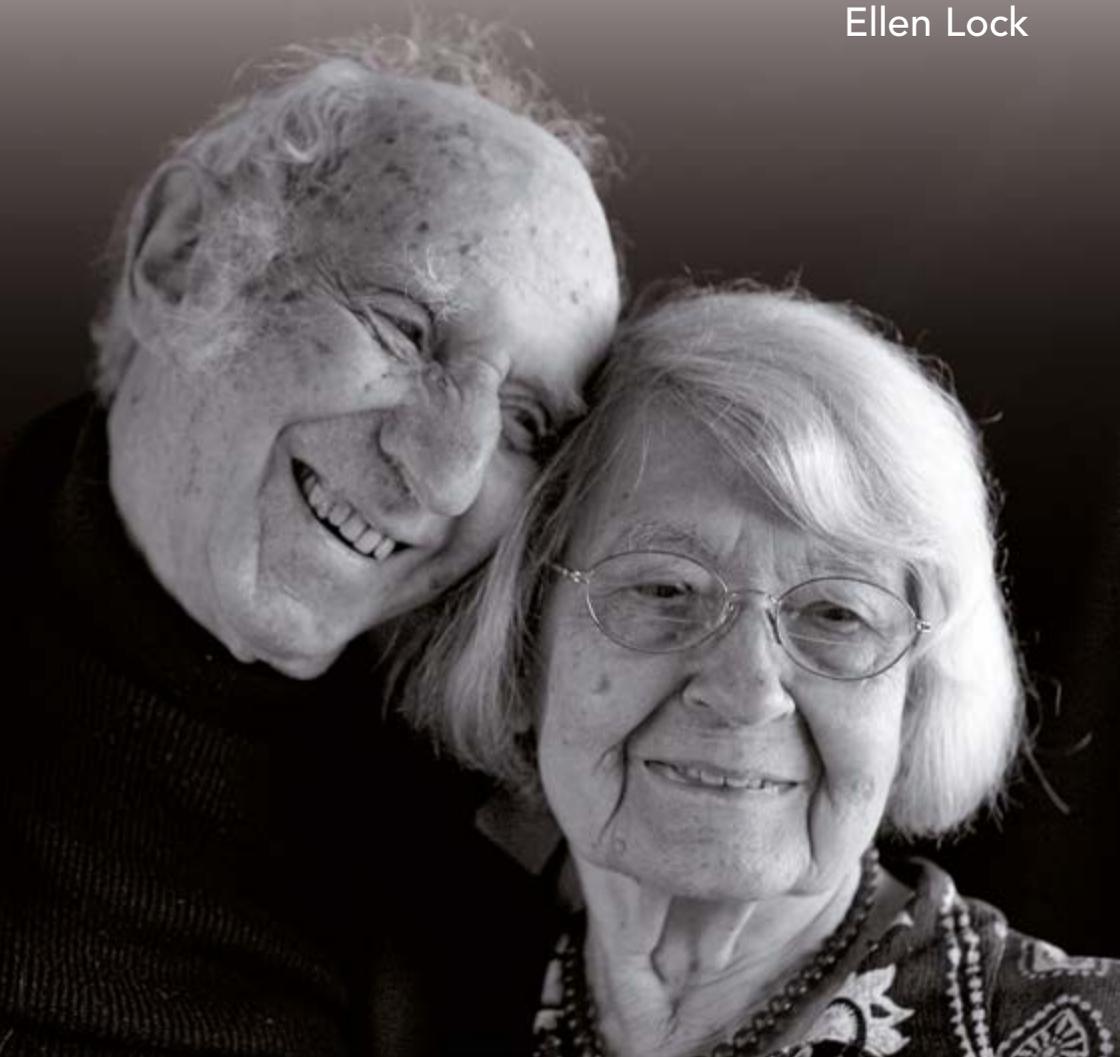


Come tell me after all these years your tales about the end of war

Tales of members of the resistance
and victims of war

Ellen Lock



Come tell me after all these years
your tales about the end of war
tell me a thousand times or more
and every time I'll be in tears.

by Leo Vroman: Peace

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Tales of members of the resistance and victims of war

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Content

Tales of Members of the Resistance and Victims of War 10
Martin van Rijn, State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport

70 Years after the Second World War 12
Nicoly Vermeulen, Chair of the Board of Directors
of the Sociale Verzekeringsbank (SVB)

Speaking for your benefit 14
Hans Dresden, Chair of the Pension and Benefit Board

Tales of Europe

Real freedom only exists if everyone can be free 17
Working with the resistance in Amsterdam, nursery teacher
Sieny Kattenburg saved many Jewish children from
deportation from the Hollandsche Schouwburg theatre.

Surviving in order to bear witness 25
Psychiatrist Max Hamburger survived the camps
at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

**We want the world to know what happened
in the death camp at Sobibor!** 33
Sobibor survivor Jules Schelvis tells his story.

- Not a day goes by without something reminding you of the war** 41
Morris Tabaksblat, a former chief executive of Unilever, talks about his memories of the war.
- In search of justice** 49
Judge Anita Leeser-Gassan survived Bergen-Belsen.
- A life of survival** 57
In conversation with Bill Minco.
- Our wars had nothing in common** 67
The wartime childhood of Ed van Thijn.
- The Death of the Adversary** 75
Renewed interest in novel by 101-year-old writer and psychiatrist Hans Keilson.
- Joke Folmer saved pilots; 'Mad Tuesday' saved her** 81
Joke Folmer became involved in the Resistance at the age of seventeen.
- Cruel fate has not crushed us** 87
Hella de Jonge talks about her debut novel 'Los van de wereld' ('Disconnected from the world').
- 'Your character and upbringing make it impossible not to resist'** 95
Siet Gravendaal-Tammens was at the top of the resistance in Groningen.
- Soldier of Orange** 103
Resistance fighter, 'Engelandvaarder' (England voyager), radio operator, war pilot, and writer Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema recounts his experiences during the war.

- Far away** 113
After escaping from the Netherlands to join the Allied forces, Bram Grisnigt was dropped back into occupied Dutch territory as a secret agent.
- A place for the 'Forgotten Holocaust'** 121
In the presence of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, Zoni Weisz unveiled the Sinti and Roma monument in Berlin.
- Jan Wolkers' memories of the Second World War** 127
A conversation with the creator of the Auschwitz memorial.
- Forever quiet for them** 135
Jaap Keijmel and Johan Provoost talk about the Allied bombing of Breskens on 11 September 1944.
- The longing to be reunited with my wife gave me the strength to endure all those camps!** 143
Reprisal victim Arie Kooiman talks about the consequences of the raid in Beverwijk.
- Keep hold of my hands!** 151
Koos Postema talks about the bombing of Rotterdam.
- Tales of the Dutch East Indies**
- We were prepared to fight to the bitter end** 160
Ambonese resistance member Coos Ayal tells of her battle against the Japanese in New Guinea.
- Now it's time for me to speak out** 166
For fifty years, Jan Ruff-O'Herne kept silent about her experiences during the war.

- You needed each other to survive the Death Railway!** 174
Han de Bruïne worked on the Pakan Baru railway on Sumatra as a prisoner of war.
- Endless toil under a burning sun** 184
Felix Bakker recalls his period of forced labour on the Burma Railway.
- Survivor of the Junyo Maru maritime disaster** 195
90-year-old Willem Punt can remember every detail of his internment as a prisoner of war.
- I drew hope from memories of another world** 202
As a child, author Mischa de Vreede grew up in Japanese women's camps on North Sumatra.
- The war is behind me now; I have turned the page** 210
Couturier Edgar Vos recounts his experiences as a child in a Japanese camp.
- You wouldn't wish a hell like that on your worst enemy!** 218
Ronald Scholte survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki as a prisoner of war.
- You have to grab luck while you can!** 226
Ben Bot, former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, became streetwise in Tjideng.
- I survived Tjideng thanks to my mother's courage** 236
Hermance Clegg, mother of the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, was a survivor of the Japanese camp Tjideng.
- Under my sister's wings, I always felt protected** 246
Historian and lawyer Cees Fasseur grew up in Japanese POW camp Lampersari-Sompok, in Semarang, Java.

- Finding lost time** 254
Biologist, artist, writer and poet Leo Vroman talks about internment in Japanese camps and how it affected his life.
- No one can understand my story about the Dutch East Indies. It was such a different world!** 262
Herman Romans van Schaik survived the atrocities of the Bersiap period in Surabaya.
- In my dreams I'm escaping from a burning Catalina** 270
At the age of six, Theo Doorman survived a Japanese attack on a Catalina flying boat off the coast of Australia.
- Van Dis on the warpath** 278
I carry the war in me, as it were, because I went through a kind of war at home.
- The captain gave the signal to abandon ship** 288
Seaman Frits de Jong survived a Japanese attack.
- They can't touch my innermost being** 292
Toos Blokland kept a diary in the camps at Darmo-wijk and Halmaheira.



Martin van Rijn.

Tales of Members of the Resistance and Victims of War

This book consists of a selection of interviews published in the magazine *Aanspraak* between 1997 and 2014. This is an anthology that brings together the very best content from a consistently interesting magazine. I admire the people who made the selection because, with so much to choose from, it must have been an awfully difficult job. Throughout the years, the basic structure of *Aanspraak* has barely changed. And why should it have? The magazine has been highly appreciated from the very first edition, not least because of the in-depth interviews, for which there has always been space.

To me, interviews like these are small monuments. Monuments made of words. Sometimes the interviews are with famous people, sometimes with less well-known individuals. These stories are about victims of war, former members of the resistance, victims of persecution, children who had to go into hiding, people who survived the Hunger Winter, those who were or were not interned in camps in the Dutch East Indies, and many others. A highly diverse group of people, therefore, who were connected by that terrible war.

Last September, I addressed a large number of veterans at a remembrance ceremony in Roermond. I urged them to tell their stories. We need their stories to show the next generation what a disastrous effect exclusion and persecution have had, and how this undermined the rule of law in our country. This applies equally, of course, to the stories you have before you. They make the horrors tangible, and contain lessons that we cannot afford to forget. This is a book to cherish.

Martin van Rijn

State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport



Nicolý Vermeulen.

70 Years after the Second World War

Marking the 70th remembrance of the end of the Second World War, I am honoured to present you with this anthology on behalf of the SVB and the Pension and Benefit Board. Each and every one of the stories in this book is remarkable. They are a perfect testimony to the impact that the war had and continues to have. When I talk to clients, it becomes clear again and again how important it is that their stories are passed on as lessons in life for present and future generations. We are pleased to contribute to this aim by bringing these stories together in an anthology in which Dutch former members of the resistance, victims of persecution and civilian victims of war, some famous, some less well-known, speak about their experience of the war. This book is a very impressive illustration of the diversity of people who were affected by a wide range of wartime events.

I would also like to draw attention to the departure of Ms Hans Dresden as Chair of the Pension and Benefit Board. We thank her - also with this gift - for her outstanding contribution over a period of many years to the Pension and Benefit Board. I sincerely hope that you will be inspired by the stories, and that you will take the wisdom they contain to heart and pass it on to others.

Nicolý Vermeulen

Chair of the Board of Directors of the Sociale Verzekeringsbank (SVB)



Photo: Ellen Lock.

Hans Dresden.

Speaking for your benefit

In my past four years as Chair of the Pension and Benefit Board, I have always taken a great deal of pleasure in writing the foreword 'Speaking for your benefit' in the magazine Aanspraak, which we publish for our clients. I know that the magazine is well-received by readers because I frequently received heart-warming letters and telephone calls in response to my columns and the interviews.

Many clients asked whether it would be possible to collect some of the interviews by Ellen Lock and publish them in a book. It is very gratifying that this has in fact happened. I could not have wished for a better farewell gift.

Almost seventy years have passed since Liberation Day. Seventy years is a long time, but for those who experienced the horrors of the war, the past is not so far away. This anthology contains their stories. Stories of what they experienced during the war, and also of what they made of their lives after the war.

The interviews published in Aanspraak often paint an extremely detailed and personal picture of how people experienced the war and how they look back on those times. This anthology gives a vivid impression of the different events and responses to those events. It becomes clear how each individual experienced the war in his or her own way. A single story could never give an adequate account of a world war that affected so many.

Hans Dresden

Chair of the Pension and Benefit Board

Tales of Europe



Sieny Kattenburg at the age of 19 and Harry Cohen at the age of 23, 1943.

Real freedom only exists if everyone can be free

Working with the resistance in Amsterdam, nursery teacher Sieny Kattenburg saved many Jewish children from deportation from the Hollandsche Schouwburg theatre.

As from July 1942, the Hollandsche Schouwburg theatre in Amsterdam was a guarded assembly and deportation point for Jews who had been rounded up in raids. The nursery across the road became a guarded annex used to accommodate the Jewish children because they were considered too noisy. For nineteen months, weekly transports took place from the Hollandsche Schouwburg to camp Westerbork.

The resistance in Amsterdam managed to save around 600 children from deportation from the nursery. Sieny Kattenburg, who was one of the nursery teachers, smuggled many children out of the nursery. When this became too dangerous, Sieny and her husband decided to go into hiding as well. In this interview, we look back at her work in the resistance and how she went into hiding.

Failed escape to England

'My father had a wholesale shoe business and a shop in Nieuwe Hoogstraat in Amsterdam. I was born as Schoontje Kattenburg in the house opposite the shop on 19 March 1924. My sister Jetty, who is two years older than me, is still alive. My parents and my brother Leopold, who was nine years younger than me, were murdered during the war. At the age of 16 I was attending higher elementary school (mulo) and wanted to go into nursing, but the war threw a spanner in the works. On 10 May 1940, our whole household was in panic. A German business friend came by and advised us to flee to

England. Initially, my father was unwilling to leave his sick old father behind, but he also urged us to leave. We drove in a jam packed car to IJmuiden, where we met with an enormous queue of Jewish refugees. We were unable to get on a boat in all the chaos, and had to turn back and go home.'

Working in the nursery

'More and more anti-Jewish measures were introduced and the atmosphere in the streets was becoming increasingly sinister. In September 1941, I, as a Jewish schoolgirl, was no longer allowed to go to my own school. In October 1941, I met with my friend Betty Oudkerk, who told me we could work as nursery teachers in a nursery opposite the Hollandsche Schouwburg theatre. The director, Henriëtte Pimentel, took us on, but we had to ask for our parents' permission first. After our training as nursery teachers, Betty Oudkerk, Fanny Philips and I worked inside the building permanently, 24 hours a day, sleeping in the attic. Fanny and Betty supervised the older children, aged from 5 to 13, and I was responsible for the babies and toddlers, aged from 0 to 4. I was in charge of a dormitory containing 40 cots and camp beds, given to us by the Jewish Council because of the huge influx of children.

As Jews were not allowed to go to the shops, they provided us with food as well. That was how I met Harry Cohen, who carried parcels and letters back and forth as a bicycle courier for the Jewish Council.'

Rescuing Jewish children from the nursery

'When the Hollandsche Schouwburg theatre was taken into use as an assembly and deportation centre on 20 July 1942, Walter Süskind was appointed as director by the Jewish Council. Thanks to his fluent German, he was able to win the trust of the German guards. Every week, he was given lists of people due to be deported, which he passed on to Mrs Pimentel. She gave me the job of asking parents whether they wanted to give up their children. I had an armband signifying that I had permission from the Germans to go between the theatre and the nursery. I told the parents that they could opt for

their child to go into hiding. Many parents did not want that, replying, "No, we are young and strong, we can look after our child." Others said, "Make sure they are placed with good people." If they agreed that their child should go into hiding, I prepared them for it: "Think it over thoroughly before you decide. Instead of your baby, I will bring you a doll wrapped up in a blanket so no one can see it. If anyone wants to see the baby, tell them it's asleep." At four in the afternoon, I asked them whether they wanted to go ahead with the plan. As soon as we received their consent, the resistance could set to work. Blond children could be sent to the North, in which case a minister was contacted with the message, "I've got 'tea' for you, when can I send it?" The minister would then look for addresses where the children could go into hiding with trustworthy people. If a child had dark hair, they would phone a priest in the South, this time saying that they had 'coffee' rather than 'tea'.

I would hand children to people from the resistance over the little wall in the back garden to the college for nursery school teachers. Others 'disappeared' during our walks. If there was a guard in front of the door, I signalled through the window to a childminder inside how many children she was to send outside, so that the numbers I gave added up when he counted.'

Love at first sight

'Mrs Pimentel said to me, "That Harry Cohen is a nice boy. You would stand a better chance of going into hiding together in the country if you were married." On 26 May 1943, my parents and my nine-year-old brother Leopold were sent to Westerbork. I wrote to my parents that Harry and I wanted to get married, on the advice of the director, and asked them for permission. Their permission arrived a few days later through the register of births, deaths and marriages, which, for Jews, was in the department store Vroom & Dreesmann. The desk was right by the entrance because Jews were not allowed to enter the actual store. On 28 June 1943, Harry went there to report that he wanted to get married as soon as possible. The man informed him,

"You can get married this very day at 12 a.m. in the Hortus Botanicus (Botanical Gardens)." The Jewish Council agreed to this. At 10 a.m., Harry hurried to convey this news to my witness, Mrs Pimentel. I was wearing my nursery teacher's uniform and Harry had his courier's clothes on. The man from the registry asked, "Do you take this man to be your husband?", but my mind was elsewhere, with my parents in Westerbork. Impatiently, he snapped, "So what is it to be, a yes or no?" It was a strange way to enter into a marriage, but we could now live together in the nursery until we went into hiding on 29 September 1943.'

An incredible coincidence

'In the early morning of 29 September 1943, we went into hiding, helped by friends of Harry's parents. We were apprehended by a member of the German SD (Sicherheitsdienst: security police), who asked us for identification. The thought flashed through my mind that we had had it. In terror, I thought that Harry might show our false identification rather than the real documents, but the SD officer merely said, "Get back to your work as quickly as possible!" The incident passed without further consequence, but we were shaking with fear. A business friend of my father's, Mr De Haan, gave us money before we went into hiding, and took our photos to look after. We heard afterwards that the entire nursery had been vacated and everyone sent to Westerbork on 29 September 1943. Harry and I escaped this fate and were assigned to various addresses in the Haarlemmermeer part of Amsterdam, where we remained for a short period of time. For instance, for days on end we had to wait for a yacht in a remote little shed on the water, where rats scurried over us at night. Our contact spoke of a person called Henk, who was in hiding with a family with five children. The description sounded familiar to Harry, who had a photo of his father in his pocket: "Would that be this Henk Cohen?" Almost unbelievably, his father was staying at our new hiding address, a day labourer's house belonging to the Breijer family in Nieuw-Vennep in the country. The reunion with Harry's father, who was recovering from a prostrate operation, was

very special. Sam Breijer, the man of the house, let him sleep in his own cupboard bed until he was better.'

A well-kept secret

'We were not allowed outside the yard because no one in the village knew of our presence. After seven house searches by the SD, which we survived by keeping as quiet as mice under the floor of the house, the farmer decided to further extend the crawl space. Eleven of us spent 19 months underground. Initially, we took turns, with five above and six below, but after so many house searches it was considered better if we all stayed underground. Our crawl space was a mere 70 cm high and we had a single chamber pot to use as a toilet. We had enough to eat as the family had a large vegetable garden. We got so stiff from lying motionless that we could hardly walk any more. One day, we asked the couple, "Why are you risking your lives for us?" Aunt Anne was hoping for a place in heaven, but uncle Sam replied, "Jesus says that you should help anyone in distress and offer them accommodation; I would even help a German in need." After Mad Tuesday (Dolle Dinsdag) on 5 September 1944, when rumours were spreading that liberation was at hand, aunt Anne asked us, "Could you perhaps manage on one sandwich less so that we can also give some bread to the beggars who come to the door?" Of course we agreed. And she asked, "After liberation, there is one thing you can do for me. Come to church with us to thank the Lord!" When we were liberated, all eleven of us went along to the church where a front row of 18 seats had been reserved for the Breijer family. Our secret had been well kept, because everyone was amazed that eleven of us had been there all that time.'

An enormous sense of loss

'After the war was over, you were constantly thinking about who had survived or not. I was often frustrated that I had not been able to save more children, not even my own little brother. My parents had been in the prime of life, and my brother was only nine when they went to Westerbork. The loss was unbearable. I lost the will to live.'

I was so depressed that I could not get out of bed any more. Harry's father came to visit me and said, "Today is a beautiful day. I am grateful because I have two eyes, two ears, a mouth, and two legs that still work really well. The cinema opens again tonight. Are you coming?" Despite the huge loss of his wife and three sons, he still managed to put a brave face on. He was a great example for me.

Fortunately, we were able to stay with the De Haan family for the time being. I knew that my parents had given things to acquaintances to look after. When we arrived there, I saw our paintings and other household objects through the window. They were standing talking to neighbours, and when they saw us, they said, "Filthy Jews, they must have forgotten to gas you!" One day in 1947, a German called at our door. He wanted to show the house to his mother and aunt because he had had such an enjoyable time during the war. That didn't go down very well either!

After these bizarre incidents, we decided that we no longer wanted to live in the Netherlands. Real freedom only exists if everyone can be free. In 1953, we moved to New York, where Harry found work as a bookkeeper. We tried to leave the past behind us but the war was with us every day. In 1975, we moved to Amstelveen because our son and daughter were living in the Netherlands again. We did not want to weigh down our children with our stories. It was all too terrible to speak about, so we kept everything to ourselves. We wanted to lead an ordinary life. When my young daughter spotted a tear on my face during a remembrance service and asked, "What is the matter, mother?", I could not bring myself to tell her. Of course our children sensed our pain, and that was very difficult for them. It was 40 years before we could talk about that time with other people. We felt uncomfortable talking to people who had been through the camps. Sometimes people I saved as a child from the nursery come to visit, wanting to know more about their family or foster parents during the war. Harry and I have a good life together, but not a day goes by that I don't miss my family.'





Max Hamburger: 'I weighed just 28 kilos, I'm on the bottom row, fourth from the left'

Surviving in order to bear witness

Psychiatrist Max Hamburger (92) survived the camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

'If I had gone to sleep, I would never have woken up again. If I was to bear witness, I had to stay alive and it was that thought that gave me the will to carry on to the very end.' Max Hamburger was one of the figures in the world-famous photograph taken by an American soldier in the death barracks at Buchenwald just five days after the liberation in 1945. For Aanspraak, he talks about his experiences during the war.

An abnormal childhood

'I was born in Amsterdam on 10 February 1920, the second son of the diamond merchant Hartog Hamburger and fashion designer Julia Wa-

terman. My mother created haute couture and often went to Paris. When I was four years old, my father was hit on the head by a baseball on the sports field, and died shortly afterwards. My mother coped with her grief by working even harder and we were often left with my grandparents. In 1930 my brother died of leukaemia. We were racked with grief at his death. I was left with only my mother. It was not a normal childhood.'



Max Hamburger
Student identity card, around 1941.

Resistance

'What we had suffered as a family inspired me to start studying medicine in 1938. At the beginning of 1942, however, Jewish people were barred from state education. Thanks to a job I had with the Jewish Council, I was given a 100,000 stamp on my identity card which saved me from being immediately deported to Westerbork. As soon as they had finished drawing up the lists of deportees, I decided I didn't want to work there anymore. In the summer of 1942 I got a job as a medical intern in the new Jewish Hospital, which gave me the same identity card. While I was there, I met a lovely nurse called Jannie Bolle who became my girlfriend. In the lab I learned about a medicine used to treat syphilis, called Pyrifer. If you inject Pyrifer intravenously, it gives the 'patient' a high temperature similar to malaria or typhus. By using this drug I could declare people who had been called up for deportation and sent to us for a medical examination as being 'unfit for transport' so that they would not be deported to Westerbork. Later, I was awarded the Resistance Memorial Cross for this. In March 1943 we heard that the Germans were going to take all the patients from the hospital. When they came to round everyone up in June, we hid some

of them in the bathrooms under the washing and even in the mortuary. We arranged for patients who were seriously ill to be taken into hiding.'

A quick decision

'In August of 1943, a captain in the SS, Aus der Fünter, came to close down the hospital. Six hundred members of staff and three hundred patients were ordered to pack their bags. One of the nurses told us she would not be deported because she had been given a 120,000 stamp signed by Aus der Fünter's secretary. As quick as a flash, we copied the new details onto our identity cards and blew on the ink to get it to dry fast. In the hall I was suddenly confronted by Aus der Fünter: "What are you doing here?" He asked to see my identity card and I showed him the forgery. He didn't notice and said: "You..., carry on!" As it turned out, our decision to forge the passports was in the nick of time because none of the people who left that hospital ever came back. We were sent to work in the Jewish Hospital at Weesperplein with the other nurses and doctors who stayed behind. We tried to save as many patients as possible there as well. Because of their fear of infectious diseases, the SS had a couple of rooms reserved for patients with diphtheria or scarlet fever. I actually caught diphtheria and spent a couple of weeks in an isolation room.'

Meeting my mother again

'When I was pronounced better, I was sent to the Portuguese-Jewish Hospital where partners from mixed marriages were sterilized. I refused to cooperate with this, as did most of the staff. Through a secret door in the hospital I was able to get into the villa next door and go into hiding. By this time, Jannie and I had been secretly married by a rabbi so that we could go into hiding together. It was soon obvious that it would be safer to find a different hiding place. A cousin of mine was married to a resistance member and lawyer called Lau Mazirel, who came and took us to her house on the Prinsengracht which also served as her office. She also managed to get my mother out of the Hollandse Schouwburg theatre building where she was awaiting deportation and brought her to join us. It was wonderful to

see my mother again, but we had to find another place for her to go into hiding as quickly as possible. Shortly after that, Jannie and I were betrayed and arrested. We were interrogated and sent to the camp at Westerbork. My mother's hiding place was also given away. The last time I saw her was by the punishment barracks at Westerbork on Sunday 6 February 1944. We fell into each other's arms and cried. I keep her alive now in my memories. In Auschwitz I met a radiologist I knew who had been deported at the same time as my mother. He told me that she had gone to the gas chambers on 6 March 1944. Although I had arrived on 10 February 1944, I never saw her again.'

It was my only chance

'When I arrived in Auschwitz, I heard an SS officer shout: "Doctors and nurses to one side!" and I joined the group of doctors. In the doctors barrack I fell ill with a fever and diarrhoea. A Jewish male nurse from Warsaw took good care of me because I reminded him of his son. One by one we were tested by the camp doctor to check whether we really were doctors. He thought I was too young to be a doctor so I was sent to join the work teams after all. That was really hell. Doing hard labour in the freezing cold without enough clothing, we were not expected to survive for more than 3 months. A Polish resistance worker advised me to take the doctor's test again. All of the doctors helped me prepare for it, and to everyone's surprise I was allowed to take it again and passed. From then on they acknowledged I was a doctor and I was spared the heavy work. During the day I had to clean the barracks under constant watch. At lunchtime I dished out the soup and in the evening I checked hair for lice. In April I went down with another fever. On 1 May 1944 I was just about to report sick when my number was called for a medical examination that would allow me to go as a doctor with a group of Hungarians who were being transported to a forced labour camp. It was my only chance to escape the hell I was in. I knew my fever was too high for me to get through the medical, but a fellow prisoner, Sally de Jong, brother of the Dutch historian Loe de Jong, came up with a ruse the night before: "Ask if you can go to the toilet. Then, when I read out

the numbers of the doctors who are going, I won't mention your number. As soon as they've finished taking everyone's temperature, you can come back and simply walk out with the doctors who've passed the medical. No one will notice." And that way he saved my life.'

Forced labour

'We went by train to Silesia as medical relief workers with a group of Hungarian labourers who were being deported. In a subsection of the camp at Gross-Rosen, which was spread out over a wide area, we were given an old factory to use as a clinic. We had to inoculate everyone against typhoid fever and in February 1945 we were installed in a barrack that was infested with lice. But this time there was a ray of hope. A fellow prisoner had overheard reports from an officer's wireless that the Russians and the Americans were gaining ground. When the camp was cleared, we had to walk to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia in the snow. From there, we were taken by train via Prague to the camp at Flossenbürg in Bavaria. There were 40,000 prisoners working there in stone quarries and Messerschmitt factories. The camp guards were given shooting lessons using prisoners, visible against the white landscape, as live targets. Every day, people were condemned to death and hanged before our eyes. Many died of starvation and exhaustion. Seeing it was horrific. I volunteered as a cleaner to avoid the heavy work in the quarries. Amazingly, I occasionally got them to let me clean the prisoners' barracks.'

This story must be told

'At the beginning of March 1945 we were deported to Ohrdruf, a labour camp that was part of Buchenwald. They had underground bombproof factories here for the production of V weapons. After they had carried out dynamite explosions underground, it was our job to shift the stone rubble from the corridors into rail wagons. Once, the combination of hard work and practically no food sent me into a coma. They brought me round again by giving me a bit of bread. Shortly after that, we were made to walk 80 kilometres through the snow to Buchenwald which took four days and nights. Some of my

fellow prisoners who thought they had seen bread in my rucksack attacked me and knocked my glasses into the snow. It was only a stethoscope they had seen, but I couldn't find my glasses again and if you lagged behind you were shot. The roads were strewn with dead bodies from this death march. When we reached Buchenwald I couldn't take another step. I just lay there on the ground without moving. An SS officer bawled at me: "You, get up!" and kicked me hard in my stomach. I was terrified he would shoot. But he said: "Ah, what the hell!" and walked on.'

'The prisoners who could still walk were called to the roll call area and told to leave the camp because the Americans were approaching. The dying were sent or dragged to the death barracks. On 11 April 1945 Buchenwald was liberated by the American army. The famous photo of us was taken five days after the camp was liberated. I'm on the bottom row, fourth from the left. While I was lying there, someone told me I should go to the sick barracks or I wouldn't survive. "If they don't take you in, just lie down on the grass outside. If an American sees you lying there, he'll make sure you're taken in." And that's how it went. I was deloused with DDT powder. No more lice and we got American baby food! That was my first impression of the liberation. Then one night in the sick barracks I realized: 'If I go to sleep now I'll never wake up again, and I have to stay alive in order to bear witness to everything that's happened.' I fought against sleep that night with every last ounce of strength I had, and that's how I survived.'

Getting better

'I was diagnosed with acute tuberculosis. The Red Cross flew me via Erfurt Airport to Eindhoven, where the Philips company building served as an emergency hospital. I weighed just 28 kilos. I was soon moved from the overcrowded hospital to a sanatorium and a number of different treatment centres, each one worse than the last. It was my then-wife Jannie who had also survived Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen who got me admitted to the 'Hooglaren' sanatorium near Blaricum. Later, when we were living at Archimedesplantsoen in Amsterdam,

we received a visit from an aunt of mine who had fled the German invasion by going first to Belgium and then on to South Africa. She had heard that I was the only family member who had survived and she very much wanted to pay me a visit. I owe my life to her because she had 'Streptomycine' sent to me from South Africa. Streptomycine was the first antibiotic against tuberculosis, but you couldn't get it in the Netherlands at the time.'

White lilies

'In 1950 I went back to finish my medical studies and chose neuropsychiatry as my specialist subject. My aunt wanted to pick me up and take me to Johannesburg. She was flying to meet me with her son and his wife when their plane went down over Rhodesia. After my medical finals in 1957, her husband bought me a ticket to Johannesburg. If I wanted, I could go to live and work with him. I took a huge bunch of white lilies with me in the plane. At my aunt's graveside I said goodbye to the last member of my family. Suddenly it all came out and I wept floods of tears. You couldn't afford to show your emotions in the camps. You accepted everything that happened in order to survive. My uncle wanted me to stay and arranged everything for me, but I couldn't live in a country that discriminated between people on grounds of race. When I returned to the Netherlands I went to work in the psychiatric hospital in Santpoort. Although we had been through so much together, Jannie and I were divorced and my second wife and I moved to Limburg.'

'I worked as a psychiatrist for many years. I was able to use my experiences to help many people who suffered as a result of the war until I reached the point that I couldn't listen to their stories anymore. Unfortunately, I never found a psychiatrist who could help me. It saddens me that I wasn't able to be a good husband in my earlier marriages because I was still living under the shadow of the past. I find it difficult when people make demands on me and I become intractable. I have eight children from my three marriages. I am happy with my third wife and she gives me the space I need to be myself.'





Rachel and Jules Schelvis, 1940.

We want the world to know what happened in the death camp at Sobibor!

Sobibor survivor Jules Schelvis tells his story.

On 1 June 1943, Jules Schelvis (Amsterdam, 7 January 1921) was deported from Westerbork along with his wife and his wife's family. He took his guitar with him as 'a good way to keep my mind off things'. When he got to Sobibor, he managed to join a group of men who were selected to work cutting peat in the camp at Dorohucza. Looking back, it was to this that he owed his life.

Keeping the memory alive

On 27 January 2010, before Holocaust Memorial Day, Jules Schelvis read out the names of the first Dutch victims of the death camps at Muiderpoort station in Amsterdam. This was the station where his journey had begun, first to the Westerbork transit camp, and then on to its final destination in Sobibor, where he lost his wife and his parents-in-law.

In the Dutch television news on 23 January 2010, Jules Schelvis said that 'by reciting aloud the names of the murdered Jews, we commemorate them and help keep their memory alive.' Schelvis explained why he had set up the Sobibor Foundation. 'For years, Auschwitz was the only camp mentioned or commemorated in the media, but there were so many other death camps that no one knew anything about. I thought that if it was not to be forgotten, it was important to set up a monument in Westerbork transit camp for all those who died in Sobibor and in the other camps. I wouldn't have got far on my own, so I set up a Foundation. The monument we erected consists

of five concrete coffins engraved with the final destination camps Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen, Terezin (Theresienstadt), Mauthausen and Auschwitz-Birkenau and the numbers of the Jews who were deported and murdered.'

Travelling with a guitar

In November 2009, Jules Schelvis told his story to the German court in Munich at the trial of the war crimes suspect Demjanjuk. 'In April 1941, all Dutch citizens aged fourteen and older were required to carry an identity card. Jewish people had their identity cards stamped with a 'J' so they could be easily picked out by the Germans. On 26 May 1943, my wife and I were arrested at her parents' house. In those days, a raid would cover a whole district, and all the Jewish inhabitants, men, women and children, were taken to Jonas Daniël Meijerplein square. We were taken by tram under heavy guard to Muiderpoort station and put on a transport to Westerbork. At the beginning of June 1943, my wife Rachel, my parents-in-law and I were loaded onto a goods train. There were 61 of us, crammed together so that we couldn't move. One couple lifted a child's pram into our truck. There were two buckets in the truck: one filled with water and one to be used as a lavatory. The stench was soon appalling. I had my guitar with me because I thought I could play it in the evenings after work around the campfire. After 72 hours, the train stopped in some marshland. The door slid open and an SS officer jumped in, pointed a revolver at us and snarled, "In a few minutes, we'll be taking you into a camp where you will hand over all your valuables. To make this easier for the camp authorities, it would be better to give them to me now." Many people gave him their jewels. He quickly disappeared and the train started to move again. After a few hundred metres, it came to a halt. We saw a camp with several watchtowers, surrounded by a double row of barbed wire. A sign hanging above the gate on the adjacent access road said 'SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor'.

We entered the camp ten trucks at a time. There was a small guard-house and some barracks with window boxes. Ringed by more barracks

and watchtowers was a stretch of waste ground. Under the watchful eye of the SS, we were whipped out of the lorries by men in blue overalls who spoke Yiddish. If this didn't go fast enough, the SS lent an even fiercer hand. We were herded into one of the barracks like hunted animals and our baggage was thrown onto a huge heap. I was dismayed to see my guitar crushed between the bags. As we left the barracks, an SS officer separated the men from the women. It happened so fast, I had no time to say goodbye to my wife and parents-in-law. When I tried to turn around to look at my wife, they aimed their guns and yelled at me to look straight ahead, keep on walking and shut up.'

The selection process

'Suddenly I saw my brother-in-law standing with a group of men in another part of the field. In a flash, I thought, 'That's where I should be.' In my best school German, I asked the SS officer who was doing the selecting if I could join that group. He asked how old I was. "Zwei und zwanzig, Herr Offizier", I said, but he snapped, "Ich bin Oberscharführer!" Then he asked, "Gesund?" I answered: "Jawohl, Herr Oberscharführer!" With a nod, he made it clear that I should be quick and join the group. His decision was no less than permission to stay alive. Another SS officer said that we would come back to Sobibor in the evenings to have dinner with our families. "The rest are going to have a shower now," he went on, "That's why we've separated the men and women. You can't expect to get washed together!" In the distance I saw a large group of men starting to get undressed. The officer shouted "one, two, three, four" and all 81 of us marched off towards two railway trucks and an engine, ready and waiting to depart. We travelled so far that we realised we wouldn't be going back. At the Dorohuczka labour camp, we had to cut peat which would be used as fuel because there wasn't enough petrol. The work was so gruelling it killed at least 80 men a week, and every week a new group would arrive from Sobibor. We were guarded by Ukrainians.'



Rachel and Jules Schelvis, 1939.

A matter of survival

'So many people died in Dorohucza from beatings or exhaustion that my instincts told me I had to get out of there. I heard about a group of Polish Jews that were setting up a printing press for the Nazis. I had worked as a printer before the occupation. I tried everything I could think of to get myself and my brother-in-law into the printer's team. My brother-in-law wanted to stay in the camp because he had to sing songs for the Nazis in the evenings and thought that would save him.

I was able to move on to another camp as part of the printer's team. You had no idea where you would end up. I survived so many massacres in the labour camps, and then the allied bombing raids in the final year of the war. I was even sent to Auschwitz, but I was selected for work along with a number of other men from the same trucks. In fact, we were sent somewhere else almost immediately because they needed more workers in the armament factories. As the war progressed, we were deported to labour camps in the west as the Russians were advancing. During one of these journeys I suffered excruciating pain from an ulcer on my foot. They put me on the same stretcher as someone who had died of typhoid fever. I caught it too and was eventually liberated from the camp infirmary in 'Erholungslager' Vaihingen by the French. I was taken to a hospital where I was looked after by French nurses. For the first time, I was treated as a human being again. Never had a real bed with a pillow and blankets felt so good as after the hell I'd been through.

Months later when I was back in Amsterdam I was amazed to discover that my mother and sister had survived Bergen-Belsen and were in Sweden. My mother lived to be 86, and every month I talk over the phone to my sister, who emigrated to Melbourne in 1952. Later, when I was searching for news of my wife, I discovered what 'Sonderkommando' meant, and that she and her parents had been sent to the gas chambers as soon as they arrived at Sobibor.'

