

● PSF Belgium 1938-41

CONTINUED

Belgium - 1939

November 3, 1939

My dear King Leopold,

Your Majesty's letter of September 26, 1939, has been handed to me by Mr. Theunis, in fulfillment of the special mission with which you entrusted him. It was a great pleasure to receive Mr. Theunis who is well known to me, and I have assured him that we will be most happy to extend him every courtesy.

I am especially glad to have your views on the present situation in Belgium. This is in part due to the very close and affectionate feeling in this country for Belgium and to the memory of your Father, King Albert. The stand of the Belgian nation has won in this country the highest admiration and respect. But it is also due to the fact that the Government of the United States has followed recent events with deeply sympathetic interest, and certainly I personally have the greatest satisfaction in knowing that you did everything within your power to avert the calamity which has come to pass.

I am entirely in agreement with your ideas on peace and bringing the nations together and that their mission is not ended until the success of the search for a lasting peace based on justice, which must come. Indeed, the neutral nations are charged with greater responsibility than ever before for the peaceful development of the human race, since they must strive until order in law has been restored. The Government of the United States cordially agrees that among the nations still at peace it is necessary to minimize the attempts to restrict normal activity by economic warfare, and to keep commerce flowing whenever possible, and to insist upon their rights as neutrals for the continuance of their normal existence.

The Government of the United States is ready to discuss measures with Mr. Theunis to this end, and to examine with great care any suggestions he may have to offer. The position of the United States is well known. It is unjust that any nation should be forced by violence to curtail its normal activities. The humanitarian aims which Your Majesty asserts are the highest; and you may be assured that this Government will not be indifferent to the appeal which you have made. The Government of the United States will take great pleasure in actively searching for ways and means by which the end you seek may be brought about.

Please be assured of my cordial wishes for your success in seeking a just conclusion to the present situation.



Brussels, the 26th September 1939.

My dear President and Friend,

In agreement with my Cabinet I have decided to send M.G. Theunis, Minister of State, on a special mission to your Government.

M. Theunis, who has been Prime Minister several times in my Father's time and since my accession, has learned to know and to appreciate your Country in the course of several visits to the United States of America. I venture to express the hope that after having been so kind as to receive him, you will be good enough to facilitate the accomplishment of his mission.

I take this opportunity to place before you, in all sincerity, here under, my personal views on Belgium's particular position.

Knowing you have a perfect command of the French language, I think it preferable that I should express myself in my native tongue.

Depuis la guerre 1914-1918, au cours de laquelle le ravitaillement américain a sauvé notre pays de la famine, la grande République des Etats-Unis n'a cessé de témoigner à la Belgique la plus active des sympathies. Mon peuple tout entier et moi-même nous lui en avons gardé, vous le savez, une profonde reconnaissance.

To His Excellency
the Honourable Franklin ROOSEVELT,
President of the United States of America.

Aujourd'hui, alors que les jours sombres de 1914 se renouvellent pour une partie de l'Europe, c'est tout naturellement vers l'Amérique que nous nous tournons, et aussitôt nous vient d'elle le réconfort que nous en attendions: vous avez bien voulu suggérer l'organisation de facilités particulières pour le ravitaillement de la Belgique et des Pays-Bas. C'est pour la Belgique le plus grand encouragement que de savoir son existence assurée une nouvelle fois, grâce à votre appui. Ainsi les Etats-Unis continuent inlassablement l'oeuvre de paix à laquelle ils se sont toujours attachés.

Nous avons suivi avec admiration les efforts que vous n'avez cessé de faire, Monsieur le Président, pour sauver le monde de la folie de la guerre. Il n'a pas dépendu de vous que cette calamité fût épargnée à l'Europe.

La Belgique a été profondément touchée par l'expression de vos sentiments pacifiques et par leur haute humanité. Elle y trouve la justification de sa propre attitude et les raisons d'y persévérer.

Depuis 1936, mon pays a affirmé sa volonté de pratiquer une politique d'absolue indépendance. En ce faisant, il a poursuivi un double but: servir la paix générale, assurer et maintenir sa propre liberté.

Indépendance ne signifie pas indifférence. Tous les problèmes européens trouvent leur écho en Belgique, en raison même de la position géographique qu'elle occupe entre les trois grandes puissances occidentales. Plus qu'aucun autre pays au monde, la Belgique surpeuplée et dont l'économie ne s'était pas encore relevée depuis la guerre 1914-1918 est attachée, par raison vitale, au maintien de courants économiques normaux; plus qu'aucun autre territoire, elle court le danger d'une destruction totale, si elle est impliquée dans une guerre.

Aussi, lorsque nous avons vu s'accumuler sur l'Europe les nuages menaçants, annonciateurs de l'orage, avons-nous tenté un suprême effort et rappelé au sens de leurs responsabilités les hommes qui tenaient le sort de tant de millions d'hommes entre leurs mains, afin qu'ils recherchent par la conciliation la base d'une paix durable fondée sur la justice.

Notre voix n'a pas été entendue. La guerre a éclaté. L'armée belge mobilisée est prête à combattre pour la défense du territoire et l'indépendance de la Nation. - Mon peuple, qui ne porte aucune responsabilité dans les causes lointaines et immédiates de la guerre, a proclamé sa volonté de maintenir sa neutralité aussi longtemps que sa souveraineté et l'intégrité de son territoire seront respectés.

Notre position est donc claire: nous sommes décidés à rester en dehors du conflit, pour autant que notre territoire ne soit pas violé. Si, par impossible, il en était ainsi, nous sommes décidés, comme en 1914, à nous défendre de toutes nos forces pour le Droit et la Liberté.

Mais la mission de la Belgique, toute de paix et de conciliation, n'est pas terminée. En se cantonnant en dehors du conflit, mon Pays en limite l'étendue; il s'interpose entre les grands Etats belligérants, et chacun de ceux-ci, à des titres divers, recueille les bénéfices inappréciables de cette attitude; enfin, il maintient, au centre même de la lutte, un régime de bon sens et de liberté, semblable à celui de la grande démocratie américaine.

Servir ce régime, et, avec lui, servir l'idéal d'humanité qu'il représente, tels sont le devoir et l'ambition de la Belgique, au moment où se joue le sort de la civilisation.

Nous serons sans doute l'objet de pressions diverses; mais nous y résisterons.

Il est cependant une chose qui pourrait compromettre notre résistance: le manque de vivres et de matières premières. Placés entre les grands belligérants, nous nous attendons à souffrir de la guerre économique. Mais il serait très injuste qu'un pays pacifique fût acculé à l'inactivité et à la famine et que, par sa volonté de ne pas s'associer à des hostilités, économiques ou militaires, ses huit millions d'habitants fussent privés du pain nécessaire à leur subsistance, et des matières dont la transformation doit leur permettre de payer leur nourriture.

Le commerce international de la Belgique est la source de ses revenus nationaux, et par conséquent de ses possibilités fiscales. Celles-ci sont, à leur tour, essentielles pour ne pas rendre le pays financièrement tributaire de l'un quelconque des belligérants.

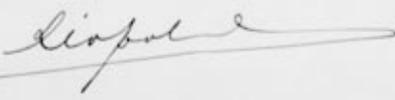
Comme Chef d'Etat, vous comprendrez, je le sais, la nécessité vitale pour la Belgique, de s'assurer un minimum d'activité industrielle et commerciale. C'est pour elle une question de vie ou de mort; nous revendiquons le droit à l'existence.

Mon Pays et moi, nous comptons sur votre sens éclairé de la solidarité humaine et sur la sympathie active et puissante de la Grande République pour nous aider.

J'ose dire que la Belgique met toutes ses espérances dans les Etats-Unis et son Président.

Believe me, dear President,

Yours very sincerely,


Leopold

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

The HONOURABLE FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT,

President of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA,

WHITE HOUSE,

WASHINGTON. D.C.

PSF: Belgium
4

Re-Longhand letter of the President of Dec 19, 1939

to Leopold offering to send cruiser for his children
and to bring them safely to America where he and his
family might watch after them at Hyde Park etc.

Leopold's reply of January 30, 1940 attached.

See:Famous People folder-Drawer 3-1940.

PSF: Belgium
1939



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

In reply refer to
Eu 740.0011 European War, 1939/1941

January 5, 1940

~~STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL~~

My dear General Watson:

I am enclosing a copy of despatch no. 539 of
November 28, 1939, from Ambassador Davies in Brussels
marked by him for the attention of the President in
which Ambassador Davies reports a conversation which
he had with the Prime Minister and the Minister for
Foreign Affairs just prior to his departure from
Belgium.

Sincerely yours,

For the Secretary of State:

Under Secretary

Enclosure:
Copy of despatch
no. 539, November 28, 1939.

Brigadier General
Edwin M. Watson,
Secretary to the President,
The White House.

Department of State

BUREAU
DIVISION

Eu

ENCLOSURE
TO

Letter drafted 1/4/40

ADDRESSED TO

Brigadier General
Edwin M. Watson.

Brussels, November 28, 1939.

No. 539

Subject: Conversations with Prime Minister Pierlot and
Foreign Minister Spaak.

For the attention of the President and the
Secretary of State.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that on November 28, I called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Pierlot, and on Foreign Minister Spaak. During these visits, in which I was accompanied by Counselor Wilson, I mentioned my approaching departure for the United States and discussed various aspects of the European situation, with special reference to their effect upon Belgium. As I consider that the views expressed by Mr. Pierlot and Mr. Spaak will be of interest to the President and Secretary of State, they are set forth below:

Conversation

Conversation with Prime Minister Pierlot.

I explained to Prime Minister Pierlot the reasons for my departure for the United States.

The conversation then turned to the subject of the blockade of German exports which the Prime Minister declared was unjust. He expressed the opinion that it would injure the neutrals more than Germany. With respect to the German mine warfare, he believed that Great Britain would oppose it successfully. In response to a question of mine, he stated that the war trade negotiations with France were approaching an end and confirmed my information concerning the Franco-Belgian agreement for the exchange of iron ore for coal and coke. Part of this coke would come from Germany in return, it appears, for an agreement on the part of Belgium to export to Germany a definite percentage of its steel manufactures. He expressed the belief that Germany would continue to furnish the necessary coke except, possibly, in the event that the Germans should be angered by the refusal or inability of Belgian shippers to transport German products in Belgian ships, owing to the blockade measures taken by the Allied Governments.

I stated that I would appreciate it if the Prime Minister would outline the European situation as he viewed it, as such an expression would be of great value to the President and the Secretary of State. He acquiesced very pleasantly and entered upon a very clear and comprehensive statement.

