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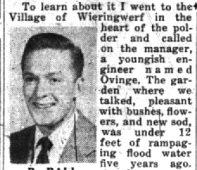
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New Dutch Crops Are Growing Where Nazis Flooded Farmland 5 Years Ago

By ROBERT BALL

WIERINGERMEER, The Netherlands—It does a reporter good to be able to tell the story of a reconstruction job that is nearly finished, and it is perhaps not surprising that the story comes from Holland, where even the bombed-out houses are neat and clean.

It is the story of the recovery of the Wieringermeer polder land, flooded by the Germans in the last weeks of the war.



R. BALL

To learn about it I went to the village of Wieringermeer in the heart of the polder and called on the manager, a youngish engineer named Ovinge. The garden where we talked, pleasant with bushes, flowers, and a new sod, was under 12 feet of rampaging flood water five years ago.

As far as one can see over the hills and landscape (Ovinge is used to hearing people say: "I knew it would be flat, but I didn't know it would be so flat.") few traces of the disaster remain.

The HOUSE AND barns are suspiciously new and there are no trees, but otherwise the farmland strikes fertile and unmarred out to the horizon.

The 20-year-old, 50,000-acre Wieringermeer polder was first step in the plan which will eventually regain about 550,000 acres from the Zuider Zee, just about moving that well-known body of water right out of the geography books.

In the well-diked polder the water would normally stand at the secondary windows of the 512 farms and the three villages. In 1949 the water really was there. "You mustn't think that land recovery is anything new for us," Ovinge began. "We've been draining and diking since the 16th century."

"IN THOSE DAYS the polder were built by Amsterdam merchants with money made in the East Indian trade. Now it's the

German government who foots the bill and owns the land.

"Our polder farmers rent land, house and barn from the government on a twelve-year term with renewal privileges.

"The rent varies with the amount of sand in the soil but averages \$30 a year for each 2 1/2 acres, and the barn including Winter wheat and seed potatoes are the big crops."

April 17, 1945 was the black day. German officers routed the village mayors out of bed at 4:00 a.m. to tell them that the dike would be blown at noon.

"The only good luck was that the flood water, coming from the enclosed Zuider Zee, was nearly fresh. If it had been sea water, we'd have had to let the land desalt for three years before planting."

"As it was, we planted immediately. It was hard work, because no one could live in the polder. Nearly all the houses were gone.

"Every morning we brought in the farmers and reconstruction workers, but we got a normal crop that year."

"THAT WAS FOUR YEARS ago. Now we can say that the job is nearly finished. Still some building going on, but that's mostly additions.

"We used the chance to change the layout of the villages and make them larger. The only thing we can't speed up are the trees. We've planted them, but it's out of our hands now.

"I'll be glad when they're full grown. This landscape is so terrifically flat, you know."

CARRYING WHAT they could, the polder dwellers evacuated to Middelblik, 12 miles south.

"What they couldn't carry was stored in second floor bedrooms and attics. There was some looting, both by Germans and Dutch.

"The Germans claimed a military reason, danger of paratroop landings on the flat polder," Ovinge said.

"But they were already surrounded. I think the truth was that they wanted in the short time left, but as much as they could. The Wieringermeer polder was our pride and they took the chance to hit us in our heart."

TWO DAYS AFTER the gap was opened the Zuider Zee fish could swim again everywhere they had swum 20 years before. The seeds for the 1945 crop lay two fathoms deep.

"Ten days after the flooding, the German commander sent me a letter," Ovinge continued. "It was ridiculous and tragic at the same time. He said he was sorry and gave permission to refrain the polder.

"The Germans even made an effort to close the gap, but at that time, just before the surrender, they had nothing to do the work with. As soon as possible after the surrender we began the job ourselves."

"WE WERE SHORT of everything, money, labor and materials, but we started anyway. We had to hurry. We needed the 1946 crop.

"Besides, the water was eroding the soft inside wall of the enclosing dike and storms were damaging the buildings. Every time a north wind whipped up waves on the flood water, dozens of houses crumbled.

The first step, laying of a new dike outside the gap, was finished in August. Then the pumping began.

In 1930 it had taken six months to drain the polder, in 1945 11 auxiliary pumps, five of them donated by the United States, supplemented the pumping station.

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Four New Teachers, Two Custodians Are Employed by B of E

The Birmingham school board has announced contracts signed by the following for the coming school year:

Barbara Jane Hill, physical education instructor for girls Baldwin senior high school; Marjorie McKay, English teacher at Barman junior high school; W. A. Hime, sixth grade teacher, Adams school; and Helen Jacques, librarian for Baldwin high school.

The board also announced the resignation of Miss Margery Euhl as first grade teacher at Adams school had been accepted.

THOMAS BOSLEY and John Wood have been regularly employed as custodians for the public school system. The eight engineers and custodians of the system were authorized to attend the convention at Michigan State college June 29 through July 1.

Dr. Dwight B. Ireland, superintendent of schools, was authorized to purchase a new wood-cutting band saw for the industrial arts department of the senior high school.

Pumper to be Housed by Walnut Lk. School

The Birmingham board of education has granted permission to the Walnut Lake school district to store their new pumper which has been purchased by the Walnut Lake volunteer firemen in the school garage.

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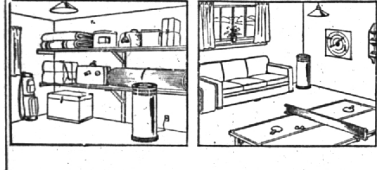
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