Witnesses to the extermination camp at Sobibor

Jules Schelvis recently told his story to the Dutch court in Munich as a witness in the case against Demjanjuk, a Ukrainian suspected of having worked as a camp guard in Sobibor. Schelvis had already acted as co-prosecutor against Sobibor commandant Karl Frenzel in a German court in 1985. Frenzel was acquitted on appeal on the grounds that he was too old and too ill. Demjanjuk may be acquitted in the coming months because of lack of evidence. And yet Schelvis still goes to Munich as one of a group of co-prosecutors. What makes him want to testify against Demjanjuk? Schelvis says, 'We want the whole world to know what happened in Sobibor. This is probably the last time that a suspected camp guard will face trial. There is no limitation date on his alleged crimes, no matter how old or ill he is. If the court can prove that he was in Sobibor at that time, then it is certain that he played his part in the killing machine. That he was part of a system responsible for the imprisonment and extermination of Jews. In his defence, Demjanjuk says that he was forced to do this work but that does not excuse him.'

The Sobibor Foundation

The Sobibor Foundation was set up in 1999 by Jules Schelvis, one of the eighteen Dutch survivors of Sobibor, the German death camp in Poland. He was one of three Dutch eyewitnesses still alive in 2010. The foundation is supported by relatives and friends of the survivors and anyone who feels in some way connected with Sobibor. Its goal is to keep the memory of the extermination camp alive. Around 170,000 European Jews were murdered in the gas chambers of Sobibor, of whom 33,000 were Dutch. Less than 50 Sobibor inmates survived the war, including 18 from the Netherlands. Most of the survivors escaped during an uprising that took place on 14 October 1943. After the uprising, the Nazi's decided to close the camp. Three hundred Jews were brought in from Treblinka to dismantle the camp at Sobibor. After they had finished, they were executed so that all traces of the camp would be erased.



Photo: Dirk P.H. Spits.



Morris Tabaksblat.

Not a day goes by without something reminding you of the war

Morris Tabaksblat, a former chief executive of Unilever, talks about his memories of the war.

Morris Tabaksblat, now aged 71, spent his sixth and seventh years in the concentration camps of Westerbork and Theresienstadt. His parents were Christians, but the family was deported in 1943 because of their Polish-Jewish ancestry. They had to line up on the platform at the Theresienstadt transit camp with their suitcases and bags, ready for departure to the Auschwitz extermination camp.

Events took an unexpected turn, and the family survived the Second World War. We interviewed Morris Tabaksblat, former chief executive of Unilever, about his memories of the war.

Could you start by telling us about your background?

'My parents were both of Jewish origin, and they lived in the Polish town of Lodz. While in military service, my father befriended a man who inspired him, and this led him to convert to Christianity, much to the disapproval of my parents' Jewish relatives. Anti-Semitism was becoming increasingly virulent in Poland, so my parents decided to emigrate to the Netherlands in 1932, via France. They were originally intending to emigrate to Palestine, but my father wanted to study theology first. He started working for the Reformed synod in The Hague, which enabled him to continue his studies. I was born in Rotterdam on 19 September 1937, and I have four sisters. Our whole family survived the war, but nearly all my parents' Polish relatives were murdered. My parents made no attempt to flee to England when war broke out. They did not have sufficient means, and had only just emigrated to the Netherlands.'

Where were you when war broke out?

'In May 1940, my parents were living in The Hague. My father told us, very grimly, that there was shooting around the city. He continued to work for the Reformed synod during the next couple of years, but eventually, everyone who had Jewish grandparents had to leave, and in October 1943, we were picked up by the Dutch police, ironically enough, and deported to camp Vught. Like many Jewish people at the time, my parents had given photo albums and some valuables to friends for safekeeping.

A month later, our family was deported to the Westerbork transit camp, with the exception of my oldest sister, who stayed behind in Vught. We were terribly worried about her, but she joined us two months later. The camp was quite well organized. For instance, we often had safety drills, involving us sitting in trenches. There were

even reasonably good facilities, such as a school and a small hospital. My sister was well looked after by doctors after she suddenly got polio, and I had an operation for a jaw infection. We went to school, and there were even some toys. I gained some basic writing and maths skills. My father had to spend a number of weeks in the punishment barracks, where he was made to carry out hard physical labour. That was extremely worrying for us, because we never knew what would happen to him, and there were weekly transports to Auschwitz.

I stayed in the camp in the barracks with my mother and my sisters. As a six-year-old, you probably notice different things than an adult would: I am very fond of flowers, and one of my main memories of Westerbork is the many lupins blossoming there.'

What can you remember of the Theresienstadt transit camp?

'We were deported to Theresienstadt in September 1944. The journey seemed endless to me. We stood crammed together in dark, closed cattle trucks for hours. As a small boy, I was squashed between bellies and legs of adults. On the way to Theresienstadt, the cattle wagon was opened very briefly, and I noticed that we were in the middle of a pear orchard. A German soldier on patrol by the door opening saw me standing there, and gave me a small pear. It was a nice gesture; maybe he had a child of my age himself. For the rest, I don't remember how long the journey actually took, or that anyone died during that transport. We did not have our heads shaved in Westerbork or Theresienstadt because they were transit camps. We didn't get a number tattooed on our arms either, and we continued to wear our own clothes. But we did have to be deloused and have a shower when we got there. I was a small boy, so I went into the large shower area with my mother and sisters. There was a lot of frightened screaming among the naked women because they were afraid of being gassed. It appeared they knew what was going on in Auschwitz and other camps. There was a prison in the camp, where prisoners were punished and sometimes hanged.

In this camp, my father became a spiritual counsellor and a fireman. He had to help operate the fire engine, as there were often small fires breaking out. Our whole family shared a single room above the fire station. All the other prisoners slept packed together in the barracks. Having this room for ourselves alone probably saved us from the highly contagious typhoid fever that killed many prisoners. The place had been a garrison town, which explained why there were so many barracks. Everything stood still in Theresienstadt. There were no schools, and I was terribly bored. We didn't even have a ball to kick around or pencils to draw with. I often played with the fire commandant's son, who was Czech. We sometimes sneaked outside the barbed wire to play, but my mother was furious when she found out. She was scared she would lose me if the German guards found out I was Jewish rather than Czech. But they just let us play. Not all of them were brutes.'

What was your greatest fear?

'You were always afraid you would lose each other, with all those transports and crowds of people. I was lucky to be able to stay with my mother and sisters the whole time. It was all much more frightening for my parents and my oldest sister because they were far more aware of the dangers. Like Westerbork, Theresienstadt was a transit camp, and there were regular transports to the death camps. One time, we had to line up on the platform with our bags and suitcases, ready to go to Auschwitz. Right at the last minute, my father managed to convince the guards that it was necessary for him to stay in Theresienstadt as a spiritual counsellor, and after some excruciatingly tense minutes waiting for the answer, we were allowed to stay after all. Perhaps the synod had also written a letter to protect him. We don't know exactly what saved us.

A lot happened in the camps without any good reason, and you would go mad if you kept wondering, "Why were we saved, and not others?" So I deliberately put that question out of my mind. It was simply pure luck that we survived. But I have seen countless compa-

rable situations during my travels for Unilever, in other places in the world where things are also terrible. Some places make you think of things you experienced yourself. Not a day goes by, really, without being reminded of the war. It is pointless to wonder about causes. It was simply a matter of hate. It had nothing to do with logic. You were unlucky if you found yourself within that sphere of hate. Everyone was held captive; there was nowhere you could go.'

Can you remember anything about the liberation?

'We were liberated by the Russians in the spring of 1945. You could hear explosions and shots going back and forth in the distance. All of a sudden, the Russians were there and the Germans had fled. My father was immediately asked to act as an interpreter because he spoke Russian. I can remember my father and a Russian standing by my bed, laughing cheerfully and holding handfuls of cherries. Until then, we had only had foul-tasting cabbage soup to eat every day. According to a Dutch saying, hunger makes even raw beans taste sweet, but the soup always tasted awful, no matter how hungry we were. So you can imagine how delicious those cherries tasted! The day after liberation, my father took me to the camp prison. He knew more or less what had happened there, but he wanted to confirm for himself that it was all over, once and for all.'

Have you ever been back to Theresienstadt?

'Yes, I went back in 1991 with my wife and daughter. My father was nearly 90 at the time, and was curious as to what I would find there. There is now an exhibition of children's drawings in the former prison. But I can't remember that we even had a pencil or a piece of paper there. I wish we had, as I was always so bored there. Soon after being freed from the camp, I remember seeing marguerites all over the hills, so marguerites have become a symbol of liberation for me. At the time, nobody was interested in the prisoners who had been freed. We didn't arrive in the Netherlands until the end of May 1945 because there was hardly any transport. Once in The Hague, we were given a medical examination and were billeted in a reception shelter.'

My father soon got work at the synod again and normal life resumed. I was placed in the third class of primary school, and had a lot of extra lessons because of all the schooling I had missed out on. My oldest sister didn't want to live in the Netherlands any more. She emigrated to the United States in 1948.'

Do you still suffer from the war?

'Some people I meet still make me wonder, "What would you have done during the war?" and "Would you have joined the NSB (Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, the National Socialist Movement), worked for the resistance, or done nothing?" Everyone asks themselves questions like that now and then, but I think survivors do so a bit more often.

After studying law in Leiden, I started working for Unilever. I had meetings all over the world, which meant that I, a former camp inmate, sometimes found myself sitting around the table with former friends and enemies. There were people working for our company who had been in the Hitlerjugend or the Wehrmacht. Sometimes they were perfectly decent people who were fine to work with, I must say. I once had lunch with Englishmen and Germans who had both been involved in heavy fighting during the battle of Monte Cassino, an abbey in central Italy, which saw many casualties on both sides. And I have dined with English people working for Unilever who had flooded Walcheren during the Second World War, as well as a colleague who came from that area, who had been forced to take refuge in the attic because of the flooding. Coincidental discoveries like that were actually quite common in the post-war years, when you had perpetrators and victims sitting at the same table at international meetings.'

Has your wartime past influenced the choices you have made regarding work and life?

'You learn to see things in perspective. I tend to keep a cool head in emergencies, and I always look for solutions. In situations like that, I remind myself that we have survived much worse.'

Your name will always be inextricably linked with the 'Tabaksblat Code' (the Dutch corporate governance code): a number of rules for good management of listed companies. Do you think that politicians and the business community have a moral duty to avoid an economic crisis, in view of the fact that economic crises are often accompanied by an increase in xenophobia?

'There is definitely a connection between economic problems which lead to unemployment and poverty and phenomena such as xenophobia. The rise of Nazism and the hateful ideology it brought is directly related to the economic chaos in Germany that resulted from the Treaty of Versailles and the consequences of the stock market crash of 1929. It is the task of the government and businesses to prevent these kinds of developments by creating affluence, which can only be done with sensible legislation and codes of conduct. The Code is but a very small part of that, but it was interesting to contribute to its creation. I was pleased that others continued that work.'

Where do you prefer to be during the remembrance on 4 May?

'My wife and I have been to the national commemoration at Dam Square in Amsterdam a few times, which is very impressive to experience. But for me personally, real remembrance is something you do in an intimate family environment because that gives you more space for your own personal experience and memories of the many loved ones you lost. You encounter so many moments, places and images in the course of a year that confront you with what happened, and each time, you stop to remember. The things you experience personally and as a family need their own time and place, so I prefer to reflect on them in a private setting.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Anita Gassan.

In search of justice

Judge Anita Leeser-Gassan survived Bergen-Belsen.

Judge Anita Leeser-Gassan, now aged 70, survived Bergen-Belsen, together with her mother. She was born into a well-known family of diamond traders in Amsterdam but chose to make law her profession. She was a judge in Amsterdam for almost thirty years, becoming vice-president of the court in 1983. From 1981 to 2000, she was a judge in a juvenile court. She retired in September 2005. Anita Leeser-Gassan tells her story of the war to the readers of Aanspraak.

Fragmentary memories of the war

'I was born in Amsterdam on 17 September 1935 to Jewish parents. I was an only child. We were not orthodox, but we were consciously Jewish. My parents taught me that every Jewish person has his or her own faith. I still feel that way.

I was four years old when war broke out in May 1940. My memories of that time are brief and fragmentary - vivid images that keep coming back. I can clearly remember the sound of the air raid siren at the beginning of the war. We were standing at the bottom of the stairs at my grandparents' house in Johannes Vermeerstraat, with copper pans on our heads. Shortly afterwards, a policeman took us to IJmuiden in his car so we could escape to England by boat. We had to return to Amsterdam because we could not get on the boat. The policeman committed suicide.'

Respite

'The German war industry had a great need for industrial diamonds during the war. In the summer of 1942, when Jews started being deported on a large scale, the Sicherheitspolizei (security police) asked for diamonds in exchange for a temporary respite from deportation.

This prompted my father to flee to Switzerland. My parents divorced in 1942. My father fled with the female partner of a couple my parents knew.

My mother started a relationship with the remaining partner, Jacques Smit, who was already a good friend. From that moment on, I had two fathers, as it were, and I loved them both dearly. My father lost sight of his new partner in Switzerland. From Switzerland, he sent my mother, my second father and me a Paraguayan passport, which he thought might save us. To stay safe as long as possible, and to postpone forced labour in Germany, my mother and my second father worked at the sterilisation office in the Central Israelite Hospital. Horrific though that may sound, some good work was done for mixed marriages insofar that even pregnant women were issued with a certificate stating that they were infertile. If you had been 'officially' sterilized, you didn't have to wear the star any more. In 1943, we were allowed to live in the hospital. My mother worked in the secretary's office. Children I played with in the hospital were taken away. The situation eventually became untenable for us as well, and the head of department was no longer able to protect us. From then on, in early 1944, my mother, my second father and I had to go into hiding.'

A spy

'We first went into hiding in a building that belonged to my grandfather, in Van Baerlestraat, in a storage space above a shoe shop. We were looked after by people my grandparents knew. In February 1944, things became too dangerous, and we had to leave. We stayed at a number of safe houses. I remember one of them in particular. A friend of my second father's was in hiding with his wife and her mother with a family in Lomanstraat, a street in the Oud-Zuid part of Amsterdam. Aunt Dicky and uncle Henk already had five children as well as three people in hiding in their home, and they took us in as well. It is amazing that they were able to do that. Six weeks later, the six of us were taken to a boarding house, where we were betrayed. The security police discovered our address after letters mentioning

the address as a safe house were found during a raid on resistance members. A German soldier found all six of us standing in a cupboard when the house was searched. I tried to convince him not to take us with him, saying, "Would you not rather take my doll for your children?" We were taken to the head office of the security police in Euterpestraat. My mother, my second father and I were locked up in a cell downstairs. A man was placed in the cell with us. He asked all kinds of questions, such as "Where are you from?" I was sitting on my mother's knee, and I whispered to her, "Don't tell him anything, he's a spy!" After the war, he turned out indeed to have been a spy. As a child, I instinctively knew something was wrong because his shoes were too posh.'

You'll be back!

'On 16 July 1944, we were taken from Euterpestraat to the Weteringschans detention centre where a fatal raid by the well-known resistance fighter, Johannes Post, had taken place just the previous night. You could still see the blood on the courtyard walls. It was a very frightening place. On 20 July 1944, my mother's birthday, we were taken to Westerbork. Watched over by German guards, we walked down the long corridors of the detention centre. Years later, I worked as a lawyer in that very same building. When clients moaned and whined, I sometimes said, "At least you know that you are getting out of here. I didn't have that certainty, during the war!" The guards took us to Amsterdam Central Station by tram. While we walked across the rails to the train, which was far from the platform, workers encouragingly called to us, "You'll be back!"'

Hope

'On arrival at Westerbork transit camp, the first thing I saw from the train was the little wooden guard huts lit up by the sun. When I walk around Cannes during the summer, with its little wooden huts, I am always reminded of Westerbork. One Tuesday, we escaped fate, but the next Tuesday, it was our turn to be deported. I remember the transport dates so well because they coincided with our family's

birthdays, oddly enough. Twentieth July was my mother's birthday. On 1 August 1944, my second father's birthday, we were taken to Bergen-Belsen on the penultimate transport, and we were therefore hoping to go back on my birthday, 17 September. Unfortunately, that was not to be. In Bergen-Belsen, people with dual nationality were held captive so they could be exchanged, and were not sent straight to the gas chambers in Poland. In 1944, some Jews with dual nationality were actually exchanged with German prisoners of war and sent to Palestine, so news like that gave us hope.'

Recipes

'If the guards found out you had lice, you had to have your head shaved. As a child, I thought I would die if that happened. I still have the scarf with which my mother and I endlessly and fanatically went through our hair every day. Daily meals consisted solely of cabbage soup and a centimetre of kuch (a kind of hardtack). The novel 'Pallieter' by Felix Timmermans, with its extensive descriptions of sumptuous feasts, was passed around in the camp. In some strange way, thoughts of all that delicious food helped to stave off the hunger pangs a little. Rank and station were no longer relevant there. It was more important to be able to rely on someone. A market saleswoman gave up her last piece of bread, while a solicitor had stolen bread, which was tantamount to sending someone to their death in that camp!'

Lost

'My second father was once beaten so badly on the back by a kapo that he could barely walk. The kapo then gave him a pear to make up for it. My second father was a stockbroker by profession, but he had stated that he was a diamond trader. He was sent on to Oranienburg with other diamond traders. We never heard from him again. From the end of 1944, tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners were 'evacuated' from the frontlines to Bergen-Belsen by the SS. The camp got more and more hellish. The food had run out but prisoners kept arriving. Deadly, contagious diseases such as typhoid fever and tuberculosis raged. Towards the end of the war, my mother and I,

almost dead from typhoid fever, were loaded into a truck. I saw corpses along the road that had been cut open by prisoners so they could eat the livers. We were stuffed into a train with cattle wagons full of mortally ill fellow prisoners that rode through the frontlines. Many died on that journey. We had draped the train with any and all pieces of clothing that looked at all white to show the Allied air forces that it was not a war train. At Magdeburg station, we had to get out to take cover under the train from Allied and German fire – together with the guards, as irony would have it. After hours of being shot at, Magdeburg station was bombed to the ground by the Allies. The Germans initially planned to take us to the gas chambers in Theresienstadt, but when we got stuck between the front lines, they wanted to throw us into the Elbe, train and all. Our German guards eventually fled, terrified of the approaching Russian troops.'

Liberation

'On 23 April 1945, we were liberated in Tröbitz by three Russians on horseback. The Russians forced the locals to take us into their homes, emaciated and disease-ridden as we were. Those people didn't know what had hit them! Many people from Tröbitz were infected by us, and died as a result.

After a few weeks in which we could regain our strength, we were transferred to Leipzig. We were repatriated by the French Red Cross. In a sickbay for displaced persons in a school in Maastricht, my father suddenly walked in with my aunt. I ran to embrace him. He didn't recognize me at first because I only weighed 23 kilos. He had travelled to England specially, via Switzerland, to be able to work with the English repatriation so he could look for us. He went to Bergen-Belsen first. He then went to all the stations the train had stopped at, but lost track at Magdeburg because the records had been lost when the station was bombed. By coincidence, he found us in Maastricht, where he had to be for his work. He took us to Amsterdam in his army vehicle. For us, that was the real liberation - being reunited with him. My parents got together again after the war, and my father spent a very long time looking in vain for my second father.'

Justice

'My wartime past definitely heightened my sense of justice. Because you have been treated so unfairly, you want the world to be fair, or to become fair. My grandfather, who was a diamond cutter, had a portrait on the wall of Henri Polak, a union man who was well-known at the time. This inspired me to start studying labour law, but I ended up choosing the legal profession. After some time, I wanted to do some judging, too. Ten years ago, I went back to Bergen-Belsen with a group of survivors. There was nothing left. The British had burned the place down to combat contagious diseases. I heard from a travelling companion that the worst camp executioner had been buried alive after liberation in the hole he had had to dig for the corpses. This satisfying piece of news alone made it more than worthwhile to have made the journey. I tried to find out about the history of this executioner in books and museums. I looked for him in photos of Bergen-Belsen in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and other war museums, but his name was not mentioned anywhere and I couldn't find any photographs of him either. Justice at last!

I was in close contact with aunt Dicky, my mother while I was in hiding, and her children, until she died a few years ago. I receive flowers from her son every year on 4 May. How can you hide six people in your house? I sometimes ask myself if I could have managed that. When I meet someone for the first time, I often have a fleeting thought, 'Could I have gone into hiding in your home?' The first time I didn't have that thought was when I visited Israel, forty-five years ago.'



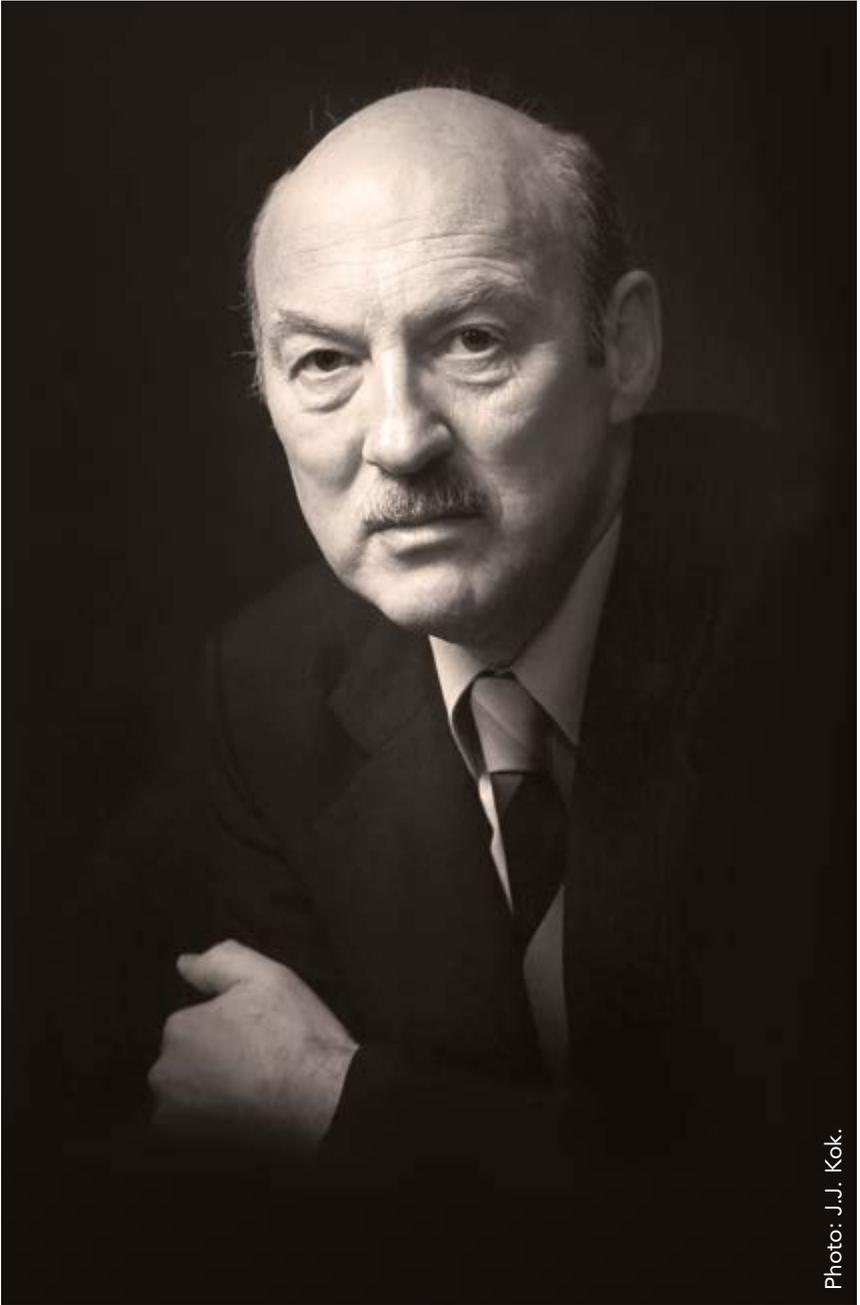


Photo: J.J. Kok.

Bill Minco, circa 1984.

A life of survival

In conversation with Bill Minco.

At the beginning of February 1941, Bill Minco was taken by the Grüne Polizei from his classroom in a Rotterdam high school and thrown into Scheveningen prison. In the 'Geuzen trial' on 4 March, Minco was sentenced to death along with 17 other members of the Geuzen group. This vanguard of the resistance movement became known as 'The Eighteen Dead' from the renowned poem by Jan Campert.

Minco and two of his fellow prisoners were granted a pardon because they were still minors, and the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. For Minco, it was the start of a hellish journey through a series of German prisons and concentration camps until he was liberated by the Americans on 30 April 1945. Shortly after his return to the Netherlands, Minco committed his experiences to paper. After that he banished the war completely from his mind. In this way, he was able to continue surviving after the war was over.

'The account I wrote contains all the memories I still have of that time. I recorded my story in June 1945 on the advice of Sijds Nijdam, a childhood friend and budding psychiatrist. He said, 'You should get all that stuff out onto paper!' If I reread it now, it's like reading about someone else. Some of it I have only just read for the first time. When my grandchildren grew up, we thought it would be a good idea to make it into a book for them. By that time, I had a large collection of material about the war, our trial and the camps, as well as the drawings I had made over the years. I used all this to supple-

ment my original account. The book was published in 1997 under the title 'Koude Voeten (Cold Feet).'

'What is special about my story is that all those experiences belonged to just one person. It is a four-and-a-half-year chain of events that would be less extraordinary if taken separately. After all, there are many other people who experienced similar things during the war, but who have not always been able to distance themselves from what happened. In the end, I have been lucky that I have managed to do that.'

The Geuzen resistance movement

'When the war broke out, I was seventeen years old and living in Graaf Florisstraat in Rotterdam. I grew up in a traditional Jewish family. We didn't have it easy. My father worked hard as a sales representative for men's clothing. I had one brother. Growing up, I was influenced more by my friends than by what I learnt at home. The most important people for me were my two friends, Sijds Nijdam, who was musical, and Benno Wissing who was artistic and later became a professional artist. We thought we knew how the world worked and how it could be made better. Sijds Nijdam lived in the same street and we often fell in love with the same girls; Wissing was a school friend of Nijdam's. We would meet up regularly though I don't remember exactly how often, there are huge gaps in my memory.'

'When the bombing raid on Rotterdam started, I went up onto the roof of the Home Economics School in our street and watched the bombardment from there. Seeing my own city being bombed in front of my eyes was one of the reasons I joined the Geuzen resistance movement. I can still picture it clearly, the Junkers flying over the defenceless city and reducing everything to rubble. The planes flew very low so they knew exactly what they were doing. But the other reason was the story of my uncle, who went to Germany before the war and left again in 1938 after Kristallnacht. He stayed in our house for a while and then left for England with his family. It was his stories of what happened during Kristallnacht that roused me to action.'

Along with a classmate of mine called Arie Overwater, I decided to go to England to help in the liberation of the Netherlands. We weren't much good at school anyway so the decision was easily made. We came into contact with a sailor, Dick Kouvenhoven, who said, 'Why go all the way to England when you can fight the Germans here by joining the Geuzen resistance!' It was a tiered organization, run a bit on military lines, and no one knew anyone except in the level above him. The only person we saw was Kouvenhoven. Our first assignment was to map out everything in Rotterdam pertaining to the military. We bought an ordinary map and marked in all the places where anti-aircraft guns were located, where soldiers were stationed, where their headquarters were and where the ships were docked. And Arie said quite recently, 'Yes, and we also cut wires', so apparently I did that too.'

Eighteen dead

'At the beginning of November 1940, it all went wrong, and members of the Geuzen resistance were arrested for the first time. Everyone was forced to talk, and the Germans found out about our map. Apparently the captives couldn't avoid mentioning my name so on the morning of 7 February 1941, the Grüne Polizei called me out of my classroom and took me to Scheveningen prison, where they locked me up alone in a small cell. During the interrogations, I was badly beaten. Then I was sentenced to death, which was totally out of proportion to the acts of resistance I'd committed! But it was the same time as the February Strike and the Germans wanted to set an example. In the days before they passed sentence, my lawyer said, 'You're Jewish, you haven't got a chance. You've had a good life, you should look at it that way.' But that's not how I saw it at all. It was impossible that my life should be over already! And in fact, on 13 March 1941 they didn't execute eighteen Geuzen group members on the Waalsdorpervlakte, but only fifteen. I was one of the three pardoned. To everyone's astonishment, a Jew had escaped the worst. According to German law, minors could not be sentenced to death. The highest possible punishment was life imprisonment. So that's what I was sentenced to.'

Something to hold on to

'After the pardon, I was transferred to another wing where I shared a cell with Grandpa Bakker, a kind and virtuous man who had also been in the Resistance. A devout Christian, he taught me to believe and to pray. He believed that the Jews were God's chosen people and tried to convince me of this on the basis of the Old Testament. Faith became important to me at that time because it was something to hold on to. And it continued to be so during the eighteen months I spent in solitary confinement in Untermaßfeld prison, where I was given almost nothing to eat and only Nazi propaganda to read. When a new director arrived at the prison after a year, I asked him personally for some German literature to read. I was allowed to borrow Goethe's Faust from the library and it was thanks to German literature that I managed to keep going, even though the loneliness sometimes drove me literally mad. In 1943 the prisons were declared 'Judenrein' and I was told that I would be transferred to the concentration camp at Mauthausen. On my last evening in Untermaßfeld, one of the guards came to say goodbye. When he came to lock me up for the night, he stepped inside, shut the door behind him, shook my hand and said with tears in his eyes, 'Lebe wohl und bleib gesund, Minco.' It is because of him and Germans like him that I don't want to tar all his countrymen with the same brush. But it was clear from his reaction that the Germans knew what was happening in Mauthausen.'

Every man for himself

'Mauthausen was the worst camp imaginable. The SS were everywhere and keen to see blood on a daily basis. It was so bad that you couldn't even trust your fellow prisoners. It was literally every man for himself and the SS for all. The work in the stone quarry was inconceivably hard. Your life meant nothing. You just tried to survive. At times like that you realize how thin the veneer of civilization is. Finally, I was deported to Auschwitz. I wondered why they didn't shoot me straight away, but my status as political prisoner meant that they weren't allowed to kill me because that would be too quick a release from suffering. I had to serve out my sentence.

I weighed just 43 kilos when I arrived in Auschwitz, little more than a skeleton. Above the camp gates was the sign 'Arbeit macht frei'. We knew what Auschwitz meant and we awaited our fate. We were made to stand with our faces to the wall of a building for an interminable period of time. Suddenly, someone shoved a loaf of bread under my arm. A loaf of bread! I couldn't believe it. After so much hunger, after everything I had been through, a loaf of bread... Someone had thought about me. For a moment, the heavens opened, for a moment you felt that you were a human being, that someone cared...

It wasn't until later in my barracks that I learned that the well-known Rotterdam boxer, Leen Sanders, had been alerted to the fact that a man from Rotterdam and survivor of Mauthausen was standing against the wall near block 24. In Auschwitz they apparently knew what Mauthausen signified. Leen Sanders had been deported to Auschwitz at the end of 1942. His wife and children had been sent to the gas chambers on arrival. A fellow prisoner who had a relatively privileged position in the camp, and who had also been a boxer, had managed to get Leen a job as block senior. As such, Leen was able to help many of the Dutch prisoners in the camp. He also protected people from physical violence.'

'In Auschwitz I got typhoid fever and diarrhea and ended up in the camp infirmary. Every week, the sick who were no longer capable of anything were called up and gassed. Each day, they wrote my number down, but the following day I was never called. Again, it was my status as a convict that saved me. On 18 January 1944 they started evacuating Auschwitz in the face of the Russian advance. After I was put onto the transport to Dachau, I lost track of Leen Sanders. Following that, I was put to work in a number of camps. It was on 30 April 1945, after a night in a train that was stranded in the chaos, that I was liberated by the Americans. They suddenly appeared round a bend in the road. I only really understood that we were free when I held a Camel cigarette in my hand, but I didn't have any matches.'

A new start

'After I got home to Rotterdam, I found I had TB, but fortunately I got a place in a sanatorium in Davos. One of the nurses there became my wife. Thanks to her, I could sometimes forget the pain. It was no coincidence that we named our son Victor. When I arrived home again, I started doing a correspondence course in engineering. The first lesson was about locks - after I had been locked up for four and a half years! That finished it for me. I also had trouble concentrating. And that's what happens. Anything that went wrong had such an impact, it took up every minute of the day. We had children and hardly any money. All those worries stopped me getting a camp syndrome or any other syndrome for that matter. I think it was probably a good thing. There were many others, including Leen Sanders, who also survived the war and whom I often visited, who have suffered more from their wartime experiences.'

A master of survival

'I think the war has made me who I am. I went through more in four and a half years than most people do in a lifetime. You learned to look people in the eyes. It sharpened my intuition, which is necessary for survival. And I have become a master of survival. Not that I'm proud of it because it hasn't made me a better person. I am always on my guard and sometimes shut myself off. I prefer to keep my distance. But in the end, I haven't lost my faith in people. If you have no faith in people or in the future, life loses its meaning. As I once wrote, 'I want to live for the people I love; I can live because there are people who love me; above all, I want to live because I have survived; I feel it is my duty to live. In spite of all that has happened, I still believe that the good in man can overcome evil.'

Remaining vigilant

'One of the highlights of my life was when I presented the Geuzen Award to the German president Von Weizsäcker. It might sound crazy, but at that moment I had the feeling that the war had been won for me at last. I was the one who proposed giving him the award.'

The Geuzen members who were still alive were very much against the idea at first, but they realized that this would be an example to the younger generation and a lesson for the future. As chair of the Geuzen Resistance Foundation, I am now writing a speech for the presentation of the Geuzen Award for the Sinti and the Roma in Europe who are still suffering from discrimination.

There are still people who are consciously active in communicating their war experiences to the youth of today. I remain vigilant but I do not hate. If you continue to hate, you're not doing anything different to what they did then. That would be unbearable. It would mean that millions of people had died for nothing. Fortunately, I see that young people are showing an interest. I take them to visit the camps. I have also been to the camps with my own children. I went back once with Nijdam to the prison at Untermaßfeld because it was the time I spent there that had the most profound influence on me.'

Happiness

'Looking back now, there have been a lot of happy times in my life since the war. Every life has its ups and downs, but on balance, my life has been very good. I have achieved more and experienced more than I could ever have imagined. Without any formal training, I rose to the position of councillor for finance and economic affairs in Hilversum, which is something I look back on with pride. I also started a business selling beds, which my son has succeeded in expanding. I have three children, eight grandchildren and even one great-grandchild, for whom I am currently making a cup out of clay. I have since remarried and my wife has given me back some of my youth. Do my experiences mean that I feel happiness more intensely than other people? I think so, but I can only speak for myself. I know plenty of other people who are still struggling with the war, day and night. Anything I can do to help them, I do.'

If...

'If I had not joined the Geuzen resistance group in 1940 I would not have been convicted, my parents would not have gone into hiding – my mother said, "They've got one of ours already, they're not getting the other three." – and my family and I would probably have ended up being deported to Westerbork and then to Auschwitz, like so many others, and we would not have survived. But it did not happen like that and I can pass on something of my war experiences to the next generation and generations after that. For me, a life sentence turned out to be four and a half years. But I am never quite sure if it has not been too long after all.'



Photo: Sander Minco.



Ed van Thijn.

Our wars had nothing in common

The wartime childhood of Ed van Thijn.

As a seven-year-old Jewish boy, Ed van Thijn (70), now member of the Upper House for the Dutch Labour Party, was arrested by the Germans in Amsterdam and deported with his mother to the Westerbork transit camp. With a lot of luck, his father was able to get them out of the camp and into hiding. Members of the resistance group 'Naamloze Vennootschap' (NV) provided Van Thijn with hiding places at different addresses. In November 1944, he was betrayed and taken to Westerbork again.

After the war, he tried to put the past behind him. As Mayor of Amsterdam, however, he was unable to avoid the many commemoration ceremonies that brought him face to face with his past again.

My mother's box

'For years, I didn't want to hear anything about the war. Then one evening in my study, after the television programme Nova, I got out the box that my mother had left me. It was full of yellowed photos of family members who had died and documents and letters relating to my wartime childhood. The tears flowed down my cheeks as my past came back to me in a huge rush. It was because of that box that I finally started writing about my time during the war.'

The raid

'I was an only child, born on 16 Augustus 1934 in the Amsterdam neighbourhood known as Rivierenbuurt. My upbringing wasn't religious but our home environment was still typically Jewish. I was five when the war started. I can still picture my father arriving home in his soldier's uniform after being called up to join the Dutch army at the Grebbeberg. After that, we moved to Bussum as fast as we could. At the end of 1942, the Germans ordered us to move back to Amsterdam because we were Jewish. We went to live with uncle Koos, my father's non-Jewish brother-in-law.

During the first raid in March 1943, I was terribly ill with a lung infection caught after I had lent my winter coat with its Jews star pinned to it to a friend who had forgotten his star. The Germans pounded on the door and my mother opened it. My father wasn't home. They shouted, "How many Jews are in here? All Jews are to come with us!" The soldiers searched the house and pulled my blankets back. Uncle Koos said, "The boy is seriously ill!" At this, the soldiers drew back, afraid of catching something contagious. They left us alone that time, but came back for us a few weeks later. In the Westerbork transit camp, I shared a bunk with my mother in the women's barracks. I spent most of the time in the infirmary though because of my asthma and the dysentery I had contracted in the camp. I lay opposite the terminal beds, where I saw people die on a daily basis. Every Monday evening, they read out the names of thousands of prisoners who were to be deported to Poland. On the Sunday before, you could already feel the tension, 'Please let us not be one of them!' My illness meant that our time kept getting postponed.'

My hero

'My father was my hero. Twice, he managed to escape from a moving train to Westerbork, thanks to a key given him by the Amsterdam resistance which happened to fit the lock on the door of the train car. With a lot of luck, he managed to get my mother and me out of Westerbork. He arranged for us to go to the new Jewish Hospital in

Amsterdam under the pretence of a contagious disease. From there, he drove us away in an ambulance and, just four streets from the hospital, he handed me over to a woman from the 'Naamloze Vennootschap', a resistance organisation that arranged for children to go into hiding.'