He agreed with Foreign Minister Spaak that the situation was not so acutely dangerous as it had been on November 11.

Nevertheless,

Nevertheless, Belgium must be on its guard because from 45 to 47 German divisions are still stationed along the Dutch and Belgian frontiers. It seemed odd to Mr. Pierlot that they should be placed there, especially if they were reserve troops. He understood that there might not be enough room for them near the battle front, but he failed to see why, in a country the size of Germany, it was necessary to concentrate so many soldiers in a rather uncomfortable and inconvenient corner of that country. Furthermore, these troops are arranged in a manner permitting a rapid offensive; namely, in deep formations, headed by motorized forces and tanks. This was the way the German armies were arranged prior to the invasion of Poland and, in the present instance, the same motorized regiments are found on the Dutch and Belgian frontiers that participated in the Polish campaign. On the other hand, although the French and British have many troops along the Franco-Belgian boundary, they are distributed in a long line; in other words, in a defensive rather than an offensive formation.

Mr. Pierlot then discussed the general aspects of Germany's political and military situation. He referred first of all to the possibility that the Germans might address their major activity toward the Balkan states in order to obtain a greater breathing space for themselves. Here, however, they were checked by Russia. On the west, the Maginot line cannot be successfully attacked. On the other hand, if the Germans should attempt to pass through Switzerland, they would have to cross an unfavorable terrain in the face of serious opposition.

If

If they should overcome this and finally enter France, they would find themselves in the southeastern part of the country where they could not vitally destroy the enemy. If they should attempt to break through Holland and Belgium, they would meet, especially in the latter country, with an extremely effective resistance based on previously prepared successive lines of defense. In addition, the French and British would undoubtedly participate in this fighting and thereby establish a numerical equality. The nature of the country, according to Mr. Pierlot, did not permit the use of tanks and armored cars as in Poland, and if the Germans should by chance break through one line of defense, they would immediately face another.

On the other hand, the Allies were in an equally difficult position. The Siegfried line was practically impregnable, while the Prime Minister was confident that they would not invade Belgium, primarily because they had promised not to do so, and secondly because they would face the same inconveniences as the Germans. In view of the foregoing, both opponents appeared to be facing a stalemate. There was a possibility, however, that as Germany was now in the hands of a dictatorship, which must continue to achieve successes, a long inactivity would provoke popular resentment and a loss in prestige, and in order to obviate this, Hitler might attempt, as an act of desperation, to force his way into Holland and Belgium. If this should take place, it is to be feared that in as thickly settled a country as Belgium, the destruction of life and property would be tremendous. In this connection, he wished to assure the President that the Belgians would fight it out to the end. He paid a high tribute to the character and intelligence of King Leopold.

Turning to the subject of the crisis of November 11, which had reached an extremely critical stage at the time of King Leopold's visit to Queen Wilhelmina, Mr. Pierlot said that the Italian Government had made representations in Berlin, urging the Germans to desist. The Spanish had done the same thing, but in a much more emphatic manner. General Franco had ordered his Ambassador at Berlin to inform the Germans that through their alliance with Russia and the ideologies represented by the latter, they had forfeited a large part of the sympathies which they formerly enjoyed. If they should attack Belgium, which had done them no harm, they would lose completely the remainder of these sympathies. Similar information was conveyed to the German Ambassador at Madrid, and at Brussels by the Spanish Minister to the German Ambassador, Herr von Bülow-Schwante. It is believed that these representations produced a definite effect.

On the subject of the economic situation in Germany, Mr. Pierlot believed that the Germans could hold out for a long time, but he did not think that they would obtain from the Russians anywhere near what they were probably expecting.

Italy, said the Prime Minister, was in a comfortable position. She has sold her neutrality at a very high price and is now busy making money and rehabilitating her currency. The first rift in the axis occurred during the visit of Foreign Minister Ciano to Salzburg, where he met von Ribbentrop. When hostilities broke out, the Italian people were decidedly opposed to any participation and in this view, they were supported by the Royal family. Mussolini eventually realized that if he
should

should try to force Italy into war, he might bring about a collapse of the Fascist regime, and he therefore bowed to public sentiment. It is clear, however, that Mussolini and Italy are interested in taking an important part in the eventual peace negotiations, thereby enhancing Italy's prestige, and that Mussolini is awaiting to seize upon that opportunity.

In the event of Hitler's death, Mr. Pierlot pointed out that he had already designated his successor. It was possible, however, that dissension might take place among the various Nazi leaders, which would result in fighting and bloodshed. He appeared to be uncertain as to what part the army would take in such circumstances. There had been serious differences of opinion, he pointed out, both in the army and in the Nazi party on the subject of the contemplated invasion of Belgium and Holland.

In answer to the question as to what Belgium might do if Holland alone were invaded, Mr. Pierlot replied that Belgium's situation, with the German army along its entire northern border, would be critical in the extreme. He stated clearly that Belgium had no treaty of alliance with Holland and therefore was not obligated to go to the assistance of the latter. Belgium, however, might find itself in a situation so critical that its very existence would be threatened, and in such circumstances, would act promptly and vigorously, and if necessary call immediately for the French and British to come to the help of Belgium and The Netherlands. Nobody, however, could at this time make any definite assertions as to what Belgium would do.

Mr.

Mr. Pierlet asked me to convey to President Roosevelt Belgium's hopes that as a leading neutral he would show the way to the others, and to express to the President Belgium's gratitude for the moral and material assistance which had been given by the United States in the past.

Conversation with Foreign Minister Spaak.

I informed Mr. Spaak that I was leaving for the United States in response to instructions from the Department directing me to return to Washington for consultation concerning the contemplated commercial convention.

When asked to express his opinion about the political situation, Mr. Spaak said that the crisis of November 11 had passed and that matters were not so critical. He did not expect any German offensive at present but felt that Belgium's attitude of caution and preparation should not be relaxed.

Turning to the extension by the allied powers of the blockade against German exports, Mr. Spaak recognized clearly the injurious effect it would have upon Belgian industry and did not perceive any legal justification for it. On the other hand, the German Government's attitude towards Belgium was becoming increasingly severe. He doubted whether the German mine-sowing campaign would be successful, as the British would probably find some means of neutralizing it. He hoped, however, that it would be possible, for the welfare of Belgium and The Netherlands, to realize the suggestion of President Roosevelt, namely, to establish a safe sea lane through the mine fields, and requested me to convey this thought to the President when I reached Washington.

Respectfully yours,

Joseph E. Davies

*File
Personal
PSF: [unclear]
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Personal.

Dublin, January 8, 1940.

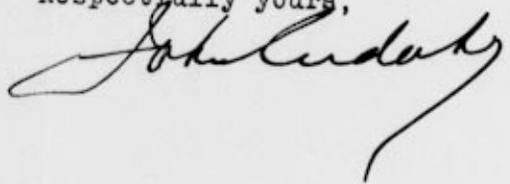
~~Confidential.~~

Dear Mr. President:

Since talking to you Bill Bullitt called me from Paris and told me George Earle would like very much to come to Dublin. I know George and his wife very well. They came here when I was first installed and spent three days with me, so should have a fair estimate of Ireland and the activities here.

I am sure if George is enthusiastic for Ireland he will be well qualified as Minister here. I did not know he was interested when I suggested David Gray. I think David Gray would make an excellent Minister, but you can understand my position with reference to George because of long and close friendly association with him.

Respectfully yours,



The President,
The White House.

PSF: Belgium

JT
A portion of this telegram
must be closely paraphrased
before being communicated
to anyone. (C)

BRUSSELS

Dated January 13, 1940

Rec'd 12:48 p.m.

Secretary of State,
Washington.

RUSH

14, January 13, 4 p.m.

~~STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.~~

Tension in official circles has suddenly increased and situation is regarded by Belgian Government as extremely serious as reports have been received from reliable quarters that Germans are contemplating an attack January 15 on Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg. During the last three days which have been clear and cold there has been much activity of German airplanes over Belgium. Precautionary measures have been taken as reported by the Military Attache who requests transmission to War Department of the following:

(SPECIAL GRAY) "Additional troops placed on defense positions against possible German attack. Leaves canceled. Additional guards on important bridges, viaducts and sensitive points of communications. German aviation very active over Liege and Belgian Luxemburg. All alert measures intensified". (END SPECIAL GRAY) Waller reports from Luxemburg heavy gunfire on front and growing anxiety in government circles and population although no outward evidence of such concern.

Paraphrase already
sent major & complete
Index 1/13/40 at 4:45 PM (H)

WSB

WILSON

COPY

January 14, 1940.

Belgium
+

MEMO:

By telephone from Secretary Hull

THE PRESIDENT

"The Netherlands Legation has received a telegram from the Hague, to the effect that their information as well as that of Belgium is that a German attack on the low countries is to be expected sometime this week."

Tel and Tel

ab

*file
personal*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Belgium
↓

THE SECRETARY

January 16, 1940

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

I thought you would be interested in knowing that the Belgian Ambassador has telephoned the Department to say that King Leopold will receive Ambassador Cudahy tomorrow.

C.H.

C H

TELEGRAM

10WUD 17 US Govt Cable

The White House
Washington

Belgium
4

BRUSSELS 1500 Jan 17 1940

The President

The White House

Shall telephone to you today eight p.m., Brussels time three
p.m., Washington time.

Cudahy

1049am/d

Belgium
4

file
↓

Brussels, January 19, 1940.

Personal and
Confidential

Dear Mr. President:

The situation here is summarized in our confidential telegram No. 23 of January 17, 6 p.m., and my secret telegram No. 24 of January 18, 3 p.m., to you and the Secretary. Telegram No. 25 of January 20, 11 a.m., will set forth the different hypotheses regarding the forced landing of the German officers in Belgium, the immediate cause of the present tension.

Although this tension has relaxed simply by lapse of time, the fundamentals of the situation remain the same. About 60% of the front line German military strength is concentrated opposite the Holland-Belgian frontier and 80% of the mechanized units are poised for action in this area. This concentration commenced three months ago and was accelerated the first of January. The most persuasive military view is that when the weather is more favorable, the Germans will strike.

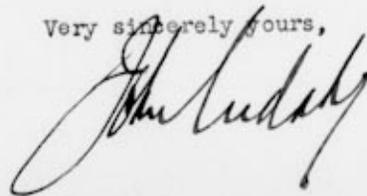
The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington.

They must have clear visibility and firm ground for their motor units. Until now the days have been short and there has been much fog.

