

Grebbelinie 1940: Water & Fire

Accompanying materials

Meeting point: Fort De Gagel

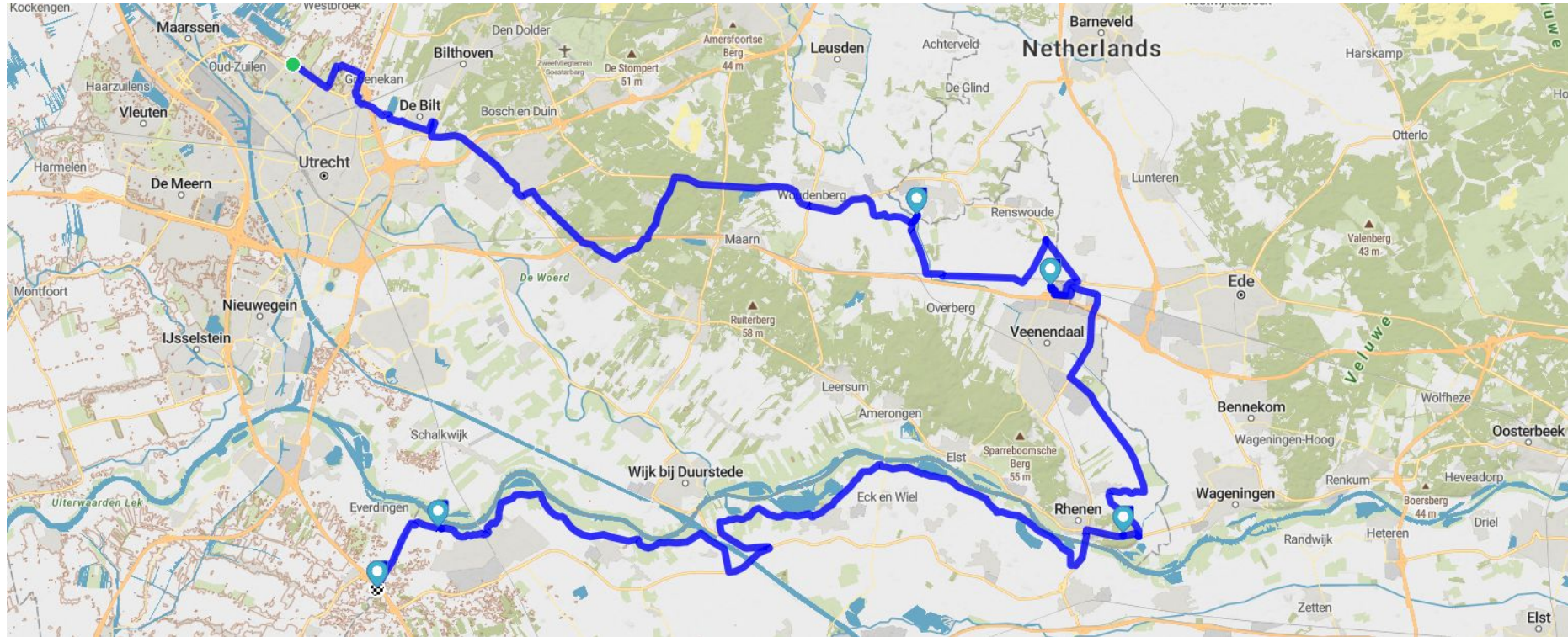
- **Geography:** Two-thirds of the Netherlands is a low-lying alluvial plain. Centuries of draining peat caused the land to sink, creating a "**hydraulic battery**" of potential energy held back by dikes.
- **Inundation Logic:** Flooding land to a "knee-deep" **30–50 cm** made it too deep for marching but too shallow for boats.
- **The Fort's Role:** Forts defended "**accesses**"—high ground or roads that could not be flooded. Utrechtse Heuvelrug - elevated ground!
- **Evolution:** The Old Waterline stopped the French in **1672** (rampjaar). The 19th-century New Dutch Waterline (NDW) moved east to include **Utrecht**. High-explosive shells (1885) forced the transition from **brick to concrete**.
- **Grebbelinie Link:** A forward shield built to buy time for the NDW to fully flood. In 1940, it was chosen as the **primary defense** due to its superior high ground.
- **Point out bunkers:** built in 1940 to modernise the forts of the NDW, we will ride past more forts! Type B bunker, the most numerous!