In hiding

'That woman took me by train to Brunssum in South Limburg. The first couple who took me in had eight children of their own as well as the many other children and resistance members they were hiding! They acted as a reception centre for the whole area. They were taking an enormous risk with me because if I got one of my asthma attacks and I was bound to make a noise. In many of the places I was taken to, I was the only one in hiding. Each time, I had to adapt again to the strict catholic or protestant environments that I found myself in. Once or twice I was sent back to the reception centre because I was unable to settle in or the situation became too dangerous.'

The matchbox

'My most precious possession during that time was a matchbox with my postage stamps symbolizing good and evil: one of Queen Wilhelmina and one of Hitler. I would gaze at these fervently every evening hoping that good would prevail. Once, when I was hiding in a farm in Dalfsen, there was a house search. I was downstairs in a cupboard built into the wall behind a large wardrobe. They didn't find anyone. But the following morning they came back and pounded on the door. I flew downstairs again with my surrogate father who managed to shove the wardrobe across just in time. But I had been betrayed. I have never wanted to know by whom. The Germans thumped on the door of the cupboard and threatened to shoot off the lock. I crawled out scared and found myself staring at the barrel of a gun. I was taken to the prison in Zwolle. They wanted to know where my parents were so they kept questioning me over and over. My name in hiding was Jantje van Thijnen, and the 'Naamloze Vennootschap' had instilled me with the idea that I had been

evacuated from Rotterdam and that my parents had both died in the bombing raid. Every day, I repeated this story. To my great sorrow, they took away my matchbox.'

Peace at last

'I was put into a cell with three others, all older than me. We cut up a cardboard box to make chess pieces and a board and we would play for hours. In November 1944, a group of us were sent to Westerbork. Several kilometres beyond Assen, we were thrown out of the lorry and told to start walking. I stumbled through the snow in my clogs and was dreading having to go back into the camp, as I knew what to expect. Fortunately it wasn't nearly as bad as I imagined. The atmosphere was totally different because the deportation trains weren't running. I owe my life to the railway strikes at the end of the war. There were now about 800 people walking around relaxed. It was a far cry from the 10,000 people a year earlier, all in fear of being deported. A kind woman took me under her wing and because I felt safe with her, I stayed with her even after Westerbork was liberated. She wrote to my parents to let them know how I was. My parents had found a good place to hide out and had survived the war. In June 1945, my father came to take me back to Amsterdam. My mother swept me up in her arms and then put me in the bath and gave me a good scrub as though she could wash away all the years of misery. Everything felt happy until I asked, 'Where are grandpa and grandma?' Then the mood broke, because they were dead and would never return.'

The war was her problem

'After the war, my parents said, 'It could easily happen again.' They took a conscious decision that we would stop being Jewish. 'We never want to see our names on a list again, it's too dangerous to be religious', said my mother. My parents were always arguing, and they divorced soon after. I stayed with my mother. My mother thought about the past constantly. I wanted to forget the war and look only to the future, but I had trouble getting to sleep at nights. To tire myself out, I would bang my head against the pillow until I fell asleep.

My mother took me to see a psychiatrist who prescribed electroshock treatment. The Germans hadn't actually touched a hair on my head although they did subject me to years of mental oppression, but this torture therapy beat everything! I had never come into contact with physical violence, but three years after the liberation I was tortured after all! After the treatment, I was incapable of saying anything. Something in me had broken. I never spoke about what I had gone through during the war. The war was my mother's problem. She had suffered so much in Westerbork! And her only child had been taken from her! The best way of sparing her feelings was to be with her but absent at the same time. I stayed with her, but escaped into my own fantasy world, into my room with my dreams and my books, or to the cinema. Though I did actually want to tell my first girlfriend at school about the war. As soon as the first words about the war, the raids, going into hiding had left my mouth, she stiffened. She pushed me away, stared at me in astonishment and started to cry. "I want to go home, I want to get out of here!", she sobbed and grabbed her bike. Her parents complained to my mother that I had upset their daughter! My mother asked, 'What in heaven's name did you do to her? What did you tell her? What got into you?' I didn't utter a word. Our wars were totally different, after all.'

Gone

'Like all young men, I wanted to go to university, be popular and have a good career. But my asthma made this practically impossible and I was a failure at most sports. I was only ever good at chess and rowing. I studied political and social sciences and was interested in foreign policy. In 1954, I took the radical step of moving out of my mother's house. I was advised by yet another doctor to go to a health spa in the Auvergne. By the time I got to Paris, I found that my asthma had disappeared. When I got home, the doctor asked, 'Was it the therapy or the feeling of independence that did you so much good?' I would still go to see my mother every week of course, but we didn't get on. She focussed on the past till the day she died, whereas I always tried to get her to see the importance of the present and the future.'

The broken sky

'I couldn't talk about the war for a very, very long time. I believed I had no right to speak about it. I was alive, whereas so many people had died. What I had been through surely didn't count? On the day I became Mayor of Amsterdam, I felt proud of course, but I also thought about all the boys who were no longer with us and who hadn't been given the same chance. For that reason alone, I had to do my best. I wanted to show that you don't have to remain a victim and that you can still make something of your life, even in the face of such experiences.

Even now, I still have nightmares that my name is being called out at Westerbork, but it is always triggered by something specific like a commemoration ceremony. As Mayor, of course, I couldn't avoid the remembrance ceremonies which forced me to reflect on my own time during the war. For me, the most poignant war monument is the Auschwitz monument 'The broken sky' by Jan Wolkers. That broken mirror is the perfect symbol of the indescribable damage that was caused. We should keep the 4th of May as the day on which the Netherlands remembers the Second World War and we must continue to be vigilant and fight for freedom. Despite so much collaboration and indifference, there were still people who dared to go against the grain and carry the torch for human rights! There will be more like them in the future too, I'm sure of it!



Photo: Odette Taminau-van Thijn.



Hans Keilson, 1930.

The Death of the Adversary

Renewed interest in novel by 101-year-old writer and psychiatrist Hans Keilson

On 5 August 2010, the re-edition of the book 'The Death of the Adversary' (1959) led to a review in the New York Times. The reviewer, Francine Prose, praised the book as one of the best novels of the 20th century, calling the Dutch-German author Hans Keilson a genius, and ranking him as one of the ten best writers ever.

As well as being a novelist, Keilson has worked as a musician, a doctor, a PE teacher, and, after the war, a psychiatrist. Many of his patients had been in hiding as children during the war, and he obtained his PhD with a thesis on war trauma in children. As an expert on victims of war, he has on occasion been mentioned and consulted by claimants under the Pensioen- en Uitkeringsraad schemes. In this

edition of *Aanspraak*, therefore, we are very pleased to introduce you to the writer and psychiatrist Hans Keilson.

Our telephone won't stop ringing

Why has the Netherlands not heard of Hans Keilson before? 'My novel was first published in Germany in 1959 under its German title, 'Der Tod des Widersachers'. The Dutch translation, 'In de ban van de tegenstander', was published in the Netherlands in 2009. The book is now available in many languages, translated in English as 'The Death of the Adversary'. Of course, such an exuberant review in the New York Times by that American lady was a bit of an exaggeration. Our telephone hasn't stopped ringing since. My latest book, 'There stands my house: a memoir', was published in March 2011. It's based on memories of my youth in Germany. The first edition sold out straight away.

I was born on 12 December 1909 in Bad Freienwalde in Germany. From 1928 to 1934, I studied medicine in Berlin, but after I had finished I was not permitted to practise because of my Jewish background. Music is still my biggest passion. As a student, I played the violin and trumpet in small bands in Berlin to pay for my studies. My music made people dance, which I thought was wonderful. As I could not work as a doctor, I took jobs as a sports teacher at Jewish schools in Berlin.

I wrote my first novel, '*Das Leben geht weiter*' translated as 'Life Goes On', while I was still a student. It was about my father's return as a veteran of the First World War and about the bankruptcy of his textile shop. The book was published by S. Fischer in 1933, at almost exactly the time Hitler took power. It was banned as soon as it was printed. The Dutch translation appeared in March 2011.

In 1936 I fled to the Netherlands, under the firm persuasion of my girlfriend, Gertrud Manz, and we settled in Naarden. I continued to write and publish under a pseudonym. I wrote poems and anthologies of Dutch texts - about Colijn, for example. I also worked as a pedagogical supervisor with children who were having problems at school and

who were sent to me by a Dutch friend who was a doctor. That was how I was able to keep afloat as a newcomer in the Netherlands.'

Last wish

'My last wish is to be buried beside my first wife at the Jewish cemetery in Badhoevedorp. She died in 1968. She was a respected graphologist. Before the war, she saw Hitler's handwriting, and said to me; "That man is going to set the world on fire!" I wasn't inclined to believe her at the time. In fact, I said "You're crazy!" We fled to the Netherlands in 1936. She converted to the Jewish faith after the war because she resented the fact that the Pope had done nothing to help the Jews. He could perhaps have exercised some influence, as a spiritual leader. We did not get married until after the war because the German laws on race forbade mixed marriages. The laws also applied in the Netherlands, even before the occupation.'

Regrets

Can a 101-year old have any regrets? 'Yes, I wish I had done more to get my father and mother into hiding. My parents thought they would be safe because my father had received the 'Eiserne Kreuz' for his services as a soldier in the First World War. That turned out to be an illusion. They also fled to the Netherlands in 1938 but did not escape the transports. I saw my father pack his rucksack with medicines for my mother to take to Westerbork. Her health was weak. I wake up every day regretting that I did not do more for them. It was virtually impossible to find places for the elderly or sick to go into hiding. What would you do if someone you were sheltering died during the war? That's what my novel 'Comedy in a Minor Key' is about.'

I understood their loss only too well

'I found my first hiding place at the Rekkense Inrichtingen, a psychiatric institute for the criminally insane, in the Achterhoek region through a good friend from Naarden. He was the Headmaster of a Montessori school, and at one time I had helped him with children with learning difficulties. I subsequently went into hiding in Delft, staying with the

Rientsma family. Leo Rientsma and his associates in Delft were in contact with a resistance group based in Amsterdam. For the first month, they tested my trustworthiness. After that, if there were problems, they would send me under the name 'Dr van der Linden', equipped with a convincingly forged passport, to visit Jewish children who were in hiding. Many children in hiding had a very difficult time of it. They had been torn away from their parents, taken to live with strangers, and locked up in cramped little rooms. There was often a lot of tension in those foster families.

I myself had parted from my parents abruptly and cruelly when I went into hiding. It causes me unspeakable pain that I could not prevent my parents from being deported to Auschwitz. My future wife was able to stay in Naarden with our one-year-old daughter, Barbara. I only saw them once or twice throughout the entire war for safety reasons. The neighbours were good people, but I was not allowed to send her any letters, and I was told that it was too dangerous to visit them.'

Being listened to helps

'After the war, I became a psychiatrist, sometimes treating children I had visited during the war. In some cases, listening was all I could do. But listening in a non-judgmental way can have a strong therapeutic effect. I later did research into the succession of traumas suffered by these Jewish wartime foster children. I showed that the age at which children were forcibly parted from their parents was relevant to how the traumas would be processed. I also found that staying with one or several families could affect the degree of traumatisation. And it may sound strange, but foster care after the war was particularly important for the processing of traumas.'

The Death of the Adversary

'Writing 'The Death of the Adversary' had a therapeutic effect on me. I started it in 1943, the year I went into hiding. My first wife buried the manuscript in the garden in a breadbin when I had to leave. I continued working on the text after the war.'

Keilson believes it is vital to keep a critical attitude. 'My main source of inspiration for this book and for my life are the lessons I learned from my psychiatrist Le Coultre from Amsterdam, with whom I was in therapy for two years as part of my study. He took the position that 'Every person has good and bad in them, and you are often your own greatest enemy. The art of life is to encourage what is good in yourself and your fellow human beings and let it flourish. And to stay critical with regard to what is bad in yourself and in others.'

Staying critical

Keilson proposes in his novel that an adversary needs a victim. 'In love, you attribute good characteristics to the other person. Similarly, hating someone means that you attribute bad characteristics to the other person. Without the other person, there is nothing to hate. You must always see yourself clearly. Many people refuse to see that the solution is within themselves. It's easier to create a common adversary.

When my book was published in Germany in 1959, Jewish readers criticised me for daring to claim that what the Nazis did was also a matter of projection. As if I was trying to say that the Jews, as victims, could have done anything to change their situation. What I actually meant was that you have to anticipate the moment at which victims are designated and stop it happening. Even in marriages and friendships, we seem to need to pass blame onto the other person. It's an ancient mechanism, which you can protect yourself against by staying alert and respectful.

With this book, I am trying to warn people against this hidden danger. As soon as respect for individuals is not an absolute given, things will go wrong. As soon as minorities are excluded, as soon as respect for individuals disappears, hate will suddenly have too much room to grow. It's the beginning of a descent into the shadowy area between good and evil. As far as xenophobia is concerned, we must remain critical and be prepared to enter into dialogue to tackle the subject head on.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Joke Folmer.

Joke Folmer saved pilots; 'Mad Tuesday' saved her

Joke Folmer became involved in the Resistance at the age of seventeen.

During the war, many Allied crew members landed in the Netherlands when their planes were shot down. Local people often took care of them before they were smuggled out of the country by the resistance. Together with other members of the resistance, Joke Folmer, who became involved in the resistance as a girl of 17, succeeded in getting more than a hundred pilots and other refugees across the border.

As she speaks, Joke Folmer produces a white parachute, saying, 'Look, I was given this silk parachute after the war. It belonged to one of the boys I saved. A strip was taken from it and used for my wedding dress.'

Joke started working for the resistance in 1942. 'It all started when Rosette, a Jewish friend of mine, had to go into hiding, and I was asked to deliver her homework. Her family was betrayed, and did not survive the camps. I still think of them often. I was soon distributing 'suspicious' packages, and after some time, I started guiding people, including American, Canadian and English pilots, to various addresses and across the border into Belgium.'

Dutch customs

'I was certainly afraid, but I carried out my work very carefully. I had three fail-safes. My father worked at the police station in Zeist, and he intercepted German telex messages stating when and where Allied planes had come down. I used the information in the telexes to trace

the pilots. A secret transmitter was used to contact England and check all the details because we were wary of spies. I also questioned the pilots about typical aviation expressions using pictures. If they recognized a drawing of a Gremlin, for instance, there was nothing to worry about.'

Joke Folmer got hold of Dutch clothing for the Allied pilots, and arranged for a photographer to take a picture for their identity papers. 'They were always given names that they could easily pronounce, such as 'Jan Vis', or 'Klaas Jansen' - without the Dutch 'ch' or 'r' sounds. I also taught them Dutch manners. Politeness dictates that Americans and Englishmen rise when a lady rises or enters a coupé. They had to stop doing that. I even taught them Dutch table manners. (Americans ate using one hand). As soon as they were sufficiently 'assimilated', I took them by train to the border people in places such as Venlo and Maastricht, and sometimes even as far as Antwerp, Brussels or Liege. I once took three English pilots to Utrecht station. A female guard from the salvation army warned me, 'Madam, you are being followed by those men, you will be safe if you come with me!' I winked to indicate that they were supposed to be following me. I tried to avoid Utrecht station after that, as we were apparently too conspicuous there. As I was smuggling pilots repeatedly over the same railway lines to Belgium, a Dutch guard once saved me by warning me that we should leave the station via the luggage depot. I did indeed see Germans posted at the main entrance.'

Caught

In April 1944, after her mother had been followed in Amsterdam for several weeks, Joke was apprehended together with her mother. Her mother was taken as a hostage to camp Vught so that Joke would not escape. Joke was locked up in solitary confinement in the Oranjehotel prison in Scheveningen. 'Luckily, I had been used to solitude as a child on my father's plantation. I still keep a paperclip in my purse which I used to scratch an uplifting poem on the prison wall. While I was being interrogated, I was hit hard on the hand with a stick.

All they knew was that I had helped five Englishmen, and they continued to interrogate me. I was relieved that they knew so little. I had hidden a needle under the callouses on my palm, and I embroidered the names of the prisons on my father's handkerchief, starting with Scheveningen and camp Vught.' During a trial in Utrecht, Joke was sentenced to death for helping pilots, together with two other girls from the resistance group 'Fiat Libertas'. Thanks to Mad Tuesday, 5 September 1944, the procedures were disrupted and they were hurriedly transported to German in cattle wagons. As prisoners, they belonged with the so-called 'Nacht-und-Nebel-Gruppe', a special punishment category set up on Hitler's orders to have members of the resistance disappear without trace.

Folmer relates, 'We spent nine months in various prisons in Germany. The trial papers with the sentencing were forwarded but never arrived on time. I was sent all over Germany, together with about three hundred other women, because we did not have any papers. Only 32 political prisoners escaped execution and survived the diseases and hunger. We were finally freed from the prison at Waldheim, about 60 km to the West of Dresden, by a Russian soldier. A Frenchwoman started singing the Marseillaise! That was an unforgettable moment. In the chaos of those days, we had to take care not to get raped. A Dutch fellow prisoner from Waldheim stayed nearby to protect us, weak though he was.

We were in the Russian zone, which was subjected to increasingly strict checks. After waiting in vain for the Red Cross, we attempted to descend the Elbe in a rowing boat. The attempt was unsuccessful, and we ended up in a Russian camp. After an exchange with an American camp full of Russians, we reached the Netherlands at the end of June 1945.'

Remembrance

Looking back on her time in the resistance, Joke Folmer, now aged 84, says 'I have never had nightmares, but I do have a daytime equivalent. And the experience did saddle me with some quirks. For in-

stance, I cannot stand being in a room without a window, I cannot bear the smell of kohlrabi, and I hate big crowds of people. After the war, the war historian Loe de Jong sent me all the original German documents that precisely documented what they knew about us. Thanks to confessions from people who helped pilots, they were able to trace almost our entire group. My name was also on the list of contacts. The envelope with death sentences, which kept following us, showed the stamps of all the German prisons we had been in.'

Joke's eyes light up and she says, 'Two years ago, I was invited to attend a special remembrance event in London for women who had experienced the Second World War. They allowed me to go with my daughter. After the remembrance ceremony, we had to walk after Queen Elizabeth in a special line to the Ministry of War. My daughter had the opportunity to speak to Margaret Thatcher. I had to sit at the front next to an empty chair. What a surprise when the Queen sat down next to me! She was very friendly, and asked where I was from and what I had done in the resistance. She herself had repaired cars during the war. It was very special to speak with her so personally. The 92-year-old English lady sitting to my right proclaimed, "Your Majesty, today is a very special day. It is Joke Folmer's birthday!" I was then congratulated on my 82nd birthday. It still amazes me.'

'For many years, I visited schools to inform pupils about the war. I particularly liked bringing out the parachute and telling my story of the war using all kinds of objects from those times. I also found it very important to always make a connection with current problems. I found the questions and discussions the most enjoyable. Pupils often asked me, "Would you do it again?" My answer was invariably "Yes, I could not have done otherwise."



Photos: Ellen Lock.



Hella de Jonge.

Cruel fate has not crushed us

Hella de Jonge talks about her debut novel 'Los van de wereld' ('Disconnected from the world').

'In our family, everything revolved around the Second World War', Hella de Jonge writes in her autobiographical debut novel. Hella grew up in Amsterdam, in artistic circles in which her father, Eli Asser, was a successful writer of humorous texts. However, life in the Asser family was not always fun and laughter - on the contrary. Hella's Jewish parents both survived the Holocaust, but almost all their relatives and many of their friends had been murdered. They had three children after the war, but they never escaped the clutches of the grief the war had caused them.

Dancer and violinist Hella Asser met cabaret artist Freek de Jonge. They have been happily married for 36 years. When Hella lost a child, she noticed that, in the eyes of her parents, no suffering was comparable to the suffering they had gone through during the war. In her debut novel, Hella de Jonge gives a fascinating account of growing up in a family where the war coloured everything.

It was always war in our house

After the war, Hella's parents, like many survivors, were racked by guilt in respect of those who had not survived, asking themselves, 'Why them and not us?' 'When I was growing up, everything was linked to the war, and the tiniest incident was liable to culminate in a full-blown drama,' Hella relates. 'If you were ill, you could drop dead at any moment. The exaggeration was terrifying. My parents had survived the war together when they were in their twenties by going into hiding just in time. In 1942, they were working at the Jewish

psychiatric hospital, 'Het Apeldoornsche Bosch'. They thought they would be safe there because the Germans initially did not have any plans for the institution. My father, Eli Asser, worked there as a nurse, and my mother, Eva Croiset, as a cleaner.'

When Eva Croiset realized that both patients and staff at the institution were going to be transported, they faced a terrible dilemma: 'Should they go along with their colleagues and patients or escape and go into hiding?' Eva convinced Eli to go into hiding. They escaped via the back door in the nick of time, just as Germans were entering via the front door. Hella de Jonge: 'Most of the patients and nurses died. The train took them straight to the gas chambers. None of our relatives returned after the war, either. Our house was full of possessions and paintings that had belonged to relatives who had died. As a child, I was terrified of a painting that hung on the wall in the living room. It was a portrait of my grandmother, who had been murdered. She kept looking at me out of large, dark eyes. Talking about the war was taboo, but it was omnipresent thanks to those portraits. Whenever we asked any questions about the war, my mother looked sadly at my mother's portrait and remained silent.'

Attraction and repulsion

Family relations were disturbed because both her parents had lost all faith in humanity. Hella has the following explanation for this mistrust: 'Although they had cheated death by the skin of their teeth, its grip on them never let go. My mother's trust in people was completely destroyed when she rang the doorbell of her parental home after the war. The current occupant slammed the door in her face, shouting, 'The chairs are ours, now!' This caused my mother to retreat into her own sorrow and fight her own war. While in hiding, my father had ended up at a place where the vicar said to him, "Will you please leave as soon as possible, you are endangering the members of our congregation." Basically, my parents mistrusted the whole world. Together, they formed a bastion in which they understood each other without the need for words, and which was inaccessible to us children.'

Because of their unprocessed anger and grief, our youth was coloured by their wartime past and their mourning for their murdered relatives.

As a child, you sense your parents' pain, but don't have the means to articulate it.' Hella's pain as a child comes from her total inability to make her parents happy. She wanted so much to help them. Hella recounts, 'I deliberately went to my mother offering to do the cleaning together, or to sew together in the sewing room, to make her happy and proud.' But her mother's grief clouded her eyes to such an extent that she was oblivious to her daughter's attempts to get closer to her. She only saw what went wrong, and was incapable of feeling happy for her daughter.

Disconnected from the world

'On my twelfth birthday, I was given a ring that had belonged to the grandma who had not returned. After spending a day on the beach with friends, the ring was nowhere to be found. I hardly dared go home. My mother was shocked and distressed. I was banished to my room. There were many more such incidents of things going wrong unintentionally. I longed to dance and be happy, but my parents wanted peace and quiet in the house. The only time I felt momentarily free of the heaviness of the world was when I turned somersaults on my parents' bed. As an adolescent, my parents found me difficult and awkward.' As a result of all the tension and friction, 14-year-old Hella got to the point where she couldn't swallow food any more. 'When my weight dropped to a mere 37 kg, I was admitted to hospital. In despair, my father had dragged me into the kitchen by the hair in an attempt to force me to eat. Out of sheer powerlessness and frustration, he yelled at me that I had started to resemble his murdered little sister and that it was my fault she had been taken away. 'You killed my little sister!' he screamed when I again refused to eat. In the end, I chose to live. There was no point in locking myself away in my own misery; that was not going benefit anyone. And what's more, I did not want to turn out like my parents.'



Photo: Ellen Lock

Hella de Jonge, April 2007.

Taking leave

Hella: 'In my life, I have had to learn to deal with death in various ways. Every time you have to take leave of someone, you have to find a way to come to terms with your grief. I have learned that death does not necessarily only bring grief, but that you can turn the grief into something good - by channelling it into something creative, for example. You are not doing the deceased any favours by just giving up and wallowing in grief.' On 17 November 1979, Hella met the love of her life, Freek de Jonge, with whom she has been happily married for more than 36 years. 'Cruel fate could not crush us,' Freek sings his ode to their love in the play they are currently both performing in - Hella as a violinist, Freek as a cabaret artist. Hella continues, 'The most difficult period in my life was when we lost our second child. I recently had to make a studio recording for the audio version of my book, and I found it very difficult to read about it aloud. We went to the Dutch island of Texel with our two-year-old daughter and our new-born baby son. Shortly before, I had taken the baby to the doctor because I had found him lying in his cot one morning with his little head in a circle of blood. The doctor reassured me that there was no need to worry and that all babies had nosebleeds now and then. Our baby died on the way to our holiday destination, just after we had filmed him. We were walking along the dunes in a state of deep shock when Freek said to me, "You must never use this as your parents used the war!" At the time, I did not fully understand what he meant.'

'My mother practically ignored the death of my baby. When we told her about it, she insisted that her GP come straight away to check her blood pressure. Her high blood pressure was more important right then than the news that our child had died. I felt very much alone with my grief at losing the child. My parents were too wrapped up in the suffering the war had caused them. I went to them for comfort, but they were grieving for so many murdered relatives that they were incapable of comforting me, and Freek was performing a lot at the time. The most beautiful part of my book, in my opinion, is when I take leave of my mother as she lies in hospital in intensive

care. A couple of years before, she had had a near death experience in which she had seen her mother, who told her to go back for Eli's sake. When she dies, I describe a dream in which my mother's mother comes to collect her and she can finally leave all the suffering from the war behind her. During a lecture at the Vrije Hogeschool college in Utrecht, a student asked me, 'Did your mother perhaps love her own mother more than she loved you?' Her question brought home to me how terrible it must have been for my mother to lose her mother.'

Breaking the ice

'My husband, Freek, in contrast to me, comes from a very loving and trusting home. I think it is good to have a partner who has a very different perspective on life. At any rate, it has been good for me to have Freek bring me down to earth now and then. My parents had the misfortune to have been afflicted by the same fate. They were united against the rest of the world. That kept their eyes closed for a very long time to the happiness and love they could have received from their children. They kept bringing the war into everything and withdrew from the world together. Luckily, my father has now broken free of those chains. After my mother died, he built up a new life and met a woman with no experience of the war. He has really started to flourish, and I can finally talk to him. I feel sure that if my father had died before my mother, and my mother was still alive, I would have been able to talk to her as well. My father has read my book, and is happy for me that I have been able to put my story down in words.'





Photo: Verzetmuseum Amsterdam.

Siet Tammens at age 4 and 15 (1919 and 1930).

'Your character and upbringing make it impossible not to resist'

Siet Gravendaal-Tammens was at the top of the resistance in Groningen

During the Second World War, school teacher Siet Gravendaal-Tammens joined the resistance as a matter of course. 'I simply had to take action against injustice; I could not have done otherwise. First, I arranged for a Jewish boy from my class and his brother to go into hiding with a family. Soon after, I found accommodation for Allied pilots and other adults. One thing led to another.' Siet kept silent on the war for many years, but finally decided to speak. 'If my story encourages others to fight against discrimination as well, it will be worth telling.'

Self-willed

'I was born on 29 July 1914 on a farm in the town of Kloosterburen in the district of Groningen as the oldest of eight children. I was top of the class in primary school, but was teased because of my red hair. I did not let the teasing get to me though; I was self-willed, eager to learn, and tended to be dominant. At secondary school, a minister of the Reformed Church inspired me at catechism, and I wanted to study theology. My mother advised me against it, saying "Women can't become ministers, and you're not one to play second fiddle!"

I ended up in teaching, but there was not much work. In early 1939, I became a live-in teacher for a boy with Down's syndrome, in a professor's family in Groningen. I studied orthopedagogy and logopedics to optimize my teaching of him.'

Joining the resistance as a matter of course

'At the beginning of the war I still had my pupil to teach, but I was seeing so much injustice that I just had to take action. I lived with the professor's family until the end of 1941, but it became too dangerous to continue doing so, so I found rooms in a different place and started working at a special needs school in Groningen. In 1942, Jewish people were only allowed to shop at certain times, so I did shopping for Jewish families in the neighbourhood. I already had an extensive network for resistance work through the church, the tennis club and visits to pupils. My first act of resistance was to arrange for a Jewish pupil and his brother to go into hiding with a farming family. I took them to their new accommodation on the back of my bicycle. One thing led to another. My next room, in a boarding house, became a temporary refuge for Jewish children, pilots, other adults, as well as being a storage space for ration cards and weapons for the resistance. In July 1942, I was given leadership of a resistance group in Groningen. We gradually came into contact with other northern Netherlands resistance groups. Despite the widely differing religious and political backgrounds of these groups, we were united in our fight.'

You must continue!

'As from the summer of 1943, all the resistance leaders in the province met up for regular consultations of the 'Groninger Top' (top of the resistance in Groningen) at my home. There was an urgent need for extra ration cards to help those in hiding get enough food. On 4 June 1943, the Bedum resistance group raided the Langweer rationing office in Friesland, taking 5,000 ration cards and stamps for forging identity cards in one fell swoop. On 5 August 1943, our resistance fighter Piet Hut was shot dead by the Germans. On the following Sunday, I went to Usquert to speak to his parents after church.

In desperation, I said that we should perhaps keep our heads down for a while. But his father said with conviction, "No lass, we have to continue!" In mid-1944 many leading people were betrayed and arrested. We often had intensive discussions about the deployment of our assault groups who had the task of eliminating members of the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) or Germans. At our initiative, those eliminated included NSB police chiefs Elsinga and Keijzer, who hunted Jewish people and members of the resistance. On 25 April 1945, the occupier took retaliatory measures. Bedum was surrounded; six men were shot outright, and 148 others were rounded up. Most of them ended up in German camps, 22 of them never returned.'

Betrayal

'A colleague at the special school where I was working started to suspect I might be working for the resistance. This NSB member deliberately rang my doorbell after 8 o'clock at night during curfew, and he got too dangerous for those in hiding at my home. Two men from the assault group rang his doorbell and shot him down in the doorway. However, he was not dead, but unable to speak because of his wound. As his colleague, I was obliged to visit him in the hospital and pretend to be concerned, but I'd rather he was dead. As soon as he could speak again, he phoned the German headquarters in Groningen to report me. Fortunately, an infiltrator was there, who warned me in time. On 31 January 1944, I went into hiding in Friesland, in the guise of a Miss Martha Oosterveen, the niece of a sick housekeeper who was standing in. I found only doing housework frustrating to say the least. It was not long before I was transporting ration cards and weapons again by train to Amsterdam, taking them to the identity cards office at Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal. This was where couriers from all over the Netherlands came to get their assignments. On Tuesday 13 June 1944, I was arrested, together with about thirty others. I rang the bell of the house where the office was and all of a sudden there were Germans in front of me on the steps. I was carrying ration cards, identity cards and applications for forgeries. Everyone who rang the bell was taken captive and watched over

in a single room. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the last couriers were let in, with the words, "Aha, Rotterdam, three hours late!", making it clear that we had been betrayed.'

She couldn't break me

'After being arrested, I was taken to the bunker at Camp Vught. The Germans still did not know who I really was. I was not at Vught for long. I was soon taken to the Oranjehotel, which was a German prison in Scheveningen. In my cell, I thought up a new reading method for the special school. Scratched on the wall were the words 'Only trust in yourself'. I didn't agree. I continued to trust my resistance group and I believed that some power would protect me. From Scheveningen, I was taken back to Camp Vught as Miss Oosterveen, in the 'Scheveningen' commando. A female guard from Silesia did her best to break me, but without success. I kept getting locked up in solitary confinement. In Vught, they finally discovered that my name was Tammens, and that they were looking for me in Groningen. Two guards took me there by train. The station at Den Bosch was crowded, and I managed to give a message to someone for my family, which they received.'

Gateway to hell

'In the evening, I arrived at the German Security Department (SD) at the Market Square in Groningen, the so-called Scholtenhuis, otherwise known as the gateway to hell. The interrogations I was subjected to here were long and hard. A notorious nazi, Lehnhoff, of the Groningen Einsatz commando, was responsible for order in the region. He interrogated me that same evening in a very nasty manner. After the interrogation, I was watched over in an attic by two older Germans. I was too scared to sleep, but they assured me that Lehnhoff had no influence in that room. The next night, I shared the attic with two men from the resistance, one of whom I knew, but did not trust. He kept saying, "Just tell them everything, they already know everything anyway." This person's fiancée came by in the evening with tasty food, and the guards ate some too, so something was clearly very wrong. Of course, I said nothing.'

Groningen Detention Centre

'I had spent over a week at the Scholtenhuis with the same clothes on. After being transferred to the Detention Centre, I was subjected to a bath and de-lousing, and given prison clothes. I was in luck this time, because a relative of Piet Hut was a prison warder, and I was able to inform my family via her. At the end of August 1944, in the interrogation room, a member of the SD declared me guilty of supplying weapons, membership of the assault groups, and helping pilots. They also thought I had eliminated people, but they were wrong there. I was finally sentenced to death, but permission from Berlin was needed to execute women. Luckily, 5 September 1944 was 'Mad Tuesday' (Dolle Dinsdag) and as a result, they decided to send me to the prisoner of war camp on the German island of Borkum. I had to get ready to leave on Friday 8 September. My sister was alerted, and she was able to give me some clothes to take.'

Imprisoned on Borkum

'The hundreds of prisoners of war had to dig in the mudflats in the cold. Female prisoners had to provide their meals and do the cleaning in a former hotel. In the evenings, I was locked up alone in a cell. During Christmas, the girlfriend of the guard had gone home, and he raped me in my cell. I put up a lot of resistance and was seriously damaged. I was examined by a doctor after the war, and was told I would not be able to have children. I was held on Borkum until the end of March 1945. Then I was taken to Emden where a large group of prisoners were waiting for Swedish ships, but during the trip back at the end of April, a temporary truce came into effect. I was finally repatriated by land via Nijmegen. Not until mid-May 1945 did I arrive at my parents' home in Usquert.'

The world had turned upside down

'Much had happened during the war that I could not talk about with my family. I visited my friends from the resistance to find out which of them were still alive, and we were of great support to each other. To my dismay, the headmaster at the school where I had worked did not

want to employ me because I had been seen associating with various men in the war, which meant I could not get a certificate of good conduct. It seemed as though the world had turned upside down. Something snapped, and I had a complete breakdown. I was finally absolved of all blame in an independent report by the mayor. When I got my job back, relations were, of course, very much strained. So I applied for a job as a speech therapist at another school, where I applied my own reading method. After a year and a half, the inspector of education on Curaçao asked me to work as a speech therapist and special education expert, and that seemed a good step to leave the past behind me.'

A thick line

'On Curaçao, I drew a thick line under my wartime past. I did not speak about it to anyone, but I got very ill with typhoid fever. After I recovered, I became head of a special education school in Willemstad, which had its own speech therapy practice. There was a nice group of Dutch people with whom I played sports and bridge, and one of them, Cees Gravendaal, would later become my husband. After retiring in 1964, I returned to Groningen, where I continued to work as a speech therapist. When Cees Gravendaal was widowed, we got married, and I had the best years of my life until he died in 1981. I didn't come out of the war unscathed, and it was not easy to come to terms with what happened. I did not have a need for revenge. However, I do get recurring nightmares when I am tired, from which I wake up screaming. On 4 May, I always go to the commemorations at the urn containing the ashes of those who died at the Groningen Detention Centre. That is the remembrance closest to my heart. I have no regrets. I could not have done otherwise than resist. It is not a question of merit; your character and upbringing make it impossible to act otherwise.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema in Londen, 1942.

Soldier of Orange

Resistance fighter, 'Engelandvaarder' (England voyager), radio operator, war pilot, and writer Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema recounts his experiences during the war.

'When people hear my name, they picture a young hero like Rutger Hauer in the film 'Soldier of Orange', but I'm now an old man of 82,' says Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema with a twinkle in his clear blue eyes.

He is the author of 'Soldier of Orange', an autobiographical account of the Second World War, reprinted 46 times and with sales of over a million copies. The introduction to the book is by Prince Bernhard, a good friend of Hazelhoff's from his war years in England. 'It was first published under the title 'Het hol van de ratelslang' (The rattlesnake den). A friend of mine read it and said, 'Your book is more like 'The Courier of the Czar', a popular Dutch adventure story set in the past. Then I came up with the present title. 'Soldier of Orange' stands for every man and woman, military or civilian, who did what they could to resist the Germans during the war.'

'I wrote 'Soldier of Orange' mainly out of a sense of duty because there were only three 'Engelandvaarders' who shared my unique experiences of the Second World War. How Queen Wilhelmina had such a strong fighting spirit and how she ordered the Engelandvaarders - her countrymen who had travelled to England to continue the fight and prepare to liberate the Netherlands - to set up and maintain radio contact with the occupied Netherlands. History needed to be recorded for the sake of the whole Dutch nation!

The director Paul Verhoeven made a good job of capturing my story on film. Rutger Hauer represents the 'Soldier of Orange' for the younger generations, and I think it's clever the way he played me. In the film, the landing scenes in the dunes were filmed in daylight. When I complained about this to the producer, Rob Houwer, he said, "Look, everything you did in the war, you did in the dark. You landed in the dark, you flew in the dark, not to mention all those other things you did in the dark that I won't inquire about. But if the film's as dark as that, no one will want to watch it!" Of course, I had to agree with him.'

The Dutch East Indies

'I was born in Surabaya on the island of Java on 3 April 1917. I'm the only one of our family still alive. I had an older sister, Ellen. My father was the administrator for a number of rubber, coffee and sugar companies. I grew up in the Dutch East Indies and it still influences the way I look at life. Everything has a soul there. Maybe that's why I'm so open to everything life brings. I think you can do anything as long as you're prepared to work for it. I love the Netherlands. The Dutch in the East Indies were more Dutch than the Dutch at home. But it was difficult to get a good education for your children in the East Indies so my parents moved to the Netherlands when I was twelve.'

Coffee or kitchen knife?

'On 10 May 1940, I was working on my law studies at my parents' house in Wassenaar. It was a beautiful summer's day with a clear blue sky. At four o'clock, we heard the firing of anti-aircraft guns. It sounded like someone was banging against the central heating with a hammer. German parachutists were jumping out of planes and even landing in the gardens of Wassenaar. We heard on the radio that we were at war. I was making coffee and looked out of the kitchen window. What was I expected to do? Should I attack a German parachutist with a kitchen knife or offer him a cup of coffee? Then I realised that this had put everything into a new perspective. That afternoon,

my friend Chris Krediet and I drove to The Hague on a motor bike to sign up for military service. The man in the office said, 'We'll let you know in two weeks, but within a week, the Netherlands had signed the capitulation.'