Bill Bullitt does not believe a major attack will come on this flank or any other place. He believes that the Germans will carry on a war of attrition to a successful conclusion, pointing out that they were on the point of winning by such methods in 1917.

The weight of opinion is against him, and I must say I am not convinced by this viewpoint. It is anybody's guess, of course, in this war without precedent, but I believe Germany must try for a military decision and that we shall see action in spring or before then.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John L. Hudspeth". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed text "Very sincerely yours,".

File personal

PSF: Belgium

Brussels, January 25, 1940.

Personal and
~~Confidential~~

Dear Mr. President:

When I took my abrupt leave of de Valera, he told me very frankly that he was disappointed that another Minister had not been designated for Ireland.

He put the case this way: "By your own definition, Ireland is in the combat zone. These are trying times and we should have an American Minister in Dublin." He asked me to urge that a Minister be sent at once and that I tell you.

We are trying to keep the State Department in touch with the situation here, which basically remains unchanged since the crisis of January 15th, although as far as the Belgian public is concerned, tension has subsided. The Government people and the Military do not feel that way. They think that Belgium is in the same imminent danger of attack as it was when the famous German plan was discovered.

The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington.

I am sure I shall like it here. I believe this is one of the busiest listening posts on the Continent. It is a great relief after the inactivity of Ireland.

It was great to talk to you the other night and I hope you will continue to give such good reports of your health and spirit.

Respectfully yours,

John L. W. W. W.

I talked to Bill Bullitt last night and he told me he had a fine report from you.

PSF: Polignone
4

Brussels, Belgium
February 2, 1940.

Personal

Confidential

Dear Mr. President:

The Spanish Ambassador left here this morning with the intention of proposing to General Franco that the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin approach Hitler and ask him the terms on which he would enter into peace negotiations at this time. If proposals capable of discussion were forthcoming, the Spanish Ambassadors in Paris and London would approach the French and British Governments with a view to arranging a peace conference.

The Ambassador asked me about your attitude. I assured him that while you could not possibly make any commitment without some knowledge of the suggested effort, your whole-souled sympathy was in the direction of peace. I reminded him of your persuasive influence at the time of Munich and how ever since the outbreak of the war you had repeatedly expressed your willingness to explore any feasible method for ending the conflict.

The majority opinion of the diplomatic colleagues is that both from the viewpoint of morale and from economic necessity, Germany must attack this spring and force a military decision. The crucial question is the supply of fuel oil in Germany, and from all the evidence I can gather, this is inadequate, even if military operations are confined to their present tempo, to last over a year. Even with greatly increased supplies coming from Rumania and Russia, there is no possibility of Germany having sufficient oil to last beyond a year. Therefore an offensive must be staged before next fall and this should logically be timed as soon as the weather permits traction for motorized military units.

President
~~The Honorable~~

Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington, D. C.

From the angle of morale, Hitler's success has depended upon dynamic action, and a review of his career shows a coup de théâtre every six months. It is not reasonable to believe that he can maintain his great prestige unless he moves on. Therefore he must risk all and bring off an offensive.

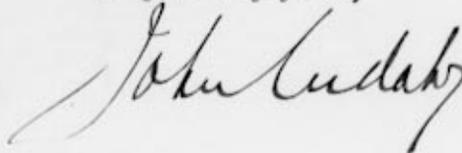
Those who oppose the view that there must be decisive military action, argue that the heavy cost of an offensive through Belgium or Holland would be incommensurate with the gain, which could be nothing except the closer approach for aerial attack on England, and that even with the occupation of sites in Holland and Belgium, air bases could not be readily constructed under bombardment from British air forces. In Rumania there would be nothing won by taking possession of that country, for much of the oil supply might be cut off by military destruction if Rumania was invaded, and there would also be a stoppage of grain and meat supplies that are now coming to Germany from Rumania and Hungary.

I believe we will see action this spring or early summer, for the reasons given. But I know there are many who oppose this opinion and are sure that there will never be any military offensive but that Germany will be content to wage a war of attrition in which it will be bound to prevail just as it was prevailing against France and Great Britain in 1916 and 1917.

This will be delivered to you by Bill Bullitt, whose views when I saw him two weeks ago were vigorously opposed to mine. But he will tell you for himself what he thinks.

As we have said in our despatches, the fundamentals here continue the same: 60% of the front-line German forces are poised for attack opposite the Belgian-Dutch frontier, and the Government considers the situation on a day-to-day basis.

Respectfully yours,





EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BRUSSELS

May 6, 1940

Dear Mr President -

It

made me depressed the other day, when Bill Bullitt told me you were feeling for from poor, and I hope you will remind Miss Le Hand that she is to send me a message about

you.

Of course it has always been a miracle to many of us, the way you have stood the gaff and punishment through all these grinding seven years, and now comes the terrific burden and strain of the war.

I am not so well advised
of developments in the Mediterranean,
but I'm more than ever convinced
that we shall see a major
military offensive on the
Western Front this summer,
and the logical place for
the Germans to come is through
the Low Countries.

Please take good care of
yourself, and do have some one
there ~~to~~ send me a message
about your state of feeling.

Respectfully yours
John Ledyard

PSF: Belgium - 1940
Confidential file
from
The King of the Belgians

(The attached came to file - April 10 - 1940)

La France et la Grande-Bretagne sont disposées à entamer des négociations en vue d'un traité de paix qui n'impliquerait ni le morcellement de l'Allemagne, ni des conditions inadmissibles pour l'honneur allemand.

L'indépendance des Polonais et des Tchécoslovaques devrait être assurée et une loyale collaboration politique et économique des Pays d'Europe devrait être établie, par des garanties indiscutables de confiance et de durée.

Beaucoup de bruits circulent au sujet de ce qui s'est passé et se passe en Pologne. Une enquête impartiale devrait être menée au plus tôt à ce sujet.

Bruxelles, 11 mars.

P 5 F: Belgium

April 17, 1940.

Dear John:-

Many thanks for yours of March twenty-ninth. Since then the Danish and Norwegian aggressions have taken place and your Belgian and Netherlands situations seem to be a little more tense than when you wrote. I pray God the Germans will not attack in the West but judging by the Scandinavian action they are complete experts at hiding their moves.

All goes well here and the news of the past ten days has greatly impeded the local and national political dog fights. All to the good!

As ever yours,

Honorable John Cudahy,
American Embassy,
Brussels,
Belgium.

Brussels, March 29, 1940

Personal

Confidential

Dear Mr. President:

Sumner shall have told you the messages I delivered from the King.

Sumner handled himself wonderfully well and I am sure his mission was well worth while. He was the ideal man for such a job and you could not have made a better choice. Never once did he lose his feet or head, and there were times when he was in a very hard balancing position.

There are two viewpoints regarding the outlook. One of these persists in the belief that the war will never assume a military character but will continue to the bitter end, a contest of attrition. This is the majority view.

The other, to which I still adhere but with weakening faith, is that we shall have a major offensive this spring or summer. Where the attack will go is anyone's guess. The Italian Ambassador has just told me in confidence that the German Ambassador here, who only recently returned from Berlin, assured him that the Germans would stage a major offensive within a matter of weeks.

Here in Belgium there is a relaxation in the tension, but this is based more upon an easing by lapse of time than because of any change in the fundamentals. Germany has lost the element of surprise, for the warnings of last November and January have caused the Belgians and Dutch to mobilize almost to the limit of their manpower and to greatly strengthen their lines of defense.

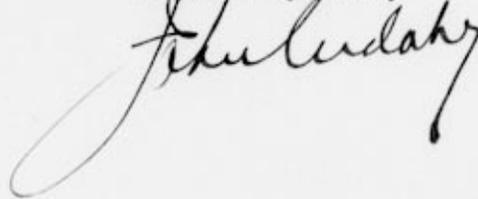
The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt
The White House
Washington

But 68 to 72 German divisions are concentrated on the Belgian-Dutch frontier, and of the 15 German mechanized divisions almost 14 are at close proximity to this border; and there is no reasonable explanation as to why they should be there unless poised for an attack. Those are the fundamentals which lead the Government people here to believe that an attack may yet come before this military season is over.

From all I read and hear, the foreign policy of this Administration is overwhelmingly popular, and this should be the controlling influence in the coming campaign.

I hope you are taking good care of yourself, and send you every devoted best wish.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John L. Rudolph". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Respectfully yours,".

Belgium
14

May 8, 1940.

Dear John:-

The news today is very bad and, of course, my hope, being of the Netherlands on my Father's side and of Belgium on my Mother's side, is that both nations will resist the rumored ultimatum to the bitter end.

I hope the King will not forget my suggestion that he send the children and his Mother to this country, and, as you know, there is a cruiser at Lisbon which is available for just this. This thought includes the grandchildren of the Queen of the Netherlands and the children of the Luxemburg family.

I am in extremely good health but, of course, much depressed and much occupied with world affairs. As you know, things in the Far East are still in an extremely uncertain state — and if the whole of the Mediterranean becomes involved, the good people in this country will wake up to the world situation. They are already beginning to but still have a long way to go.

Take care of yourself and don't take any unnecessary risks.

As ever,

Hon. John Oudahy,
American Embassy,
Brussels,
Belgium.

Brussels, Belgium
April 15, 1940.

Personal and
Confidential

Dear Mr. President:

I was worried to hear from Bill Bullitt that you were not feeling quite yourself when he left ten days ago, but I hope you shall be back in good form when this reaches you.

I am leaving in a few minutes to see Bill for a few hours and get his review of the situation. But I shall come right back for we are on the alert again and one does not want to get far from Brussels these days.

Davignon, the Belgian Ambassador to Germany, who is an old friend of Warsaw days, saw me about a week before the Scandinavian invasion and told me that he had recently seen Hitler who appeared in very sound health and very optimistic. Hitler told him Germany would put on a major offensive within a short time. Davignon said he got the same report from all governmental officials in Berlin. The German plans were perfected, he said, to launch an air attack against England at seven different points, the identity of which were never mentioned.

My own view, as you know, has, since my coming here, been consistent that we would witness a major offensive and that the war would be decided from the military phase before the end of 1940.

I wrote you two months ago when Bullitt left for home, and expressed such views. At that time he differed violently with me and took the position that

The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington.

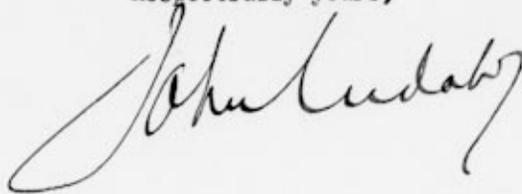
the war would be one of attrition. I suppose he will oppose me again when I see him this evening.