- Main resistance line
- ||||| Dieldijk
- ▨ Inundated fields in times of war
- ↪ Inlet of river or lake
- ★ Fortified city
- ⬡ Vesting
- Batterij
- Werken
- Bunkers are not on this map

Trip overview



1st stop: Scherpenzeel sector - Lambalgen

1. Strategic Context

- **Fall Gelb Northern Sector**
- **The Netherlands is neutral** - Like in WW1
- **The Sand Ridge Bulwark:** Lambalgen sits on a natural sand ridge, a high point used since 1745 to contain the critical Lambalgerkom inundation basin.
- **Tactical Bottleneck:** It served as a "dry access" point; if captured, the Germans could have drained the entire Scherpenzeel sector's water defenses.
- **Failure of the Waters:** Due to a dry spring, the expected inundations were often just mud, forcing soldiers to rely on their trenches and bunkers instead of water barriers. Also explain how farmers fought inundation.

2. The Battle (May 13, 1940)

- **The Massive Assault:** The German 227th Infantry Division launched a major attack supported by 76 artillery barrels.
- **The Dutch "Wall":** Defenders from the 15th and 22nd Infantry Regiments held their fire until the last moment, effectively halting the German advance.
- **German Retreat:** Surprised by the "fixed determination" of the Dutch, General Zickwolf was forced to order a retreat that evening to regroup.

3. Heroes and Figures

- **Captain Moquette:** At the nearby "Angel Redoubt" (De Engelaar), he and a few dozen men held off **two full German battalions** using only earth and wood fortifications. Hold fire until the last moment.
- **Sergeant Bongers:** Successfully engaged low-flying Luftwaffe aircraft using only **Hembrug carbines** and a Vickers machine gun, reportedly shooting one down.

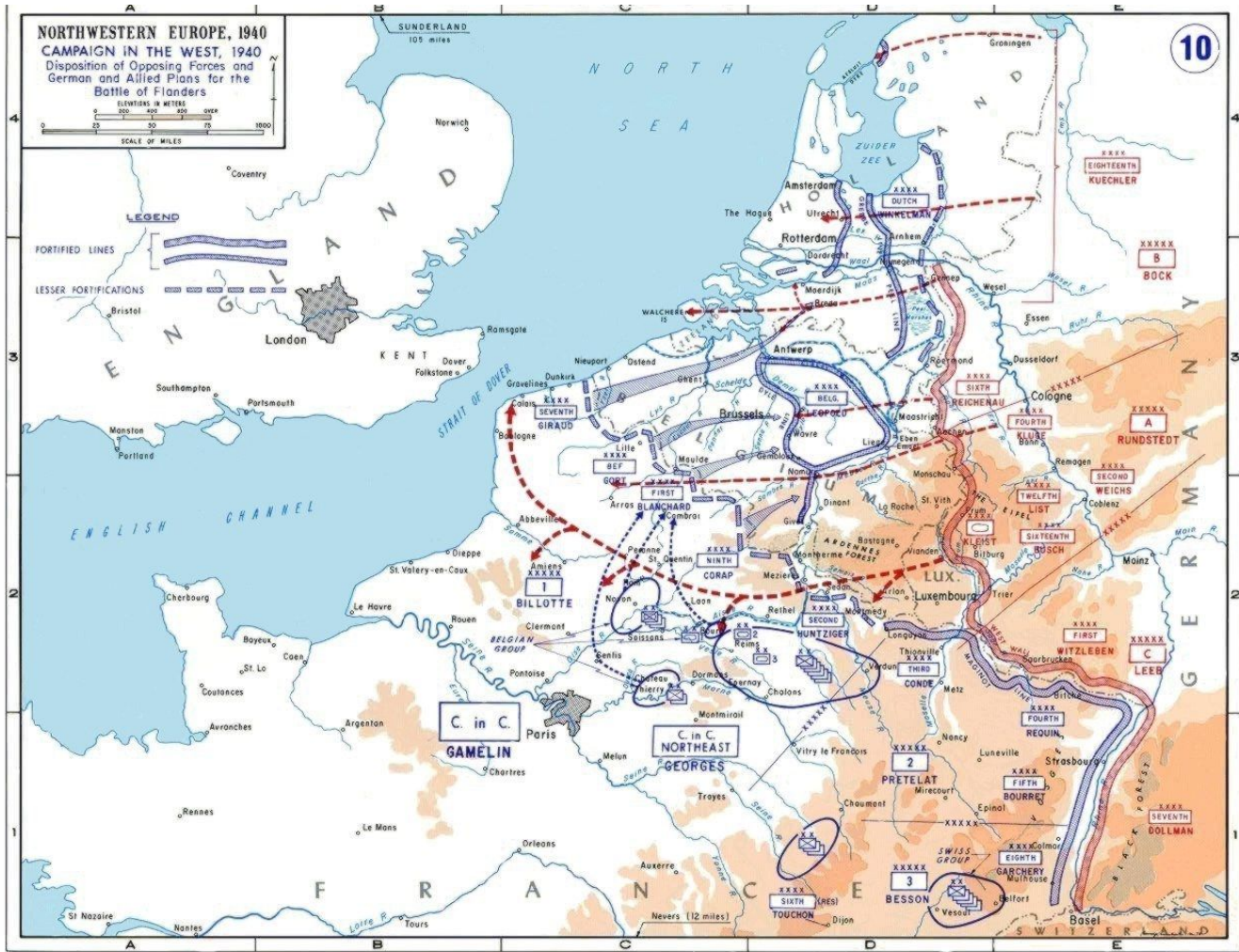
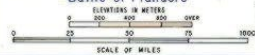
4. Equipment and Tactics

