PART TWO

THE MODERN AGE
NEUTRAL BORDERS, NEUTRAL WATERS, NEUTRAL SKIES
PROTECTING THE TERRITORIAL NEUTRALITY OF THE
NETHERLANDS IN THE GREAT WAR, 1914–1918

Maartje M. Abbenhuis

Ever since the ‘nation-state’ became the predominant political unit in nineteenth-century Europe, the borders of European countries, represented by the bold lines on geo-political maps of the time, have assumed special significance. Borders mark the limits of a state’s territorial sovereignty—the area in which a country’s government holds absolute legal jurisdiction—and they delineate the precise boundaries where other governments take over that jurisdiction. Of course, borders have associated cultural definitions including that of forming the physical representation of the ‘nation’, a supposedly easily identifiable entity for citizens. Yet, as we know, borders are far from the static, unalterable, or uncontroversial lines in which they are represented on maps. Because they function both as the boundary separating states and the place where these countries and their peoples meet, the relationship between states can often be defined in terms of their borders. Borders also act as ‘political membranes’ through which people, goods, information, and wealth pass from one nation-state to another. It is therefore, vital for governments to control what and who move across their borders, especially when relations with their neighbors are not open or peaceful. In this sense, borders act as agents as well as instruments

---