There is nothing to indicate a short war and everything to indicate a long one. And I would think from this long range that the international issue will transcend all other considerations in the coming campaign at home.

I hope to have good news of you and that you are feeling yourself again.

With every devoted, friendly wish,

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John L. Rudolph". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Respectfully yours,".

*file
personal*

*Truman Paper
2*

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

May 14, 1940.

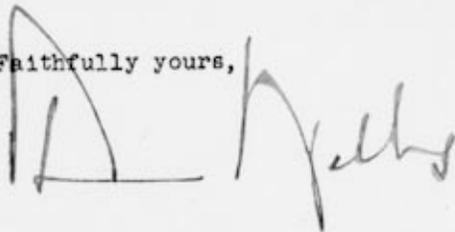
My dear Mr. President:

I am grateful to you for your thought in sending me with your memorandum of May 14 a telegram sent you by the King of the Belgians in reply to your message. The King's telegram is very moving.

In accordance with your request, I am returning this message herewith, together with the telegram you received the other day.

Believe me

Faithfully yours,



Encs.

The President,
The White House.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

14

May 14, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

x20

I thought you might like to see the enclosed and perhaps make a copy for your files. When you have finished with it, will you be good enough to return it for my files, together with the one which I received the other day?

F. D. R.

x463-4
xPP7523

Cable from "Leopold", Bruxelles, Belgium, 5/13/40 (?), to the President as follows: "Je suis profondement touche de votre noble message le peuple Belge resolu a consentir les sacrifices les plus extremes pour le maintien de sa liberte adresse au peuple Americain le expression de sa gratitude (over)

14
votre fidele amitie m est particulierelemente
precieuse en ces heures d epreuve".

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MAY 14, 1950.

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

I thought you might like
to see the enclosed and perhaps
make a copy for your files. When
you have finished with it, will
you be good enough to return it
for my files, together with the
one which I received the other
day?

F. D. R.

4-11-50
100-100000

Gable from "Leopold", Bruxelles, Belgium.
5/13/50 (?) to the President as follows:
"Je suis profondement touché de votre noble
message le peuple belge vous a consenti
les sacrifices les plus extrêmes pour le
maintien de sa liberté et de sa peuple
Americain la expression de sa gratitude (over)

TELEGRAM

W28 X etat

The White House
Washington

BRUXELLES 54/53 13 1751 ETAT GHR

The President

The White House

Je suis profondement touche de votre noble message le peuple
Belge resolu a consentir les sacrifices les plus extremes pour
le maintien de sa liberte adresse au peuple Americain le expres-
-sion de sa gratitude votre fidele amitie m est particuliere-
ment precieuse en ces heures d epreuve.

Leopold.

2:01pm/d.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 11, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR
THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR PREPARATION OF REPLY
FOR MY SIGNATURE.

F. D. R.

Cable from King Leopold.

TELEGRAM

The White House Washington

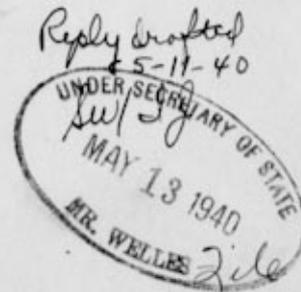
W173X-RCA-mc 88 Cable (ETAT GHR) 708p

BRUXELLES, 23:24, May 10, 1940.

A SON EXCELLENCE LE PRESIDENT
DES ETATS UNIS D AMERIQUE WASHINGTON

BRUTALEMENT ATTAQUEE PAR L ALLEMAGNE QUI AVAIT PRIS VIS A VIS
D ELLE LES ENGAGEMENTS LES PLUS SOLENNELS LA BELGIQUE SE
DEFENDRA DE TOUTES SES FORCES CONTRE L ENVAHISSEUR DANS CES
HEURES TRAGIQUES QUE VIT MON PAYS JE M ADRESSE A VOTRE
EXCELLENCE QUI SI SOUVENT A TEOIGNE A LA BELGIQUE UN INTERET
AFFECTUEUX CERTAIN QU ELLE APPUIERA DE TOUTE SON AUTORITE
MORALE LES EFFORTS QUE NOUS SOMMES FERMEMENT DECIDES A FAIRE
POUR SAUVEGARDER NOTRE INDEPENDANCE

LEOPOLD



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

14
MAY 11, 1940
No. 227

The Department of State made public today the following exchange of telegrams between the President and His Majesty Leopold III, King of the Belgians:

"HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA.

"Brutally attacked by Germany which had entered into the most solemn engagements with her, Belgium will defend herself with all of her strength against the invader. In these tragic hours which my country is undergoing, I am addressing myself to Your Excellency, who so often has demonstrated towards Belgium an affectionate interest, in the certainty that you will support with all of your moral authority the efforts which we are now firmly decided to make in order to preserve our independence."

(SIGNED) "LEOPOLD"

"THE WHITE HOUSE

"May 11, 1940

"HIS MAJESTY
LEOPOLD III,
KING OF THE BELGIANS,
BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)

"I have received Your Majesty's telegram. As I stated in an address which I delivered last night to representatives of the twenty-one American Republics, the cruel invasion by force of arms of the independent nations of Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg has shocked and angered the people of the United States and, I feel sure, their neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. The people of the United States hope, as do I, that policies which seek to dominate peaceful and independent peoples through force and military aggression may be arrested, and that the Government and people of Belgium may preserve their integrity and their freedom. As an old personal friend I send you my warm personal regards."

"FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT"



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

In reply refer to
PR 855.001 Leopold/62

February 27, 1940

My dear Miss LeHand:

Reference is made to the letter which the President addressed to His Majesty the King of the Belgians in December and sent to the Department for transmission by pouch, with a request that it be delivered in person to His Majesty.

I am enclosing herewith a reply from His Majesty which has been received from the American Ambassador at Brussels, who states that he delivered the President's letter to King Leopold during an audience granted on January 29, 1940.

Sincerely yours,

G. T. Summerlin
George T. Summerlin,
Chief of Protocol.

Enclosure:
Letter.

Miss Marguerite A. LeHand,
Personal Secretary to the President,
The White House.



PALAIS DE BRUXELLES

Le 30 janvier 1940.

Mon cher Président,

Je vous remercie cordialement de votre bonne lettre du 19 décembre.

Il est extrêmement réconfortant pour moi de savoir quel ami sûr et fidèle j'ai en vous; je vous en exprime toute ma gratitude.

Nous sommes plus fermement que jamais décidés à faire notre devoir jusqu'au bout. Ma conscience de Chef d'Etat m'indique la voie à suivre : épargner à mon Pays et à mes compatriotes l'horreur de la guerre et de la destruction, mais n'hésiter devant aucun sacrifice, si l'honneur et l'intérêt suprême de la Nation étaient en jeu.

La situation d'un petit Pays placé entre de grands voisins en guerre n'est pas enviable. Nous allons nous trouver devant d'énormes difficultés économiques et financières, causées principalement par la charge écrasante de notre mobilisation. Mais notre organisation de défense ne peut se relâcher un instant, car elle est la condition même de notre salut. Je suis certain que vous partagez mon avis.

Son Excellence
Monsieur Franklin ROOSEVELT,
Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique,

WASHINGTON.

Ma Mère est très sensible à votre message. Elle me charge, à son tour, de vous dire son souvenir le meilleur, ainsi qu'à Mrs Roosevelt.

En vous exprimant toute ma reconnaissance pour votre sympathie personnelle et celle du peuple américain,

Believe me, dear President,
Yours very sincerely,

Diop



PALAIS DE BRUXELLES

Son Excellence

Monsieur Franklin ROOSEVELT,

Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique,

WASHINGTON.

***Embassy of the
United States of America.***

Enclosure to despatch No. 20 of February 2,
1940, from the Embassy at Brussels.

The attached letter to King
Leopold was sent Dec 19, 1939 and
not Dec 4, 1939.

December 19, 1939.

My dear King Leopold (written in longhand by the Pres

I watch the hourly events, as you know, and I am glad that at this moment matters look less critical in Belgium and The Netherlands than they did when I telegraphed you several weeks ago. However, one never can tell what the morrow will bring forth -- especially in view of the fact that all of the rules and courtesies of international relations have been thrown into the discard.

I pray that the independence and the integrity of Belgium will not be further jeopardized. I want you to know that you must feel wholly free to call on me at any time -- especially if I can help your family in any way. I say this as an old friend of yours and of your Father and Mother.

The hazards of modern warfare make it I think important for the future of Belgium that the safety of your children be fully guarded, and one has the feeling here that no spot in Europe is wholly safe.

As I suggested, I can send a cruiser at a moment's notice to Portugal or Spain -- away from the horror of mines and submarines and bring them safely to the United States. My wife and I would be most happy to care for them either here in Washington or under the care of my Mother at our country place at Hyde Park.

I have written to the queen of The Netherlands in similar vein in regard to her two small grandchildren -- and, incidentally, I never forget that I am a Netherlander on my Father's side and a Belgian on my Mother's side.

It goes without saying that if The Queen Mother should care to come here at any time she will, of course, be most heartily welcomed by all of us. Please give her my warm regards when you see her.

Take care of yourself in these anxious days. You have the full sympathy and support of a unanimous American people.

With my sincere regards, I am,

Always faithfully yours,

DRAFT OF LETTER DICTATED BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE WRITTEN LONGHAND

December 4, 1939.

My dear King Leopold:-

I watch the hourly events, as you know, and I am glad that at this moment matters look less critical in Belgium and The Netherlands than they did when I telegraphed you several weeks ago. However, one never can tell what the morrow will bring forth -- especially in view of the fact that all of the rules and courtesies of international relations have been thrown into the discard.

I pray that the independence and the integrity of Belgium will not further ^{be} ~~be~~ jeopardized. I want you to know that you must feel wholly free to call on me at any time -- especially if I can help your family in any way. I say this as an old friend of yours and of your Father and Mother.

The hazards of modern warfare make it I think important for the future of Belgium that the safety of your children be fully guarded, and one has the feeling here that no spot in Europe is wholly safe.

As I suggested, I can send a cruiser at a moment's notice to Portugal or Spain -- away from the horror of mines and submarines and bring them safely to the United States. My wife and I would be most happy to care for them either here in Washington or under the care of my Mother at our country place at Hyde Park.

I have written to the Queen of The Netherlands in similar vein in regard to her two small grandchildren -- and, incidentally, I never forget that

I am a Netherlander on my Father's side and a Belgian on my Mother's side.

