readers of socialist leader P.J. Troelstra's parliamentary speech of early August 1914, in which he stated that the 'national idea now superseded all national strife.' Tellingly, no explicit mention was made of Troelstra's role in the 1918 revolution, although the editorial does state that it believes Socialists' love of fatherland to be sincere. 'UNITED our nation now acts,' it concludes[48]. Similar notions are echoed in socialist newspapers: here, too, we find a stress on unity and on the common defence of Dutch neutrality, independence and *democracy* –socialist newspapers, like nearly all others, make little effort to hide on which side of the front lines there sympathies lie, although they are very sincere in their desire to see the Netherlands maintain neutral[49].

44. *Het Vaderland*, 14-09-1939, 'De blokkade en onze veestapel.
45. *Nieuwsblad van Friesland*, 06-09-1939, 'Op en om de boerderij;' *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 02-09-1939: 'Vischvoorziening in tijd van oorlog. Regeering bereid gunstige molestverzekering van materieel mogelijk te maken.'
46. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 26-08-1939, 'Dagen van spanning in 1914 en thans. Het vraagstuk van beurssluiting wellicht spoedig urgent. Speculatieve posities van veel minder omvang dan in 1914. Raming van uitstaand bedrag aan prolongatie,' and 13-09-1939, 'Beurs en nijverheid.'
47. *Limburger Koerier*, 05-09-1939, 'Tweede Kamer in bange tijden bijeen.'
48. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25-08-1939, 'Gesloten gelederen'
49. E.g. *Zaans volksblad*, 05-09-1939, 'De democratie tone zich in staat tot handelen. Neutraliteit is iets dat vanzelf spreekt.'

Explicit references to the First World War-era are also used to predict the outcome of the next war. Germany, most newspapers conclude in August and early September 1939, is in worse shape in '39 than it was in '14 and will, even after a successful Polish campaign, probably sue for peace[50]. Newspapers also go out of their way to explain the distinct lack of trenches, which Dutch readers evidently equated with 'world war,' in Poland, pointing to the general unsuitability of the battleground terrain for digging in[51]. Finally, memories of the First World War are invoked in preparing the Dutch population for the practicalities of another long bout of neutrality. *De Telegraaf*, for example, printed a series of tutorials on the distribution system, constantly referring to distribution as a core Dutch experience during the last war[52], whilst the Utrechts *Volksdagblad* advises socialist women on what, judging from the experiences of the last war, their role might be[53].

Only newspapers associated to fringe political parties (communists and national-socialists, most specifically, print narratives that run counter to the remarkably consistent languages and images used in the mainstream media. But even their, to our contemporary eyes almost laughably slanted, analyses are often based on quite similar references to the First World War period, with the communist *Tribune* arguing, for example, that government and press assurances of preparedness were nothing more than a ruse to keep workers docile, in order to stop a potential 1918-style revolution dead in its tracks. They did so by extensively and explicitly recalling World War I-era economic woes, pointing to them as a sign of things to come (again)[54].

Conclusions and outlook

In this article, I have presented an admittedly very small and somewhat arbitrary selection of Dutch newspaper articles dealing with their 'belated representations' of the war. However, since they present such near-unanimous retroactive

50. *Amigoe di Curaçao*, 30-08-1939: 'Toen en nu;' *Leeuwarder nieuwsblad*, 02-08-1939, 'Duitschland herdenkt 1914. Een vergelijkend overzicht.'

51. *De Tijd*, 11-09-1939, 'Een rede en een antwoord. Rusland en Roemenië mobiliseeren. Warschau houdt stand.'

52. *De Telegraaf*, 01-09-1939, 'Hoe werkt de distributie? Hoofdstad in eerste stadium: noodkaarten worden uitgereikt. Onderwijl: inventarisatie der voorraden' See also the even more practical *Leeuwarder Courant*, 15-09-1939, 'Huishoudproblemen in mobilisatietijd'

53. *Utrechts volksblad*, 01-09-1939, 'Verantwoordelijkheid der vrouwen is groot'

54. *Het Volksdagblad*, 30-08-1939: 'Distributie dreigt,' and 04-09-1939, 'Onverschilligheid maakt plaats voor belangstelling. Een stemmingsbeeld in mobilisatie-tijd. De Communistische Partij is paraat.'

characterisations of the Great War, and the Dutch experience therein, I believe it is nonetheless possible to draw a number of tentative conclusions regarding the contours and shapes of its communicative memory.