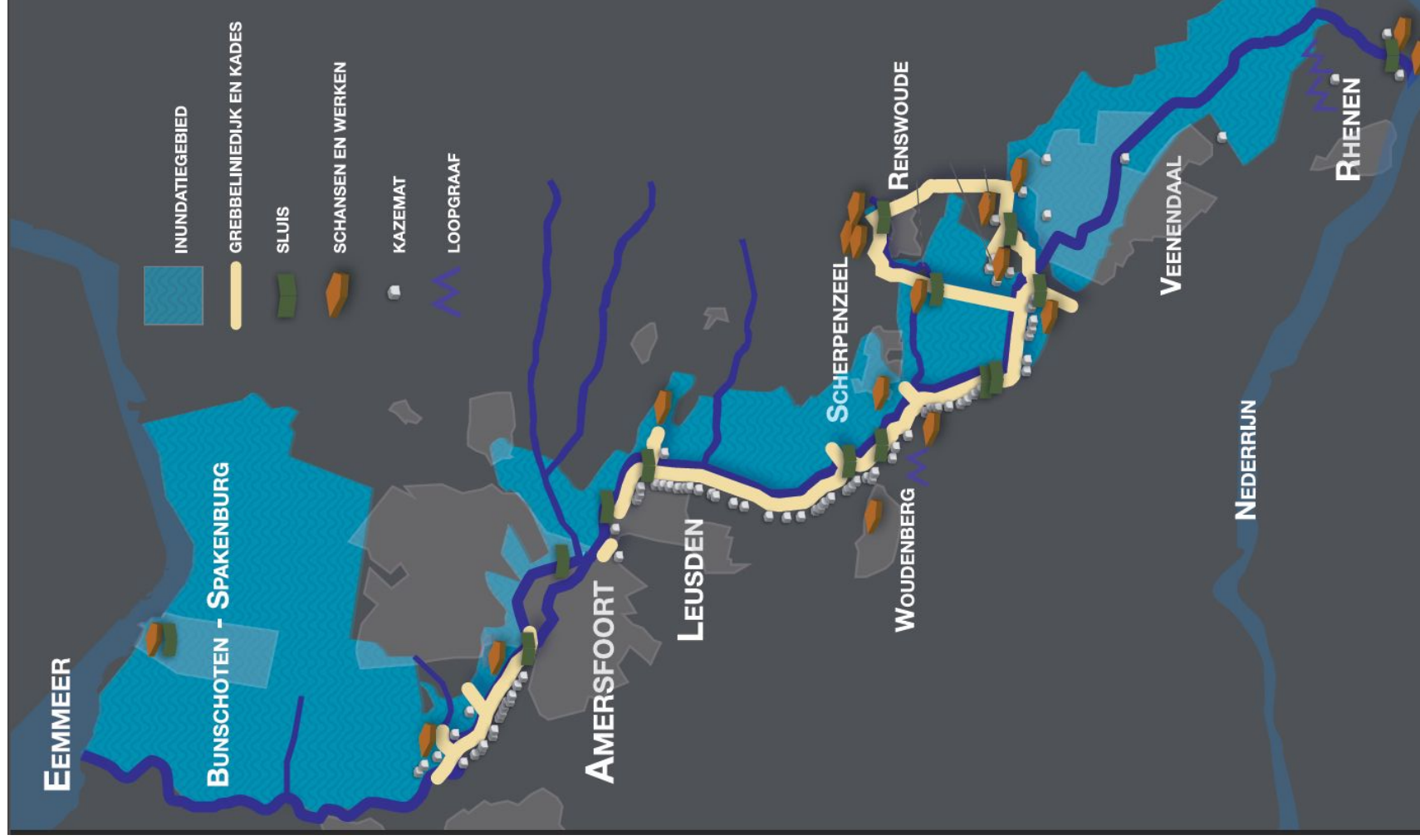
- **The Rare K-Kazemat:** Lambalgen featured the **only K-type casemate** in the Grebbelinie, designed for flanking machine-gun fire.
- **Standard Bunkers:** The **S-3 "Porcupine"** (concrete with camo hooks) and the **G-1 cupola** (steel turret) provided the backbone of the resistance.
- **Artillery Precision:** Dutch batteries used communication between front-line infantry and rear guns to disrupt German staging areas with exceptional accuracy. Delaying German attack by 5 hours.

