

Hotel De Wereld – Wageningen, 5 and 6 May 1945

The practical implementation of the liberation

On 4 May 1945, the German forces in Northwest Europe surrender on the Lüneburg Heath. The German capitulation is now a fact, but in the Netherlands it still has to be determined how this surrender will be put into practice.

For this reason, on 5 May, we are in Wageningen, at Hotel De Wereld. This modest hotel would become one of the best-known places in Dutch history. Here, representatives of the Allied forces and the German occupying forces meet to make arrangements for implementing the capitulation in the Netherlands.

This is not a new capitulation. That has already been agreed upon. In Wageningen, the terms are translated into practical arrangements for the Netherlands. What must the German forces do? Where must they remain? What information must they hand over? And how can the transition to the liberated situation be kept orderly?

A first meeting

The first people involved arrive at Hotel De Wereld in the morning. Among them is Lieutenant-General Charles Foulkes, commander of I Canadian Corps. Prince Bernhard, commander of the Dutch Resistance Forces, is also present.

Representing the German commander, Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz, is Generalleutnant Paul Reichelt, his Chief of Staff. Foulkes instructs him to inform Blaskowitz that he must come to Hotel De Wereld that afternoon. At four o'clock, the Germans are expected to be there to receive and sign the implementation orders.

The atmosphere is formal and controlled. There is respect in the way the men interact, but the situation is far from equal. The German representatives are expected to comply with the orders of the Allies.

It is also made clear that everything must proceed in an orderly and disciplined manner the following day. There must be no disorder and no shooting.

After this brief meeting, Reichelt leaves. The real confrontation is still to come that afternoon.

Waiting for the decisive moment

During the hours that follow, there is waiting and preparation. Foulkes confers with his Chief of Staff, Brigadier George Kitching. Maps and documents are spread across the table. Everything must be recorded carefully.

The words being exchanged make clear what matters to them: there can be no half measures. Complete lists, maps and information must be provided. Although the war is coming to an end, there is still much work to be done.

The liberation does not mean that the fighting and dangers of war simply disappear from one moment to the next. Minefields must be cleared, supplies must be inventoried and the German forces must remain under control.

Then the sound of an approaching car can be heard once again.

5 May, four o'clock in the afternoon

In the afternoon, Reichelt and Blaskowitz return to Hotel De Wereld. Generaloberst Johannes Blaskowitz is the German commander in the Netherlands. He takes his seat opposite Foulkes.

The first question is simple, but of great significance: does Blaskowitz acknowledge the surrender agreed upon on the Lüneburg Heath?

He confirms it.

The next chapter can now begin: the implementation of the orders in the Netherlands.

Foulkes opens the folder. Kitching is ready to record everything. Reichelt takes notes. The Canadian interpreter George Molnar translates the orders.

The orders are specific.

The German forces must remain in their current positions and are responsible for maintaining discipline. Within 24 hours, they must provide complete information about their units and locations. Maps of minefields and demolitions must also be handed over, along with information about depots and supplies.

Prisoners of war and internees must also be reported.

But the orders go further. Waterways must be cleared and assistance must be provided with the food supply of the Dutch population.

These may appear to be practical instructions. Yet they have major consequences. A map of a minefield can save lives. A list of troops and locations can prevent further chaos. Food can help a population that, after years of war and occupation, is desperately in need of assistance.

The German response

Blaskowitz makes clear that he will carry out the orders. At the same time, he expresses concern about the fate of his men. He wants to prevent German soldiers from being handed over to the Soviets and asks for clear leadership over the Resistance Forces.

Prince Bernhard responds calmly: the concerns have been heard, but the orders remain fully in force.

Each person present has their own role in this decisive moment.

Blaskowitz sees it as his task to maintain order and prevent chaos. By cooperating, he may be able to save lives.

Foulkes knows that structure is essential at this moment. The sooner the arrangements are implemented, the sooner stability can be restored.

Prince Bernhard represents the Dutch Resistance Forces. He is not a party to the capitulation, but he does serve as a link between the Allies and the Dutch resistance.

Reichelt must ensure that the German organisation actually carries out the orders. To him, lists, maps and information are not mere formalities: passing on information about minefields can save lives.

Kitching, meanwhile, keeps track of the administration, deadlines and logistics. This too is part of the liberation.

And then there is **George Molnar**, the young Canadian interpreter. His task may seem simple, but it is essential: he ensures that the words of the different parties are actually understood.

6 May – the signing

The following day, 6 May, the arrangements are formally recorded in the Aula of Wageningen.

The orders have been put on paper and the participants take their seats once again. The papers get signed.

The war does not disappear with a single signature. But the agreements recorded in Wageningen make clear how the transition to the liberated situation is to be carried out.

The German chain of command must implement the orders. Troops must remain in position. Information must be handed over. Mines must be cleared. Waterways must be opened. And the Dutch population must be assisted with food supply.

The liberation becomes practical

When we look back at 5 and 6 May 1945, we see more than a historic moment involving famous names and signatures. Above all, we see how the end of the war takes shape in practice.

In Wageningen, it is about **stability, order, mine clearance, food and information**.

Short sentences are written down.

But the consequences are far-reaching.

Here, liberation is put into practice.