Take care of yourself in these anxious days. You have the full sympathy and support of a unanimous American people.

With my sincere regards, I am,

Always faithfully yours,

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

For the original carbon of this memorandum--See:Hull folder-Drawer 4-1939. The letters were sent through State Dept.

November 11, 1939.

Belgium

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

What would you think of my sending something like the following as personal and unofficial messages to King Leopold and Queen Wilhelmina? In view of the fact that Leopold is an old friend of mine and that I have ancestral Dutch connections it would be a decent thing to do and, in addition, whether they accepted or declined, if war comes to them it might be a helpful political gesture for the future.

"To King Leopold:

In the event of a new invasion of Belgium, and because of our long-time friendship, I hope you will feel free to send your children and any other members of the family to the United States during the danger period. You can rest assured that Mrs. Roosevelt and I would gladly look after their safety and well-being and that we would regard them as members of our own family. As a matter of precaution it would probably be best for them to go by train and motor to Bilbao or Lisbon and I would gladly send a cruiser there to bring them to Washington or to our country place at Hyde Park.

I am thinking much of you in these grave hours.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT"

"To Queen Wilhelmina:

I am thinking much of you and the House of Orange in these critical days, and it occurs to me that in the event of the invasion of Holland you may care to have the Crown Princess and the children come to the United States temporarily to be completely safe against airplane raids. It would give Mrs. Roosevelt and me very great happiness to care for them over here as if they were members of our own family and they could come to us either in

Washington or at our country place at Hyde Park.

I am telegraphing my old friend Leopold in regard to his own children, and I want you to know that I want to help in any personal way which lies in my power.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

F. D. R.

Belgium - 1940
3

May 22, 1940

Dear Mr. President:

I enclose a copy of the message which was received for you through Ambassador Bullitt from the King of the Belgians. I also enclose a draft of a reply for your consideration and approval.

Faithfully yours,

Cordell Hull

Enclosures:

1. Telegram No. 794,
May 21, Paris.
2. Draft of reply.

The President,

The White House.

COPY

TELEGRAM RECEIVED

FROM-- GRAY
PARIS

Dated May 21, 1940.

Rec'd 4:28 p.m.

Secretary of State
Washington.

RUSH

794, May 21, 6 p.m.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

The Belgian Ambassador has just called on me with a message from King Leopold for President Roosevelt. The message is dated May 21, 1940 at the General Headquarters of the Belgian Army. An English translation of the message reads as follows:

(END SECTION ONE)

BULLITT

COPY

TELEGRAM RECEIVED

JT

PLAIN

FROM

PARIS

DATED MAY 21, 1940

Rec'd 4:12 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington

RUSH

794, May 21, 6 p.m. (SECTION TWO)

"Once before, in the tragic days from 1914 to 1918,
the American people gave splendid relief to my people.

All your efforts sought to avoid the recurrence of
war horrors.

Once more, neutral and loyal Belgium has been violated
without provocation by the same aggressor, by whom destruc-
tion and ruin are spread everywhere.

The Belgian army, faithful to its heritage of honor
and the legacy left it by my Father, fights with all its
strength, resisting foot by foot.

The civilian population, women, children, old people,
live in anguish, scattered, without shelter, in dire dis-
tress, their present situation is even more dreadful than
the one in which they found themselves in 1914 when they
were so wonderfully helped by the Commission for Relief
in Belgium, which for four years was regarded by us as the
in carnation of human ideals and American generosity.

I

tragic

-2- #794, May 21, 6 p.m. (SEC TWO) from Paris

I earnestly appeal to you on behalf of the Belgian people and I take this opportunity of assuring you of my deep admiration for the high ideal which inspires the free American people, and which you exemplify in your messages and your deeds. (Signed) LEOPOLD".

(END OF MESSAGE)

BULLITT

tragic

M2y 21, 1940

AMERICAN EMBASSY

PARIS

Please ask the Belgian Ambassador to transmit the following message from the President to King Leopold:

QUOTE. I have received Your Majesty's message from the battlefield and hasten to assure you of the deep sympathy which goes out from the American people to Belgium in its heroic battle for freedom and integrity and to the women and children and old people of your country who are the tragic victims of a brutal invasion.

QUOTE. Americans, individuals and private organizations, aware of this unprecedented emergency, have not hesitated as the shocking reports of appalling suffering, widespread distress and wanton devastation have poured in from the war zone. Funds spontaneously contributed by the American public were immediately allotted by the American Red Cross for the special relief of the desperately suffering refugees of Belgium and France. Further sums were assigned by the Red Cross for the purchase of ambulances, medical supplies, emergency

emergency field hospitals and other immediate necessities of our stricken people.

QUOTE. American organizations abroad have sprung into action and are now straining all their resources to shelter, feed and clothe the civilian sick, the wounded and the destitute. Red Cross chapters throughout this country are working overtime to speed up their production of surgical dressings, blankets and articles of clothing.

QUOTE. I cite these examples in order to reassure Your Majesty that the people of the United States are deeply conscious of the suffering and despair of innocent non-combatants and are directing their every resource to the relief of the millions of human beings who are being engulfed in misery. Americans, who, through God's will, have been spared the horrors of war, are thoroughly conscious of their moral duty to stem with compassion and humanitarian assistance the tide of destitution which is sweeping over other parts of the world.

QUOTE. I am certain that I can speak for the American people when I say to you, in reply to your appeal, that they are prepared to respond quickly and generously in this

tragic

-3-

tragic time. UNQUOTE.

(Signed) FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

740.0011 European War 1939/3215

Eu:RTP:AB

COPY

May 24, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR

HON. SUMNER WELLES

Do you think it would be all right
to send the following messages via Berlin--
even if the Germans do read them?

1. To John Cudahy, Brussels

You and yours are much in my thoughts
and I am proud of you.

2. To Gordon, the Hague -- same message
3. How About a personal message to
Daisy Harriman -- same message.

All to be signed Franklih D. Roosevelt.

F.D.R.

fdr/tmb

(For original memo and Welles answer of the same date)
See:Welles folder-Drawer 1-1940

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

*PSF: Belgium
4*

May 24, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR
THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

Will you check on this?

F. D. R.

Letter to the President, dated
May 3, 1940, in re disturbing leak
in the secrecy of Ambassador Cudahy's
telegram of April 18th, addressed
"for the President and the Secretary
of State only".

file personal

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

May 25, 1940

My dear Mr. President:

In compliance with the request contained in your memorandum of May 24, I have checked up on the complaint made by John Cudahy in his letter to you of May 3. I find that his telegram of April 18 - No. 87 - was distributed only to the Secretary of State and myself in addition to you. No other official of the Department of State had access to it.

The newspaper report which disturbed John Cudahy was a story to the effect that the King of the Belgians had advised you that the invasion of Belgium was imminent. At that time, you will remember, the newspapers were filled every day or so with stories reporting that the Low Countries were about to be invaded, and it is not unnatural to suppose that the fact that the press knew that the King had received the American Ambassador would be linked with the then rumored invasion of Belgium.

As I told you the other day, we are having the most rigorous check-up made in the Department, and I will keep

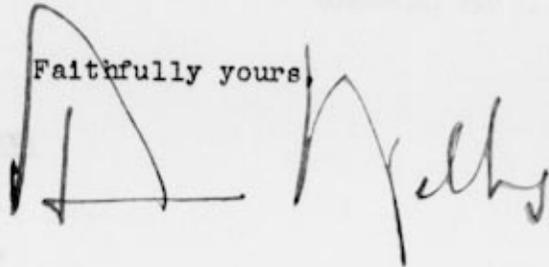
The President,

The White House.

you informed if we run across anything that is disquieting.

Believe me

Faithfully yours,



[Faint, illegible typed text]

Brussels, May 3, 1940.

Personal and
~~Strictly Confidential~~

Dear Mr. President:

I have just written to the Secretary about what appears to be a disturbing leak in the secrecy of the telegram I sent April 18, addressed "for the President and the Secretary of State only."

The Secretary will discuss this with you. But I do not need to tell you how upset I am that there is a possibility of others than those in your most trusted confidence being acquainted with the contents of such a telegram.

If I have been able to keep intimately in touch with the situation here, this in large part has been due to the great confidence the King has given me and I don't think he is over given to confidences. But I am very much afraid that this press story will give him a jolt, and it would be a strange coincidence if

such . . .

The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington.

such a story could arise from any other source except from the secret telegram of April 18.

If any action is to be taken, it will be necessary for a statement to be ready for release in Washington at the time the King informs me the situation calls for action.

The Secretary's answer stated that my message had been given to you just as you were leaving for Warm Springs. The Secretary asked us to keep you in touch with developments, but gave no intimation of our Government's attitude, and I would be grateful if you could send me some word that I might report to the King.

Things are quiet here now and all indications point to a continuance of calm until the outcome in Norway appears more certain.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John A. L. ...". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "John A. L. ...".

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
THE SECRETARY

*File
Personal*

November 12, 1940.

Personal and ~~Confidential~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

I herewith return Myron Taylor's communication, which is very interesting.

CH

S:CH:DMZ

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 18, 1940

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE:

For your information and
return.

F.D.R.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

SEP 19 1940

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

892

PSF; Belgium

KILLINGWORTH
LOCUST VALLEY
LONG ISLAND

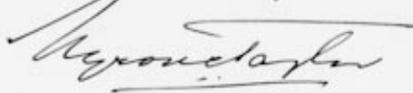
September 12 1940

Dear Mr. President:

Herewith I am enclosing two prepared reports upon the action in Belgium, which were given to me in a rather confidential way by the Belgian Ambassador to the Vatican. I am sure you will take interest in reading them.

I look back upon the delightful visit with you on Monday with much satisfaction; and with continuing regard and best wishes, believe me,

Very sincerely yours,



The Honorable
Franklin D. Roosevelt,
The White House,
Washington, D. C.

[TRANSLATION]

MEMORANDUM DRAFTED BY MR. DEVEZE, MINISTER OF STATE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE ORDER OF BARRISTERS AT THE BRUSSELS COURT OF APPEALS; MR. PHOLIEN, SENATOR, FORMER MINISTER OF JUSTICE, ADVOCATE AT THE COURT OF APPEALS AT BRUSSELS; and MR. RAOUL HAYOIT DE TERMICOURT, ADVOCATE GENERAL AT THE COURT OF CASSATION, TEMPORARILY SUBSTITUTE FOR THE AUDITOR GENERAL.

CHAPTER I - Circumstances leading to the Belgian Army's laying down its arms.