The Resistance

'After the summer of 1940, I went back to my studies in Leiden. On 26 November 1940, the Germans closed the university because of the protest against the dismissal of a Jewish professor, professor Meijer. Led by one of the university professors, professor Cleveringa, the students had come out in protest against this racist act. I worked with a printer in Katwijk to produce a pamphlet called the 'Leiden Manifesto', which called for the university to be re-opened on the basis of the Dutch pre-war principles of freedom and democracy for all. When I took these pamphlets to my student friends on the night of 15 February 1941 with so-called 'instructions' for their distribution, they agreed to help immediately. The printer was arrested but fortunately he didn't mention my name.

Shortly afterwards, I was arrested for something that had absolutely nothing to do with me and held for several days in the SS prison in Scheveningen known as the Orange Hotel. The only thing I thought was, 'How can I get out of here as fast as possible?' I wrote a note to the German commandant in pencil on a piece of toilet paper, asking him to release me. This request was not at all appreciated and it was turned down, but in the end they let me go because they didn't have enough room in the prison. After that, I had to go into hiding where I worked very hard at my studies because there was nothing else to do. I was soon ready to graduate. Leiden university opened just once during the war for ten days. I still can't find anyone who knows why. I heard about it and immediately registered to sit my exams. So apparently nothing happened at the university in those ten days except that Hazelhoff got his degree.'

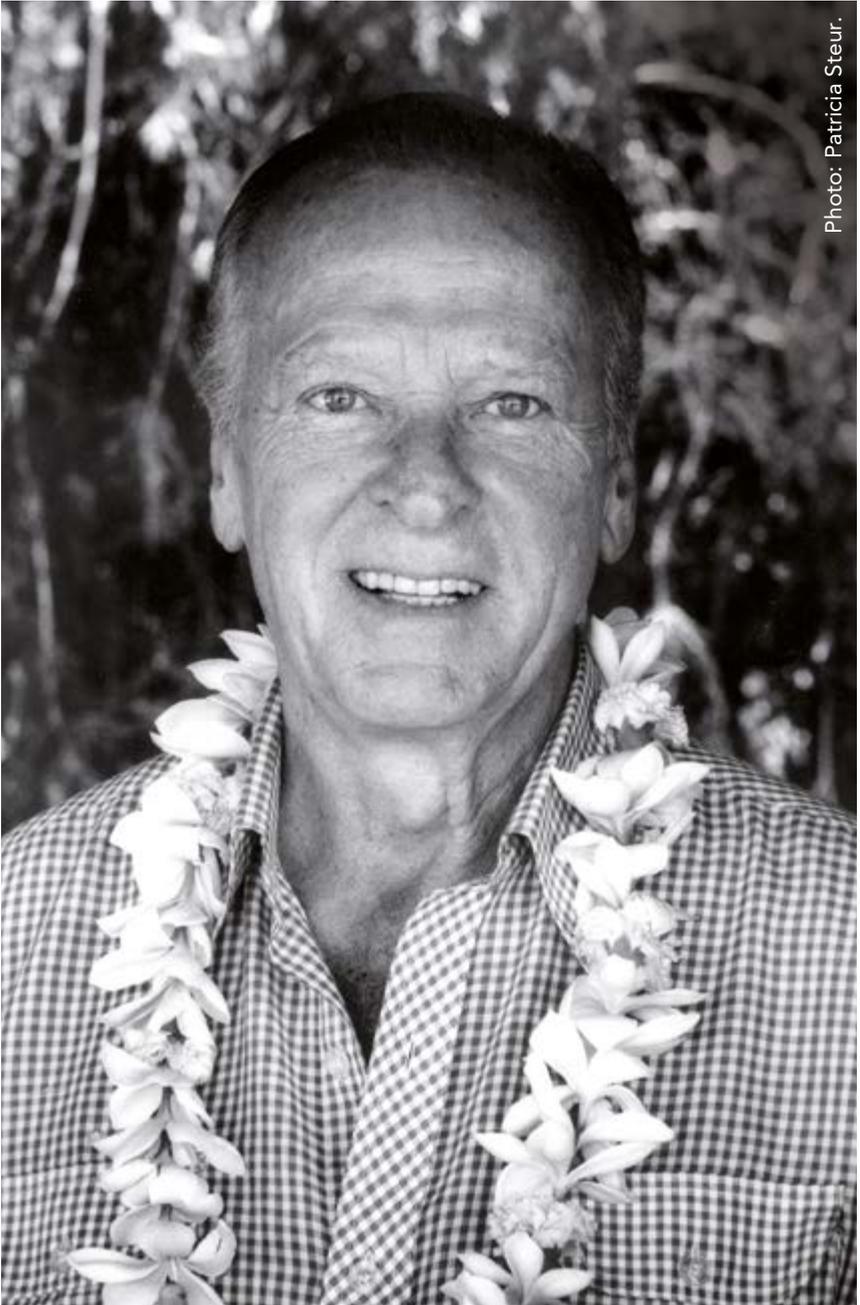


Photo: Patricia Steur.

Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema.

Engelandvaarder

'After I had been involved in several acts of resistance, it was no longer safe for me to stay in Leiden. My friends and I wanted to sail to England, but the coast was heavily guarded by the Germans. We could only risk the crossing on a night when there was no moon. The German patrols were everywhere and the first two attempts at escape ended in failure. Finally we managed to get to England on the third attempt, on board a Swiss cargo ship. In London we discovered to our great disappointment that the Resistance movement's communications from the Netherlands were being intercepted by the Germans.'

Secret agent in London

'Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch government had taken refuge in London. She would meet each Engelandvaarder personally so that she could get the news from the occupied Netherlands at first hand. In London we wanted to do what was needed to create good radio links with the occupied Netherlands. Wilhelmina supported us in our plans. She brought us into contact with the Dutch Intelligence Service and put an English ship at our disposal. Seventeen times, we sailed to the Dutch coast at night to land agents and radio transmitters onto Dutch soil.

The missions often failed: contacts were betrayed, our contact didn't appear on the coast at the agreed time or the coast was too heavily guarded. Our biggest problem was the weather. Several of our people were arrested and shot. The Engelandvaarders were seen as a nuisance because we believed that the Dutch government in London should do more to oppose the Germans. That's why I was summoned to a court martial of the Dutch government in exile as a 'wild boy' who trampled on the rules. But for the very same actions, Queen Wilhelmina personally made me a Knight of the Military William Order, the Netherlands' highest military decoration in recognition of courage, tact and loyalty to the country. A very great honour, especially if awarded by a monarch with such fighting spirit. But I firmly

believe that if you wear such an honour, you must do so in the name of all the other Dutch people who gave so much during the war!'

RAF pilot

After his exploits at sea, Hazelhoff turned to the battle in the air. As a pilot in the RAF he flew 72 bombing missions to Germany including twenty-five to Berlin. 'People sometimes ask me, "Doesn't it worry you that when you bombed Germany you killed so many ordinary men, women and children?" But I think you have to see everything in the context of the time. I had seen Rotterdam, London and Coventry. The Germans were responsible for that and we wanted them out of the Netherlands. I had the opportunity during the war to hit back hard at the Germans by immediately going into action. I really wanted to train as an RAF pilot and in the end I joined the 'Pathfinders', an elite air force unit of RAF Bomber Command. We dropped the flares to mark where the bombs should be dropped. It isn't difficult for me to talk about all of this because I could get rid of my anger in the fight and afterwards I worked through it by writing. It's been much harder for many Dutch people who lived through the occupation or survived the concentration camps to deal with their trauma.'

Aide to Wilhelmina

'At the end of the war, Queen Wilhelmina asked me to become her personal aide. Immediately after the liberation I flew back to the Netherlands with the Queen. The quotes in my book are quite literal because I wrote everything down as soon as she said it. She didn't always make it easy for those of us in her small entourage. We were housed temporarily in a villa in Brabant. The surrounding farmers had cellars full of good food which they were more than willing to share, but the Queen said "I won't eat anything that's not available for everyone." The next day she insisted on being given forms for ration coupons which she filled in herself: name - Wilhelmina; profession - queen. I felt responsible for the Queen's health. One evening, I had ordered a steak for dinner. I was immediately reprimanded, "Captain,

this is steak!" "Yes, your majesty." "Is everyone in the Netherlands eating steak this evening?" "I didn't dare say yes.'

'As her aide, I was also responsible for her safety, but I only had one other aide and six former soldiers to protect her in the villa where we were staying. Just a few kilometres away, the German troops were retreating and the rumour that Queen Wilhelmina was back in the Netherlands was spreading like wildfire. Every day, a long silent procession of people walked past our villa. I dread to think of what could have gone wrong.

During the Queen's festive entry into The Hague, I was allowed to sit in the back of the car next to her. The effect of the Hunger Winter - the Dutch famine in the harsh winter of 1944-1945 - on the Dutch people was appalling. The people we saw coming up to our car were terribly thin and in some cases you could see that their ability to react had been impaired.

I also had to make the arrangements for Queen Wilhelmina's household. If something went wrong, she would say, "Captain Hazelhoff, you are making it impossible for me to reign!" Queen Wilhelmina rebelled against her privileged childhood and wanted to live as simply as her people. She never went back to live in a palace. But after a few months I found my position as aide too restricting and I tendered my resignation. Second fiddle has never been my favourite instrument.'

Hawaii

'I have been living in Hawaii for thirty years now and I am not well known here. We can get involved in everything here. My son Erik, who is an artist, once had the idea of going to live on the island of Maui. When I visited him, I found the island so appealing that my wife and I came to live here too. But the Netherlands is in my blood and we go back every spring to visit our friends. When I meet new people in the Netherlands, they always link me to the Second World War. Nobody on Hawaii knows about that. And the Americans have been involved

in so many wars since. If they hear 'the war', they say "Which war?" In the Netherlands everyone wants to reminisce so you automatically become this old guy who can still talk about the war. I still write, usually eight hours a day, six days a week. Last week I finished two books. I was writing an autobiographical book in English and my publisher asked if I could translate it into Dutch. They'll both be in the shops in April 2000. Of course, there's already 'Soldier of Orange', but so much has happened in my life in the last fifty years that I look at the war now from a completely different angle. The most important thing in your life is not what happens to you but how you react to it.'





Bram Grisnigt and Ann Stone, 1943.

Far away

After escaping from the Netherlands to join the Allied forces, Bram Grisnigt was dropped back into occupied Dutch territory as a secret agent.

In May 1941, 18-year-old Bram Grisnigt and a friend set off for France on their bicycles in order to eventually return from England to help liberate the Netherlands. After travelling through Belgium, France, Spain, Curaçao and Canada they finally arrived in England. After training as a secret agent with the British secret service in London, Bram Grisnigt was dropped into occupied territory in North Brabant in the Netherlands. As a radio operator, he maintained links between Dutch resistance groups in the Netherlands and the 'Bureau Inlichtingen', the Intelligence Service of the Dutch government in exile in London.

Dreaming of faraway places

I was born in Rotterdam on 26 January 1923 in a family with two older sisters. As a little boy I dreamed of sailing to faraway places. In those days, most people never went further than a school trip to Arnhem. My father died when I was still young. It was not easy for my mother to raise three infants on her own, so my sister and I were fostered out to a family in Zeist, where I spent a very happy childhood. When I tried to get into a school for naval cadets, I was turned down because I was colour blind. Out of frustration I registered at a trade school in the Hague. As early as 1940 my friend Dick van Delft and I were already planning to go to the Dutch East Indies to help liberate the Netherlands there.

'Exam preparation'

In May 1941 we told our parents that we were going to stay for a weekend with relatives in Zeist to revise for our exams. With our schoolbags strapped to the back of our bikes and a standard school atlas as our

guide, we set off towards Belgium. After a series of adventures we finally succeeded in getting through the German occupied territories in Belgium and France and reach unoccupied Vichy France where we reported to the Dutch consul in Lyon. On his advice, we travelled to Toulouse and stayed in a Dutch refugee camp just outside the city. There we met other Dutch people who were making their way to England to join the allied forces as well as Jewish families who had fled from Belgium and the Netherlands. My friend Dick didn't think he would get any further so he decided to return to the Netherlands. In that refugee camp I met a man called Piet Hoekman from the Dutch town of Urk and we decided to journey on together. On 27 May 1942 we left for Barcelona along with another thirty or so fellow countrymen who were also heading for England.

Hit by a German torpedo

On 1 June 1942 we boarded the Spanish passenger ship Cabo de Buena Esperanza. At Gibraltar, a British patrol boat took some of the Dutch passengers from the ship. A few of the other fellow travellers jumped overboard and were drowned in the high waves of the bay. Afterwards, we were glad that we hadn't risked jumping into the sea. On 21 August 1942 in Curaçao I signed on as a sailor on board of the M.S. Rotterdam which was loaded with fuel. On 28 August 1942, our ship and two other ships from the same convoy were torpedoed by a German submarine. I had decided to sleep on deck that night because it was so hot, and with hindsight, that was what saved me when the ship went down. Ten of the forty-eight crew members lost their lives, including my cabin mate, a seventeen-year-old English boy called Little. I managed to get to a lifeboat. All these lucky escapes - was it just luck or something more than that?

After being picked up by the American Navy, we were taken to the Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. I worked a passage to New York as a sailor on a Philippine cargo ship, and from New York I went up to Canada and enrolled as a soldier in the Princess Irene Brigade. It was here I met up with Piet Hoekman again. He had made his way

to Canada by a different route. On 12 December 1942 together with thousands of American and Canadian soldiers, I sailed for Scotland on board the troop ship, the Queen Elizabeth. Nineteen months after leaving the Netherlands, I stepped onto the quay at Glasgow. From Glasgow we were taken to the Princess Irene Brigade's training camp at Wrottesley Park in Wolverhampton. During a holiday in London, Piet and I were asked if we would be prepared to take on a special and dangerous assignment.

Training to be a secret agent

We were selected by the 'Bureau Inlichtingen' - in English: Information Office - from a group of volunteers and given a three-month crash course in being a radio operator. We were trained in parachute jumping and how to use a firearm, and given lessons in coding, decoding and sending messages. As part of the 'Bureau Inlichtingen' we came directly under MI6, the British Intelligence Service. We were given a new identity and we weren't allowed to contact any of our friends anymore. Every day our group of trainees went by train to the training centre in London. It was in the train that I met the love of my life, Ann Stone. She also travelled into London every day on the same train. She first got to know me as 'Kees Coster'.

The drop

On the night of the 19th to 20th September 1943, Piet and I were dropped under a half moon above North Brabant. We should have landed near Escharen, but because of a navigation error we came down fifteen kilometres away near the village of Beugen. The parachute carrying our wireless equipment landed behind a hedge in a garden where some men were standing talking to each other. We pulled out our pistols and crept up to them. Whose side were they on? Luckily it turned out they were working for the air-raid defence service and they helped us hide our equipment. Around midday, we were given the name and address of our contact, a village policeman in Escharen called Beuvink. The next morning we sent a message to London by means of the two carrier pigeons we had brought with us,

to let them know that we had arrived safely. Our job was to set up and maintain links between Resistance groups in the Netherlands and the exiled Dutch government in London. I sent and received radio telegrams from Amsterdam and Piet did the same from the Hague. Most of the messages were about political, military or economic matters.

Betrayed

Op 6 November 1943 Piet and I went to visit Constable Beuvink in Escharen. What we didn't know was that the previous evening, two other secret agents, Marinus Verhage and Jan Diesfeldt, had also arrived from London, but their equipment had landed on a farm in Overasselt. Constable Beuvink believed the farmer could be trusted, and he was going to pick up the equipment with Piet and Jan. When Piet and Jan entered the property, however, they found German soldiers waiting for them. In the ensuing exchange of fire, my friend Piet was killed. As soon as Beuvink heard the shots he knew that they had been betrayed. He raised the alarm to warn me and Marinus and we went to the local priest who found us a hiding place in a barn. When we looked out through the half windows of the barn in the daylight, we saw Jan crawling along the side of a ditch. The next day, we managed to slip through the area the Germans had cordoned off without being seen and made our way to my foster parents' house in Zeist where we went into hiding for a while. Later in the war, Jan Diesfeldt was caught by the Germans and executed.

Arrested

After Piet was killed I took over his equipment and started working with two radio sets, one in Amsterdam and one in Zeist. On the morning of 2 February 1944, the Germans got a trace on the transmitter in Amsterdam and I was caught by their security service while I was signalling from an attic on one of the central canals. I tried to escape, but the house was crawling with Germans. Inevitably, I was beaten up, arrested and taken to Euterpestraat in Amsterdam and then on to prison in Scheveningen and later to Haaren and Vught. In the camp at Vught, I was locked in a cell in a bunker together with another three

secret agents. One of them, Harm Steen, was taken from the cell and executed. When the allied troops started to approach at the beginning of September 1944, the camp was evacuated and we were sent to concentration camps in Germany. Most of the prisoners thought this was a turn for the worse, but I saw it as a chance for survival. If I'd stayed any longer in Vught, I would probably have suffered the same fate as my cellmate.

A sign of life

On 6 September 1944 while we were being transported to Sachsenhausen I wrote a note in pencil and threw it out through a crack in the wall of the truck somewhere near the Dutch-German border. The letter was found and delivered to my foster parents' house so they knew I was still alive. I still have the note. 'Fellow-Dutchman!!! Could you please deliver this note to the following address. We are all well and on a transport train to Germany. Keep Smiling. Address Wisman-Krullelaan-Zeist. Sender: BR.'

Ravensbrück

Via the camps at Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme, a camp near Aurich, back to Neuengamme and Braunschweig, I eventually ended up in the concentration camp at Ravensbrück. Of all the camps I was held in, Ravensbrück was the worst. The overseers in the camp were professional criminals who treated us even worse than the SS. We slept three to a bunk bed, and were made to leave the barracks as soon as it was light. To survive you need an incredible amount of willpower, luck and support from the other prisoners. On 27 and 28 April 1945, as the Red Army gained ground, the SS took the decision to close the camp. Those who were in no state to move were left to die of exhaustion or shot. All the men who could still walk were forced to join the notorious hunger marches.

Escape

One time at dusk during the march, I saw a chance to escape. After getting permission to 'scheissen', I crawled further and further back

behind a bush and away from the march. In the middle of the wood I lay down on the ground but I didn't feel cold. I looked up at the clear sky shining with stars and the sheer sense of freedom made me intensely happy, one of the most beautiful moments of my life. The next morning I went back to the camp because I thought 'If they send help anywhere, they'll send it here first.' Next to the entrance to the camp and the sign 'Arbeit macht frei' I saw an enormous pile of wasted naked bodies: prisoners who had died. Nailed to the ground I gazed at it for a long time. That image is burned into my memory and for me, it represents Nazi-Germany. In the men's barracks I found another seven Dutch apathetic men, who were on the verge of death. The Germans had fled and the Russians were approaching. These men were critically ill, but where could we get help? In the end, it was the women from the adjoining women's camp who came to take care of us, even though their situation was almost as bad. To us they were like angels. On 30 April 1945 the camp was liberated by the Soviet army. Many of the sick still died in the weeks after we were liberated. Because I was a soldier, I did not have to wait long before I was taken to the transit camp for allied prisoners of war at Neubrandenburg and then back to the Netherlands.

We've always got room for guys like you

Back in the Netherlands, I had difficulty settling down. I wanted to get as far away as possible from any reminders of the war. First, I went to find Ann in London and asked her to marry me. Without her support, I couldn't move on with my life. Henk Letteboer, a secret agent who had become a friend during the war, had a cousin who worked for Shell in London. He arranged a meeting for us with the chief executive officer, who said, "We've always got room for guys like you!" I accepted the offer he gave me and moved to Curaçao with Ann. I have travelled a lot in my work for Shell, so in that sense my childhood dream came true after all. After almost twenty years abroad, Ann and I returned to the Netherlands, and we now live in a lovely, peaceful part of Brabant.

Freedom

Every year Ann and I try to attend the commemoration ceremony at the monument to the 'Women of Ravensbrück' on the Museumplein in Amsterdam. Almost none of the speakers were aware that Ravensbrück had also been a men's camp, which disturbed me. In the end, I contacted the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp Committee and they have now included a text on the monument in memory of the men who died as well. On 29 November 2003 the Pinpoint monument was opened in Beugen for the 180 secret agents who were dropped into the Netherlands, 95 of whom were killed. I wish I could have been there with my good friend and comrade-in-arms, Piet Hoekman. It grieves me to see how freedom is taken for granted in the Netherlands. People have no idea how hard we had to fight for it. So many courageous men and women have risked being arrested and executed, and have died in prisons and concentration camps far away.





Zoni Weisz.

A place for the 'Forgotten Holocaust'

In the presence of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, Zoni Weisz unveiled the Sinti and Roma monument in Berlin.

Zoni Weisz, a member of the Client Council for Members of the Resistance and Victims of War, works on behalf of the Sinti and Roma community inside and outside the Netherlands. On 21 June 2012 he received the Bundesverdienstkreuz 1st class from the German government. As the representative of the European Sinti and Roma community, he spoke at the unveiling of the Sinti and Roma monument near the Reichstag in Berlin on 24 October 2012. Here is a summary of his speech.

A memorable day

Chancellor Angela Merkel, ladies and gentlemen, '*Latcho Dives Mare Sinti oen Roma*'. A special welcome to all those who survived the genocide of the Sinti and Roma. For you, the survivors, this is a special day, but also an ambivalent day. On the one hand, we feel joy that this monument has finally been unveiled, but on the other

hand it is inevitable that we think back to the terrible Nazi period and to our loved ones who did not survive the insanity of that time. For me, as a survivor, it is a particular honour, but also a very emotional occasion to be able to speak to you here today; to speak as the representative of the hundreds of thousands of Sinti and Roma who were sacrificed to the racial delusion of national socialism. After many years of making preparations and solving the problems we encountered on the way, the time has come at last for us to unveil, in this wonderful place in the centre of Berlin, our monument to the memory of all the Sinti and Roma who were murdered by the Nazis. An original, beautiful and thought-provoking monument, designed by the Israeli artist Dani Karavan.

A tangible acknowledgement of our suffering

For the many who have died, it is unfortunately too late, but for the few who can join us today with their families, I regard this monument as a form of 'Wiedergutmachung'. It is the tangible acknowledgement of the unimaginable suffering inflicted on our people. I hope that as with the monument for the Jews murdered by the Nazis, which stands just a stone's throw from here, it will help the world to realise the horrors our people endured during the Nazi period. Xenophobia and racism have always existed and it was not the first time that the Sinti and Roma had been persecuted and excluded. But although we had been exposed to persecution for hundreds of years, the Nazi persecution was beyond imagining.

As soon as Hitler came to power in 1933, Sinti and Roma were deported to concentration camps such as Dachau and Sachsenhausen. Simply because of who they were: Sinti and Roma. Pure insanity! And it was already clear that it was not only the Sinti and Roma who would suffer, but the Jews as well. Gradually, we were stripped of our rights. We were made to wear identification, registered, isolated, robbed, deported and eventually murdered. The meaningless industrialised murder of defenceless, innocent people, conceived and implemented to the last detail by fanatical Nazis and bureaucrats. Criminals

who found legitimacy for their crimes in the Race Laws. Half a million Sinti and Roma, men, women and children were murdered during the Holocaust. But if we look at the way we are still being treated by society, nothing, practically nothing, has been learnt from it. The world knows little or nothing about the genocide of the Sinti and Roma. Even during the Nuremberg trials, scarcely a word was spoken about the fate of the Sinti and Roma. I hope that with the unveiling of this monument, the 'Forgotten Holocaust', as I call it, will no longer be forgotten, but will receive the attention it deserves.

When I saw my loved ones for the last time

I am able to be with you here today because of the miraculous way I escaped the so-called 'Zigeunertransport' of 19 May 1944 from the camp at Westerbork to Auschwitz. As a seven-year old boy, I was also due to be deported and I was standing on the railway platform with my aunt Moezla and a small group of family members waiting for the train to Auschwitz. The train arrived, and my father and mother, my sisters and my brother were already on it. I immediately saw where they were because my father had hung my sister's blue jacket through the bars of the cattle truck. If I close my eyes, I can still feel how wonderfully soft my sister's jacket was. We were supposed to join the Auschwitz transport, but with the help of a 'good' policeman we managed to escape. At the last moment, my father shouted desperately "Moezla, take good care of my boy!" That was the last I saw of my beloved family. That image will be etched on my brain for ever. I was completely alone. To be seven years old and to have lost everything; you cannot begin to describe how desperate you feel.

I have said it often in the past, but today, in this place, I need to speak about it to you. Often, today too, I think of my mother who cared for my brother and sisters in the most appalling circumstances in the 'Zigeunerlager' in Auschwitz-Birkenau. We cannot by any stretch of the imagination conceive of the suffering that my mother and all the other mothers had to endure, including the horrific medical experiments perpetrated on their children.

Finally, in the night of 2 to 3 August 1944, the remaining 2,900 women, children and old people in the 'Zigeunerlager' were sent to the gas chamber, including my mother and my brother and sisters. This is why we have gathered here today. We now have a place of our own to remember our loved ones who were murdered.

A monument to hope

This is a monument to recognition. Recognition of the suffering inflicted upon us. It is a monument to encourage reflection, but it is also a monument that raises questions. How was it possible for so many innocent people to be murdered? How was it possible for so many people to look the other way and think that it would not be so bad? How was it possible for so many people to go along with what was happening, to be complicit in the greatest crime in the history of humanity? We must learn lessons from history. Our loved ones cannot and must not have died for nothing. With all the democratic means at our disposal, we must ensure that such destructive ideologies can never take hold again in the future. It is our task to create the conditions in which minority groups can live in peace and security.

This is also a monument to hope. The hope that everyone, irrespective of their background, skin colour or religious beliefs, should be granted equal rights and equal opportunities. The hope that those rights are recognised and enforced in practice. The hope that the fascism, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Ziganism which is evident in many countries today, does not grow the way it did in the 1930s. The hope that we will no longer tolerate expressions of hatred for other ethnic groups. The hope that we can respect differences between cultures and people. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to finish with the hope that this monument will become a place of reflection and realisation, and that it will contribute to our mutual understanding so that we can live together in peace and friendship. Thank you.



Above: The monument to Roma and Sinti victims consists of a large slab covered with a layer of water. In the middle of the slab, there is a stone. According to artist Dani Karavan, there should always be a fresh, flowering rose lying on the stone. The water is framed by a mosaic of stones.

Right: German chancellor Angela Merkel and Zoni Weisz at the unveiling of the Sinti and Roma monument in Berlin.



Photo: Sandra Steins.



Photo: Jef Helmer.



Jan Wolkers.

Jan Wolkers' memories of the Second World War

A conversation with the creator of the Auschwitz memorial.

In the night of 18 to 19 October 2007, Jan Wolkers died in his sleep at the age of 81. A writer, painter and sculptor, Wolkers was a man who embraced the world and still had a great deal left to give. He was a born storyteller, full of passionate and moving stories about art, his own works, his sons and, of course, about nature. This engaging, inspiring and charming man was interviewed on 8 August 2007 for the December edition of Aanspraak. It was to be one of the last interviews he gave before he died. He spoke candidly about his war experiences. To explain the significance of the Auschwitz

monument, Jan Wolkers had written 'Never again can this place be reflected by an unbroken sky'.

Although Jan Wolkers once wrote in a poem 'Life is like a footstep that leaves no echo', in this interview we are able to hear him one last time. Pomona, Jan and Karina Wolkers' solitary white house, once the country residence of the mayor of Texel, lies hidden amongst the green branches on the edge of a Texel wood. Karina opens the door and takes me through to Jan's study. The room is flooded with light from the windows that constitute one of the walls with a panoramic view over the fields towards the church of Den Hoorn on the horizon. This bright and spacious room contains large abstract paintings and glass sculptures placed in front of the windows, glittering in the autumn sun.

Jan is sitting in a comfortable chair at a long table. He looks very fragile. I shake his long, slender hand. His skin is very thin, almost transparent. He has trouble walking. "I suffer a lot from erysipelas," he says grimacing in pain and grabbing at his leg. Karina brings us apple cider and traditional Texel cake. On his desk, there is an electric fly swatter. "I electrocute flies with this but they're pretty smart!", he laughs. Then he points outside, "Look, do you see that red pied woodpecker? That's an exceptionally beautiful bird with a breast the colour of the red coat Rembrandt painted in his portrait of Jan Six, one of his most beautiful paintings."

Can you tell us something about your background?

'I was born in Oegstgeest on 26 October 1925, the third of eleven children. I was brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church but I'm not a reformed Christian at heart. My father would read out three exciting stories from the Bible each day and we would hang on his every word as though the stories were actual and real. It was these Bible stories that awakened my interest in other cultures from a very young age, but being contrary by nature, I always questioned what I heard. When I was seventeen, I read Spinoza who said, "God and nature are one and the same" and "There are no miracles, you yourself must be the

miracle." I still think that's a wonderful thought. I wanted to draw and paint from a very young age.'

Where were you when the war started?

'10 May 1940 was a beautiful summer's day with a clear blue sky. From my attic window in Oegstgeest I watched the black Junkers flying over. They looked like flying coffins. I was fourteen and had a job outside school hours in the Academic Hospital in Leiden. That day I had to go to the laboratory doctor to pick up a white rat but no one was there. An open truck drove up, loaded with the bodies of soldiers killed at the battle near Valkenburg. They were taken to the chapel next to the laboratory. I stood frozen to the spot, watching it all. The German bodies were covered in mud and completely crushed because their parachutes hadn't opened. I thought it was strange that the dead Dutch soldiers were carried off the trucks just as roughly as the dead Germans. I'll never forget the yellow face of one Dutch sergeant. There wasn't a mark on his head except for a small bullet hole in his forehead. I stayed next to the students watching this gory scene, completely transfixed. Fascinated rather than scared. Could that be why I find death so intriguing?'

What did you do in the first years of the war?

'Early in the war, I went out walking with a girlfriend who was madly in love with me. We lay down in the grass together near the lovely old Tower and church ruins in Warmond. She obviously thought 'This is it.' But I suddenly caught sight of a natterjack toad between my feet, and as I'd never seen one before, all my attention was focussed on the toad. It must have been an awful disappointment for her.

In the first months of the war, German soldiers used to come to my father's grocery to buy coffee because you couldn't get it in Germany any more by then. You must remember that 50% of Germans had voted for the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands before the war. Those young soldiers did not all suddenly start rooting for Hitler. They were nice enough boys, I sometimes got chatting to them. Not

all Germans were bad. It is astonishing to think how they could let it happen. Of course, Hitler was a psychopath. I did a typing course in the Breestraat in Leiden. We learned to type to the music of Victor Sylvester which was often drowned by the metallic sound of German boots marching down the street. That typing diploma allowed me to work at the distribution office in Oegstgeest. I was responsible for logging how many coupons each person got. The people working there once let themselves be tied up so it looked like we'd been raided and the Resistance could steal all the coupons.'

Your brother was in the resistance.

How much did you know about that?

'My brother was in the resistance but he kept it secret from me. He thought I was an odd character, someone that apparently couldn't be trusted with secrets. I do know that he often stole weapons for the resistance from the German army camp. He always carried a bag with him, ostensibly to collect grass for the rabbits, but it was full of rifles. My brother travelled to France intending to go on from there to England, but he couldn't find a French resistance group to help him cross the Channel. Fortunately we knew he was all right because he sent us a postcard with a rose on it. When he came back, I dressed up as a female courier for a joke, but the first person I met said "Hi Jan!", so that didn't last long.'

In 1943 all Dutch men were called up for Labour Service.

What did you do then?

'In 1943 I went into hiding. I was enrolled in a course at Rapenburg in Leiden, so I had a key to the empty atelier. They had stopped giving classes because of the war. It was a hiding place where I could just carry on painting and sculpting. Mr Bouwmeester, from the same family as the great architect, lived on the ground floor. The next day, while I was working on a sculpture, he suddenly appeared behind me in the uniform of the WA, a division of the pro-German NSB. I was startled and told him that I was hiding to avoid Labour Service. Fortunately, he never betrayed me.'

Do you remember any 'nice' times during the war?

'In the summer of 1944 there was a big exhibition of Rembrandt van Rijn in the Rijksmuseum. The Nazis hailed him as a folk hero in the Telegraph national newspaper and in the local paper. A good friend and I thought up a way of getting back at them. In the night of 15 July 1944, we hung a wreath on the facade of the house in Leiden where Rembrandt was born with the text, 'Rembrandt in dark times, crowned in darkness.' On 'Mad Tuesday', at the beginning of September 1944, the Breestraat was suddenly caught up in a party atmosphere. A man came out with a bottle of gin and gave everyone a glass. That was really funny. The Americans were supposed to arrive the next day but it was another six months before the Canadians drove over the Wilhelmina bridge into Leiden. Every day, my mother brought me a pan of food. In December 1944 I was so hungry that I moved back in with my parents. Never has hunger been called by such beautiful names as the names of the tulip bulbs we ate. My father would cycle to Haarlemmermeer to exchange bed linen for food. On one moonless night I went out stealing because my family were so hungry. There was a farm near our house where they kept turkeys. It was so dark in the farmyard that I couldn't see properly and when I finally took the bird out of the bag, it turned out I'd stolen a peacock. But the peacock tasted fine too. I spoke to the farmer after the war. He knew we were stealing his poultry but he thought, 'There are so many mouths to feed at the Wolkers' house.'

What events affected you most during the war?

'One of the most shocking things that happened for our whole family was that a neighbour of ours who was a member of the pro-Nazi NSB discovered that an old Jewish woman was hiding in our house. After the Jewish woman had stepped onto the balcony for a moment to get some sun, the neighbour warned my mother "You'd better watch out keeping Jews in your house!" The Jewish woman had to move to another hiding place immediately. The tragic thing is that at her new address she was arrested and deported to Auschwitz. Our house was never searched once during the entire war.'

There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about the moment when my brother died during the war from diphtheria. I can still see him through the glass in the Academic Hospital exactly as he was before he died. He looked at me intently and raised fist as if to say 'Don't give up, keep on fighting and resisting!' He died soon after. I didn't suffer from anxiety during the war. It was only after I had children that I started fearing that something might happen to them. Years later, when my father was buried, I saw my brother's skull lying in the family grave. I saw the gap between his teeth. That made me realise that there is no power that can give us eternal life.'

How do you remember the liberation?

'The liberation was not a joyful experience for me. Everyone in the Breestraat danced 'The Jitterbug', a new American dance where the boys tossed the girls wildly over their backs. It felt like my world had collapsed that day. The snag was that I was faced with real life again. That's why I didn't feel happy. I liked the free life I had lived during the war. Immediately after the liberation, I hitchhiked my way to Paris with a rucksack full of ship's biscuits and two and a half guilders. Months later, a Jewish girl walked up to me in the Leidse Hout and said, 'You kept us alive. From the house where we were hiding, we would watch everyone walk past with sacks of sugar beet but you would carry your easel over to Oud-Poelgeest Castle as though the war didn't exist. You gave us hope!'

In 1977 you created your first war memorial, the Auschwitz memorial called 'Broken Mirrors'. What were your thoughts here?

'The chair of the Auschwitz Committee, Jos Slagter, had been coming to my atelier for years during his walks around Amsterdam. I kept a bottle of gin in the fridge specially for him and we always talked about the war. He asked me to create a memorial to Auschwitz. The idea behind it is 'Never again can this place be reflected by an unbroken sky.' When you look at the sky, it's difficult to grasp that that blue expanse could have existed above such horror, as peacefully and as unmoved as above a meadow of flowers. And in a vision of justice, you

see cracks appear all over the blue sky as though the horrific things that took place on the ground have robbed eternity of its innocence. That's how I got the idea to lay broken glass over that small piece of ground where the urn with ashes from Auschwitz rests. Great suffering is best represented by something modest.'

What inspires you to make all these beautiful things?

What is your driving force?

'Now I'm older, I often think of what the poet Slauerhoff said in his collection 'Al dwalend' (Wandering), because it so perfectly describes my narrow-minded father, 'Who knows how many tender gestures you have stifled, the Frisian mind is rigid and laconic, it ponders and deliberates...' Looking back, it's tragic that my father was so hampered by religion. He looked to it for security, but you can only find security in yourself. When I thought about heaven, I saw myself having to sit next to those heartless devotees of the Reformed Church and the idea of it was suffocating! It's important to enjoy life to the fullest. You have to do your best here to make something of it. You have to try and live life as intensely as possible, as though the days ahead of you are eternity itself. In that concept of eternity, everything can be forgotten.'



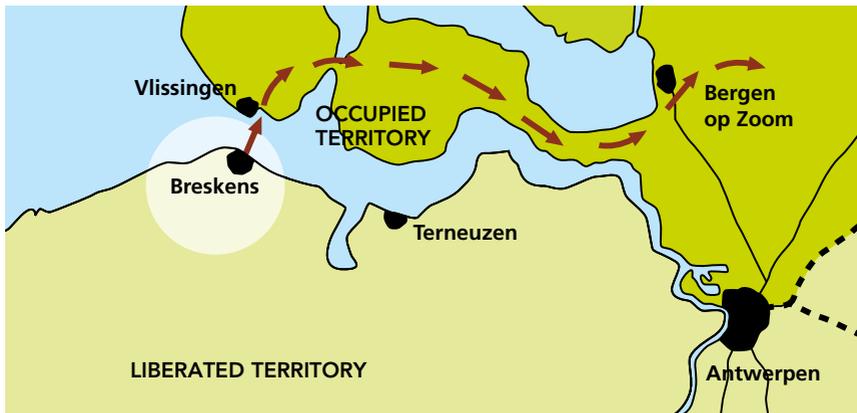
Photo: Ellen Lock.



Johan Provoost.



Jaap Keijmel (left) with his sister Esther and his twin brother Philipus who were killed in the bombardment of Breskens on 11 September 1944.



The German enclave of Breskens and their escape route in September 1944.

Forever quiet for them

Jaap Keijmel and Johan Provoost talk about the Allied bombing of Breskens on 11 September 1944.

In September 1944 the Canadian forces hoped to free Zeeland Flanders in a matter of days in order to secure the port of Antwerp so that it could be used to provision Allied troops. Things did not go according to plan, however. Due to determined resistance from the German enclave at Breskens, the struggle lasted for two months - from the beginning of September until 4 November 1944.

For several days, the Germans had been fleeing to Flushing via Breskens, and German army divisions hung around in the village streets waiting for the ferry. All other means of escape had been closed off by the advancing Allied armies. To cut off the last remaining escape route, the Allies decided to bomb the port of Breskens. The bombing had a devastating effect on the entire village, though. There were 186 immediate deaths, and many people were wounded and scarred for life.