5. The Human Cost

- **The Itchy Uniform:** Soldiers fought in **heavy, itchy M34 wool**, often digging trenches for months leading up to the fight.
- **Civilian Flight:** Troops watched their neighbors evacuate; 12,000 civilians fled, many on coal barges that left them covered in soot.
- **Bitter Victory:** Though they won at Lambalgen, the troops were ordered to retreat that night after the Grebbeberg fell to avoid encirclement.

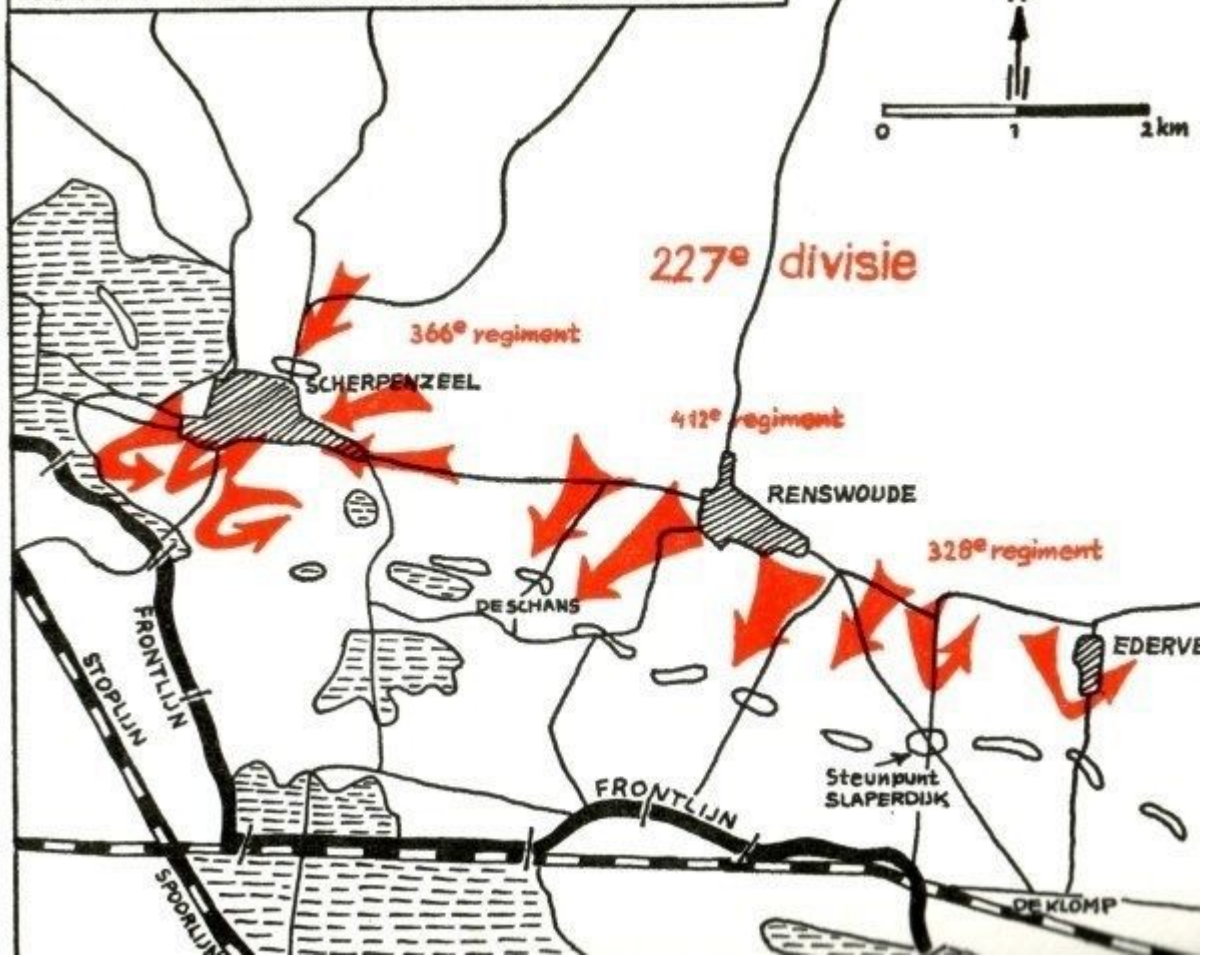
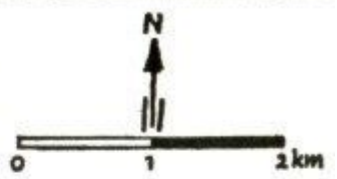
NORTHWESTERN EUROPE, 1940
CAMPAIGN IN THE WEST, 1940
 Disposition of Opposing Forces and German and Allied Plans for the Battle of Flanders







KAART 9 - DE DIVISIEAANVAL BIJ SCHERPENZEEL



3rd stop: Grebbeberg battlefield

The Strategic Geography: The "Dry Gap"

- **The Hinge of History:** Describe the Grebbeberg (a 52-meter elevation) as the **strategic hinge**. While most of the Grebbeberg relied on **inundations** (artificial flooding) to stop the enemy, the hill's height made flooding impossible, creating a critical "dry gap" identified by German spies before the invasion.
- **Tiered Defenses:** Walk the group through the four-layer defensive system:
 1. **Voorpostenlijn (Outpost Line):** 3 km east of the hill, meant to delay and provide warning.
 2. **Frontlijn (Frontline):** At the foot of the hill, featuring concrete casemates.
 3. **Stoplijn (Stopline):** On the crest, the final line of resistance.
 4. **Ruglijn (Final Line):** Formed by the Rhenen-Veenendaal railway.

The Three-Day Battle (May 11–13, 1940)