The decision to lay down arms is justified only if all possibilities of usefulness and resistance have previously been exhausted.

Only the Chief of the Army can furnish all the data making it possible to appreciate the basis of the decision which he took during the night of May 27-28, 1940.

Certain essential facts are, however, of public knowledge and for the most part can be confirmed by the experience acquired by the undersigned, as the result of positions which they held in the Army during the campaign:

1. It is as a result of events entirely foreign to the Belgian Army that the enemy was able to reach and then to establish himself on the coast of Pas-de-Calais, thus enclosing the whole Belgian Army, as well as some allied forces, in a pocket which shrank from day to day until, in Belgium, at the moment when arms were laid down,

it

it was not more than thirty kilometers deep. This situation had, in addition, moved the allied commanders progressively to withdraw the forces which were mingled with ours, the latter being thus left to their sole means of defense.

2. In the Belgian pocket zone, the furnishing, both of ammunition and of foodstuffs, became more difficult from day to day. Several hundred thousand refugees, some coming from occupied Belgium, others thrust back from the Franco-Belgian border, wandered about crazily, without shelter, without bread, without drinking water, fleeing from the bombardments, crowding all ways of communication, seriously hindering the movement of troops and offering the most frightful spectacle. Cases of typhus had already been found.

3. During this time the enemy aviation systematically bombarded the troops and concentrations; some whole streets were in flames; at no moment was the slightest reaction of Allied aviation manifest.

While the enemy's brutal offensive was beginning, while losses in men and matériel were increasing to the point that certain units were becoming skeletons, the morale of the men was further deeply affected by the evidence of their impotence under the incessant action of

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the enemy air forces, which no Allied intervention sought to paralyze, and in the face of an armament which constituted a death machine against which their own means of combat no longer protected them.

Thus is explained the fact that during the last hours certain units surrendered to the enemy without order and that, alas, even several officers failed in their duty.

It had thus become obvious to the eyes of all that no choice remained between the horrible slaughter of soldiers and, still more, of civilians, which in addition would not make possible the prolongation of the struggle in Belgium except for a ridiculously short time, and the decision taken by the Commander of the Army.

CHAPTER II - The presence of the King in the midst of his troops.

We believe that the King, the Chief of the Army, had the indisputable right not to separate from his soldiers.

By pamphlets strewn by aircraft, the enemy untruthfully announced the departure of the King. This news, had it not been possible to deny it at once, would, in the above described circumstances, have entailed the immediate collapse of the Army's resistance.

By sharing the Army's lot, its Chief assured it,

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in addition, the best possible treatment whatever might happen, both from the military point of view and the moral point of view. Finally, if it was possible to maintain order and discipline after the laying down of arms, it was due in great part to the presence of the King.

It is to be remarked that this problem did not arise for His Majesty, King Albert, because the troops which he commanded were never encircled. No comparison is thus admissible.

King Leopold could in no way be held responsible for the fact that our last possible line--that on the Yser,--was located between two direct enemy threats and accordingly, contrary to 1914, no longer covered communication with the territories of our allies.

Preferring the accomplishment of his military task to all the advantages which might be attached to his departure from the national soil, the Sovereign seems to us to have given a magnificent proof of his courage and his personal disinterestedness.

CHAPTER III - Legal character of the order to lay down arms.

Contrary to what has been alleged, the King did not negotiate with the enemy; he did not sign with them or

negotiate

negotiate any Convention. Only the order to lay down arms was given, an order of a military character.

This order was given in the name of the King by the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, who had the confidence both of the Sovereign and of the Government. All orders to the Army during this war, as during the preceding war, were given in the same form. Previous advice of this order had necessarily to be given to the enemy and notification made of the hour of ceasing fire.

Conditions were not agreed upon in advance between the King and the enemy; it was after arms had been laid down that the enemy himself declared that, because of the valor of the Belgian Army, he considered the surrender of arms as honorable, and he authorized the officers to keep their weapons.

If the conclusion of any Treaty or Convention must be covered by the personal signature of a responsible Minister, the same is not true of a military act or order. Doubtless, when the head of the Army can keep in contact with the Ministers, it is advisable for him to make no decision, not even a military decision, of first importance without referring it to them or without at least

least referring it to one of them. But when the Ministers have left the national soil, when communication with them has become impossible, the Chief of the General Staff is invested with the power to decide, together with the King, on everything which concerns the military domain.

The order given in this instance is thus in no way subject to an objection of a constitutional order, even on the part of those who do not recognize to the King the power of deciding alone, in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the Army, everything which concerns the military domain.

CHAPTER IV - The King, Chief of the Army, a prisoner of war, is temporarily unable to reign.

The King is, at present, a prisoner of war. That is a logical conclusion of the laying down of arms without a treaty or even an armistice convention, and the King has not asked or accepted any exception from this rule. A prisoner of war, the King is thus temporarily unable to reign.

Article 82 of the Constitution provides the procedure which can be followed in such a case; it is for the Government to judge whether, in the present circumstances, it is permissible to call the Chambers, since the members

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of the National Representation who were mobilized or remained in occupied Belgium cannot make their voices heard.

CHAPTER V - Conclusion

These statements of fact and of law entail the following conclusions:

1. The dramatic error which consisted in accusing the King of having negotiated with the enemy and of having thus violated his oath should be corrected by all possible means and without delay. The King concluded no pact, treaty or convention with the enemy; he acted only in his capacity as Chief of the Army and in agreement with the Chief of the General Staff, after having ascertained that, in view of all the circumstances, any continuation of the Army's struggle in Belgium would have resulted in frightful consequences and that without appreciable military utility. The King could actually have left the strip of territory which was still free. But on May 25, in a moving message to the Army, he sought to galvanize the troops by announcing to them that no matter what might happen, his lot would be theirs. This admirable abnegation had the result of keeping up courage and thus prolonging resistance.

All,

All, officers and soldiers, dismayed by the mistake made abroad as to the reality and the interpretation of the facts, have manifested their loyalty to the Sovereign. The same has further been true of the civilian populations which have had the occasion to express their sentiments.

2. It must not be concealed that the situation thus created entails a deep break which could not but grow worse between the Belgians within the country and those outside. The enemy would, in addition, find valuable encouragement therein for a policy of division of Belgium, a division against which the presence of the King constitutes the most powerful obstacle and one which it is highly desirable not to shake.

3. We candidly consider that in the higher interest of the Country and beyond any personal consideration, the truth should be reestablished, the unity of Belgians re-created and the prestige of the King restored in full.

4. With respect to the administration of the country, the law of May 10, 1940 authorizes ample delegations of power.

For the rest, as the King is a prisoner of war, it is in principle the procedure of Article 82 of the Constitution which should be applied. We have, however, indicated above the objection which results from the dispersion of members of Parliament. But whatever may
be

be decided in this respect, we venture to repeat that it is of prime importance that no impairment should be made in the moral authority of King Leopold and the validity of the powers of the depositaries in Belgium of public authority.

(SIGNED) DEVEZE PHILLEN HAYOIT DE TERMICOURT

Tr:AVA:AA:JLW:SS

[TRANSLATION]

MEMORANDUM ON THE EVENTS WHICH BROUGHT ON THE
SURRENDER OF THE BELGIAN ARMY ON
MAY 28TH

As early as May 18 the King declares to his Ministers that a definitive break in the Allied front is not impossible, that this would result for the Belgian Army and for a part of the Franco-British Armies in an isolation which might lead to grave consequences, that is, to capitulation.

On May 20, notified of the fall of Cambrai and of the state of exhaustion of the French forces in the North, the King advises London of his concern.

On May 21, the entrance of the Germans into Abbeville and Montreuil accomplishes the division which had been feared. At the conference of the Army commanders at Ypres it is agreed that the Belgian Army will cover the operations of the Franco-British forces by defending completely the line of the Lys extended northward toward the mouth of the Scheldt, with a possible retreat to the Yser.

On May 23 the enemy pressure obliges the Belgians to abandon Terneuzen and Ghent; the attempt of the British to pierce through to Arras has failed; the French units are not in condition to attack. On the
other

other hand, enemy motorized detachments are appearing in Boulogne and St. Pol on the allied rear. The encirclement is being rapidly tightened.

The King considers capitulation impossible to avoid.

On May 24 a powerful German attack forces the passage of the Lys, on both sides of Courtrai. The great battle has begun.

On May 25 the King notifies his Ministers, then his Army, of his unshakable decision to share the fate of his soldiers. He sends to London a categorical message regarding the imminent peril and regarding his intentions.

The death of General Billotte, the delegate of the Generalissimo in the North, and the material rupture of communications with France prevent the sending of a like notification to Paris. But the Belgian Ministers, who leave the King hurriedly, will describe at Paris as at London the situation which they have just lived through with the utmost anxiety.

Moreover, on May 26, at noon, the Belgian Commander transmits to the Chief of the French Mission a note on the situation of the Belgian Army in which it is said:

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"The Belgian Commander requests you to make known to the Generalissimo of the Allied Armies that the situation of the Belgian Army is grave and that the Commander-in-Chief intends to continue the struggle until complete exhaustion of his means. The enemy is attacking at the present hour from Eecloo to Menin. The limits of resistance have almost been reached."

This message remained without reply from the Generalissimo.

At 18 o'clock General Blanchard comes and presents himself to the King as successor to General Billotte. He announces that the British are evacuating the front position on our right and are falling back on the Lille-Ypres line. In the vacant space thus created between them and the Belgians, he can interpose only a D. L. M.* reduced to about 15 tanks. Furthermore, due to his not having found General Gort, he cannot state what are the latter's intentions.

On May 27, from 11 o'clock on, a series of reports prove that the front, which is slowly retreating under the repeated assaults of an enemy supported by an overwhelming air force, broke at several places, particularly at the fifth, eleventh, and seventh C.A.; a wide breach is opening in the center and no further reserves are available. Toward 12:30 the King has a message telegraphed to General Gort that "the Army is very discouraged, it has been fighting without a stop

*Light motorized detachment? - Tr.

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for four days under an intense bombing which the R.A.F. cannot prevent. Knowing that this allied group is surrounded and knowing the great superiority of the enemy in the air, the troops have concluded that the situation is desperate. The moment is rapidly approaching when they will be in no condition to fight. The King will find himself obliged to surrender in order to prevent a rout."

At about 2:30 the Major General, Aide to General Weygand, who is visiting at General Headquarters, is told: "The Belgian resistance is at the very end. Our front is crumbling like a cord which breaks after being completely worn through."