Mortal fear

In the words of Johan Provoost, aged 78: 'The weather was very fine on the afternoon of Monday 11 September 1944. I was thirteen years old, and I was playing with my friends on the square next to the church. After a while, a large number of planes came flying towards Breskens from a southeasterly direction. My mother called us, saying, "Get inside quickly, they are going to shoot." The air raid siren went off, and the German anti-aircraft guns started firing. In panic, we ran inside. The first bombs dropped into the port area, making the most terrifying noise. We all got down flat on the ground. Then bombs started falling nearby, causing glass and shutters to burst out of window frames. Masses of smoke and all kinds of rubbish came flying in. Some of my friends had taken refuge under the staircase. My mother gave us pans to use as helmets - that may well have saved us.

There were many German soldiers in the village in those days, with horses and carts. While the bombs fell, wounded horses went tearing through the streets, screaming with fear and pain, dragging their carts behind them. Wounded people were screaming, too, fearing for their lives, and calling out for help and for their family members. The stench, the darkness, the deep rumble of the aircraft engines, the whistling noise of bombs falling before they exploded - I will never forget all that as long as I live.'

Forever quiet for them, now

'There were short periods of quiet between the bombings, and each time, we hoped it was all over. And then it started again and a bomb thundered down right next to our house, making it collapse like a pack of cards. Everything was black from the smoke, and my eyes and mouth were full of dust. We were all stuck there under the rubble, and the stench was unbearable. After the bombs stopped falling, everything went quiet. Chillingly quiet. And then people started calling out for each other. Some people were severely injured. Four children had been killed. It would always be quiet for them, now.'

Under the rubble

'My mother was calling out for her children and her husband, but my father was working outside the village. I was the only member of the family who could reply. That was a terrible time for my mother; she was completely helpless. I was stuck under rubble, with my legs caught fast because my mother was lying above me with a heavy beam on top of her. Everything hurt, but the fear of not being able to get out and the horrible sounds all around were the worst. There was a German soldier lying next to me under the rubble who shouted so loudly for help that several German soldiers came to our rescue. They helped prevent more civilian casualties.



Devastations of war in Vergouwestraat, nowadays Julianastraat, Breskens September 1944.

Meanwhile, my father had arrived. What must he have felt at coming home to such a scene? When I crept out of the rubble and looked around me, it seemed as if I was in a different world. All the houses had been flattened, wounded people were being carried away, and there were dead horses lying under destroyed carts. There were fires burning all over the place, and you could hear explosions towards the port. All the inhabitants of the village were fleeing. My brother was wounded and had been taken away by the Germans, no

one knew where to. We later learned that he had been taken to a bunker in Nieuwvliet, where he had his wound treated.'

The most traumatic event of all

'My father and I went to look for my seven-year-old sister Marietje. It was some time before we found her. She was lying deep under the rubble, with her head facing downwards. We tried to pull her out, but it was almost impossible. There was no-one else to help because everyone in the street had either fled or had their own problems. I was just small enough to squeeze into the hole she was stuck in. My father could not get in. I tried to pull her out, but I couldn't. I was afraid to hurt her. At a certain point, my father said, "Just pull, she's dead anyway." I will never forget those words. That was the worst, most traumatic event that I have ever experienced. My parents took Marietje away, to the end of the street, just outside the village. My mother spent some time with her on her lap. My father said that we had to go to Biervliet, away from Breskens, which was on fire. He would join us later. He took Marietje in his arms and walked to the infant school that had been turned into a refuge for victims. I can still see him walking away from us, bent like an old man. The monument I designed represents the first impressions of the disaster we all experienced. When there is a bombing, first of all, the windows explode due to the air pressure from the explosion. Each fragment of glass from the exploded window on the stone - which is in the shape of the municipality of Breskens - symbolizes one or more victims from each family.'

Everything went dark

Jaap Keijmel, aged 73, speaks: 'On Monday 11 September 1944, a gorgeous summer's day, you could hear the heavy engines of Allied bombers approaching from the south east. They were intending to bomb the port, but that afternoon, 93 tonnes of bombs fell on Breskens itself. But the ferry still sailed, carrying Germans to the other side, after seven hours. We lived at 5 Steenoven Street. I was 8 years old. Everyone fled inside from the streets. There must have been

20 people sheltering with us at home. I was in the bedroom with my mother. There was a deafening noise and then total darkness. Everything was covered under a thick layer of black dust. I can still taste that dust in my mouth, it was so bad. It cut your breath off. It stank of gunpowder and burnt meat. You were stunned - you hardly knew what had happened. There were 13 dead bodies in our house, and a number of wounded people. I saw three corpses in the corridor, and what was left of the walls was still shaking. My twin brother had been killed instantly. My older sister Esther, aged 13, was also killed right away, and my father was seriously injured in the leg, while my older sister was hurt in the arm. Neither of them ever made a full recovery. My mother and I had been hit by bomb fragments and lost some blood. I had a wound on my leg and on the back of my head, but we could still walk. Everything was in ruins, both inside and outside. There were wounded people, screaming, searching. And I will never forget the horses. They were blowing in terror, rearing up against the wall across the street. They stayed in a state of shock, on their rear legs, against a wall. Amidst the rubble, there were wounded people and also horses everywhere, because the German army made heavy use of horses.'

A baby was saved

'A mother had her foot stuck in a pit near our house and asked us to take her baby to safety. During the bombings, her baby was saved by Jacobus van Hanegem, the father of the famous footballer, Willem van Hanegem. Jacobus was also known as Lo, and the baby was named Lo after him. He died from shrapnel wounds to his back while protecting the baby with his body. My mother and me saved that baby that afternoon by taking it to a friend of my oldest sister's while fleeing from the burning town of Breskens to the neighbouring town of Slijkplaat.'

In times of need, you look to your family

'In an instant, we had become refugees. Our clothes hung from us in tatters. We walked for hours, wounded, through the polder, leaving

the burning town of Breskens behind us. We had the opportunity to spend the night with a brother of our neighbour's. So there I was, an eight-year-old child, with my mother, on the doorstep of total strangers, and without my twin brother Philippus and my sister Esther. The next day, we could stay with my oldest sister in Biervliet. In emergencies, you always end up with relatives. My father was seriously wounded, and the Germans took him to a hospital. His leg later had to be amputated. The Germans did take care of us.

When I lie in my bed and hear planes crossing above, I still shake. I avoid fireworks and barbecues because the smells take me straight back to those horrible days. "When you have experienced things like that, you can't really laugh anymore," I sometimes say. I'm gripped by fear every night in my dreams. That isn't always easy for my partner, but she does understand. Only people who have had similar experiences can really understand each other. Every time there is a remembrance ceremony, we feel a little neglected as citizens who were victims of war. The Allies, who freed us, also caused casualties, but no-one wanted to hear that after the war. For us, remembrance day is on 11 September rather than 4 May. Liberation Day doesn't mean that much to us either, as we never really experienced celebrations of liberation here. It was more of a trial.'



11 SEPTEMBER 1944
... EN VOOR ALTIJD BLEEF HET STIL



Wedding picture Arie and Akke Kooiman, 1942.

The longing to be reunited with my wife gave me the strength to endure all those camps!

Reprisal victim Arie Kooiman talks about the consequences of the raid in Beverwijk.

In response to the fatal shooting of three members of the NSB (National Socialist Movement) on 6, 13 and 14 April 1944, the German occupier decided to hold a raid in Beverwijk and Velsen-Noord with the object of taking hostage 500 young men aged from 18 to 25 and moving them to Amersfoort camp until the perpetrators of the murders gave themselves up.

One of the young men taken in reprisal in Beverwijk on 16 April 1944 was Arie Kooiman. He was one of 486 young men deported to Amersfoort camp. There, he managed to survive the cruel physical punishment inflicted by the cruel SS officer Kotälla, but saw others perish. He was a forced labourer in a number of German camps until the liberation.

Stationed on Texel

'My father was a skipper who transported passengers and vegetables between Beverwijk and Amsterdam. I was born in Beverwijk on

3 October 1920. From the age of 16, I worked at the Central Bakery in IJmuiden, where I was trained as a baker. In 1938, I started courting Akke van Dijk. A year later, I had to go into military service, and on 5 February 1940, I was mobilised to Den Helder to defend the Afsluitdijk causeway. However, when war broke out, there was more fighting on the Friesian side. Two British war ships anchored off the coast of Texel to evacuate us, but German bombers hindered the departure of the last 1,200 men, including myself. In retrospect, that was a blessing in disguise, as all my friends who were taken aboard the British ships were killed in the Battle of the Java Sea. After the German surrender, I started working with my father on the boat.'

Escaping forced labour

'In 1942, all unmarried young men were called up to go and work in Germany. To avoid this, I married Akke on 11 June 1942. She had her gold earrings made into her wedding ring. Thanks to good connections, we got a rented house and ration stamps. In 1943, when young married men were also called up to work in Germany, I was issued with a doctor's certificate stating that I had to be admitted to hospital because of a contagious disease. That allowed me to stay at home "sick".'

The raid in Beverwijk

'On 16 April 1944, I was seized during the raid in Beverwijk. Two Germans were standing in front of the door holding loaded guns. There was no time for goodbyes. Surrounded by Germans, twenty others and I were made to stand against the church wall. 'I've had it!', I thought, utterly terrified. I saw my wife running through the field towards me so she could still say goodbye, but I shouted, "Go back!" They rounded up 486 young men at the 'De Pont' cinema. We then had to walk in line to the station, where we were loaded into freight cars. I wrote a message to my wife on the back of my wedding photo and threw it through an opening in the freight car, "We are being deported, I don't know where to." She received the message only a few days later.'

Amersfoort transit camp

'On arrival at Amersfoort camp, we had to stand in line on the heavily guarded roll call square, known as the rose garden. The guards took all your possessions; I had to give up my wedding ring, watch and shoes. We were given wooden clogs that were too big. The cruel SS officer Joseph Kotälla liked to pick out men from the line and give them a taste of his whip, while we had to watch. It was impossible to escape. You were kept under surveillance day and night from a watch tower. Kotälla and Aus der Fünten beat people to death for fun. Sometimes, we had to stand still for 24 hours. If you collapsed, they would give you a kicking. Half of my teeth were knocked out. But the torture of my friend Henk Huig, who had only just become a father, upset me the most. His backside was beaten off and his screams went straight through my soul. That could have been me! After a few weeks, he was taken away.

We had to do hard labour on a tiny amount of soup, and we soon became undernourished. On 7 July 1944, 750 of us were called together at night by Kotälla. We were taken under guard to Amersfoort station and transported by passenger train to the labour camp of Spergau near Leipzig.'

The labour camps of Spergau and Zöschen

'At Spergau, we were guarded by SS guards. After 14 days, the camp was bombed by the British, and I was transferred to camp Zöschen. As this area was where the large chemical factories of the Leuna-Werke were situated, both the camps and the factories were repeatedly bombed by the British. There were no air-raid shelters. In camp Zöschen, we were put to work building a new barbed wire fence around the camp. Twenty six of us slept in a tent on the ground on a bit of straw. You couldn't trust anyone because the physical punishments were merciless. One guard knocked the remaining teeth out of my mouth with his bare fist. I had permanent ulcers on my legs from being kicked. We were beaten so hard on the back with a hard leather truncheon that many died as a result. During the heavy bombings

of 29 July 1944, four others and I crawled into a ditch behind a small bank, bomb splinters flying all around us. Everyone on the other side of the bank was killed.'

Zöschen camp

'From Spergau, we had to walk 14 kilometres to Zöschen camp, which was situated between Halle and Leipzig. My work team had to build a barrack for the sick, carrying cement bags weighing fifty kilos from the station to the camp. The work got harder and harder because we were getting increasingly weak from undernourishment and beatings. So many men died that they kept bringing in new teams of forced labourers from Poland, Russia, Italy and the Netherlands. A man from Amsterdam called Gerrit Scholte joined my team, and we became friends. Through him, I got to know six men from Brabant in Holland, who were planning to steal a car outside the camp when the time was right to escape.'

Liberated by the Russians

'In April 1945, we heard distant canon fire. On 18 April 1945, the Russians were so near that the SS guards fled. Gerrit and I went straight to the car with the men from Brabant. Lying on the roof, securely tied by two ropes, Gerrit and I just managed to ride along with the overfull car. We were stopped by Americans at the front, at the town of Nordhausen. Gerrit and I were taken to a barn containing at least 1,300 corpses from Dora-Mittelbau to identify them.

We fled as soon as we could because we wanted to get home as soon as possible. In the German area, a German captain apprehended us and shot Gerrit in the stomach. I ran away as fast as I could, without looking back. I was on the run for days, hitchhiking and walking. Looking back, I covered 500 kilometres westwards, but I can't remember how. In Paderborn I met a Dutchman and asked him, "I'm sorry, I have no money, and my hands are too dirty. Would you please write a letter to my wife for me?" She got the message, "Your husband is well."

She didn't want to know

'From Paderborn, American troops took me to Enschede, where I was taken into a Red Cross refuge on 16 May 1945. I hitchhiked home in any way I could. My name was still on the front door, thank God! I rang the doorbell at half past twelve at night. My wife opened the door. I stood before her, almost unrecognizable. I weighed a mere 40 kilos, was toothless, and covered in scabs. We fell into each other's arms and hardly said anything. She did not want to know about the war. I washed and shaved, but had become so unaccustomed to civilisation that I proposed to lie down on the floor. No chance of that, she insisted I lay down next to her in the bed. I reported for work the very next morning at the job exchange. The officer there said coolly, "Have you found a job yet?" I left without saying anything. I got a job at the municipal works through a superintendent I knew. My wife watched me deteriorate alarmingly, and asked a doctor for advice. I was to go without delay to a Catholic tuberculosis clinic in Velsen, where I was diagnosed with TB. As a non-Catholic, they did not want to treat me there, so I had to rest at home for 23 months.'

Poor as church mice

'As we hardly had any money to live on, three unions in Beverwijk supported me. They convinced the director of the municipal gasworks that he should employ me and that I should get sick pay. Shortly before Christmas 1947, my wife and I were sitting at the table crying because there was nothing to eat. We were as poor as church mice. We could not make a celebratory dinner for my mother in law's birthday on Christmas day. A former resistance member from the union came and put 67 guilders on our table. He said, "This is yours. It's for the fruit coupons you are owed because of your illness." With tears in her eyes, my wife went and got meat for the Christmas dinner.'

Commemoration

'In the summer of 2006, I revisited those places in Germany with the foundation for reprisal victims of Beverwijk and Velsen. To my great surprise, the barrack in Nordhausen was still there, and there was a

plaque to commemorate the 4,300 forced labourers who died. I attend the commemoration of the raid on Beverwijk every year, and I remember my comrades from the Battle of the Java Sea during the Indonesia commemorations. My comrade from Zöschen camp, Gerrit Scholte, visited me at home after the war. He immediately showed me the big scar on his belly, and it was good to catch up on things.

I still have nightmares in which Kotälla is standing in my room beating me to a pulp with his whip. You never forget cruelties like that. Losing my wife six years ago to cancer is the worst thing I've ever experienced. Longing to see her again gave me the strength to endure all those camps! Since her death, I have worn her wedding ring on my little finger. We were happy together, and we had two dear daughters. In July 2013, the Arie Kooiman walk will take place in Spergau. I will be walking the 14 kilometres that I had to walk after the bombings together with pupils from various secondary schools. I'm 92, so I've already started training for the walk!



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Koos Postema.

Keep hold of my hands!

Koos Postema talks about the bombing of Rotterdam.

After forty years in radio and television, Rotterdam journalist Koos Postema now only does things that really interest him. Having started his career in education, Koos Postema became a radio reporter for the VARA broadcasting corporation in 1960. For ten years, he worked as a television reporter for the news programme *Achter het Nieuws*, after which he was given his own television programme called *Het uur U*, a controversial, taboo-smashing programme of the seventies.

He subsequently spent ten years presenting the programme *Klasgenoten* (classmates) for commercial television, in which he interviewed Dutch celebrities with their classmates from primary school. In the spring of '99, he will be collaborating in ten documentaries for RVU broadcasting corporation, and will also present a weekly programme for Radio Rijnmond. We interviewed Koos Postema about his memories of the war.

Seaplanes on the Meuse river

'As a boy of seven, I was bombed out of Rotterdam. I was living on the second floor of an apartment in a modest part of Kralingen with my mother, my two older sisters, my brother and uncle Ger, a brother of my mother's. My mother was a widow. My father had been a tram driver. He died in 1936. On 10 May 1940, I didn't have to go to school because it was the Whitsun holidays. The weather was glorious when war broke out. It feels as if I know what exactly happened, down to the last second. We were playing football in the street when Ger-

man soldiers in seaplanes landed on the Meuse river and occupied the Noordereiland (northern island). A ten minute cycle ride from our house, at the Meuse bridges, warfare was going on. Dutch soldiers resisted the Germans for several days until Rotterdam was bombed.'

The bombing

'Rotterdam was bombed on 14 May 1940. It was a war crime. I knew that even as a seven-year-old boy, because I was calmly sitting there at lunchtime, eating a sandwich with chocolate sprinkles. We hadn't done anything. Negotiations were being held with the Germans. An answer was supposed to come from the Dutch troops at 4 p.m. that day. The German general in Rotterdam had not given orders for the bombing to start, but Hitler and his cronies in Germany were getting impatient. They wanted to force a surrender. There was a terrible sound of aeroplanes and breaking glass. The house started to shake. You could see the planes with swastikas swooping over, close above our roof. My mother was wearing her summer dress. She was looking for my father's pension papers. She told me to keep hold of her hands, and we flew down the stairs, which were moving underfoot like a rope ladder. Everyone was shouting to each other. Nothing but enormous grey clouds of dust and total confusion in the street.'

Bomb shelter

'We fled out of Lusthofstraat, the confines of my world. I had never played any further than that street. Immediately round the corner, at the end of Lusthofstraat, my mother made us crawl into a bomb shelter, which was hidden under a grass-covered hill. There, for the first time in my life, I saw a dead man. He was on his back and there was blood flowing out of his head and down his cheek. My mother told me not to look but I did anyway, breathless. She didn't think the bomb shelter was safe enough at the time, so we had to get out again quickly. "Quick, quick, quick, and hold my hands", my mother said. In those days, we lived on the outskirts of Rotterdam, but now, that spot is right next to the Van Brieneoord Bridge. We started running. Straight through the fields, running non-stop, glancing back

at the burning, smoking, stinking city. And the weather stayed beautiful, with the warm sun behind the smoke clouds of Rotterdam. On our journey, we saw boys from the neighbourhood who had been looting from shops – apparently something that happened too, right after the bombing. We kept on running through fields and meadows until three in the afternoon, when we arrived in Capelle. My mother knocked at the door of an extremely pious aunt whom we seldom saw because we were heathens. Of course, we were allowed in.'

Disappeared without a trace

'On the day of the bombing, my brother had gone to work as usual. He worked at the Post Office as a technician. Jan took the tram to work that morning, wearing his Manchester suit. No-one told him that might not be a good idea because it was war. No, life went on. Jan didn't come back home from work because all the streets had vanished. The house was gone, and his family had disappeared, too. He didn't know whether we were still alive or not. And Rotterdam continued to burn for a while after the bombing. Just imagine, the bombing took place around midday in the space of a mere twenty minutes. Let me show you the surface area that was burned. The city burned from the centre to the east. First thing next day, my brother started searching. Jan asked everyone he met whether they had seen any of his family. He slept with other people in football club changing rooms which were still standing. He spent the days looking for us and playing a bit of football. My uncle found him during one of those matches. 'That lad can't do without football for a single day,' he thought to himself. My uncle told him that we were in Capelle. Jan started walking to Capelle without delay, and arrived in the evening, after having been missing for three days.'

Burnt toys

'I didn't understand why my mother kept bursting into tears. She had lost her oldest son, Jan, and would sit in the kitchen, staring out of the window. After three days, my oldest brother appeared on the dike, with a fixed stare in his eyes. "That's Jan," my mother shouted, and

we ran into each other's arms. A few days later I went back with my mother to the spot where our house had been. There was nothing left of it. Nothing at all. All we found were a few burnt toys, a rusty wheel from a child's scooter and bent street lamps. "Let's go, Koos," my mother said, "there's nothing left for us here." But where were we to go? For the time being, we could stay with one of my mother's sisters, who lived in IJsselmonde. Then we received a letter from another aunt from Vlaardingen, who said we should go there because emergency housing was being prepared, but we ended up moving into a very nice house with a garden in the Vlaardingen-Ambacht district.'

Clearing rubble

'On 15 May, life started picking up again. The whole city consisted of piles of rubble. I can remember that people started clearing rubble immediately. Life goes on, as if nothing has happened. "That's the flexibility of grief," Hans Lodeizen once wrote in a poem. And that was how it was, at the time. The damage was unbelievable and you had lost everything.

We started out life in Vlaardingen with absolutely nothing. I still can't fathom how my mother managed it, with four children and a meagre pension from the tram company. There were no childcare facilities. There was no-one to help - at the most a GP who happened to be friendly. Nobody comforted my mother. Every time there was bombing, she stared tensely at the handbag containing my father's pension papers in front of her on the table, ready to leave. To some extent, relatives would help. Being in the same boat - you've all lost everything - brings you closer together. I had to start going to school again, in Vlaardingen. The teacher said, "So you're from Rotterdam, are you, Koos? Rotterdam was bombed." After that, nothing more was said on the subject.'

Deep impression

'My brother died last year. To give you an idea of the deep impression the war made on us, I can tell you this. My brother was very ill last

year. When he died, in May, I said to his wife, "I expect the funeral will be on the 14th?" "No," she replied, "He didn't want that, not on that day of all days. Jan told me emphatically that it was out of the question." The fourteenth of May had obviously remained a very painful date for him. On that day, he had feared that his whole family had been killed in the bombing. I think that affected him very deeply. So he was buried on the 15th of May.'

Hunger winter

'Life practically ground to a halt in the Hunger Winter. We all had diarrhoea a lot of the time from eating tulip bulbs. We couldn't have coped like that for much longer. "We only just made it," my mother later told us. We were painfully thin. I didn't see my first banana until after the war, and I never saw a single orange throughout the war. My wife sometimes reprimands me for gulping my food down. That's probably a bad habit I developed as a result of the Hunger Winter: an irrepressible urge to eat quickly.'

Kiddie resistance

'In April 1945, my uncle told me to deliver the illegal newspaper, the "Trouw", to a man who lived a few streets away. I had to hurry past the school where the Germans had their headquarters with the paper hidden under my pullover. I found that very exciting to do. A colleague at the VARA, Wim Bosboom, later referred to this as "kiddie resistance" because it was obviously not hugely important or dangerous so near the end of the war.

A sixteen-year-old boy ran through the streets yelling, "We're free." People suddenly produced a packet of coffee to celebrate, and everyone came out and partied. My mother took up dancing lessons, and I thought everyone was a bit mad. Auschwitz wasn't mentioned. Occasionally, someone returned to the neighbourhood wearing a black and white striped suit. Then we children would sing songs for him and decorate his door. The man would get tears in his eyes and quickly go inside again. We were puzzled. Years later, we broadcast

programmes for the news background programme *Achter het Nieuws* about what had happened during the Second World War.'

Doctor Fennema

'My love of radio didn't start until after the war. The VARA broadcasting corporation was looking for a young reporter, and after five years in teaching, I was very keen to become a journalist. I spent ten years travelling around the world for *Achter het Nieuws*. In Saigon in 1969, during the Vietnam war, while filming a programme about children in war zones, I met doctor Fennema. He was the child of Dutch parents who had emigrated to Canada shortly after the war. He was sitting there singing old-fashioned Dutch songs with a Canadian accent in the tropical night by a camp fire for Vietnamese children who had been wounded by napalm. He played the song 'Kleine Greetje uit de polder, kind van 't lage land, blond van haar en blauwe ogen...' on his accordion. I will never forget that man. He was so optimistic, right in the middle of that horrific war. After two days, we had gained his trust, and he whispered, "Do you see those two wounded men on stretchers over there? They are Vietcong. I help them too. Don't tell anyone!"

We continued to film him during the day, and listened to his songs during the evenings, with the roar of American bombers in the background. 'Will it never end?' I thought. I had heard sounds like that when I was small, and thirty years later, in Vietnam, war still sounded the same.'



Photo: Saskia Lelieveld.

Tales of the Dutch East Indies



Corporal Coos Ayal in the Women's Corps KNIL uniform, Brisbane 1946.

'We were prepared to fight to the bitter end'

Ambonese resistance member Coos Ayal tells of her battle against the Japanese in New Guinea.

Coos Ayal spent three years fighting with a Moluccan resistance group in the jungles of New Guinea. When the Japanese invaded New Guinea in April 1942, she was living with her uncle Nahuwae, who was a civil servant. Together with her uncle and aunt, she fled into the jungle, joining a group of 62 guerrilla fighters, and was the only woman to survive the bitter fighting, alongside sixteen men.

To New Guinea

'My Ambonese parents had six children and lived on the island of Nusalaut. I was born there on 15 April 1926, a child of a strict Protestant family. My uncle Nahuwae was a civil servant in New Guinea, and visited us together with his wife when I was six years old. They had no children and were eager to bring me up, and my mother agreed. Leaving was difficult. When I was twelve, we received a telegram saying that my mother had died giving birth to her seventh child.'

Surviving in the jungle

'On 12 April 1942, a Japanese flotilla dropped anchor in the bay at Manokwari. Having read reports of Japanese atrocities, my uncle and aunt fled with me, joining a group of guerrilla fighters led by KNIL captain Willemsz Geeroms. We had no choice but to accompany them on a dangerous journey through the jungle and mountains to the northern coast of New Guinea known as the Vogelkop. Armed with pistols and rifles, we attacked Japanese camps, sometimes with help from local residents. At the age of only sixteen, I was also given a rifle and a knife.

When we began there were 62 of us all together, and my aunt and I were the only women. Sergeant Kokkelink had immediately told the men, "Anyone who lays a finger on Coosje will pay the consequences!" So I always felt safe.

My duties were the same as those of the men: to eliminate as many Japanese as possible. But I also mended their clothes and dressed their wounds. Day and night we walked through the swamps and the rain forest, exchanging fire with the Japanese much of the time. Once a fragment of a hand grenade lodged above my eye. We suffered greatly from deprivation, illness and unbearable hunger. When it rained, we would catch the water in our hands to drink it. And we slept in separate camps so that the enemy could never catch all of us at once.'

An unexpected attack

'The enemy became increasingly active, sending ships full of troops which our resistance members tried to overcome. Sergeant Kokkelink moved our camp from a hill with a good view to the banks of the Aroepi River, where he looked for cover so we could wait for the enemy. In the meantime, three men from a different resistance group had fled to us after discovering a big Japanese patrol and shooting dead some of the Japanese soldiers as they were bathing. Retaliation was sure to follow.

On 18 April 1944 I was with my uncle at the riverside, which we used both for bathing and as a latrine. We heard the attack, and from our hiding place in the undergrowth at a distance, we saw the Japanese when they appeared at the top of the hill. I saw the captain, Willemsz Geeroms, reach for his weapon, but it was too late. Many of our fellow fighters lost their lives during the attack, and the Japanese set fire to our camp. They took the captain and my aunt away, and later beheaded them. A Papuan messenger brought us a message from our imprisoned captain in which he urged us to surrender. But no one was willing to do that. In a letter, Sergeant Kokkelink answered, "That we would ignore his orders because he was in the hands of the enemy, and that we would continue to fight to the last man."

After the Japanese attack, my uncle immediately sent me to the second camp, towards Aroepi, to warn the other men. After running for six nights and days I met a Papuan boy on the road. He told me, "Tell me where they are and I will take you to them!" I did not dare trust him, since so many Papuans had accepted payment as spies. So I answered, "You go to the second camp, then come back to me!" When he brought back one of our men, I knew it was safe. We quickly broke up the second camp and continued to run from the Japanese. Of the initial 62 people in our resistance group, only seventeen remained. Sergeant Kokkelink decided to lead us on a march eastwards in the hope of reaching safer territory. After walking for a week we found a good hiding place along the Adjai River.'

Poisonous fruit

'Sometimes we and the Japanese were camped on opposite sides of a river, but we no longer shot at each other, because neither side had the bullets to spare. We found small bananas and vegetables on Papuan plantations. One day in the jungle I found some large fruits that looked like apricots and took them home to the men, though I did not eat any myself. The next morning we understood that they were poisonous. Everyone's lips and faces had swelled, and everyone had stomach ache. Luckily no one blamed me.'

We were constantly afraid of being discovered and shot at by the Japanese, so we never slept easily. I always kept my little bible under my pillow of leaves, and every morning and evening I would pray for protection and courage. At one point I had every tropical disease at the same time - dysentery, malaria and beriberi - and I was at the end of my strength. My uncle stayed behind with me, but Kokkelink told him, "If she can't keep up with us, you will have to shoot her, because she must not fall into the hands of the Japanese!" My uncle could not bring himself to do that. He bathed my face with water, prayed for me and encouraged me, saying, "Coosje, you must carry on!" And, miraculously, my strength returned. We quickly rejoined the others. If our journey had lasted even two weeks longer, I would not have survived. I had oedema as a result of hunger, leeches and tropical ulcers on my feet.'

Loyal to the Netherlands

'We survived, thanks to three loyal clan leaders. Their men protected us and supported us in battle until the very end. We carried the Dutch flag with us, rolled up in a bamboo cane. One day we had received a message in a bamboo tube from a Papuan messenger. Our Sergeant Kokkelink hardly dared to open it, fearing it could easily be a bomb. But instead it was a letter from a naval lieutenant, Abdul Rasak, who wrote, "Dear fighters, we are a unit of the Dutch-Indonesian forces and have landed on the Kebar plains. We have been ordered to find you and make contact. We enclose a flag with

this letter, as proof of our presence.” Even though no one knew him, and it could have been a trap, it was true. On 4 October 1944 we were liberated by Abdul Rasak. He began preparations for us to be rescued, and arranged with the three clans for a landing strip to be built on the coast so that a plane could come to take us away.’

Heroes

‘We were received like royalty in Rasak’s army camp. We gobbled up rice like hungry pigs. As soon as the landing strip was finished we were flown to Hollandia, the capital city of New Guinea. In the hospital, I was shocked at the sight of my swollen, ravished face in the mirror. When I saw Japanese people in the internment camps in Hollandia, I trembled in fear. After being cared for so well for two weeks, I was flown to Brisbane. Stepping off the plane in my old rags, I received a hero’s welcome. A company of women officers stood at attention, and General Van Mook was waiting for me together with my uncle and our men. I went on to train as a nurse, then completed infantry training and was promoted and became Corporal Ayal.

After the war, we sent the flag with our names on it to Queen Wilhelmina. One day, General Van Mook called me into the canteen, and I was awarded the Dutch Cross of Merit on behalf of the Queen. In a handwritten letter, she thanked us for the flag and for our loyalty to the Netherlands. That letter now hangs framed on my wall.

I met my husband in an army canteen in Brisbane. He was from Curaçao and had been billeted to our base. We had a huge party at our wedding. My husband later got a job in Curaçao, with Shell, and we had nine children. It was not until I returned to Ambon thirty years later that I saw my father and my family again. My father had never stopped believing and insisting to anyone who asked that I was still alive.’

Remembrance

‘I was awarded the Resistance Memorial Cross by Prince Bernhard in 1981. When I wanted to return to the Netherlands from Curaçao with

my family, I wrote to him for help and everything was arranged. I was provided with a furnished house in Ridderkerk, plus a pension for members of the resistance. I always attend the remembrance ceremony in The Hague on 15 August, and I am often asked to lay a wreath. Our resistance group Kokkelink always met twice annually. Now, Piet de Kock (93) and I are the only ones left. I regularly wake up screaming. In my nightmares I am running for my life, fleeing Japanese soldiers who are shooting at me, but I never talked about this with the men here. There are some battles one has to fight alone.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Jan O'Herne, at about 16 years of age.

Now it's time for me to speak out

For fifty years, Jan Ruff-O'Herne kept silent about her experiences during the war.

For half a century, Jan Ruff-O'Herne (86) kept silent about what happened to her during the war, until the day she realised that history was repeating itself. In 1992, when she heard on the radio that the Serbians in Bosnia were using rape as a deliberate tactic, she felt it was time she broke her silence. 'This must never be allowed to happen again! It's time I spoke out!', thought Jan Ruff-O'Herne, who, as a nineteen-year old, had been systematically raped by Japanese soldiers while being held prisoner during the Second World War.

Breaking the silence

'In October 1992, I got a letter from a family friend in the Netherlands who had been with me in the Japanese internment camp at Ambawara. This friend had witnessed the moment when I had been taken forcibly from the camp. "Dear Jannie, I'm writing to you on behalf of the Foundation for Japanese Debts of Honour (*Stichting Japanse Eerschulden*). I would like to ask you whether you would be willing to testify at the International Public Hearing in Tokyo for Japanese war crimes and post-war reparations." This came at a time when my history of being forced into sex in wartime was happening again in Bosnia. I had already been thinking, 'It's time that something was done about this. It's time for me to speak out.' I replied that I would act as a witness in Tokyo, but that I would have to tell everything to my daughters first. How, as a mother, can you possibly tell your daughters about such atrocities? I had always avoided telling them, and now I had to. In the space of a week, I wrote down the whole story of what had happened to me during the war. I often had to break off because the memories were too painful. At the end of the week, the time had

come to give it to my daughters to read. I gave it to my youngest daughter, Carol, while I was picking up my granddaughter from the airport in Adelaide. There wasn't much time to talk so I stuffed the manuscript quickly into her hand luggage just before she boarded the plane. I was crying behind my sunglasses as I drove back home with my granddaughter safely strapped in her car seat. I was able to give a copy of the manuscript to my eldest daughter, Eileen, while she was at home so she was able to read it in peace. I was terrified about how they would react. Many Korean women who had already spoken out about this had been disowned by their family and friends.'

No flowers

'This was the story I had been keeping from them. It was February 1944 and we had been in the Japanese women's camp at Ambarawa for almost two years. We suddenly heard there was to be an impromptu inspection of the camp. Ominously, all the Japanese said was that all single girls aged seventeen to twenty-eight were to line up for inspection. My mother looked at me anxiously. I was nineteen. The Japanese inspected us from head to toe. There were a number of selection rounds until there were just ten girls left, including me. We were given half an hour to pack our things. I took my bible and my missal, crucifix and rosary beads with me. My ambition before the war was to become a nun because I loved the Franciscan nuns who taught at my Catholic college. I believed I had a vocation. I had already made my first vow to the priest there. The women and children all started screaming and crying to try and prevent them from taking us but to no avail. The priest gave me a holy book. He looked at me sadly and gave me his blessing. We were driven away in open trucks. Seven girls from another camp were also loaded into the truck along the way, and we were then taken to a large house in a bourgeois neighbourhood of Semarang. The house was guarded by Japanese soldiers. The soldier in charge told us it was no use trying to escape because Dutch women would be easy to find in this part of town. The house was called, 'The House of the Seven Seas' and we were

to serve as sex slaves for the Japanese military. We all tried to find a place to hide within the house, but they found us and made us have our photograph taken. We did our best to appear as unattractive as possible, but it was no use. The photos were pinned up in the hall. Under each photograph they wrote the name of the flower that was on the door of our rooms. There were also bouquets of flowers in the rooms. I couldn't stand the sight of flowers for a very long time afterwards. A big, fat, bald Japanese man who had paid a lot of money for me dragged me into my room. I punched and kicked for all I was worth but nothing helped. We were abused day and night for three whole months. Most of them came in the evenings and during the night. I pleaded for help with every soldier who came. I resisted each rape with all my strength. My whole body was covered in bruises from so much struggling. It was impossible to escape.'

A heavy secret

'One day, a Japanese doctor had to examine us for venereal diseases. I pinned all my hopes on him; maybe he could get help for us. He looked me over from head to foot with precisely the same expression as all the others and, from then on, he always raped me before he carried out an examination. All the doors and windows of his room were left open so that the other soldiers could watch. I cannot begin to describe the shame and humiliation of it. How could I get this to stop? After a couple of days, I thought I'd found a solution. If I cut my hair and they found me unattractive, maybe it would stop. But it had the opposite effect on the Japanese. Suddenly, I had become a curiosity and even more of them came. I became pregnant. The other girls advised me to tell the Japanese woman who was guarding us. She forced me to swallow some pills so that I had a miscarriage. As a good Catholic, I didn't believe in abortion so that was very difficult for me to deal with. After more than three months, we were picked up again and taken to the Kota Paris camp near Buitenzorg. We were warned never to tell anyone about what had happened to us. The girls from the other 'houses' were brought to the same camp. Our mothers were also brought to Kota Paris. Meeting my mother again

was incredibly emotional. Neither of us could say a word; we could only hug each other. I fell asleep in her arms while she stroked my shaven head. The next day, I told her everything, and then I didn't utter another word about it for fifty years. Times were different then and sex was not a subject you could talk about. In September 1944, we were taken with our families to camp Kramat in Batavia. On top of everything we'd been through, we were imprisoned separately from the other women. They called us whores over the fence because they thought that we had agreed to sex in order to get more food. It was incredibly hard having to carry such a heavy secret. I was always afraid that at some point the story would come out.'

Love

'On 6 August 1945, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. After Nagasaki was also hit three days later, Japan surrendered. When we were liberated shortly after, my mother was in an emergency hospital, desperately thin and suffering from a severe lung infection. I simply couldn't let her die. I asked the nuns in the camp to pray for her. Fortunately, American planes dropped supplies of the new medicine penicillin into the camp. The penicillin saved her life. When a priest arrived in the camp, I cried and told him everything that had happened and asked his advice about becoming a nun. He listened in silence and, to my bitter disappointment, replied that under the circumstances it would be better if I didn't become a nun. I was shattered. I considered the words of the priest to be absolute, and I didn't question his judgement. Every day, I visited my mother in hospital, even though we had been strongly advised not to go out because of the threats from Indonesian freedom fighters. As I was in danger of being shot by snipers, an English soldier offered to give me a lift in his jeep, and we fell in love. After that, Tom always took me to see my mother. He was like a guardian angel to me. In complete contrast to the priest, he was full of sympathy when I told him my story and it didn't detract at all from his love for me. Together, we went to the highest British military authority and reported what had happened as being war crimes. They dutifully took it all down but I never heard anything more about

it. Tom was very patient with me. We moved to England where we got married. At first, I had three miscarriages. The shadow of the war was still following me. After an operation on my womb, we had two daughters. In 1960, we moved with the girls to Australia.'