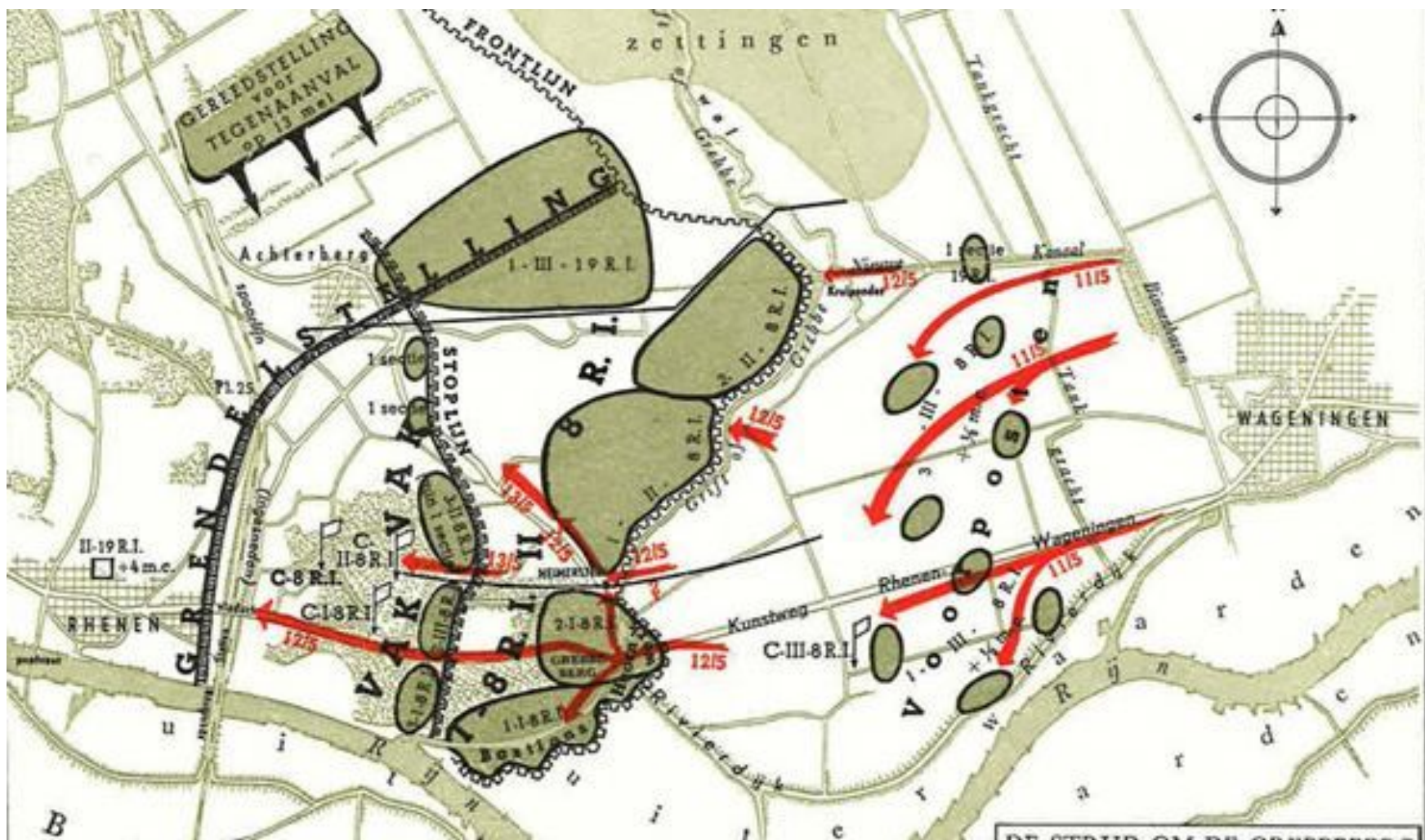
- **May 11 – The Fall of the Outposts:** Discuss how German artillery severed telephone lines early on, leaving Dutch defenders isolated. SS troops utilized fire-and-maneuver tactics to roll up the line by evening.
- **May 12 – Storming the Hill:** Describe the capture of the **Hoorwerk**, an 18th-century fortification, and the subsequent infiltration of the Stopleveline by SS commander **Hilmar Wäckerle**, who led a bold, coordinate-defying push toward the railway.
- **May 13 – The Breaking Point:** Focus on the **Stuka bombardment**. At 13:30, 27 Junkers Ju 87 dive bombers struck the hill, shattering the morale of exhausted conscripts and leading to a general rout and a retreat toward the New Holland Waterline.