A little before 16 o'clock the Belgian Command states:

(1) That from the national point of view the Army has fulfilled its task; it has used to the full its capacity to resist. Its units are incapable of resuming the combat tomorrow. A retreat toward the Yser cannot be contemplated; it would dislocate the units more than combat; it would carry to the extreme the congestion of the allied forces already fatally hemmed in between the Yser on the one hand and Calais and Cassel, attacked by the Germans, on the other hand.

(2)

(2) That from the international point of view, the sending of a bearer of a flag of truce to inquire as to the terms for the cessation of hostilities will serve to gain for the Allies the entire night of the 27th to the 28th and part of the morning of the 28th, a period equivalent to that which it would be impossible to obtain through the continuation of the struggle except at the price of a catastrophic dislocation of the Army.

The King decides that a bearer of a flag of truce shall be sent to learn the terms of suspension of hostilities between the German Army and the Belgian Army.

This decision is immediately communicated to the French and British Missions. The Chief of the French Mission, while understanding the good grounds for the decision, expresses the opinion that the negotiations ought to be conducted in concert by the three Armies.

The answer is made to him a little later that the mission is limited to inquiring as to the terms for a suspension of arms.

The General says incidentally that he has

succeeded

succeeded in notifying General Weygand by radio; but that he does not succeed in getting in touch with General Blanchard, whose headquarters do not occupy the position which had been planned. He adds with our approval that he is deploying on the Yser the 60th French Division which we advised sending toward Dunkerque on our Belgian trucks to be placed at the direct disposal of the French Command.

It is to be noted that the inundation of the Yser and the destruction of the passages over this river have been organized by us for 48 hours.

As to General Gort, we no longer know where he is; for his headquarters, which were to be set up at Cassel, had to give this up in the face of an attack of German tanks; and the destruction of the Lille central exchange has made impossible all telephone communications. At 17 o'clock the bearer of a flag of truce leaves the Belgian General Headquarters.

At 22 o'clock, the return of the bearer of a flag of truce: "The Fuehrer requires that arms be laid down unconditionally."

At 23 o'clock the King decides to accept and to propose that suspension of firing be set for 4 o'clock.

At

At 1:30 notification is given to the Chief of the French Mission, who in the meantime has moved to La Panne.

At 3:15 the Chief of the French Mission communicates a telegram from General Weygand: "The French and British Governments are in agreement for their Armies to save the honor of the flag by separating from the Belgian Army."

At 4 o'clock the Germans suspended firing all along the Belgian front except in the sector of Roulers-Ypres where the Belgian units, not having been notified, continued to defend their positions until about 6 o'clock.

About 9 o'clock a message from the bearer of a flag of truce makes known that the German Command demands the unhindered advance of their columns in the direction of the sea. This message is at once telephoned to the Chief of the French Mission. A little later the rupture of the telephone system puts a definitive end to the communications between the delegate of the Allied Command and the Belgian Command.

Chateau de Jaeken,

June 3, 1940.

Tr:FGH:HSF

Note rédigée par Monsieur DEVEZE, Ministre d'Etat, ancien Bâtonnier de l'Ordre des Avocats près la Cour d'Appel de Bruxelles, Monsieur PHOLIEN, Sénateur, ancien Ministre de la Justice, avocat à la Cour d'Appel de Bruxelles, Monsieur HAYOIT de TERMICOURT, Raoul, avocat général près la Cour de Cassation, temporairement Substitut de l'Auditeur général.

CHAPITRE 1 :

Circonstances ayant amené le dépôt des armes par l'armée de Belgique.

La décision de déposer les armes ne se justifie que si toutes les possibilités de résistance utile ont été préalablement épuisées.

Seul le Chef de l'armée peut fournir l'ensemble des éléments permettant d'apprécier le fondement de la décision qu'il a prise durant la nuit du 27 au 28 mai 1940.

Certains faits essentiels sont toutefois de notoriété publique et, pour la plupart, peuvent être confirmés par l'expérience acquise par les soussignés en raison des fonctions qu'ils ont remplies auprès de l'Armée pendant la campagne:

1°) C'est en raison d'événements totalement étrangers à l'armée belge que l'ennemi est parvenu à atteindre, puis à se fixer à la côte du Pas de Calais, enfermant ainsi toute l'armée de Belgique ainsi que des forces alliées dans une poche qui allait se rétrécissant de jour en jour pour ne plus atteindre en Belgique, au moment du dépôt des armes qu'une trentaine de Kilomètres en profondeur. Cette situation avait d'ailleurs incité les Commandements alliés à retirer progressivement les forces qui se trouvaient mêlées aux nôtres, celles-ci étant ainsi laissées à leurs seuls moyens de défense.

2°) Dans la zone belge de la poche, le ravitaillement tant en munitions qu'en vivres devenait de jour en jour plus difficile. Plusieurs centaines de milliers de réfugiés, venus les uns de la Belgique occupée, les autres refoulés de la frontière franco-bel-

ge,

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erraient affolés, sans toit, sans pain, sans eau potable, fuyant les bombardements, encombrant toutes les voies de communication, entravant gravement les mouvements des troupes et offrant à tous le plus affreux spectacle. Déjà des cas de typhus étaient signalés.

3°) Pendant ce temps l'aviation ennemie bombardait systématiquement les troupes et les agglomérations; certaines rues entières étaient en flammes; à aucun moment ne se manifesta la moindre réaction de l'aviation alliée.

Tandis qu'une offensive brutale de l'ennemi commençait, que les pertes en hommes et en matériel croissaient au point que certaines unités devenaient squelettiques, le moral des hommes était en outre profondément atteint par la constatation de leur impuissance sous l'action incessante de l'aviation ennemie, qu'aucune intervention alliée n'essayait de paralyser, et en face d'un armement qui constituait une machine à tuer contre laquelle leurs propres moyens de combat ne les protégeaient plus.

Ainsi s'explique que durant les dernières heures des unités se rendirent à l'ennemi sans ordre et que, hélas! plusieurs officiers même manquèrent à leur devoir.

Il était ainsi devenu évident aux yeux de tous qu'il ne restait le choix qu'entre un carnage horrible de soldats et plus encore de civils, ne permettant d'ailleurs la prolongation de la lutte en Belgique que pour un temps dérisoire, et la décision prise par le Chef de l'Armée.

CHAPITRE LI.

La présence du Roi au milieu de ses troupes.

Nous estimons que le Roi, Chef de l'Armée, avait le droit incontestable de ne pas se séparer de ses soldats.

L'ennemi, par des tracts lancés par avion, annonça mensongèrement

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le départ du Roi: cette nouvelle, si elle n'eût pu être aussitôt démentie, eut entraîné, dans les circonstances ci-devant décrites, l'effondrement immédiat de la résistance de l'Armée.

En partageant le sort de l'Armée, son Chef lui assurait, en outre, le meilleur traitement possible quoiqu'il advienne, tant au point de vue militaire qu'au point de vue moral. Enfin si l'ordre et la discipline ont pu être maintenues après le dépôt des armes, la présence du Roi y fut pour la plus grande part.

Il y a lieu de faire observer que ce problème ne s'est pas posé pour S.M. le Roi Albert, parce que les troupes qu'il commandait ne furent jamais encerclées. Aucune comparaison n'est donc permise.

Le Roi Léopold ne saurait être rendu responsable en une manière quelconque de ce que notre dernière ligne possible - celle de l'Yser - se soit trouvée placée entre deux menaces directes de l'ennemi et partant ne couvrit plus, à l'inverse de 1914, la communication avec les territoires de nos alliés.

Préférant l'accomplissement de sa tâche militaire à tous les avantages qui se fussent attachés à son départ du sol national, le Souverain nous apparaît comme ayant donné un magnifique témoignage de son courage et de son désintéressement personnel.

CHAPITRE III.

Caractère juridique de l'ordre de déposer les armes.

Contrairement à ce qui a été allégué, le Roi n'a pas traité avec l'ennemi; il n'a signé avec lui ni traité ni convention quelconque. Seul a été donné l'ordre de déposer les armes, ordre à caractère militaire.

Cet ordre a été donné au nom du Roi par le Chef d'Etat-Major Général de l'Armée, investi de la confiance à la fois du Souverain et du Gouvernement. Tous les ordres à l'Armée, durant cette guerre comme durant la précédente, ont été donnés dans la même

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forme. L'avertissement préalable de cet ordre devait nécessairement être donné à l'ennemi et notification faite de l'heure de l'arrêt du feu.

Des conditions n'ont pas été préalablement arrêtées entre le Roi et l'ennemi; c'est après le dépôt des armes que l'ennemi lui-même a déclaré, en raison de la vaillance de l'armée belge, qu'il considérait le dépôt des armes comme honorable et autorisait les officiers à conserver leurs armes.

Si la conclusion d'un traité ou d'une convention quelconque doit être couverte par la signature personnelle d'un Ministre responsable, il n'en est pas de même d'un fait ou d'un ordre militaire. Sans doute lorsque le Chef de l'Armée peut se tenir en contact avec les Ministres, convient-il qu'il ne prenne aucune décision, même militaire, de première importance sans leur en référer ou sans en référer au moins à l'un d'entre eux. Mais lorsque les Ministres ont tous quitté le sol national, que les communications avec eux sont devenues impossibles, le Chef d'Etat-Major Général est investi du pouvoir de décider, en accord avec le Roi, tout ce qui a trait au domaine militaire.

L'ordre donné en l'espèce n'est donc point sujet à une objection d'ordre constitutionnel, même de la part de ceux qui ne reconnaissent pas au Roi le pouvoir de décider seul, en sa qualité de Commandant en Chef de l'Armée, tout ce qui a trait au domaine militaire.

CHAPITRE IV.

Le Roi, Chef de l'Armée, prisonnier de guerre est temporairement dans l'impossibilité de régner.

Le Roi est actuellement prisonnier de guerre. C'est là une conclusion logique du dépôt des armes sans traité ni même convention d'armistice. Et le Roi n'a demandé ni accepté aucune dérogation à cette règle. Prisonnier de guerre, le Roi est donc tempo-

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rairement dans l'impossibilité de régner.

L'article 82 de la Constitution prévoit la procédure qui peut être suivie en pareil cas; il appartient au Gouvernement d'apprécier si, dans les circonstances présentes, il est permis de réunir les Chambres, alors que les membres de la Représentation Nationale mobilisés ou demeurés en Belgique occupée ne peuvent faire entendre leur voix.

CHAPITRE V:

Conclusion.