Support in the fight

'My daughter Carol was totally distraught on reading my story and couldn't stop crying. In the plane, they thought someone in the family had died. Eileen came to see me immediately. She couldn't say a word but just threw her arms around me. After a while, she said, "Mum, now I understand why you never wanted flowers for your birthday and why you never went to the doctor!" The story made both my daughters intensely sad, but also very angry. They supported my decision to go to Tokyo but they wondered whether it would be too much for me to face on my own. In the end, Carol and her husband went with me. When the voice of the Japanese pilot rang through the speaker in the plane, a chill went down my spine. My daughter said, "You'd better get used to it mum, you'll soon be surrounded by Japanese people." Now that my daughters knew about my secret and supported me during the hearing in Tokyo, I felt as though I was being released from the burden that had weighed me down for the past fifty years. CNN broadcast the hearing over the whole world. When I got back to Adelaide, I was greeted with sympathy and hugs by my friends and fellow parishioners.'

Liberated

'Thanks to my faith, I don't harbour any hatred against the Japanese. I have been able to forgive them, but I cannot forget. Every evening, the memories still cut through my soul. I still have nightmares. Every time that I was raped, I prayed to God in the words of Jesus on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" I also prayed a lot with my daughters. The strength of my faith probably saved me from going mad. I was never angry at God either. It was the Japanese that had done this. It was the war that had made them so cruel. It probably wouldn't have entered their heads in peace time.

During all that time that I was being raped I would pray, "Dear God, they can rob me of all my worldly possessions, they can humiliate me and abuse me, but they can never take away my faith."

Hope

'After I found the courage to tell my story in Tokyo, I continued to speak to audiences about it at the request of the International Red Cross and Amnesty International for the next sixteen years. I tried to alert lawyers to the issue. I received several awards, but the one I treasure most came from the Pope. In 1997, along with two women from Korea, I was invited to a hearing in the U.S. Congress on the initiative of Congressman Michael Honda. As a democrat with a Japanese background, he wanted Congress to accept a resolution at the end of March 2008 calling on Japan to apologize officially for the suffering inflicted on women who were systematically raped. Our wartime stories have served to strengthen and support that resolution. It was the first time that any country had taken our case so seriously. The current Japanese scheme for compensation paid by an independent, privately financed Japanese organization is an insult. There isn't another legal system in the world today that wouldn't have its apologies as perpetrator accompanied by decent reparation. I still hope that I can live to see the Japanese government apologize properly for the war crimes committed by Japanese soldiers on an estimated 200,000 Korean, Chinese and Indo-Dutch women. Thanks to the years that my fellow victims and I have spent fighting this cause, the U.N. has recognized systematic rape as a war crime since 2008.'



Photo: Stella van der Kroegt.



Han de Bruïne just before the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in 1941.

You needed each other to survive the Death Railway!

Han de Bruïne worked on the Pekanbaru railway on Sumatra as a prisoner of war.

During the Second World War, the Japanese had various railways built in the territories they occupied. The most well-known railway that prisoners of war were forced to labour on was the Burma-Siam railway in Thailand, which was the subject of the famous 1957 film, 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'. The hell of the Muara - Pekanbaru railway is less well-known, although tens of thousands of people died during the building of what has been dubbed the Death Railway through swampy Sumatran jungle. Via the Dutch Foundation for Commemoration of the Burma-Siam Railroad and the Sumatra Railroad (SHBSS), the editors got in touch with a survivor of Pekanbaru, Han de Bruïne, who was willing to tell his story for Aanspraak magazine.

The battle at Tjiater

Han de Bruïne relates, 'On 7 December 1941, Pearl Harbor, the American naval base on Hawaii, was attacked by Japan. As a young man of 18 in the fifth class of secondary school (HBS), I had to report at once for compulsory service with the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL). On 10 December 1941, I reported at Bandung and was enlisted in Tjimahi with the Reserve Artillery Officer's Training Corps. As young soldiers, infantrymen were immediately deployed at the Battle of the Tjiater Pass on 7 March 1942, where the KNIL was attempting to halt the Japanese advance on Bandung. We had to take ammunition to the KNIL, but that meant going through the lines of fire, and the Japanese couldn't tell the difference between an apprentice and a graduated officer. Huge numbers of young men



Han de Bruïne,
8 years in Tjimahi.

were killed before my eyes, and prisoners of war were executed immediately. After this last battle, Japan threatened to attack Bandung, where there were many refugees. Then, on 8 March 1942, the KNIL capitulated.'

Sabotage

'We had to collect equipment and take it to the Japanese army base in Tjimahi. My fellow servicemen and I did our best to sabotage as much of the equipment as possible. For instance, we would let the engines of tractors run until they broke down before we delivered them. Once, we pulled the striking pins out of forty cannons and chucked them into the swamp. Then we were taken as prisoners of war to the so-called shaved head camp in Tjimahi. I had the fortune to be in the same Japanese camp as my father for the first year and a half. We were of great comfort to each other. In early 1944, my father was transferred to Struiswijk prison in Batavia. I was deported to the 10th Battalion in Batavia, which was headed by the infamous camp commandant Sonei, who was "moon crazy", quite literally a lunatic. We had to stand on parade for hours on end, even in the middle of the night. It was already known in the 10th Battalion that we would be transported for heavy forced labour, so we were fed a little better there.'

The Pekanbaru railway

'In early May 1944, together with other Allied military personnel, I was put on the first transport of KNIL prisoners with the final destination of Pekanbaru on Sumatra. The Japanese made the prisoners of war build a railway through swampy jungle from Pekanbaru to Muara so that they could transport war materials and coal. Our transport had been preceded by many transports of Javanese forced labourers known as romushas. Men were dying like flies from heat, contagious diseases, hard labour, malnutrition and mistreatment.

In 'The Sumatra Railroad' (in Dutch: *Op Dood Spoor*), the most recent reference work about the Pekanbaru tragedy, the historian Henk Hovinga describes how over 80,000 of the 102,000 romushas must have lost their lives during the building of the Muara - Pekanbaru railway. Of the almost 5,000 Allied prisoners of war, among which there were about 4,000 Dutchmen, some 700 died from exhaustion, malnutrition and tropical diseases while working on the railway. Moreover, in the region of 5,800 forced labourers (including 4,000 romushas) lost their lives when Allied submarines torpedoed the ships *Junyo Maru* and *Van Waerwijck*, which were loaded to capacity with slaves to work on the railway. The Japanese regarded the romushas as inferior. For example, they let us bury our dead, but romushas who were ill were simply left behind. You could see their bodies lying in the jungle next to the railway, but you learnt to steel yourself against it.

We were shipped in from the port of Tandjong Priok on Java in a big cargo ship that had previously been used to carry coal. All that coal dust made us look as black as miners. The Japanese had employed Korean guards, who hit us even more cruelly. The stench on board was unbearable. Everyone had to keep his mug, small pan and spoon with him and all other luggage was thrown in a large pile in the middle of the central hold. Throughout the journey, which took three days, rain poured onto our luggage through the hatch planks above the hold. At Emmahaven port in Padang, the soaked lugged was thrown onto the quay. Via the prison in Padang, where, on the advice

of a Dutch doctor the romushas were separated from the POWs because dysentery was rife among the romushas, we were taken by train to Payakumbu and then by truck to Pekanbaru 1. The journey there was impressive because you had a view of wild, primeval forest from the truck. In camp Pekanbaru, the Japanese let us write a single postcard with nine compulsory lines and one line that we could compose freely.'

Starch and salt

'We hardly had any time to eat, and we got the same sago gruel to eat every morning. This starch, which resembled wallpaper paste, tasted a little better when warmed up with a bit of salt. We often worked in Logas from 6 in the morning until 11 in the evening, with only a half-hour break. This is the little pan I cooked with in the camp, when I got a chance. In the evenings, we got a cupful of rice. I found wild purslane in the jungle and ate fern tops to get some vitamins. To survive, I gathered a team of about ten men together, a so-called 'kongsi'. A kongsi meant that one of us was always responsible for fair distribution of the food. If you found something outside, something you could use, you shared it with the others. There was always one of us looking after our possessions in the barracks. You needed each other to survive. You couldn't survive on your own on the Death Railway. One day, I sold my watch, which had been repaired by a fellow kongsi member who had been a watchmaker in the Netherlands. I got quite a lot of money for it, which allowed me to buy a block of trassi (a big lump of fish refuse), from the locals. The trassi cost 40 guilders, and you split in in half, ate half with your kongsi, and sold the other half inside the camp for 40 guilders. You were always trying to make a profit like that, and getting food to survive together. If someone had stolen from someone, he had to walk through the middle of the barracks and was hit by everyone.'

More between heaven and earth

'Pekanbaru 2 was the death camp, where people who were seriously ill with tropical diseases such as malaria and beriberi were taken to

die. My job there was to carry bodies away and look after the sick. It was important to hold the corpses with the heads upwards so that the poisonous fluids didn't run out. That job put me at an increased risk of contracting contagious diseases myself! In Pekanbaru 2, some men with a high fever developed "tropical madness", causing them to hallucinate and become hyperactive. Many of them sang Christian songs all day long. We tied them down as quickly as possible for their own good because if a Japanese saw one of these sick people running around in a fever they would just shoot him dead. I was a nurse, and I fed the sick. To provide them with protein, we fed them maggots that we found in the latrines. We also put maggots on our wounds because they consumed bacteria. That looked pretty gruesome on my festering ankle wound, but the wound healed quickly. As so many people were dying all around you, prisoners of war were pretty much preoccupied with life and death and good and evil. For example, there was one particular bend in the rail over the river that the romushas were especially afraid of. It was said that the bend was bewitched by evil forces, known as *guna guna*, because all the lorries we used there derailed. I believe that there is more between heaven and earth, and that was certainly the case in Indonesia. So many unimaginable things happened there, I couldn't help but believe in invisible forces. '

War changes your view of humanity

'The English prisoners of war in our camp had no experience of the tropics. They were filthy because they never washed. We were used to keeping clean because otherwise you got tropical ulcers. The English fell sick more often, and spread bacteria. Even though my father was a KNIL officer, I lost my respect for officers in the Japanese camps, apart from the good ones. Officers didn't have to do compulsory labour, so compared to us, they had a very easy time of it. I had real respect for the Dutch doctors in our camp, though, who tried to operate under very difficult conditions and with very limited means to save lives. For example, the Japanese had a lot of respect for a dentist in our camp, and they gave him six vials of anaesthetic.

He only used one of them for jaw surgery, and gave the other five to doctors so they could anesthetize their patients. I once had a large sore on my backside operated on. Those doctors risked their lives for us. They were real heroes.'

Liberation

'By the time the war was almost over, I was exhausted. I had beriberi and was extremely weak. While I was working, a Jap suddenly started shouting at me about my gold signet ring which had belonged to my grandfather. He was determined to have that ring, and ordered me to take it off. I didn't give in. I told him, 'You can only have it if you give me your samurai sword!' He continued to hold my hand with the ring. I punched him and he fell off the dike. The other Japanese there laughed at him, and he left. I was terrified that he would take revenge the next day, but romushas then told us that the war had ended. This news was slow to penetrate the Sumatran jungle.

On 15 August 1945, the day Japan capitulated, an official ceremony nevertheless took place to mark the completion of the Pekanbaru railway. A special gold-coloured rivet was punched. But the railway was never properly used because the rails kept sinking into the swamp mud. If we had had to continue working there, we would still be dumping gravel because it kept sinking into the swamp. After a single shower of rain, the rails would subside unevenly, or a herd of elephants walked over them, and we would have to start again. We also sabotaged the work whenever we could. So building that railway to transport coal to Sumatra was a hopeless endeavour. But the Japanese kept insisting that the railway had to be completed, and did not want to admit failure. After the war, the rails were only half a centimetre above the ground in some places.

In mid-September 1945, Lady Mountbatten landed in a Dakota on a small grass field at camp Pekanbaru. Everyone was given biscuits. We were all allowed to send a message, which her pilot took straight to Java, where the messages were further distributed by the Red Cross.

That way, my mother, who was in a Japanese camp, heard that I was still alive. An American pilot flew me and fifty other fellow prisoners of war in a last group to Singapore. There, men women and children in the various camps waited to be taken by ship to their home country.'

Reunion

'I was very keen to see my mother again, so I did all I could to return to Java. The captain of our military group on the ship on which I had sailed to Java pretended that he hadn't seen us when we were fetched by marines of the H.M. Tromp and taken to Batavia – the British military commander in Batavia did not allow Dutch military personnel to disembark. My mother was being nursed in the 'Hotel des Indes' in Batavia. There was a Scotsman standing guard, who wouldn't let me pass at first, but I managed to convince him. My mother weighed a mere 35 kilos, and my little brother was just as thin. They were amazed to see me. The next day, my father arrived. We slept in our old house in Batavia, which had been looted. After the war, I simply started serving in the army again. At the end of January 1946, I was allowed to go to the Netherlands on extended leave. However, we received a telegram while in the Suez Canal that all leave had been cancelled because of the unrest in the Dutch East Indies. I was so thoroughly fed up with the war. In the end, I was declared unfit for military service. Five years of service, including being a prisoner of war on the Pekanbaru railway, was more than enough.'

Remembrance

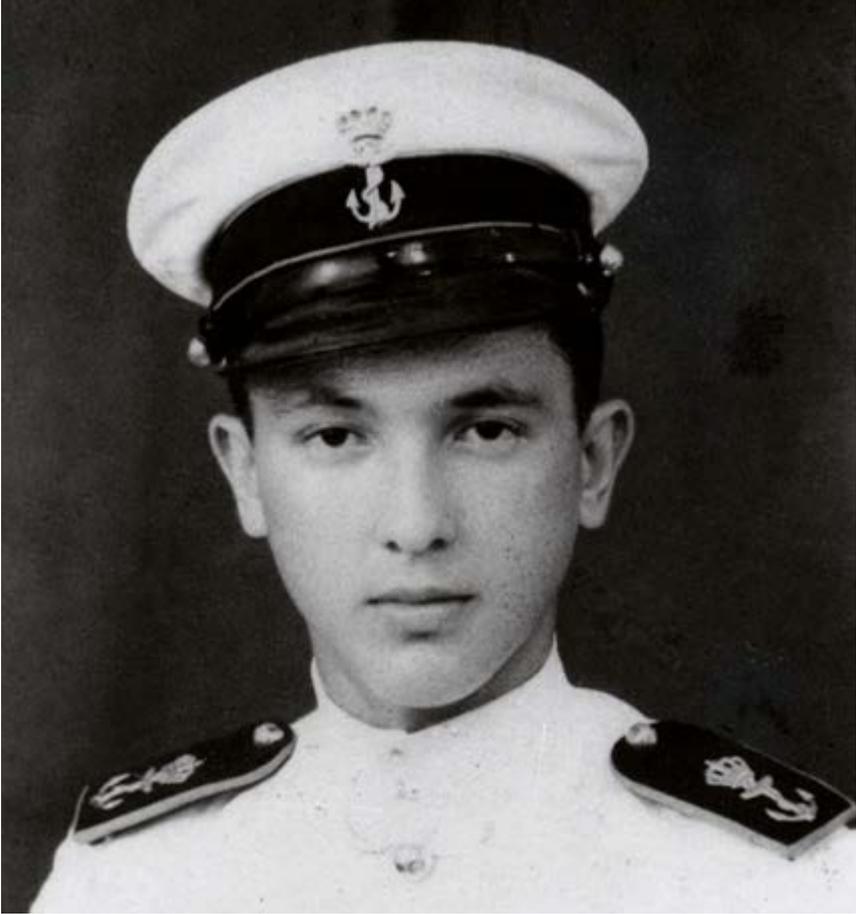
'I have been back to the Pekanbaru railway twice in recent years. The rails were overgrown with vegetation, but a small guard house was still recognizable. On my last trip, I bought a gourd, exactly like the ones I used to fill with water when I was doing forced labour. I also spoke to a number of romushas who had experienced those times. No-one one suffered like they did. For me, working on that railway was sheer hell during the last months of the war because I was so weak and ill, and many fellow prisoners were dying around me. Together with two twin brothers, I laid bodies in a hole. One of the twins got

malaria tropica, and sat bolt upright during the night, before falling dead with his head hanging back. That was definitely the worst thing that happened to me during the war – having to bury a good friend I had gone through so much with. I still think about that often.

Every day, I light a candle for my wife, whom I met in Singapore in November 1945. She died five years ago. We were lucky in that we shared a similar background. A single word or look would suffice because we had both been in Japanese camps. Her mother talked constantly about the war, but we didn't use to mention it in front of our children. We would only talk about it later if they asked about it. I never go to the remembrance ceremony at the Indonesian Memorial Monument on 15 August. It's too hectic. I prefer to go to Bronbeek, where there is a monument for the Pekanbaru railway - a marble monument that I had the privilege of unveiling in 2006 on behalf of all the Dutch victims of war who experienced the Pekanbaru railway. I used to go to that monument with my wife at other times of the year as well, when it was nice and quiet, and we would sit together in the grass, remembering.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Felix Bakker, marine 3rd class, January 1942 Soerabaja.

Endless toil under a burning sun

Felix Bakker recalls his period of forced labour on the Burma Railway.

"It was a miracle that I managed to survive the Death Railway. Each day, more of my comrades dropped away, falling victim to exhaustion and infectious disease." Now 85, Felix Bakker was taken prisoner during the Japanese occupation of the former Dutch East Indies

and transported to Singapore. Later sent on by train to Thailand, he was assigned to forced labour for the construction of the Burma Railway. An estimated 12,600 prisoners of war died working on the project, including 3,000 Dutch citizens and 85,500 Asian labourers. Felix Bakker pays tribute to them each year at the monument in Bronbeek.

Dutch, with Indo-Chinese roots

'My father came from Amsterdam. He was a navigating officer on ocean-going vessels. He met my mother in Tandjong Priok, the Batavia harbour. I was born on 16 October 1925. I never knew my father: he died when I was only three. My mother came from an Indo-Chinese family and worked in Batavia as a cook. From the age of four I attended the Protestant boarding school in Soekaboemi (now known as Sukabumi), where I was raised and educated in the Dutch tradition.'

In the Navy

'At boarding school, my tutor often gave me his newspapers to read. Aware that the Japanese were threatening war, I joined the marines as a volunteer in October 1941. At 16, I was called up on 24 November 1941 and entered training in Surabaya. On 1 December I started my marines training, and on 7 December, Pearl Harbor was attacked. On 8 December our commander told us that from then on we were to be considered fully-fledged marines, and expected to defend ourselves from the enemy.'

Battle of the Java Sea

'At every remembrance ceremony, I always think back to my comrades who fell in the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942. I clearly remember being in a harbour café with one of my buddies the night before the battle and how, beautifully turned out in his white dress uniform, he bought me a beer. He said, "Listen Felix, have one on me. After all, I won't ever be able to spend my wages!" And he gave me his roll of banknotes. He died the very next day during the Battle of the Java Sea, led by Rear Admiral Karel Doorman.'

Fighting against the Japanese in East Java

'I was commissioned to a fighting reconnaissance patrol in East Java, and our mission was to slow down the Japanese invasion after their landing. We were engaged in battles with them for days, with our badly equipped unit of 40 men facing a much bigger Japanese opponent and their reconnaissance planes. We were quickly forced to retreat, and the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army surrendered on 8 March 1942.

On March 12 1942, the Japanese loaded us into army transport trucks and took us to a big prisoner of war camp in Malang. All kinds of military personnel were there in a willy nilly mix of ranks and grades. Many of them had trained for battle and then never made it to the front lines. "At least you got to fight!" they told our unit ruefully. It didn't take long for the camp guards to convince that anyone caught trying to escape would be sentenced to death. One time five prisoners were caught and brought back to the camp in chains. After digging their own graves, they were tied to posts and executed before the eyes of the entire camp. Two machine guns were trained on us, just to make sure that no one would attempt to stop the execution. The Japanese became increasingly cruel, and they forced us to do the most bizarre jobs.'

To Singapore

'After six months at Malang we were transported to Singapore. We ended up in an enormous international camp with Japanese guards, but the English were in charge. It was a welcome relief not to hear Japanese guards screaming at us any more. A week later we were herded into iron boxcars, forty at a time, so full that we could only sit with our knees drawn up. Five days and five nights we spent in that train, without sleeping, on our way to Thailand. There was a rope hung in the opening of the boxcar; we could swing out on it when we got diarrhoea. And nearly everyone had dysentery. The boxcars were terribly hot in the daytime and icy cold at night. In Ban Pong they loaded us into trucks, and we stood in them half dead. Forty

kilometres later we arrived at Kanchanaburi, where we had to cross the River Kwai on a ferry. I was so tired that I fell into a deep sleep on the opposite side. But of course, as soon as everyone was across, one of the Japanese guards kicked me awake again. The English prisoners had already split the rocks to make a pass through. We 650 Dutch prisoners were marched on to the first base camp in Chungkai.'

Working on the Railway of Death

'In order to allow supplies through to the sizeable Japanese army in Burma, the existing rail link to the country needed improvement. The Japanese decided to use their prisoners of war to lay down a new railway line that cut straight through a region of mountains and thick jungle. The work was so intense and the prisoners so worn by infection and malnutrition that they died in droves. And so the railway became known as the Railway of Death.

The Japanese wanted the railway ready within fourteen months. We put up bridges that were held together with nails and rope. Because the rails were more or less laid down on sand, we had to start over again from scratch after the monsoon rains. The railway was finished in December 1943, and from then on we carried out maintenance and repaired damage from Allied bombing.'

Day and night

'In the tropics it is pitch dark by six p.m. even so, we were counted every day, and the amount of work we did was noted with precision by the guards. Each one of us was expected to shift a cubic metre of rock each day. We shared a pickaxe, a spade and wicker basket per pair of men. If we hadn't done enough then we would have to work on by torchlight until late. Three times a day we were given watery rice gruel or pumpkin soup. After a while our shoes and clothes wore out, and we scratched our skin on the shrubs and cut our feet on the sharp rocks. This led to tropical ulcers, and some men ended up having their legs amputated. The camp doctors had no anaesthesia, and the men's screams were chilling. We were forced to build wooden

and iron bridges over the River Kwai. I carried quite a lot of wood on my back, but we also transported a great deal using elephants.'

Poor bastards

'Our Japanese guards made us work very hard in the burning sun. They screamed at us and beat us often, and we began to learn some of their language. They were brutal, even to each other. Since the Allies were bombing us in the daytime, we did much of our work at night, by torchlight. I once had to cross a temporary wooden bridge together with a Scottish prisoner. We were supposed to carry food and then wounded Japanese soldiers over the Kwai. The bridge was very ramshackle, and planks were coming away. It was monsoon season, and we could see the dark river raging below. It was nearly dawn, and the guard who accompanied us was gesturing and screaming at us to hurry. There was one Japanese soldier who was missing his legs and another with a serious injury to his head. We laid them on our stretcher, but just then the bridge began to disintegrate under our feet.

The guard motioned to us to throw the wounded Japanese soldiers into the river. At first we thought we had misunderstood but then he commanded us to do it. Luckily it was so dark that I couldn't see their eyes. But I heard the Scottish prisoner behind me muttering, "Poor bastards. They're killing their own men! Poor bastards!" The guard turned to me and said, "Those are good Nippon soldiers, but they are no longer useful. They have died in the service of the Japanese Emperor!" As we reached the end of the bridge, it finally fell apart and dropped away into the turbulent river beneath. We only just escaped drowning ourselves.'

Miracle cure

'Only those prisoners who formed a kongsi were able to survive. A kongsi was a group of comrades who looked after each other when they became ill. I once had serious dysentery that lasted for days, and I was convinced I had lived my last day. My four kongsi mates had to carry me to the latrine every evening, as I no longer had the

strength to get there myself. One of them, Bert Barkmeijer, came to my bedside and told me, "Tonight, after work, I am going to give you some medicinal herbal tea. I have two packets of *Djamoe* that I brought from Java. It is good for dysentery." I answered, "No, I will never make it back to Java. I'm too ill." Bert brewed up the tea and made me drink it. I swallowed the bitter liquid and, amazingly, slept through the night without having to get up to go to the latrine. Soon after that the doctor declared me cured. A couple of days later I went to visit Bert and thank him, but found him dying. I said, "But Bert, you had two packets of tea, drink the other one!" He said, "I did, but it didn't help me." The next morning I found him lying there with flies on his mouth, always a sign that someone was not going to make it to the end of the day. I never saw him again.'

Liberation in southern Thailand

I spent the final months of the war as a prisoner in the Prachuap Khiri Khan camp in southern Thailand. We had to unload Japanese ships at night, since the Allies were bombing in the daytime. Every night we dragged fifty-kilo sacks from the ships over the beach to the camouflaged storage areas that we had built earlier. On 17 August 1945, a couple of boys from the village shouted from the wall that we had been liberated. We could scarcely believe it. That night our Japanese sergeant confirmed the news. We wanted to go and celebrate in the village, but all we had to wear were loincloths. We took some Japanese military outfits from the warehouse and were able to go into town, and we celebrated the liberation with the local villagers.

On 20 August 1945, six English paratroopers with red berets came to tell us officially that the war was over. We met a Dutch naval officer in a café, and he told us the rest: that the Americans had dropped two huge bombs on Japan. It was thanks to the atomic bombs that the war had ended. For us marines, though, the end was not yet in sight. We saw all of the Allied prisoners leave, but the English did not want the Dutch prisoners to return to Java. We were first put through jungle training in Cholburi, in Thailand's Chonburi province,

and some months later we were sent into action against the freedom fighters around Surabaya. So it was a very long time before I got to see my mother again in Java.'

Companionship and those who understand

'I never talked about the war with my first wife and our two sons. However, I did visit Thailand on a journey of remembrance with my second wife. She encouraged me to take part in the guest speakers project at the remembrance centre at Camp Westerbork. Sometimes, when I have talked about the war for a couple of days in a row, I dream that I am still at work on the railway. That I am endlessly breaking rocks in the blistering heat of the sun, without clothes or shoes, and walking on those sharp stones. We had our first reunion in 1967, in the Kurhaus in Scheveningen. Wim Kan was there, another survivor of the Railway of Death. There were only 1,500 seats, but many more people wanted to attend. I think that we are now down to about forty veterans at the annual remembrance ceremonies in Bronbeek. The monument lists the names of all of the Dutch people who died on the Burma Railway. When the monument was officially opened in 2005, I was able to read out sixty of those names, including that of my friend and comrade Bert Barkmeijer. It was thanks to him that I survived.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Second Mate Willem Punt, Curaçao 1948.

Survivor of the Junyo Maru maritime disaster

90-year-old Willem Punt can remember every detail of his internment as a prisoner of war.

On 18 September 1944, the Japanese cargo ship Junyo Maru was torpedoed by a British submarine before the west coast of Sumatra. However, instead of cargo there were around 6,500 men on board: prisoners of war - mostly Dutch and British nationals, and forced labourers - mainly Javanese and Ambonese, who were being transported to work on the Pekanbaru railway. The British submarine claimed some 5,620 victims, the largest number of deaths on a single ship in maritime history. To give a sense of scale, around 1,500 people died on the Titanic. One of the few survivors who can still tell the tale of this maritime disaster is Willem Punt.

Ordinary seaman on an ocean going vessel

Willem Punt tells his story: 'I was born on 9 June 1921, the oldest son in a poor Christian reformed family in IJmuiden. My father was a cooper by trade who made barrels for fish, but his skills were becoming obsolete and he was often without work, so we children didn't have the opportunity to continue our education after school. At the age of 16, I became an ordinary seaman with the Netherlands Steamship Company (SMN), and my first voyage was to the Dutch East Indies. My family always used to wave me off from the sluice gates at IJmuiden. I saw my parents standing there for the last time when I was 17. My mother died of typhus during the war.

On 10 May 1940, my father sent a letter to my superior, who read it out to me: "Please do not send my son back to the Netherlands for the time being, as it is extremely dangerous on the North Sea. If

Willem continues to work in merchant shipping, he will not have to do military service when he turns 18." From then on, I was able to sail in comparative safety on a steam packet line between America and the Dutch East Indies. An older Mate on the ship was glad to take me under his wing and show me the ropes.'

Fire fighting in Surabaya

'It was during my week off in Surabaya that war broke out in Asia. I heard on the radio in my hotel that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Shortly after, Japan bombed Surabaya as well, and all merchant navy crew had to help put fires out and recover bodies. I saw many local people die in a sea of flames. We implemented a scorched earth policy: nothing was to be left behind that would be of any use to the Japanese. For instance, we were given orders to blow up as many pyrotechnic workshops on Madura as possible.'

Interned in Struiswijk prison

'On 10 May 1942, my mate Leen Sloot and I were caught by the Japanese and taken off to Struiswijk prison in Batavia in a lorry. We were locked up together for six months in a cramped cell of only 1.5 by 2.5 metres. It was strictly forbidden to talk to others. The Japanese continued to interrogate us. I saw fellow prisoners being beaten up. Sometimes we saw them coming past again after interrogation, but in other cases, we never saw them again.

As from March 1943, most of those locked up in Struiswijk prison were 'prominent European figures', police officers, teachers and officials from Batavia who had previously been held in Glodok prison. We were lucky that leadership of the Dutch camp was given to Herman van Karnebeek esquire. He was a captain, and had shaken the hand of the Japanese emperor when his father negotiated oil deals with Japanese on behalf of the Netherlands before the war. As the Japanese Emperor was holy, the Japanese camp commander had a deep respect for Van Karnebeek. He managed to get us medicines and books. Libraries were emptied and their contents brought to the

prison. I devoted myself wholeheartedly to the 'Mate and Engineer' course. Nearly all the teachers of that course were also in the camp. I studied night and day and passed the exam with honours while in the camp.'

Fit for forced labour

'A new Japanese camp commander arrived who was not so gentle with Van Karnebeek. At the beginning of January 1944, we were all transported from Struiswijk to another camp in a blinded train. We were told nothing about the purpose of our journey. 2,000 of us had to march from the railway station to the former barracks of the Tenth Infantry Battalion of the Royal Dutch East Indian Army (KNIL) in Bandung. I was imprisoned there with around 6,000 other men. Anyone trying to escape was killed in view of the whole camp. From that time on, Leen and I had to carry out hard forced labour, digging wide trenches for lorries. Merchant seamen were now regarded as forced labour by Japan; we were no longer civilian prisoners.

One day, we were medically examined for overseas work by two Japanese doctors. We had to show one doctor our stools on a banana leaf, and the other doctor examined the rest of our bodies. We were both found fit for forced labour. Back in the barracks, a merchant navy man approached me who was also a palmist. He had already predicted the future for a number of fellow prisoners, and suddenly asked if he could read my palms. I am not one to believe in hocus pocus, but just for fun, I said "OK, go ahead." He told me I was going to experience a massive accident in a few days' time, and that I would have to swim for the last bit, and would succeed, but my friend Leen Sloot and he would not survive. He said I would then fall seriously ill, but would survive that as well, and would return to Holland. I would not stay long in Holland, because he envisioned me in a white uniform in a hot country, with a blond woman and two children. Don't tell anyone will you, otherwise everyone will panic, he said.'

Photo: Ships Science Museum Tokyo. From: 'The Sumatra Railroad: Final Destination Pekanbaru 1943-1945' by Henk Hovinga.



The Japanese cargo ship Junyo Maru.

Stay on deck

'It was September 1944. We had to leave early next morning for an unknown destination. 2,500 of us were prodded into shuttered trains with gun barrels. After a half hour in the train, packed like sardines, the salty smell of Batavia port met our noses. We would apparently be continuing our journey by ship. I said to Leen, "Let's try and get to the back of the queue by walking slower. We have to stay on deck, because if something happens, it will be far too hot in the overcrowded hold." Despite the strict checks, and the fact that the Japanese were incessantly hitting everyone in the queue to try to make them walk faster, we managed to board last.

On 16 September 1944, the ship departed in a north-westerly direction. The holds were filled to bursting with European prisoners of war and Javanese forced labourers. I soon thought up a ruse to maintain my position on deck. I volunteered to show people the way to the toilet. I helped those who were weak, sick or afraid of heights climb over the railings onto the two planks over the side of the ship, and kept everything clean with a bucket of seawater, like a kind of toilet lady. I was soon covered in faeces, but that didn't bother me too much, as long as I could stay on deck. There were long queues for the

outboard toilet because many people were suffering from dysentery. Leen was not so keen on that job, so he looked for something on the middle deck. That was the last time I saw him. They watched over us with machine guns from the rear deck. Prisoners who had died from exhaustion were thrown overboard without ceremony.'



The Junyo Maru left Batavia with the destination to Padang. The demise (see red point) in the Indian Oceans near Bengkulu.

The demise of the Junyo Maru

'On 18 September 1944, the ship was shaken by a heavy explosion. Parts of the midship flew all over the place. And then all was silent. To avoid panic, the Japanese informed us through the loudspeakers that the ship's engines had failed. Shortly afterwards, a second explosion took place. There was no longer any doubt in my mind that the ship had been torpedoed. It was surprising, because the last thing we were expecting was to be attacked so close to the coast of west Sumatra. The submarine was probably between our ship and the coast.

If I had not moved to a different position a few moments before, I would also have been dead. The whole midship was in a terrible state. The vessel lurched forward into the sea. I saw thousands of Javanese drowning, they couldn't swim. They were all crying for their mother or praying to God or begging the Japanese to save them in their lifeboat. But the Japanese corvette that had accompanied the ship only saved Japanese. A lorry chained up in the hold came loose

and crushed some prisoners of war. Some people managed to escape by hanging onto rafts. Many were stuck in the hold. It took only twenty minutes for the ship to sink. I jumped overboard and grabbed a piece of wood, but someone soon took it off me. Then I spotted a half full fresh water tank and lay on it. Soon, many more people came to hang onto the tank. We took turns lying on it to rest from the exertion of swimming. The next morning, we were surrounded by a big group of Japanese wearing life jackets and brandishing bayonets. They stabbed at us to get us off the water tank. I quickly swam away and a Japanese threw his bayonet past my head. I swam away underwater as long as possible, and soon disappeared from sight thanks to the high waves.'

Death by drowning

'In desperation, I searched for a plank of wood, but couldn't see anything. After swimming for half an hour, almost ready to give up, I saw a bale of sisal floating by. I kept slipping off it and the sisal rope ripped open the skin of my chest and abdomen. If you bob around like that and keep falling asleep from exhaustion, death by drowning is not far off. The most pleasant way to go, it seemed, because you would slide away silently. My life flashed before me and I had accepted that it was my fate to drown. But I kept seeing a promising object float by that could perhaps keep me alive. So I kept splashing about! An upturned sloop that suddenly caught my eye was what saved me. I was too weak to turn it round on my own. An Ambonese came to help and then his friends joined us as well.

The only tool I had with me was a metal spoon, and I had the idea of bending the copper in the boat into two buckets to scoop water out. It worked, and after a lot of bailing, the boat was empty of water. We could have taken some other people on board as well, but the fifteen Ambonese didn't want to. They wanted to go to Sumatra and escape in the interior. They actually wanted to throw me into the sea, but one of them prevented this and watched over me by sitting next to me. The next day, he had disappeared from the boat, and I was under no illusions that that they wanted to get rid of me as well.'

Saved

'A Japanese lifeboat came back after having dropped Japanese survivors off on dry land. The corvette came straight towards us and the captain asked who our leader was. The Ambonese all pointed to me. The captain took us on board, but I was first given a brutal beating because I had intended to escape. I was then rubbed all over with iodine by a Japanese doctor on board until I was completely yellow. He also put a Japanese sign on my head, and they all laughed at me. I was half unconscious from the pain, so I couldn't care less what was happening. At least I was not in the sea any more. Prisoners who had fallen asleep or who were weak were simply tossed overboard by the Japanese. After landing on the coast of Sumatra, we had to walk to the prison in Padang. I had a cell without a roof and without shadow, and got badly sunburnt. My chest and belly healed well, though, thanks to the iodine.'

Forced labour on the Pekanbaru railway

'After two weeks, I had to start working with the remaining prisoners on the Pekanbaru railway. Every day, we built bridges or meters of railway track in the scorching heat, through practically impenetrable rocks and swamps. I got malaria, with bouts of high fever, and was placed in barracks for the dying. A military doctor came and gave me his own quinine tablets with water from his canteen. I soon improved significantly. In addition, I had two guardian angels in the form of sub-lieutenant Smit and sergeant major Aardewijn, who helped me recover from malaria and spared me for a few weeks from duties on the railway. Other prisoners were envious because the work was incredibly hard. When liberation came, I was still ill. Lady Mountbatten came to Sumatra, but I was not aware of the visit. Not until several months later were we allowed to leave Sumatra.'

Paradise

'A few years ago, I learned from a Dutch documentary called 'Andere Tijden' (Other Times) that the British commander of the submarine the HMS Tradewind had noticed on 17 September 1944 that

his long distance periscope had been damaged by seawater. He was going to spend just one more day patrolling the south-west coast of Sumatra between Bengkulu and Padang. Through a second, short-range, periscope, a plume of smoke was spotted on the horizon. Commander Maydon decided to sail closer by, and fired four torpedoes, two of which hit the enemy. He had no way of knowing that there were prisoners of war on the Junyo Maru, because the cargo ship was only sailing the Japanese flag. At the end of 1942, under the Geneva conventions, the international Red Cross had urged Japan to indicate that there were prisoners on board by showing a red cross. I renounced my faith after that shipping disaster. I had always been told that God listens to prayers. I don't think so! A lot of prayers were said in the waves and in the camps. The predictions of the strange merchant shipping man came exactly true. I became a mate on ocean-going vessels, married a Dutch lady, and we had two children. I later became head of general affairs at Shell Rotterdam's nautical department. Everyone at the office came to me with questions, because of my knowledge of the world's oceans and cargo ships. Nowadays I have little urge to travel. A tropical paradise looks a lot less enticing in real life than in a travel guide. My wife and I have a good life here, together.'





Mischa de Vreede.

I drew hope from memories of another world

As a child, author Mischa de Vreede grew up in Japanese women's camps on North Sumatra.