The Three Heroes of the Grebbeberg

- **Major Willem Pieter Landzaat (The Sacrificial Commander):**
 - Stationed in a **restaurant pavilion** south of the Ouwehands Zoo.
 - Issued the famous command to "**stand firm behind the rubble**" and resist until the last man and bullet.
 - Dismissed his men when ammunition ran out, thanking them for fighting like heroes, and remained alone with a pistol in each hand to hold the post.
- **Major Johan Henri Azon Jacometti (The 'Old School' Leader):**
 - Represented traditionalist bravery, leading a local counterattack on May 12 with only a **swagger stick** and a pistol.
 - Reportedly shouted, "**Follow me, boys! Long live the Queen, death to the Huns!**" before being killed by machine-gun fire.
- **Sgt. Chris Meijer (The Tragic Scapagoat):**
 - The moral complexity of the battle: Meijer was an artillery sergeant arrested for abandoning his post after his unit retreated in disorder.
 - To "set an example" and combat rumors of a rout, General Harberts ordered his execution by firing squad on May 12—the **only Dutch soldier executed for desertion** during the campaign.

Tactics and Equipment

- **"Sand Recoil" Artillery:** Contrast German modernization with the Dutch **"despair measures."** Some Dutch guns (models from 1878/1880) lacked recoil mechanisms; crews had to build **recoil hills of sand** behind the pieces to absorb the force of firing.
- **Firepower Disparity:** Highlight the gap between the Dutch water-cooled **Schwarzlose machine guns** and the German air-cooled **MG34**, which offered superior mobility and sustained fire.
- **SS Tactics and Violations:** Discuss the **Auftragstaktik** (mission-based orders) of the SS, which allowed for rapid improvisation. Mention reported atrocities, such as using Dutch prisoners of war as **human shields** and attempting to masquerade in Dutch uniforms.





Major Willem Pieter
Landzaat



Major Johan Henri
Azon Jacometti



Sergeant Chris Meijer





4th stop: After the Lekdijk ride

May 10, 1940: The Surprise Attack

- **Early Morning:** Without a declaration of war, the Luftwaffe violates Dutch airspace. Paratroopers (**Fallschirmjäger**) land near the airfields around **The Hague** (Ypenburg, Ockenburg, and Valkenburg) with the mission to capture Queen Wilhelmina and the government.
- **The Border:** German ground forces cross the border, quickly pushing through the initial "Maas-IJssel" lines.
- **The Failure at The Hague:** In a significant Dutch victory, the paratroopers fail to take The Hague. The Dutch army counter-attacks, recapturing the airfields and taking over 1,000 German prisoners who are shipped to England.

May 11, 1940: Reaching the Main Lines

- **The Grebbelinie:** German troops reach the **Grebbelinie**, the main Dutch defense line. Heavy fighting begins at the "front line" installations you'll visit in Veenendaal and near the Grebbeberg.
- **The South:** German panzers move rapidly through North Brabant, aiming for the Moerdijk bridges to enter the "Fortress Holland" from the south.

May 12, 1940: The Battle for the Grebbeberg

- **Infantry Assault:** The battle for the **Grebbeberg** reaches its peak. The Dutch hold their ground under heavy artillery fire.
- **Moerdijk:** German tanks reach the Moerdijk bridges, effectively cutting off the heart of the Netherlands from potential French reinforcements coming from the south.

May 13, 1940: The Breakthrough

- **Grebbeberg Falls:** After three days of fierce resistance, the German SS-Regiment "Der Führer" breaks through the Dutch "Stop-line" at the Grebbeberg. General Winkelman orders the Dutch field army to retreat from the Grebbelinie to the **New Dutch Waterline** (your Stop 1 and Stop 6).
- **Royal Flight:** Queen Wilhelmina and the government flee to London to establish a government-in-exile.

May 14, 1940: The Bombing of Rotterdam

- **Ultimatum:** To force a quick surrender and avoid a long siege of the major cities, the Germans deliver an ultimatum to the city of Rotterdam.
- **The Blitz:** Despite negotiations being underway, the Luftwaffe bombs the center of **Rotterdam**, killing nearly 1,000 civilians and destroying the historic heart of the city.
- **Threat to Utrecht:** The Germans threaten to bomb Utrecht (your starting point) next. To prevent further civilian slaughter, General Winkelman decides to cease resistance.

May 15, 1940: Capitulation

- **The Signing:** At a primary school in **Rijsoord**, General Winkelman signs the official document of surrender.
- **Zeeland:** Resistance continues for a few more days in the province of Zeeland, where French troops are assisting the Dutch, but by May 17, the entire country is occupied