Ces données de fait et de droit entraînent les conclusions suivantes:

1°) La dramatique erreur qui a consisté à accuser le Roi d'avoir traité avec l'ennemi et d'avoir ainsi violé son serment doit être rectifiée par tous les moyens possibles et sans retard. Le Roi n'a conclu aucun pacte, traité ou convention avec l'ennemi; il n'a agi qu'en sa qualité de Chef de l'Armée et d'accord avec le Chef de l'Etat-Major Général, après avoir constaté que, compte tenu de l'ensemble des circonstances, toute continuation de la lutte de l'armée en Belgique eût entraîné des conséquences affreuses et cela sans utilité militaire appréciable. Le Roi eût pu matériellement quitter le lambeau de territoire encore libre. Mais le 25 mai, dans un émouvant message à l'Armée, il s'efforça de galvaniser les troupes leur annonçant que, quoiqu'il advienne, son sort serait le leur. Cette admirable abnégation a eu pour résultat de soutenir les courages et de prolonger ainsi la résistance.

Tous, officiers et soldats, consternés par l'erreur commise à l'étranger sur la matérialité et l'interprétation des faits, ont manifesté leur loyalisme au Souverain. Il en est d'ailleurs de même des populations civiles qui ont eu l'occasion d'exprimer leurs sentiments.

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2°) Il ne faut pas se dissimuler que la situation ainsi créée entraîne un déchirement profond qui ne ferait que s'aggraver, entre les Belges de l'intérieur du pays et ceux de l'extérieur. L'ennemi y trouverait, en outre, un précieux encouragement pour une politique de division de la Belgique, division à laquelle la présence du Roi constitue le plus puissant obstacle qu'il est hautement souhaitable de ne pas ébranler.

3°) Nous estimons en conscience que, dans l'intérêt supérieur de la Patrie et par delà toute considération de personne, la vérité doit être rétablie, l'union des Belges reconstituée et le prestige du Roi intégralement restauré.

4°) En ce qui concerne l'administration du pays, la loi du 10 mai 1940 autorise de larges délégations.

Pour le surplus, le Roi étant prisonnier de guerre, c'est en principe la procédure de l'art. 82 de la Constitution qui devrait être appliquée. Nous avons toutefois indiqué ci-dessus l'objection qui résulte de la dispersion des membres du Parlement. Mais quoi qu'il soit décidé à cet égard, nous osons répéter qu'il est capital que ne soit pas portée atteinte à l'autorité morale du Roi Léopold et à la validité des pouvoirs des dépositaires en Belgique de l'autorité publique.

(s) DEVEZE PHOLIEN HAYOIT de TERMICOURT.

MEMORANDUM

sur les événements qui ont amené la reddition de
l'Armée Belge le 28 mai.

Dès le 18 mai, le Roi déclare à ses Ministres qu'une rupture définitive du front allié n'est pas impossible, qu'il en réulterait pour l'Armée Belge et pour une partie des armées franco-britanniques un isolement qui pourrait conduire à des conséquences graves, c'est-à-dire à une capitulation.

Le 20 mai, averti de la chute de Courmoy et de l'état d'épuisement des forces françaises du Nord, le Roi envisage Londres de ses préoccupations.

Le 21 mai, l'entrée des Allemands à Abbeville et Montreuil réalise une situation redoutée. A la conférence des Commandants d'armée à Ypres, il est convenu que l'armée belge couvrira les opérations des forces franco-britanniques en défendant à fond la ligne de la Ighr prolongée au Nord vers l'embouchure de l'Escaut, avec retraite éventuelle sur l'Yser.

Le 23 mai, la pression ennemie oblige les Belges à abandonner Courmoyen et Gerdi; la tentative de percée britannique sur Arras a échoué; les unités françaises sont hors d'état d'attaquer. D'autre part, des détachements motorisés ennemis débouchent par Boulogne et St-Pol sur les arrière-alliés. L'encerclement se resserre à grande vitesse.

Le Roi considère la capitulation comme impossible à éviter.

Le 24 mai, une puissante attaque allemande force le passage de la Ighr, de part et d'autre de Courmoy. La grande bataille a commencé.

Le 25 mai, le Roi notifie à ses Ministres, puis à son armée, sa résolution inébranlable de partager le sort de ses soldats. Il adresse à Londres un message catégorique quant au péril imminent et quant à ses intentions.

Le décès du Général Billotte, délégué du Généralissime dans le Nord, et la rupture matérielle des communications avec la France empêchent de faire une notification analogue à Paris. Mais les Ministres belges qui quittent le Roi en hâte, dépendraient à Paris comme à Londres la situation qu'ils verraient de vive avec la plus vive anxiété.

Au surplus, le 26 mai, à midi, le Commandement Belge remet au Chef de

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la Mission Française une note sur la situation de l'armée Belge où il est dit :

"Le Commandement Belge vous prie de faire connaître au généralissime des armées alliées que la situation de l'armée belge est grave et que le Commandant en chef entend soutenir la lutte jusqu'à l'épuisement total de ses moyens.... L'ennemi attaque à l'heure actuelle d'Ecloo à Menin. Les limites de la résistance sont bien près d'être atteintes".- Ce message est resté sans réponse du généralissime.

A 18 heures, le Général Blanchard vient se présenter au Roi comme successeur du Général Billotte. Il annonce que les Britanniques évacuent la position frontière à notre droite et se portent plus en arrière sur la ligne Lille-Ypres. Dans le vide ainsi créé entre eux et les Belges, il ne peut qu'intercaler une D.L.M. réduite à une quinzaine de chars. Au surplus, faute d'avoir rencontré le Général Gort, il ne saurait préciser les intentions de celui-ci.

Le 27 mai, à partir de 11 heures, une série de renseignements prouve que le front, qui bat lentement en retraite sous les assauts répétés d'un ennemi soutenu par une aviation écrasante, s'est rompu en plusieurs points, notamment aux Vè, llè, et Villè C.A.; une large brèche s'ouvre au centre et plus aucune réserve n'est disponible. Vers 12 h. 30, le Roi fait télégraphier au Général Gort que "l'armée est très découragée, qu'elle se bat sans arrêt depuis quatre jours sous un intense bombardement que la R.A.P. n'a pu empêcher. De savoir ce groupement allié cerné et la grande supériorité aérienne ennemie, les troupes ont conclu à une situation désespérée. Le moment approche rapidement où elles seront hors d'état de combattre. Le Roi va se trouver contraint de capituler pour éviter une débâcle."

Vers 14 h. 30, il est déclaré à l'aide-major général du Général Weygand en visite au G.Q.G. : " La résistance belge est à toute extrémité. Notre front est en train de s'effriter, telle une corde qui se casse après usure complète."

Un peu avant 16 h., le Commandement Belge constate :

1) que du point de vue national, l'armée a rempli sa tâche; elle a mis en oeuvre la totalité de sa capacité de résistance. Ses unités sont incapables de reprendre le combat demain. Une retraite vers l'Yser ne peut

s'envisager; elle disloquerait les unités plus que le combat; elle porterait au comble la congestion des forces alliées déjà mortellement resserrées entre l'Yser d'une part, Calais et Cassel attaqués par les Allemands, d'autre part.

2) que du point de vue international, l'envoi d'un parlementaire pour s'enquérir des conditions d'une cessation des hostilités conduira à gagner au profit des Alliés toute la nuit du 27/28 et une partie de la matinée du 28, délai équivalent à celui que ne pourrait procurer la continuation de la lutte qu'au prix d'une dislocation catastrophique de l'armée.

Le Roi décide qu'un parlementaire sera envoyé pour connaître les conditions de la cessation des hostilités entre l'armée allemande et l'armée Belge?

Cette décision est aussitôt portée à la connaissance des Missions française et britannique. Le Chef de la mission française, tout en comprenant le bien fondé de la décision; exprime l'opinion que les négociations devraient se conduire de concert par les trois armées.

Il lui est répondu un peu plus tard que la mission se borne à s'enquérir des conditions d'une suspension d'armes.

Le général dit incidemment qu'il a réussi à avertir le Général Weygand par radio; mais qu'il ne parvient pas à toucher le général Blanchard dont le Q.G. n'occupe pas l'emplacement prévu. Il ajoute, avec notre approbation, qu'il fait déployer sur l'Yser la 60^e Division Française que nous avons prescrit d'acheminer vers Dunkerque sur nos canons belges pour être remise à la disposition directe du Commandement français.

A noter que les inondations de l'Yser et la destruction des passages sur ce fleuve ont été organisées par nous depuis quarante-huit heures.

Quant au Général Gort, on ne sait pas davantage où il se trouve; car son Q.G. qui devait s'installer à Cassel, a dû y renoncer devant une attaque de chars allemands; et la destruction du central de Lille a rendu toutes communications téléphoniques impossibles. A 17 heures, le Parlementaire quitte le G.Q.G. Belge.

A 22 heures, retour du Parlementaire: " Le Führer exige le dépôt des armes sans conditions."

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A 23 heures, le Roi décide d'accepter et de proposer que la cessation du feu soit fixée à 4 heures.

A 1 heure 30, notification est faite au Chef de la Mission française qui s'est entretemps transporté à La Rame.

A 3 heures 15, le Chef de la Mission française donne communication d'un télégramme du général Weygand : " Les Gouvernements Français et Britannique sont d'accord pour que leurs armées sauvent l'honneur du drapeau en se désolidarisant de l'Armée Belge."

A 4 heures, les Allemands cessent le feu sur l'ensemble du front belge, sauf dans le secteur Roulers Ypres où les unités belges non averties continuent à défendre leurs positions jusque vers 6 heures.

Vers 9 heures, un message du Parlementaire fait connaître que le Commandement Allemand demande la libre progression de leurs colonnes en direction de la mer.- Ce message est aussitôt téléphoné au Chef de la Mission Française.- Peu après, la rupture du réseau téléphonique met un terme définitif aux communications entre le délégué du Commandement allié et le Commandement Belge.

Château de Laeken, 3 juin 1940.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 11, 1941.

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: UNDER SECRETARY WELLES.

The Belgian Ambassador came in to see me yesterday and we had a long talk. To my surprise he wants to bring up with you the question of need for food for babies in Belgium to come from the United States. My answer was that our policy had been made clear. I told him if the British Government itself was willing, I felt that the relations between the Belgian Government and the British Government was so close that it should be settled between them.

Lord Halifax called and wanted you to know that the British Government had been urging the Belgian Government to enlarge the Constitution of the Belgian Government so that it would take in representatives of all groups in Belgium and not limit itself to a few who are now running the show. The British feel that the Belgians should take in the Flemish and other political parties in Belgium.