First of all, nearly Dutch newspapers, with socialist and communist newspapers being, initially, the only exceptions, present the mobilisation of 1914 as a very positive experience. This 'great day in the national life of our people'[55] is consequently framed, through the careful selection of texts and images, to be the epitome of the Dutch First World War experience, exemplifying the very best the country had to offer. Although considerable differences of opinion existed whether mobilisation had indeed saved the country from invasion, there is unanimous agreement that the coming together of the country in a time of need is a moment of great significance. In 1924, it is widely acknowledged that that unity had a price, paid for by the heroic self-sacrifice of the mobilised men and their families, and the official commemorations (both local and national) are described in appropriately sombre and serious tones. Underlining the differences between the neutral Netherlands and the belligerents, some newspapers stress that whereas in London, Paris and Brussels the 11th of November is 'celebrated' [sic] in nationalistic tones, whereas the Dutch chose the 1st of August to remember 'their' mobilisation[56].

In 1939, the tragic initially took a back seat to the warm glow of nostalgia, partly because, without much political framing of the commemorative events, the local committees seemed to have emphasised the social aspects of mobilisation. Although it is now near-universally portrayed as the coming-together of the Dutch people, seems to have lost some of its sharper edges and is now seen as a national social gathering, in which fear of invasion, loss of income and solitude in retrospect have given way to merriment and even a boyish excitement.

However, with the dawn of another war, references to the Great War took on a different meaning. By explicitly comparing '1914' with '1939,' journalists emphasised Dutch preparedness by presenting the unfolding Second Great War as adhering to a script as set out by the First, and by underscoring how much better prepared economically, politically and even mentally the country was than it had been in 1914 –often by inviting the reader to recall specific episodes of the country's 1914-1918 history. In a sense, 1939 is presented as an even better version of 1914, in which national unity, mobilisation and neutrality are presented as integral parts of a very Dutch trinity. Surviving another Great War depended, it seems, as much

55. *De Tijd*, 30-07-1924: 'Herdenking van de mobilisatie 1914'

56. *De Gooi en Eemlander*, 01-08-1924, 'Bussum. Herdenking mobilisatie'

on outside forces as on the workings of said trinity, claimed the liberal *Leeuwarder Courant*[57]:

> Now that Europe's fateful hour is upon us, we will need to show once more what our nation can muster. May we survive this new test, and bear the material and immaterial consequences of this new war, which will be severe even to those outside of it.

What do these belated representations of the war –which, for the most part, are uniform in their portrayal of what is considered the most important *Dutch* aspect of it, namely the mobilisation– tell us about the shape of Dutch communicative memory of the war?

Speculatively, it tells us, first of all, that Dutch memory of the war was widely seen as distinct from that of the belligerents. The mobilisation of 1914 came to be its fixture, and the first week of August –in which Dutch mobilisation was complete and Dutch collective nerve, frayed to near breaking point by the outbreak of the Great War, settled– came to embody it, perhaps just as the first day of the Somme has come to embody British memories of the war. This, by itself, is notable, because it shows such a remarkable contrast to the pan-European cultural memory characterised by death and mourning, and also disproves notions that the Great War left no memory imprint on neutrals. Perhaps most interesting of all is that it seems like it could do so by turning something that seems to the casual observer to be passive and boring –namely, being mobilised but not actually fighting– into an heroic act of self-sacrifice. Even those who did not actively partake in the mobilisation where somehow organic part of it, through the national unity that made it possible and of which it was the purest, but not the only, expression. This view of the Great War past was broadcasted so loudly and uniformly, by an increasing number of newspapers written from different ideological vantage points for very different audiences, that it must either have had a significant impact or that it was so relatively uncontested that no significant counternarratives could emerge. The only meaningful anti-narrative, as printed in the socialist press, was disjointed, and in the 1930s –when the socialists tried their very best to become part of the establishment– quietly and unceremoniously replaced with the mainstream narrative, which remained relatively unchanged throughout the entire interwar period.

However, almost as if commenting on the fleeting nature of communicative memory, a journalist at the *NRC* was asked to reminisce in early Summer 1939 –so just before the outbreak of the Second World War– about his mobilisation experiences, but found he had considerable difficulty remembering: 'My memory seemed, at

57. *Leeuwarder Courant*, 05-09-1939, 'Persoverzicht'

first, foggy. Only sporadically do vague shapes re-emerge'[58]. Without memory 'sites' to anchor the past to the present, and without overt attempts to politicise the commemoration of the war after 1924, it seems, the 'collective' memories of the Dutch First World War was fluid and could be quite easily reordered, so that new elements could be introduced with the main narrative or, indeed removed therefrom. However, the main plot line –that mobilisation was a heroic, nationally unifying experience– itself was remarkably stable; we see it repeated throughout the entire interwar period by an increasing number of newspapers written from different ideological vantage points for very different audiences. It was also a myth (as perhaps most memories are): it formed the basis of the, apparently widespread idea, that Dutch neutrality *just worked* as long as the Dutch people worked hard enough for it and believed in it enough. The German invasion of 10 May 1940 shattered that illusion and, with it, the central tenet of the Dutch memory of the First World War.

58. *De Sumatra Post*, 30-08-1939, 'Mobilisatie, een kwart eeuw geleden. Een (vage) herinnering aan de eerste dagen.