Pure magic

'In 1935, my father was posted to Batavia as a minister for the Dutch Reformed Church. I was born there on 17 September 1936. Shortly afterwards, he was called to Medan on Sumatra, where we lived in a villa quarter where only Dutch people lived. My mother was a teacher. I was the middle child, and their only daughter. Erik was a year older than me, and Matthijs was two years younger. I would listen while my mother was teaching Erik to read, so I was able to read too at quite an early age. After the children's book 'Het huisje in de sneeuw' (translated as 'Lost in the snow') by W.G. van de Hulst brought me to the point of tears, I decided that I also wanted to become a writer. I thought 'What could be more magical than to move people to tears with your stories?'

Our last hours together

'In April 1942, we were interned by Japanese soldiers. On a big grassy area, we were separated from my father. He had to go left to the men's camp. All the women had to go right. They had already started walking, with their luggage, to the Serdang quarter in Medan. My mother hissed at us, "Stay sitting and start crying!" She then plaintively asked the Japanese soldier who approached us for a cart for our luggage, and we got one. During the journey, I fainted from the heat. I woke up in the arms of our GP. She advised my mother to make us wear sunhats. My mother joked that she would try not to forget the sunhats the next time we were interned. I was not amused because I definitely did not want to experience anything like that

again. In the Serdang quarter, we slept in a single room with a number of other mothers and children. I was certain that the others would tease me the following day, because I still wet the bed every night.

We were packed together, that was what bothered me the most, all that screaming and shouting. We saw my father once more. He no longer looked neat and tidy. He got down on one knee, and put his arms through the barbed wire so that he could touch us. After that, he disappeared. I went down with a high fever and it appeared I had diphtheria. Because of the danger of contamination my mother and brothers were not allowed to comfort me when I was taken away, all alone, to a hospital outside the camp in a small open carriage escorted by two Japanese on motorbikes. On the way there, I was surprised to see white children playing in the street. My mother later explained that they were Swiss, and that they had stayed neutral during the war. I immediately thought, "I'm going to be Swiss after the war too!" The very first evening in the sick ward, I started telling stories to other sick children. A doctor stood and listened too, and did not tell me to be quiet as my parents often did.'

Great sadness

'In October 1942, we were accommodated in block B of camp Pulu Brayan, 8 kilometres to the north of Medan. We were forbidden to gather together, but my mother continued to hold bible meetings. She always said, "If we have to bow, we will do so for appearances, not from the inside." She was arrested, and the Japanese camp commander told her during the interrogation that he would chop her head off. When my mother told me this afterwards, she laughed it off, but I was angry with her because I thought she was risking too much and not thinking enough about us. As she carried on being insubordinate, we were punished by being assigned to a worse block, E block, which often flooded. One time, as I was wading through a big puddle of mud, I suddenly fell through into a deep ditch which had been invisible. Even though I had a swimming certificate, I nearly drowned because I was paralysed by shock.

My mother sent my father a Christmas hamper, with a letter about how we were and she paid to have my brothers' portraits drawn for my father. "Your portrait would only give him a fright," she said to me. However, the Japanese censors removed the letter from the package, so my father only got the drawings of my brothers, and thought I had died. I heard later from one of his camp mates that he had been terribly affected by grief. The women protested about a lack of firewood to cook with, and demolished a half-built shed that had already taken months of work. After this act of disobedience, my mother was sent to prison for a year. She had already been in detention for six months. Of course, it just had to be our least pleasant aunt, Alice, who took her place. She kept saying that every grain of rice we ate, she had saved for us. She even made me eat the disgusting little worms I picked out of my rice.'

A scraggy little thing

'In July 1944, precisely when my mother was in prison, our block E flooded. I got serious bladder and kidney infections, and was literally at death's door. Even the Japanese came to the realisation at last that we had to get out of that mud bath. My youngest brother, Matthijs, was to stay in Pulu Brayan, and Erik and I were to be evacuated with the aunt who was looking after us. That was the most awful and frightening idea for me, that we would be completely torn apart as a family. You have no idea how nasty women can be. I saw them scratch each other's faces for a few grains of rice. There was a lot of stealing, too. As motherless children, we had no protection. After consulting with Erik, I went to the head of our block and explained that we, as children, had to stay together as a family whatever happened. Luckily, Matthijs and the aunt he was staying with were allowed to go with us to Glugur camp, so we could stay together. In that camp, I came out in red patches and got swollen ankles due to a vitamin deficiency. On his birthday, the Japanese emperor gave a pardon to all prisoners. My mother was thus freed four months early. The first thing she said to me was: "You're still a scraggy little thing!" Various aunts came and told her how uncaringly we had been looked after. Aunt Alice

offered her apologies. Aunt Loet had even come to ask me in the sickbay whether I didn't want to stay a bit longer because my Aunt Alice was suffering from stress.'

My most precious possession

'I found a little bell on the floor in the woodshed, which I wanted to keep with me, but I was only wearing underpants. My dear aunt Suus made a necklace for me of blue and yellow thread so I could wear the little bell. I was so happy with this present. Then, because I was so hungry, I took the bell, my most precious possession, off the necklace and swapped it with a boy for a carrot. We handed over the carrot and bell at exactly the same moment. The carrot was gone in three bites, but I wore the blue and green necklace for a long time after that. I was most impressed by aunt Loet. Before she was interned, she had quickly grabbed some white tennis clothes to take, and she always looked clean and dignified. She seemed invincible, and that is why I always wanted to stand next to her when we had to stand in pairs for the roll call. On my eighth birthday, I got the most beautiful present from her: a diary that was almost empty, with a pencil in the spine, and a loving pat on the head. I was so happy. I would have liked to give her a kiss, but that wasn't done in those days.'

Memories gave hope

'In July 1945, we were transferred by train to camp Aek Pamienke in the forest, where I went down with exhaustion from malnutrition. You can survive things like that if you know how to "escape" by distancing yourself from the situation in your thoughts. I looked at my extremely skinny legs, full of wounds, and just thought 'This is not me. This is not happening to me. Right now, I should be walking to school wearing patent leather shoes, with long curls down my back. 'I never stopped thinking that a different kind of life was possible. Fortunately, I could still remember how my life had been before the war and I had that to fall back on. During my internment, I discovered that a good memory, and good memories, are the best things you can have. I had also read the book 'Ik en mijn speelman' ('Me and my street musician') so I knew

that, somewhere, there was a colourful life where people were gentle and courteous to each other. When the war ended in August 1945, everything changed. No more roll-calls, no more chores, no more strict division of the day, but there still wasn't enough food. We heard that a magical American pill had been invented. I got some pills, but they were worm tablets. A few days later, I was squatting over the filthy latrine and saw that revolting long worms were coming out from inside me.'

What was missing

'Soon, the first Dutch men to return were walking in and out of the camp. It was an extremely emotional time, especially when they brought bad news. My mother said we shouldn't be too joyous when we saw my father as there were other children whose father was dead. One day I saw my mother walking arm in arm with a thin, dark man. I said to my brothers, "That must be father because she'd never link arms like that with a stranger." When I saw my father I said farewell to the man I had missed in my mind, because the memory I had was of another person. As he kissed me, the tears rolled down his cheeks and his stubbly beard scratched my face. A couple of days later he told me that he'd thought about me often. I asked him if he had a book for me. He said his favourite book was 'The Secret Garden' and that he would give it to me as soon as he could. On my ninth birthday, he gave me two 'I owe you notes', one for a bookcase, and one for a book. I did actually receive these presents later, after we returned to the Netherlands. My father took me to the hairdresser in the men's camp. The men all said: "So, that's her!" and I suddenly felt very important. The hairdresser had a round mirror, and I saw my skinny face in it again for the first time. My father said, "That's surprised you, hasn't it?", and I heard another man say "She's got a dimple in her cheek." This was the kind of joking and attention that I'd missed in the women's camp, where all individual identity had been completely lost.'

It was only a Japanese camp

'In 1946 we lived for a short time in Egmond aan Zee, where I joined the fifth class of the local primary school. One day while we were play-

ing, a classmate told her mother that I had been a prisoner of war in a camp. I knew this would shock her mother so I excused myself immediately by crying, "But it was only a Japanese camp!" At the time, all attention was turned to the camps in the Netherlands and Europe. Hardly anyone knew about the camps in the Dutch East Indies.

For a long time, I continued to have trouble with my bladder and kidneys so eventually my mother took me to see a professor of pediatrics in Groningen. He was the first adult who asked me, "What is the worst thing that happened to you?" I could feel my throat constricting as I told him my worst fear "The idea that the rest of us children would be separated from our youngest brother Matthijs in camp Pulu Brayan. Father gone, mother gone and now our little brother too..." He really listened and nodded to show he understood. My mother, who had overheard our conversation in the corridor, reprimanded me on the way home, saying "You shouldn't have told him so much about the camp!"

I was very fortunate that I could write about what happened because I wasn't allowed to talk about it at home. If the camp was ever mentioned, my father would leave the room. Whenever I presented my mother with a first edition of one of my books, she would sit down, fold her arms and say "Just put it in my bag." I think she read them all, but we never spoke about them. Every year I go on holiday about the time of the national commemoration of the war in May. That war was not my war. In recent years, around 15 August, I have attended the East Indies Commemoration in my capacity as a writer. A woman came up to me after one of these services and said "Oh, you were imprisoned in North Sumatra, it wasn't so bad there!" Of course that kind of remark is based on ignorance, but it's still very upsetting. Grown-ups sometimes said to me after the war "Yes, but you were still small then," as though that makes what you went through less bad. But fear, pain, loss, hunger, death and grief are just as tangible and terrifying for a child as for an adult.'



Photo: Tobias Ordejans.



Edgar Vos with his mother.

The war is behind me now; I have turned the page

Couturier Edgar Vos recounts his experiences
as a child in a Japanese camp.

Edgar Vos (74) is one of the most renowned Dutch haute couture designers. He has sixteen successful 'Edgar Vos Boutiques' in the Netherlands, including a shop in the P.C. Hooftstraat, Amsterdam's most exclusive shopping street. Although his final haute couture collection was shown in the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel in the autumn of 2000, he is still involved in designing for his shops. Edgar Vos has enjoyed a lot of success in his life. But he also knows what it can be like at the other extreme; as a child, he was interned in a Japanese prison camp.

Princess

'I was born in Makassar in the Dutch East Indies on 5 July 1931. We later moved to Surabaya. My father worked for the Dutch Royal Packet Navigation Company (KPM) as the captain of a packet boat and he always sailed in the Indonesian archipelago. We had seven people working for us including a loving amah, Dari, who raised me and my brother Henkie who was three years older. If either of us were upset about something, we'd always run to amah Dari, not to my mother, whom I wasn't even allowed to kiss because of her make-up. My father was always at sea and my mother went out every evening. She had a collection of 37 wonderful evening dresses for her daily social

events. I would only see her at three o'clock in the afternoon, and at five o'clock she would go off to the next event in a rustling evening dress. I loved helping her to get ready and I admired her as though she were a princess.'

The squint-eyed Japanese

'After the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942, the Japanese occupied the East Indies. I was nine at the beginning of the occupation. My father had told us "You don't have to worry about the Japanese attacking us. They squint so badly they won't be able to fly the planes." That was until we were standing in front of our air raid shelter and the bullets rained down from the sky and hit the wall just ten centimetres behind us. Later, when my mother thought it was getting too dangerous in Surabaya, we left for our house in the mountains. Unfortunately the Japanese decided that the area where our second house was would be a good place for a reception camp. Our house was suddenly surrounded by the camp and soon started filling with Europeans.'

They killed my dog in front of my eyes

'My brother liked making things out of bits and pieces. He made a large cart from two bicycle wheels. I would use the cart to go to the market where I loved to haggle for fruit and vegetables and then sell them to our neighbours at a profit. After seven relatively peaceful months, the Japanese started getting really harsh. They took my dog away from me in the street and killed him in front of my eyes. They wanted to transfer us out of the region so they were getting rid of everyone's pets. In January 1943, we were put on a train to Central Java. I was allowed to stay with my mother that year, but after I turned 10, I was sent to the boys camp in Bangkong where my brother was. The camp was in an old monastery with dormitories. We slept in a barracks on a wooden plank 60 centimetres wide. Our heads were shaved and the only thing we had to wear was a pair of shorts. Shoes weren't allowed. All I wanted in the boys camp was to go back to my mother.'

Oleander

'The Japanese treated us like slaves and we were made to do hard labour. I worked all day in a patjol field. A patjol is a shovel with the blade perpendicular to the long wooden handle. We used it to dig out fish ponds. The area was damp and full of mosquitoes. I had sixty-six bouts of malaria. Once a day, we were given soy porridge. On the patjol field, we caught frogs and snakes. When they were dead, we wiped them over our backs to make them salty and baked them in a fire. You'll eat anything if you're starving.

On the other side of the hill from the patjol field was the women's camp. My mother worked in the adjacent sawas or rice fields, but we weren't allowed to make any contact. My brother was tinkering with things again and had made a radio jammer from a broom. Someone betrayed us and we were locked in a cupboard for 48 hours without anything to eat or drink. After that, they hung us from a bamboo rod with our arms behind our backs and our feet above the ground for hours in the burning sun. Then they held a bucket of water in front of our mouths and poured it down our throats. If we urinated, we would be shot. Suddenly I heard Henkie screaming; his bladder had burst. They took him to the hospital barracks but the nurses said he was in a critical state. All night, I held his hand. He said to me, "We still have seven and a half guilders. Make sure you look after mummy." He died with his hand in mine. Henkie's body was put in a large wicker basket onto a cart and driven away. I wasn't allowed to go with him. I took a branch from a large oleander bush and just managed to put it into his hand.

In the women's camp, they knew that something had happened to Henkie. For that one time, my mother was permitted to come to the patjol hill and I told her that Henkie had died. Always the lady, she was wearing earrings, even in the camp. I said Henkie had died of a heart attack. I never told her the real story because it was too awful. My mother walked away from the patjol hill with the tears rolling down her cheeks. One of the Japanese asked her "Why are

you crying?" "Because I've just heard that my son has died!", she replied. "Who told you that?", he asked. It was strictly forbidden to speak to your children so she didn't answer. As a punishment, they beat her unconscious with a stick.'

Escape

'Three months later came the so-called peace. After Japan capitulated on 15 August 1945, there was still no sign of peace in the East Indies. The camp was taken over by Javanese guards who had collaborated with the Japanese. I went in search of my mother in the women's camp. She was lying in a corner of the barracks. I lay down beside her and wished I could stay with her for ever. My mother wanted to return to our house in Surabaya so that my father would be able to find us. But when we got there we were allocated a different house. When the Merdeka uprising started, I suffered an acute attack of paralysis as a result of fright. I was admitted to the Salvation Army hospital and given vitamin injections. While I was in there, the Javanese rounded up all the men and boys and made them walk the gauntlet. My best friend was beaten to death. By the time I left the hospital, it was so dangerous that the Gurkhas were sent to protect us. The Javanese were even worse than the Japanese. The liberation was not liberation for us. We still lived in fear. It was too dangerous in Surabaya, so my mother and I and some other Europeans were transported in an eight-truck convoy to Jakarta by the Gurkhas. Hand grenades were thrown into three of the trucks, killing everyone inside. We escaped death by the skin of our teeth.'

A bar of chocolate

'We drove to the port of Jakarta. I asked every sailor there, "Are you my father?" After a few weeks, someone replied, "Your father's boat is here in the port." I walked up to the boat and went straight into the cabin, where I saw a suitcase. I opened it, curious to see what was inside. There, lying on top, was a bar of chocolate. Being used to the war, I put anything edible directly into my mouth. Suddenly my father walked into the cabin, saw me with my mouth full of chocolate and

hit me very hard across the face. Our relationship never really recovered from that. After all those years I had spent in the camp longing so much to see him again, his reaction was totally incomprehensible to me. Later, it turned out that the suitcase also contained photos of his new Australian girlfriend and he thought that I had been nosing through them.'



A party every day

'After the war, it was a real struggle for me to settle into Dutch society. I was seventeen when I moved to the Netherlands with my mother. My parents made one last attempt to live together, but in the end, my father left us for his new girlfriend. For years I had had no formal education, but I had gained a lot of life experience. After an accelerated course at evening school, I got my secondary school certificate and was offered a place at the Rietveld Academy of Art and Design to train as an interior architect. What I really wanted to do, though, was fashion, so I did that on the side. My father didn't think much of my studying fashion. Contrary to his wishes, I not only graduated in fashion, I did so with distinction.

I had to start from scratch. I went to Paris where I managed to get an apprenticeship with Christian Dior for 70 guilders a week. In 1971, I returned to the Netherlands and set up my first Edgar Vos Boutique which soon grew to 16 fashion shops. For me, working in fashion is like going to a party every day. Each day, I would see six clients, meet new people and work on wonderful couture shows.'

Competing against someone who has died

'My mother lived till she was 95 and in all those years, she never got over her grief at Henkie's death. In her eyes, everything about him had been wonderful. I saw my mother every Monday for the whole of my life. If I had to go away anywhere, I would take her with me, but she never once gave me a compliment. Henkie had always done everything better. For most of my life, I have been forced to compete with my dead brother. This was difficult emotionally because although I saw him as my best friend, he was also my biggest rival. But you cannot compete with someone who is dead, so at some point I simply resigned myself to it.'

Remembrance ceremonies

'Remembrance ceremonies are not for me. More things have happened in my life than that camp. I never think about it now. In a month's time I'm going to take a group of disabled children sailing on the IJsselmeer again. That is what I believe is important. I still have my brother's diary. He had an old school notebook in which he wrote down everything that had happened to him during the day. A few years ago, my partner and I travelled to Indonesia and I showed him where it had all happened. I went back to the place where the boys camp had been at Bangkong. Amazingly enough, the oleander bush that I had taken a branch from for Henkie's funeral was still there. Seeing that oleander brought tears to my eyes. At home, I keep my brother's photograph in a drawer rather than on display. I don't feel the need. The war is behind me now. I have turned the page.'

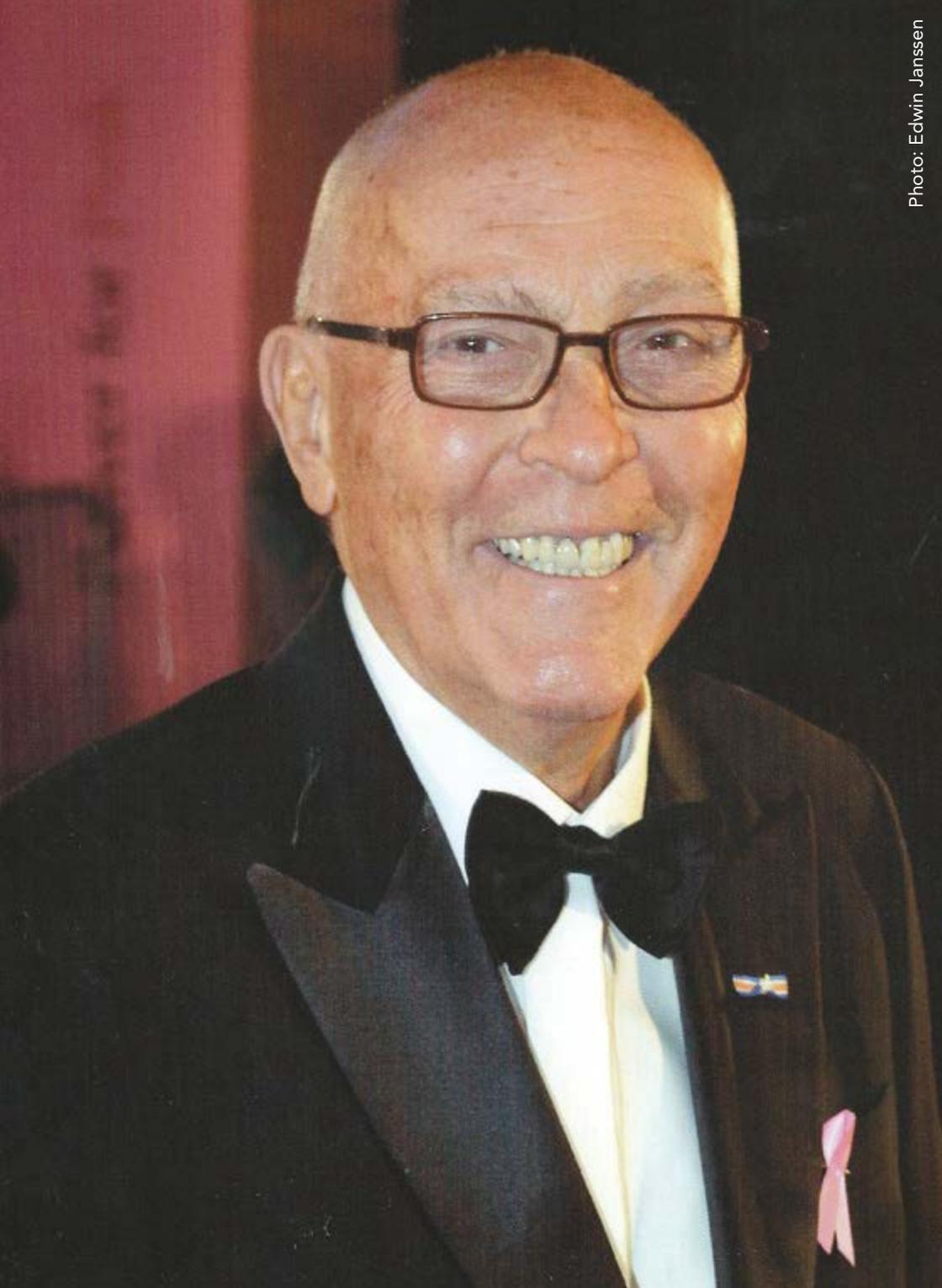


Photo: Edwin Janssen



Ronald Scholte in Paramaribo 1960.

You wouldn't wish
a hell like that on your
worst enemy!

Ronald Scholte survived the atomic bombing
of Nagasaki as a prisoner of war

On 9 August 1945, Ronald Scholte was within a radius of 1,600 metres from the atomic bomb hypocentre in Nagasaki. As a Dutch prisoner of war, he had been set to work in the Japanese POW camp Fukuoka 14. He was digging a deep underground shelter in a hill next to Nagasaki when the bomb fell. Blinded by a tremendous flash of light, he was flung seven meters into the shelter by the blast wave. That saved his life. Atomic bomb survivor Ronald Scholte talks about this humanitarian catastrophe.

How did you end up in Nagasaki?

'In the Japanese camp in Surabaya, all the technicians were selected and taken by ship to Singapore as prisoners of war. As an apprentice marine engineer, I was picked to work in Japanese industry. On 3 April 1943, along with 700 other technicians, I set sail on the Hawaii Maru from Singapore to Japan. After three exhausting weeks at sea, during which I saw fellow prisoners die from dysentery, we arrived in Japan. We were then conveyed to the port of Nagasaki by train. We had to walk to our camp, Fukuoka 14, which was about 4 kilometres away. We had to shave our heads and put on a Japanese army uniform, which included a cap with a red band bearing a prisoner number. I was number 254. On arrival, we were amazed at the meal of sushi that had been prepared for us. The camp commandant expressed the wish that we would soon be reunited with our loved ones. This grand reception was apparently a misunderstanding, as the man was dismissed the very next day and replaced by a commandant who was altogether stricter. All we got from then on was watery rice porridge and frequent beatings with a stick.'

Where did they put you to work?

'At the Mitsubishi shipyard in Nagasaki. The Japanese guards at Fukuoka 14 would shout out your number, and they would hit us with sticks to make us work harder or walk faster. Every day, we had to walk four kilometres to the shipyard and back. I was a riveter; my job was to punch steel rivets into hulls of ships. In all weathers, we worked in rivet squads of four: the riveter, the catcher, the buckler up and the

rivet heater. The riveter was the head of the squad, which meant that he bore the brunt if something went wrong. Once, I even got hit because one of my men spent too long on the toilet. In the first year alone, 15 per cent of the 300 prisoners of war died of the pneumonia they got from the cold and the malnutrition. We lived on a diet of watery rice porridge. The big, tall Dutchmen suffered the worst from malnutrition, and were the first to die. Small Indonesian-Europeans like me didn't need as much food. No-one escaped punishment and beatings, but we were not treated as cruelly as in the 10th Battalion in Batavia, under the Japanese camp commandant Sonei. Sonei was referred to as "moon crazy", a lunatic in the most literal sense who also made us line up during the night. Sonei yanked out a couple of short hairs that he had found on my almost completely bald head with a pair of pliers. He proceeded to hit me on the head with the pliers because he didn't find my head bald enough. With blood streaming down my head, all I could think was: they will not defeat me! That was the worst beating I ever received. The Japanese weren't all bad, though. One cold winter's day, an old lady came up to me while I was working and gave me a pair of gloves that had belonged to her son, who had been killed in China. "I expect you'll be glad of these," she said.'

What gave you hope while you were a prisoner?

'Every American bomber we saw gave us hope that we would be freed, but at the same time, we were afraid that the Japanese would take revenge on us prisoners of war. So we made plans for escape and smuggled some clothing to the bomb shelter in the hills. On 1 August 1945, the skies over Nagasaki were black with American bombers. They dropped one bomb over our camp and one man died. The bomb fell precisely on the other side of our shelter, blowing up a fellow prisoner. The force of the blast pushed the part of the shelter I was in above the ground.'

How did you manage to survive the atomic bomb?

'After the shelter was destroyed, our Dutch reserve lieutenant requested permission from the Japanese camp leadership to build a

new bomb shelter in the hills. They allowed us to do so, as the air raid sirens were going off almost daily. The Japanese engineers bored holes in the hills and we had to dig a shelter in the shape of a horseshoe. On 9 August 1945, I heard an aeroplane approaching. A Japanese guard said that he only saw a single plane coming. I was standing at the entrance of the shelter with my back to the city, and I heard someone shout, "A parachute, a parachute!" The atomic bomb exploded at two minutes past 11. There was a tremendous flash of light, my ears were sealed by the deafening boom, and the blast wave from the bomb flung me seven metres into the tunnel. It was deathly quiet and pitch black for several minutes. You couldn't see a thing at the back of the shelter. On the way out, I met a fellow prisoner, who was screaming, "My face, my face!" His whole face was covered in enormous, fluid-oozing blisters. Incredibly, I was unscathed. The shelter had saved me.'

What did you see in the aftermath of the explosion?

'When I emerged from the shelter and looked out over the city from the hill, everything had been wiped out. On what had been a clear sunny day, the sky and the landscape had been transformed into a uniform grey. Steel factory buildings had been flattened. Everything had been reduced to powder and ash. The people who had been outside the shelter had serious burns.

As far as I'm concerned, all my hatred towards the Japanese vanished when that bomb dropped. We were all victims of the same inhuman catastrophe that had completely annihilated the city. You wouldn't wish a hell like that on your worst enemy. Those who had been standing in the sun when the explosion happened had the worst wounds and blisters. Not until several days later did we hear from prisoners of war from Fukuoka 2 that they had seen a huge mushroom cloud. Their eyes were blinded by the light for a long time. I didn't see the mushroom cloud because I was directly underneath it. The parachute we had seen dropping from that single plane had been attached to the bomb, which exploded in the air.'

Were you not terrified when the bomb fell?

'Well, it all happened in an instant. You were hardly aware of what was going on. Like my fellow prisoners, I went to see where the bomb had fallen. We were totally unaware of radioactivity. The Korean women's labour camp that had been located right under the explosion had been pulverized. The city started to burn and the sea of fire grew and grew. Someone standing next to me said, "Rome must have looked like that when it was burning." The sea of flames was blowing towards us, and although I am not in the least bit religious, I was so afraid that I prayed for the wind to turn. While fleeing from the sea of fire, I heard a Japanese soldier scream for help. Japanese are not usually quick to cry out with pain. He said his stomach hurt, and I lifted him onto my shoulder. "Why don't you just leave him", one of the other prisoners said, but I couldn't bring myself to let him to burn alive. Luckily, the wind turned, and we reached the hills just in time. I carried him some way into the hills and left him with Japanese citizens. He died the next day from internal bleeding. A friend had found my rucksack in the bomb shelter. That was all that was left of my few possessions.'

How did you manage to survive in that no-man's land?

'Two other prisoners had found a horse and cart and used it to fetch food and bandages for the wounded from a Red Cross depot. Of course, it wasn't enough for all the victims. We hadn't seen any Japanese camp guards for two days, but as soon as they returned from the hills, it was back to the old situation again. We were forced to clear up the human and animal remains in the city within six days, and to burn them in large piles. I came across the most gruesome scenes. For instance, one time, I grabbed an arm, but the rest of the body was completely charred.'

How was liberation for you?

'Well, you could hardly call it liberation. After a few days, a Japanese officer with a samurai sword came into the new camp in the hills, stood on a platform and announced that America and Japan were now friends. We had difficulty believing that. He could not bring himself

to say that Japan had surrendered unconditionally. He left, together with his soldiers, and we were free. We armed ourselves. A few months later, the Americans shipped us to Manila, after the British and the Australians. I showed an American soldier where we had been standing when the bomb fell, and he said, "Impossible!", when he looked at Nagasaki, which had been annihilated. We had been spoiled by the food from the Red Cross packages. When a real cow was slaughtered, we didn't find it as tasty as the canned American meat. In Manila, the American army showed us films of concentration camps being freed in Europe. We all fell silent when we saw the ghastly images. The bizarre things we had experienced during the war were nothing compared to these horrors. Our comrades in arms had died from exhaustion and malnutrition, but in Europe, people had been deliberately slaughtered on a mass scale. That was why I didn't talk about my war-time past. It could have been so much worse. On board the aircraft carrier, our Dutch commander said, "If you think you are going home now, you're mistaken. It might be three or more years before you are home." So we still felt captive because of the war.'

How do you see your former enemy?

'I have very mixed feelings. My brother was a board member of the Foundation of Japanese Honorary Debts, and in 1998, he was invited to go on a memorial trip to Japan. He was unable to go because he was seriously ill, and I had the opportunity to go in his place, together with my girlfriend. No-one knew that I had been in Japan before. When we approached Nagasaki, my eyes filled with tears. It was so strange to have experienced that indescribable hell and then go back after all those years - in perfect health, too. It came home to me how fortunate I was, and how many innocent citizens and prisoners of war had died when the bomb fell. The guide found out about my Japanese past, and the next day, Japanese TV crews were awaiting me at the Peace Memorial in Nagasaki. I told them in broken English that the atomic bomb had meant freedom for me, but that it had sent countless innocent citizens and children to a horrific death, and that it had been a crime against humanity.'

Were you able to talk about this catastrophe with others soon after the war?

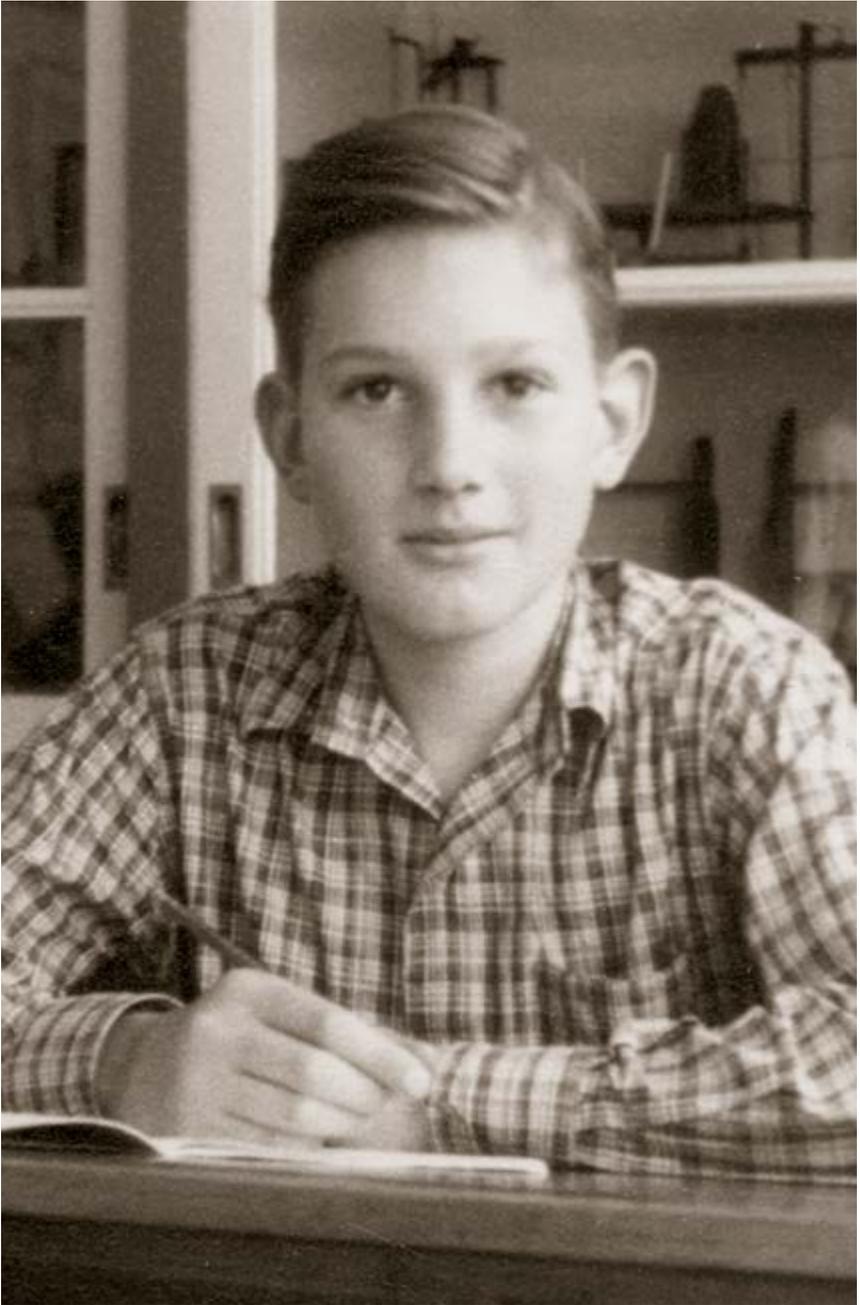
'Not a day goes by that I don't feel grateful that I'm still here to talk about it! Just after the war, the American army command forbade us to speak about what we had experienced. The Americans were not keen for the world to learn about the horrors that had taken place in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We also spent some time in Okinawa, where there were still many American soldiers being held behind barbed wire. They just stared out in front of them with a glazed look in their eyes. They were so traumatized by the fighting in the Pacific that they were not yet allowed back to the United States. I couldn't talk to my children and grandchildren about the war because I didn't want to burden them with it. But I did put my story online, at www.onzeplek.nl, because I think the world should know what really happened. I am one of the last living witnesses of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, so I am more than willing to talk to Japanese students or journalists who want to know more about this horrific historical event.'

Did the city of Nagasaki recognize you as a survivor of the atomic bomb?

'Yes, and here is proof: my medical passport from Nagasaki. In January 2009, Mr Kenji Sonobe, first secretary of the Japanese Embassy, issued me, on behalf of the city of Nagasaki, with the first medical passport as a European survivor of the atomic bomb. Only the foreign prisoners of war who had been within a radius of 2,000 metres from the centre of the explosion received a medical certificate from the city of Nagasaki. I've no idea whether I'm actually going to use it, because I have perfectly adequate insurance in the Netherlands, but I value it as a gesture by Japan.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Ben Bot.

You have to grab luck while you can!

Ben Bot, former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, became streetwise in Tjideng.

Former minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot, now aged 71, works full-time for the lobby firm 'Meines en Partners' at Lange Voorhout in The Hague. There, behind the scenes, a great deal of influence is exerted on Dutch business and politics. As a 'child of the Dutch East Indies', with an open mind regarding both Asia and America, Ben Bot was able to achieve a great deal as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the second and third Balkenende governments (from 2003 to 2007). His name now opens doors for the Hague lobby firm both in and outside the Netherlands.

Few people know what an exceptionally tough start Ben Bot had in life. He was living in Batavia (now Djakarta) when, at the age of five, the Japanese occupier put him and his mother and sisters in the Tjideng internment camp. He barely survived the ensuing three and a half years in captivity.

How did you become aware that the war had started?

'On 1 March 1942, the day the Japanese entered Java, my father solemnly explained to us that, in the interests of our safety, he had had to burn all the white uniforms he wore as an administrative official as well as all of his papers. We were living in Batavia because my father

was an administrative official working for the *Dienst Oost-Aziatische Zaken* or DOAZ, a Dutch counterintelligence service. As he had studied Japanese as part of his Indonesian Studies in the Netherlands, it was not long after the outbreak of war that he was recruited by a special unit entrusted with the task of intercepting Japanese messages. He carried out his work in the Governor's Palace, wearing handsome white uniforms bearing a 'W' which stood for Wilhelmina. He burnt his uniforms and papers as quickly as possible in the courtyard behind our house. Unfortunately, that didn't prevent him from being taken prisoner, and he was put to work on the Burma railway as a prisoner of war, along with Wim Kan, who would later become a cabaret artist. We were afraid that we would never see him again.'

What happened to you?

'My grandfather, my mother, my two baby sisters and I were also taken prisoner, and we were interned in the Tjideng camp. My grandfather went to the men's camp, and the four of us were put in a small room in the women's camp. Holes in the walls with curtains in front served as windows and a door. My mother had a bed, and we slept on cabin trunks. It is too dangerous to sleep on the ground in the tropics because of the vermin. My mother had brought a few books with her and some small toys.

At first, the camp was so big that we could play in the Tjideng river. We were also allowed to grow some vegetables. For example, I looked after a little tomato plant next to our house, and it was doing well. But when the tomatoes were almost ripe, they were stolen. I tried to get my own back on the suspected culprit by eating his green tomatoes, but they gave me terrible stomach ache and I had to confess to my mother what had happened. Her response was, "Serves you right! Now you know that you should never steal anything!" Not long afterwards, growing vegetables was forbidden, and the size of the camp was reduced several times. Our food portions also got smaller, and sometimes we had to go without food as punishment, so we were constantly hungry. There was a lot of fighting, too. You had to make

sure you didn't walk through the streets where the ruffians lived. We all kept a close eye on our possessions and food so it wouldn't be stolen. When everyone is hungry, it's everyone for himself.'

What was your most frightening experience in Tjideng?

'That was when my mother was taken from us by Japanese guards because she had to go to the camp hospital. She had severe pneumonia with double pleurisy. We were taken to the camp orphanage, where boys and girls were separated, so I was also separated from my sisters. As a five-year-old boy, you have no sense of time. It felt like an eternity without my mother, and I was terribly lonely. I was worried sick that she might not come back at all. No-one told us anything, and we never got to see her in the months it took for her to recover in the hospital. Luckily, we were reunited with her after that.'

There was a lot of hunger in Tjideng. How did you cope with that?

'My mother insisted that we eat sambal because it was good for us. Apart from that, we ate sago porridge, bread and rice flour. When camp commandant Sonei was in charge, hardly any vegetables entered the camp. Under Sonei, the slightest disobedience or suspicion of disobedience, such as a wrong move, would be punished with a beating. A failure to greet him meant the whole camp went without food for three days. He became even more sadistic when it was full moon. That was why he was also known as moon crazy, a lunatic in the most literal sense. When you are interned in a camp, all you can think is, how can I get hold of some food as quickly as possible. I was so hungry, I sometimes even ate earth just to get something inside me. When you're really hungry, you'll eat anything.'

Were there any particularly memorable moments during your captivity?

'Yes, an older boy had to go to the men's camp when he turned twelve, and he left me his secret hideaway, saying, "This is all yours, now!" Inside the hut there were a few children's books, including my favourite one, which I still have: 'Java Ho! The adventures of four

boys amid fire, storm and shipwreck' (*De scheepsjongens van Bontekoe*), in an edition with a blue hardcover and printed on lovely old Dutch paper. My mother read that story to me at least five times, and it sent me on delicious flights of fancy. Of course, from then on, I fervently wished to become a ship's captain, have adventures and go on faraway journeys. My mother's presence was always reassuring for us, however awful the situation we found ourselves in. There was no paper in the camp, and lessons were forbidden. My mother sometimes tried to secretly teach me writing and arithmetic in the sand.'

Did you get ill?

'I was seriously ill with dysentery twice. In Tjideng there was a compulsory roll-call at least twice a day for all women and children. We had to stand in line, sometimes for hours on end in the burning sun. If you were ill, it was almost impossible to remain standing. But my mother tried to make sure I was always at roll-call because we were counted. The Japanese guards also checked the houses to make sure everyone was at roll-call. If they found you in the house, you went straight to the punishment barracks, where you would be beaten with a stick. Even though I was almost too ill to stand, I was too afraid not to go to roll-call because I didn't want to be separated from my mother again.'

What was your experience of liberation?

'My mother called us together one evening and said, "I have something to tell you. The Americans have dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and it has killed very many Japanese!" A deep feeling of happiness could be felt throughout the camp. All I could think was, 'What a pity the Americans didn't bomb the whole of Japan while they were at it, at least we would be rid of all those rotters!' In three and a half years of captivity, we had only known one type of Japanese. I still feel enormously grateful to America for a fight in which many thousands of American soldiers sacrificed their lives for our freedom. A Japanese sergeant got on a crate and announced that the war was over, but that it was safer for us to stay in the camp because of the Indonesian freedom fighters. We thought it more than a bit suspi-

cious that the Japanese guards would be protecting us. The British liberators had set up an army camp next to Tjideng, and I thought it was wonderful to be near those tough-guy heroes. The Sikhs looked impressive with their big turbans, and they made one for me too. We got corned beef and eggs from them, and that for me still epitomizes liberation! We hadn't had such delicious food for so long.

One day, the British soldiers invited me along to the port in Tandjong Priok because a big American cargo ship had arrived to provision the troops. Without asking my mother, I jumped without hesitation into the truck and drove with them to the port. This confirmed my boyhood dream. I was sure I wanted to be a captain on a big warship. My mother was worried sick while I was calmly enjoying a guided tour of the ship, totally oblivious to time.'

What was it like to be reunited with your father?

'It was very unexpected, and strange for me because I didn't recognize him at all. One day, the British commander said to me, "The man in that jeep there says he is your father. He wants to know where your mother is. Get in the jeep." After all those years, I didn't recognize that strange, gaunt man as my father, and I even asked the British commander if he was sure it was safe to go with him. Naturally, my mother recognized him immediately. We were indescribably happy that our whole family had survived the war. My father was a captain and he had his own jeep with a driver - which raised him further in my estimation. I was very proud of him.'

When did you emigrate to the Netherlands?

'We didn't leave until March 1946, sailing from the port of Batavia in a passenger ship called the 'Oranje'. The Dutch government tried to get as many of the Indonesian immigrants as possible to move to Australia; they were not exactly keen to have us. But my father was determined to stay with my grandparents in Apeldoorn, and wanted on no condition to go to Australia. The journey on that big ship was one great adventure for me. In Suez, snake charmers came on

board, and divers surfaced with coins. In Egypt, we had a stopover in Attaca, and were given second-hand winter clothing so we could withstand the Dutch winter weather. I got plus fours made out of a horse blanket, and a blue winter coat that had often been mended. Everyone got six handkerchiefs with blue and white checks. Later, when I was a law student in Leiden, they were a nice way to recognize people who had been in Indonesia as well, when they pulled one out of their pocket.

Life in the Netherlands took quite a bit of getting used to. For example, in the Dutch East Indies, I was always walking around barefoot. My feet were too wide for those uncomfortable Dutch shoes. Also, I had never brushed my teeth before. And we were used to washing by standing under a bucket shower. We all adapted quite quickly, though, and moved in with my father's parents, who lived in a large detached house in Apeldoorn. The sheer luxury of that house contrasted starkly with our tiny dwelling in Tjideng. For the first time in my life, I slept in a real bed. I was eight years old, and I had experienced more than other children of my age. You could say that I was already streetwise, but I still couldn't read or write. My grandfather was a head teacher, and he spent a lot of time helping me catch up. I am grateful to him for imbuing me with a strong work ethic.'

Have you been able to talk to your parents about the camp?

'My father didn't talk about the war at all at first, but after a while, one Sunday after church, he told us about his experiences during the war after we pressed him to do. Also, he was often away for three months at a time because of his work in Indonesia as deputy secretary-general of the Netherlands-Indonesian Union. He often said, "You can thank God on your bended knees that none of us died from hunger!" He also asked us about what we had gone through in Tjideng, and those conversations greatly helped us process our camp experiences. He had had to continue working when the Allies carried out countless bombings of the railway. You didn't really talk about it outside the family because it wasn't appreciated. Dutch children and adults alike

said to us, "But you had nice sunny weather in Indonesia didn't you!" They had no idea of the war in the Dutch East Indies. My maternal grandfather died in Ambarawa a few months before liberation. He is buried there. In the Netherlands, he would probably have survived the war. That was a very painful loss. But that's life.'

Did you think you would ever become Minister of Foreign Affairs?

'No, I was illiterate when I arrived in the Netherlands. While I was training to become a diplomat, I imagined that it would be very nice to become an ambassador at some small post. At the time, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would become Minister of Foreign Affairs, but luck is like a little bird that you have to grab if you see it flying past.'

How do you look back on your declaration of regret for the police action and the recognition of the day of independence for Indonesia as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2005?

'The declaration of regret by the Dutch government took years of preparation by the governments of both sides. I was frequently in contact with Indonesian Members of Parliament and senior officials, and had always felt that the issue was causing friction. I thought that was a great pity, as I have always remained fond of my motherland. I felt strongly that it was time to apologize for the police actions so that we could get over the past and start looking towards the future. In view of my Indonesian origins, I may have been the most suitable person at the time to make the declaration of regret on behalf of the Dutch government.

On 15 August 2005, at the Indonesian Remembrance ceremony in The Hague, I first addressed a full audience about the declaration of regret, and recognition of 17 August as Independence Day for Indonesia. After seeing that the speech went down well with the audience, I felt confident about repeating the words in Indonesia two days later.

During the very special Independence Day on 17 August 2005, I stood next to the Indonesian president Yudhoyono in the Merdeka Palace

in Djakarta. Before I gave my speech, I was acutely aware that we could easily have perished in the camp, in which case I would not have been standing there!' It was a very special moment for me to be standing on the very spot where my father had worked, having the opportunity to make this gesture on behalf of the Dutch government. Things had come full circle.'



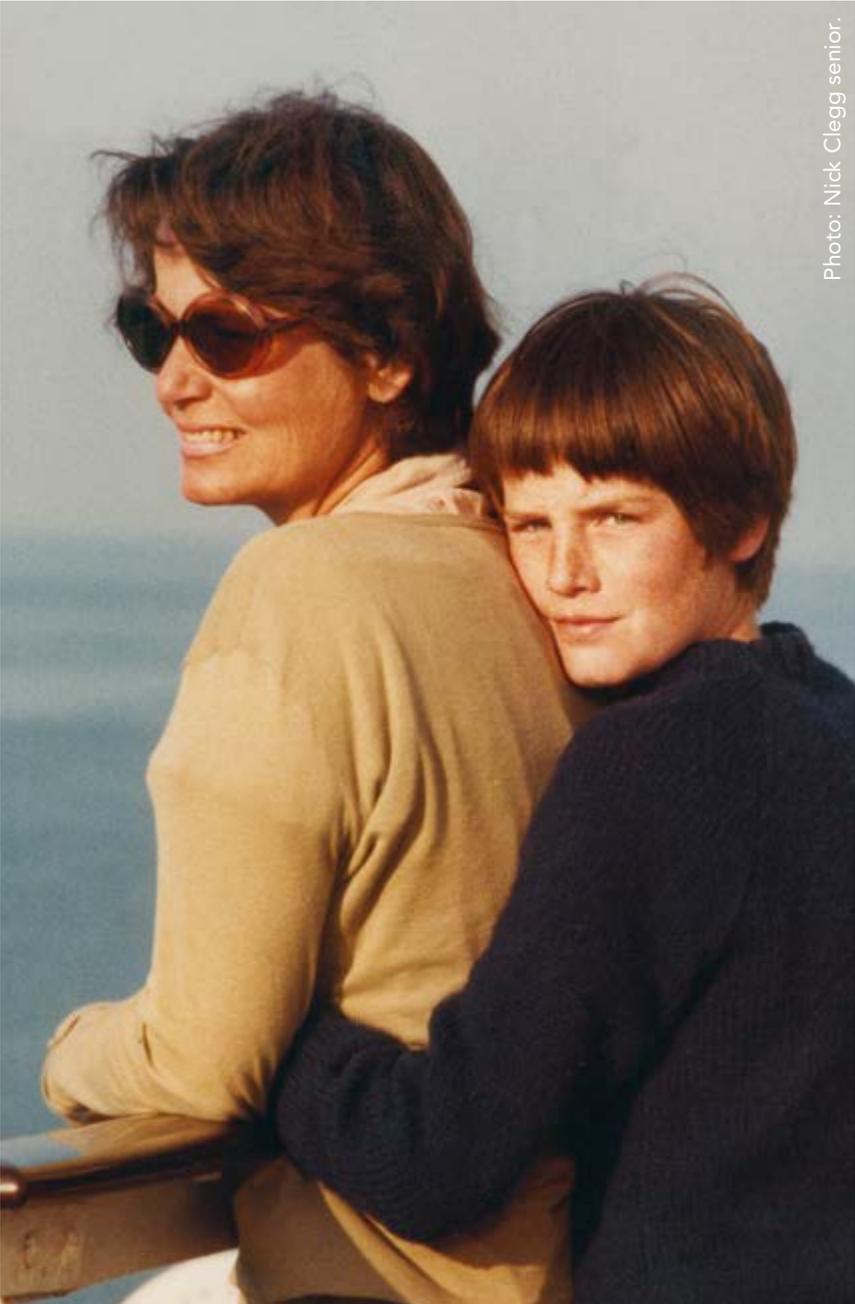


Photo: Nick Clegg senior.

Hermance en Nick Clegg on the ferry to Hook of Holland, 1978.

I survived Tjideng thanks to my mother's courage

Hermance Clegg, mother of the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, was a survivor of the Japanese camp Tjideng.

The mother of the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg is Dutch. During the Second World War, she was held in the Japanese camp Tjideng, along with her mother and sisters. As the recently-elected party leader of the Liberal Democrats, her son Nick found himself in the spotlight of international media attention during the British parliamentary elections in May 2010.

In several media interviews, he was asked about the time his mother had spent in the Japanese camps. What did the Dutch Hermance Clegg-van den Wall Bake think of her son's sudden fame? And how was she able to tell her children about her time in the camps?

Could you tell us something about your background?

'My mother studied English in Amsterdam and met my father on a student boat trip. They got married at the beginning of 1932. After my father finished his studies at the Technical University in Delft, he went to the Dutch East Indies to work for the Batavian Oil Company, and my mother followed. In the years before the war, they were very happy. They had three daughters; I was the middle one. I was born on 23 November 1936 in Palembang. Although my parents were not religious, I later turned to Catholicism. I liked to pray, even as a child.'

How old were you at the start of the Second World War?

'I think I was five when the air raid sirens began, and we were living in Surabaya. My mother gave us a piece of rubber to put between our teeth, a saucepan on our heads and cotton wool in our ears. We had to go into a bunker that heavy rain had turned into a huge puddle of mud. In December 1941, after Pearl Harbor, my father was made first reserve lieutenant in the cavalry. The whole family moved to a garrison on West Java called Batujajar.



Hermance van den Wall Bake (left) with her mother and sisters.

In 1942 my father was called up to defend the country. I missed him terribly. After the capitulation, he was held in the Glodok prison in Batavia. To be near him, the rest of us moved in with a friend of my mother's, Julie Feith. My mother was a strong personality and we children always felt safe with her. She cooked large pans of food for my father and the other men in prison. On the bottom of the cooking pans she wrote messages for my father, stuck plasters over them, and took them to the prison on her bicycle. But Sukarno had his eye

on the Feith's beautiful family home, and when he confiscated it in October 1942, one of the Japanese soldier's kicked my mother so hard that she developed a tropical ulcer on her shin. Aunt Julie was hit by Sukarno himself. My mother thought it would be better for our own safety if we moved to Kramat, a Japanese detainment camp. At first Kramat was an open camp and we were free to come and go. The women in the camp were always fighting over food, but my mother avoided getting involved. She would say: "Here, take mine!", even though it meant we got hungrier.'

What memories do you have of the war?

'Every day I saw a man walk his dog, a wonderful German Shepherd. Then, one day, we were told that dogs were no longer allowed in Kramat and I saw the Japanese put the dog in a wooden box and hammer nails right through it. That really shocked me. Around that time, I had to go into hospital to have my appendix removed. While I was away, they closed off the camp with a fence of plaited bamboo, so that no one could visit me for three weeks, which felt like a terribly long time. Also, in Kramat, my mother and three children were crammed in one house with aunt Julie Feith and her five children.

On 23 August 1943, 2,500 women and children were forced to leave camp Kramat for Tjideng, another camp in Batavia. We were transported by carrier cycle. In Tjideng, there were seventeen of us in one house. My mother and sisters and I all had to sleep in one bed, with nine people to a room. We were constantly plagued by bedbugs, impossible to get rid of. Every day, our ball rolled into the open sewer at the side of the road. My mother kept repeating that we had to wash our hands. It is a wonder that we managed to get out of it alive. At first there were 2,500 people in Tjideng but we had to keep making room for a steady stream of new prisoners. By the end of the war there were 14,350 women and children in the camp. Although there was a lot of petty theft in the camp, there was also a feeling of solidarity. If one of the mothers got ill, someone would step in and take care of the children.'



I showed my youngest son where I had been interned in Tjideng.

What gave you the courage to go on?

'My mother gave us hope. She would always say: "You have to learn to read and write. If you go to school in Holland in the future, you will want to be in the right age group." She kept up our spirits, she was a real heroine. She gave me a dictionary she had made for my birthday. She read 'Alice in Wonderland' in English with my sister. Because she did not know enough about mathematics, she paid for my elder sister's math lessons with baked sago starch, even if it meant the four of us went hungry. That shows how much she believed we would eventually live a normal life in Holland. When the war ended, she only weighed 36 kilos.

There were lots of times when the women panicked and some of them started to beat their children. The camp commandant, Sonei, was a cruel lunatic who made us stand on parade for hours on end, day and night, so we could be counted. We had to make a very deep bow, in the direction of Japan, with our little fingers on the side seams of our skirt. If we did not do it properly, we were beaten. The Japanese would lose count and were forever having to start again, but my mother always stayed very calm.'

What was your worst fear?

'During the whole time we spent in the camps, my mother managed to keep hold of her photograph albums. She had also salvaged some silver that she kept hidden in my bag under a pile of cloths. One day, my bag jingled accidentally during roll-call. I was terrified that I would be caught. A Japanese soldier searched through the cloths, and then, to my great relief, he clapped his hands and I could move on.

Our worst fear was that we would lose each other, so my sisters and I were very worried about my mother's tropical ulcers. She was covered with them because of a vitamin C deficiency. For her sake, we would go out early in the mornings and gather cherries that had fallen from the trees in the night.

One time when she was picked up by the guards after an air raid warning, we howled with anguish. There was also a rumor that women and children were to be separated, which gave me nightmares. But before they could carry out that plan, the atom bomb was dropped and the war ended. Later, my mother would often say to me: "If it had lasted one more month, you wouldn't be here." I was listless by that time and unable to eat anything at all.'

How did it feel to be liberated?

'After the bomb on Hiroshima, we noticed the Japanese were starting to pull back. The first feeling of liberation came when we heard my father was coming back. We waited for him by the gate, full of excitement. I recognized him immediately from the photograph my mother always had with her but, to protect us, the guard would not let anyone in. My father shouted: "Either you open the gate or I'll drive straight through it!" He was the first Dutch man to arrive in the camp. I was terribly disappointed when he did not recognize me but embraced another girl instead. It took me a while to get used to his deep voice. My mother was overjoyed; many women heard that their husbands had not survived. My father took us to a house owned by the Batavian Oil Company, but we had to return to the camp after a few days for our own safety.'

What do you remember of the Bersiap period?

'After Tjideng we ended up in the Tjihapit camp for families in Bandung, mainly for our own safety, and I attended school there. My sister and I witnessed a murder in the square in front of the school. A group of natives was just standing around when we suddenly saw a man collapse in a pool of blood. We were shocked. It was an extremely dangerous time. The freedom fighters had started going after the Dutch inhabitants and our house was next to the bamboo fence. To protect us, my father sat next to the gap in the fence with an axe in his hand. During a train journey from Batavia to Bandung, we were attacked by freedom fighters when we entered a tunnel. It got harder and harder to breathe as everyone fled down to our end of the train. We heard shots and women and children screaming. My mother said calmly: "Stay very still and you won't need so much air." My parents realized then that we had to leave the country.'

How did you get to the Netherlands?

'We managed to get onto one of the first flights via Cairo to the Netherlands. When we arrived in Cairo, sick and weak, the Red Cross looked after us and gave us our first real food. We were advised to chew each mouthful 36 times. For the first few years after the camp I suffered from anemia and inexplicable fevers and could not keep up with other children my age.

Later, I trained as a remedial teacher and have always taught dyslexic children. I met my husband, Nick Clegg senior, in Cambridge while on an English course. It was love at first sight. I emigrated to England and we had three sons and a daughter. Last year we celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary with a big family party in Holland.'

Have you ever been back?

'Two years ago, I took a trip to Indonesia with my youngest son, Alexander. I showed him where I had been interned in Tjideng. Amazingly enough, I remembered the way exactly. When I went back there for the first time with my husband, 10 years ago, I did not expect



Hermance with her son Nick Clegg.

to experience any camp syndrome. But in fact I found myself overwhelmed by emotion. I stood nailed to the ground with fright as it all came flooding back. I realized how difficult it must have been for my mother with three small daughters to keep her courage up for three and a half years.'

What are the most important life lessons you learned from what you went through?

'My mother was an exceptionally strong person with an enormously positive character. She never wanted to dwell on people's weaknesses. She preferred to ignore the bad side, which is what she did in the camp. My father taught me not to harbor prejudice against any race whatsoever because all are guilty of having committed some atrocity in the past. He did not want to pass anti-German or anti-Japanese feelings on to his children, and neither did I, as nothing would be gained by it.'

So what would you like to pass on?

'I am very conscious of the time I lost in the camp. One's youth is such a precious time. I wanted my children to really have fun and it is very important to me that we get on well as a family. It makes you realize that all life hangs by a thread. You try to protect your children from the bad things. Later, I could not help thinking: 'Why did they have to be so cruel?' I still do not know the answer. In the end it all comes down to the difference between good and evil. That is why I became a Catholic. I believe that Mary, the mother of Jesus, can help heal a broken world.

It is still difficult for me to talk about the war. I want to guard against passing on the fear. Language can also be a barrier to understanding, for example, the English word 'camp' is associated with going camping. My children would sometimes say "Mum, when you were in those tents..." Words can hardly explain what I went through. Before this interview, I said to my son Alexander: "They want to know how my time in the camp affected your upbringing." To which Alexander replied: "We learned never to make a fuss about food."

We are proud of all our children, and that includes Nick. We did our best to give them an international upbringing and encouraged them to go on exchanges to other countries as part of their studies. We wanted them to see that there are many different ways of approaching a problem.

Nick grew up amazingly quickly and was always an oasis of calm in the family. In one of his primary school reports they said he took on too much for his age, but it was his own choice. He has always been incensed by injustice and he will definitely have his work cut out for him in British politics. But we support him and advise him if we can. As his mother, of course, I would prefer to see him get more rest. With a full political agenda, there is hardly any chance of sleep.'





Our amah looked after my sister and me, Balikpapan 1940.

Under my sister's wings, I always felt protected

Historian and lawyer Cees Fasseur grew up in Japanese POW camp Lampersari-Sompok, in Semarang, Java.

As a historian and lawyer, Cees Fasseur was the only person to whom Queen Beatrix granted access to the personal archives of the former Queen Wilhelmina. His biography of Wilhelmina brought him to the attention of a wide readership in 2001. In *Aanspraak*, he talks about his youth in the Dutch East Indies.

Cees Fasseur was barely four years old when, together with his mother and sister, he was interned in the Japanese POW camp Lampersari-Sompok, where he remained until he was nearly seven. From the beginning, he points out that this interview is a subjective one. "Childhood memories can be so unreliable: all too often you cannot be sure whether they are stories that you have heard or events that you actually lived through."

Tennis during the day, bridge in the evenings

'I was born on the eastern coast of Borneo, in Balikpapan, on 11 December 1938. My sister Willy, who was nearly five years older than I was, was very protective of me. My father worked for the Batavian Petrol Company (BPM), in time becoming the director of a barrel factory that produced about 1,000 barrels each day for the big oil refineries. Before the Second World War, my parents' lives were very comfortable. We had a house that overlooked the sea, and a house staff of three. My mother played tennis during the day and the two of them went out in the evenings to play bridge or visit the cinema in the BPM social centre. Our amah looked after my sister and me.'

War for oil

'Late in July of 1941, the United States, the UK and the Dutch East Indies agreed to impose an oil embargo on Japan to stop the war between China and Japan. Within six months, it was expected, Japanese oil reserves would be exhausted and Japan would be forced to withdraw from the war with China. But, in a surprise move, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Two days later my mother, sister and I were evacuated to Java on a BPM plane, though I don't remember that at all. My father stayed behind in Balikpapan, working as a quartermaster in a special commando unit that did its best to destroy every oil well, drill tower and factory before the Japanese arrived. The Dutch East Indies adhered to a scorched earth policy, and my father dynamited his very own factory. After this, my father and his fellow saboteurs fled into the forests. And lucky that they did, because the Japanese punished every form of sabotage by death. Every person in the KNIL barracks, as well as a number of innocent civilians who had also remained, was summarily executed without trial.'

Hiding in the Lawu Mountains

'A BPM seaplane carried my father from Borneo to Java, where he helped blow up the oil refinery at Tjepu in Middle Java. His war contribution ended at the KNIL artillery works in Bandung. After the surrender in March he was not eager to report in uniform to the Japanese. So, in civilian clothes, he set out to meet my mother, my sister and me at the BPM holiday resort in Sarangan, in the Lawu Mountains of Middle Java. BPM cared well for its staff. It wasn't until 29 April 1942, Hirohito's birthday, that saboteurs were pardoned. But the four of us were safe in Sarangan, on the banks of a lake with a waterfall, in the mountains surrounding the Lawu volcano. Being by the waterfall is my earliest childhood memory. I remember seeing a kantjil, or mouse deer, plunge into the depths of the swirling water. That is the kind of intense imagery that sticks in your mind for a long time.'

The Nippon travel agency

'We stayed in Sarangan until my fourth birthday, in December 1942, and we were due to be interned. My father was eventually taken to the men's camp Cikudapateuh, north-east of Bandung. My mother was ordered to report to the bus station with her children, carrying no more than one suitcase each. The "Nippon travel agency" would ensure that the rest of our things were sent on after us. I remember being in the bus to Madioen, and then the long, hot train journey to Semarang with all of the European women and children crowded together. Two kampongs, Lampersari and Sompok, both in the south-eastern sector of Semarang, were designated as a camp zone for European women and children. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and matted bamboo. The original Indonesian residents had been driven out of their homes by the Japanese.

As one of the first families to arrive in the camp we were initially settled in a brick house on the main street, Hoofd-Mangga. Six months later we were transferred to a small, threeroom wooden and matted bamboo house with a small shed at 9th Manggaweg, which we had to share with seven other people. We were lucky to have running water, even though it wasn't available all the time. Camp Lampersari-Sompok was an area of about 1 kilometre square, but before long it was packed full of 3,000 women and 5,000 children. That meant plenty of playmates for me. Each day brought crushing heat and, in the low-lying area, lots of mosquitoes. Beyond the screens, directly beside the camp, was the Government Artisanal School; we could hear the Malaysian children when they sang. The Nippon travel agency did bring us our things two weeks later as promised, among them the Chinese camphor chest that I slept in from then on.'

Protected

'As long as my dear mother and doting sister were there, I felt protected. Naturally, my mother was around much more now than she had been at home. All of the adult women had formerly enjoyed a life of easy and luxury, with servants to attend to their needs, but

since all of that had suddenly disappeared they were forced to go to work themselves. Every morning and evening, all of the women and children were required to report outside their houses so that the Japanese could check that no one had run away. Each of us was supposed to call out a number in Japanese. In the beginning especially, when I could never remember how to say my number, my sister would say it for me. The women worked according to a schedule, patjollen, or spading up the earth, pulling weeds, and keeping watch at night. The Japanese and Korean camp guards beat the women and the older girls mercilessly. I don't remember ever being beaten myself. They were not that harsh with the children. From memory, my mother taught me Protestant hymns, and I sang them in my boy's soprano, with others often joining in as soon as I sang the first line, "Als g'in nood gezeten..."

Hunger

'The climate was very hard on my mother. As there was no air conditioning, she sawed a window opening herself. Early in 1945 she developed hunger oedema, and was often confined to her bed. Other women took over some of the care for my sister and me. Conversely, we children quickly learned not to continuously demand food that simply wasn't available. We were often given horrible sago porridge, with white balls of what appeared to be wallpaper paste. Before long I had taught myself to tell time so that I could anticipate when we would be fed. And you learn to be kind in order to survive. In the last year of the war, when my emaciated sister was given extra food in the camp hospital, she would pass on a few grains of rice or a couple of sago balls to me.

Fear of being abandoned was another by-product of the war, the fear that a mother or sister might suddenly disappear. All around, mothers and children wasted away from hunger or infectious diseases, but as children we didn't really realize that they were about to die. Sometimes we heard mothers crying when their sons, having just turned ten, were sent to the men's camp. Even surrounded by thousands of people, I often felt very alone and forgotten.'

Liberation

'The most wonderful day in the camp was 15 August 1945, when we were liberated. Dutch flags were spread out in the streets so that the American planes could see where to drop their food parcels. We had tins of corned beef, which I loved, and thick, creamy condensed milk, to which we added sugar to create a sweet treat. The brownish tan-skinned, sinewy British-Indian Ghurkhas arrived at the end of September 1945, together with the Sikhs, who wore turbans and had long black beards. They made the Japanese clean the latrines and do other work that the women had previously been forced to do. We all had medical examinations, and when I left the camp I weighed no more than 19 kilos.'

Reunited

'When the war ended, my father walked out of the Bandung camp and travelled straight across Java by train to Semarang to search for us. He had no idea of the danger he was in, with the possibility of attacks by Indonesian freedom fighters. Looking out of the window, I saw a thin European man approaching. My mother uttered a heart-breaking cry and jumped out through the low window. "Sjaak, you've come back!" She fell into the arms of a man I did not recognize. I supposed it must be my father, but my imagination of him was completely different, somehow connected with 'our father who art in heaven'. My mother had not seen her husband for three years, and had had to rely on very occasional telegrams from the Red Cross informing her that he was still alive.

Contrary to every camp rule, my father took us out to celebrate our having been reunited. He found two betjaks, or bicycle taxis, and we set out to the city that very evening to eat at the famous Chinese restaurant 'Toko Oen'. It was ominously quiet; there were no lights on anywhere and the streets were completely deserted. Unnerved by the threatening atmosphere, we soon turned back. The next day, peloppers, or Indonesian freedom fighters, surrounded the camp aggressively waving sticks at us totoks, white people, and shouting

“Merdeka!”, freedom. From then on the Japanese camp guards no longer let us leave the camp - our captors had suddenly become our protectors. We remained in the camp until January 1946. Then, for a few months, we moved into a pretty house in Candi Baru, a neighbourhood in the free sector of Semarang, which was separated by barbed wire from the other lower sector, still controlled by Indonesian freedom fighters.’

Hail Mary

‘From the age of six I had been taught by Franciscan nuns in the camp, learning rhymes and prayers. I came to the Netherlands for the first time when I was seven, in June 1946, sailing on the Kota Baroe. My welcome was far from chilly, for our family turned out in droves on the docks. Everyone was eager to see the family and the cousin from the Indies. I was embraced by fifty uncles, aunts and cousins, none of whom I had ever seen before. It was stupefying: there was no way I could remember all of their names! A bus took us to the Hoge Rijndijk, in Leiden, where we stayed with two unmarried aunts. At first they were charmed to see me praying so earnestly before meals. However, when my mother urged me to say my prayer out loud, I produced a Hail Mary. Shocked, my aunts exclaimed, “Mientje, he has turned Catholic!” I too was shocked, and left the room in tears. This episode led to a great deal of upset in our Reformed family.’

Troublesome memories

‘After the war my father was able to build up his own factory, and he continued to work for BPM for another five years until he retired at the age of fifty. In his elderly years memories from the camps returned to haunt him. He had saved quite a lot of notebooks from the camp years that were full of delicious recipes. “Why did you write them out?” I asked him. “We used to exchange recipes and talk about making them to stop ourselves feeling hungry,” he explained. He had also carved chess pieces from djati wood, and napkin rings with our names in them, and still had them. Because I had been so young, my education had hardly suffered. When I started at university in Leiden

I discovered that about a quarter of my fellow students had also been in Japanese camps. Friends could talk about it together, and when we did, I realized that my family had been incredibly lucky. Things could have been so different, and had been for so many people! For me, hunger had been the worst. Under my sister's wings I had always felt protected, and my mother was so sweet. Thanks to them I always felt safe, no matter what happened. Perhaps that is why I have never dreamed about it. But who knows: perhaps that is still to come?'



Photo: Ellen Lock



Wedding picture of Leo and Tineke Vroman, 1947.

Finding lost time

Biologist, artist, writer and poet Leo Vroman talks about internment in Japanese camps and how it affected his life.

Leo Vroman was born in Gouda, the Netherlands on 10 April 1915. As a biology student, he managed to escape to England in a sailing boat full of Jewish refugees. From there, he travelled to the Dutch East Indies, where he completed his biology studies in Batavia and was assigned to the Landstorm (Home Guard). When the Japanese entered the Dutch East Indies, he was successively interned in Bandung, Cilacap, Cimahi, Singapore, Osaka and Nagaoka.

After the end of the Second World War, Leo Vroman had the opportunity to stay with an uncle in New York, where he worked as a researcher into blood coagulation. The 98 year-old currently lives in Texas with his beloved wife Tineke, whom he met during his student days in Utrecht. He has received practically every Dutch literary prize in existence for his writing.

The art of losing

'Tineke's father was working in Batavia, and had already advised me in May 1940 to complete my biology studies there. I received a warm welcome from him when I arrived at the port of Tandjong Priok. Although I missed Tineke, I enjoyed my time in Batavia, and soon graduated from my studies. Because of the Japanese threat of war, I was trained as a Home Guard soldier in early 1942. Again, I had been uprooted from an environment I had just got used to. We had to go to a so-called front in Bandung. I had to stand on watch in the rain for

hours holding a bajonet. On 8 March 1942, our lieutenant informed us that we had capitulated, and asked who was willing to carry on fighting as guerrilla. As a biologist, I was keen enough to try fighting in a jungle, but he thought I was too thin. Soon, we were interned at Bandung, along with 20,000 prisoners of war. The loss of Tineke from my life, who by then was so far away in time and space, felt immeasurably worse than losing a bit of freedom.'

Longing for the world outside

'I did not have any contact with anyone, except for a clumsy note in Malaysian which I sent to Tineke's father, and he sent a very nice card back. He had not yet been interned. I carried a folder with photos of Tineke with me, but had no other treasured possessions except for paper and a pencil. I was living a rather abstract sort of life, I think. If something was bothering me, OK, something was bothering me. That was that. My first sense of real longing for the world outside was when I heard faraway strains of gamelan music during the night in Bandung.'

Christmas Eve 1942

'Our guards knew nothing about Jewish people. They had only heard about Freemasons, whom they blamed for the war. The only Jewish thing I did myself was to voluntarily take over the watch on Christmas Eve in 1942 together with other Jewish people so that the Christians could hold a service. In our little watch building next to the Japanese one, the bickering about and against Zionism got so noisy that a Japanese soldier came to complain that they could not get to sleep.'

Cigarettes for paper

'Did you want to escape from reality or document it as accurately as possible by drawing and writing accounts and poems in each camp? - From my poems of the time, I see that I did actually keep a diary, but never wrote a poem about the camps themselves, so it was a kind of escape, but not a total escape. I only wrote a poem in the camp after liberation, about life to come. I always managed to keep hold of the diary, in which I did ordinary drawings as well as anatomical ones

of all kinds of native animals, such as a monitor lizard, for example. During breaks between forced labour, I often did drawings of the surroundings, or wrote poems. Later, when we arrived in Osaka on 5 December 1943, we were told that it would be best to either hide our papers, risking discovery, or have them subjected to Japanese censorship. I opted for the latter - what did it matter, I thought - and everything was given back to me, with a big red stamp on the nose of my self-portrait. Sometimes, I swapped cigarettes or food for paper. I don't know whether I felt an overwhelming need to write, but it was difficult not to, and that is still the case.'

Snake duty

'A camp commander at the new camp at Cilacap, which was located in the midst of Chinese lantern shrubs and tall kenari trees, set us to work clearing shrubs to make space on the sea-facing side of the camp for a vegetable garden. A few people had caught snakes and put them in about 8 terraria. I was put on snake duty, and liked feeding them frogs. Snake feeding time always attracted a lot of attention. The best job was perhaps planting beans in a real jungle in Cilacap. I once wandered off and ended up in a mangrove swamp full of those delightful mudskippers (oxudercinae).'

Japan

'Imprisoned anyway, I was even curious about Japan. When a Japanese officer asked, I was not inclined to say I was too weak to go. One of the ships was bombarded and sank. The Japanese women and children from that ship came on board with us. In Osaka, we had to work in dry docks, pulling ships in, carrying heavy things and cleaning, but this heavy forced labour was clearly not what I had been trained to do. But the toughest ordeal I had to face may have been to stand up or keep turning in bed when I had pneumonia. Things only got a bit easier under our last Japanese work supervisor, Kajiyama.'

Saved from the jaws of death

'My life was saved at least three times. We were working in the dry

dock, and a storm tore a heavy lever away from the lads who were supposed to hold on to the ropes. It swung towards me and I thought I could catch it and stop it from hitting the wall I was standing in front of. Someone was shouting, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. My friend McAllister pulled me out of the way in the nick of time. The second time my life was saved, my roommate Buwalda took me to Dr Orth when I got pneumonia. This doctor thought I should go to work because I only had a temperature of around 41 degrees. Buwalda said, "But he's got pneumonia!" And the doctor said, "I know, but those are Japanese orders. He has to have a higher fever." A Japanese guard asked what the argument was about, and when it was explained, the guard said I could stay. I blacked out in a feverish dream and they were praying for me that night. The third time was when I was lying in the sick barracks in Osaka, and one of the incredibly lowflying American B29s came and dropped an incendiary bomb right on the spot where I would have been if I hadn't been ill. Now, about 73 years later, a bombardier from that group lives here in our building, and he can't resist making annoying anti-Japanese jokes or comments, such as, "We ex-POWs must stick together." He told me that they had to fly low to hit their targets properly. The targets were not the ports but the wooden houses in Osaka, which they were supposed to set on fire. He crashed and was captured and tortured by the Kempeitai, the secret Japanese police. He still hates Japan. Unlike me. I was not tortured, and I like Japanese people the same as anyone or anything else.'

Unexpected liberation

'Liberation took us by surprise in Nagaoka, where we were working in a calcium carbide factory. One day, Heinrich, as we used to call a Japanese soldier because he spoke a bit of German, came to tell us that the war was over, and that the day shift would come home straight away. And it was true. On this drawing, you can see the shell of a burnt out incendiary bomb with flowers in it that we had been given by the Japanese factory girls. The pitiful shape we were in only became apparent when, days later, we were struggling to carry a heavy



Source: War diary Leo Vroman, Letterkundig Museum.

'My drawing of the shell of a burnt out incendiary bomb with flowers in it.'

box up the steps of an aeroplane, and a heavily muscled American pilot said, in a strange voice, "Oh, for Christ's sake!" I saw tears streaming from his eyes, and only realized much later than he was crying at the sight of our emaciated bodies. A month later, in Manila, we received an official report from the Dutch government that we would be deployed against the Indonesians. I said to the lieutenant to whom I had to report, "If they give me a gun, I will start by shooting dead all our own officers." I meant it, too. A bit frightening, really. The man understood that I wanted to get to my fiancée as soon as possible, and he let me go back to Holland. But I was sent via New York.'

New York

'In Manhattan, I visited my uncle, a medical scientist, who said, "If you ever want to do research, you should stay here." "What about my fiancée?", I replied. "When did you last see her?", he asked. Six years

ago, I said. He started to laugh, saying, "There are so many nice girls in America." But my aunt and I got angry. "All right", he said, "she can come later, we can arrange that." A doctor I once dined with advised me, "You will never get a job with a nose like that, you'll have to have surgery on it." I asked Tineke to come to New York because I had the opportunity to do research in a hospital through my uncle, and I wanted to ask her advice about my nose. She wrote that she would come, and that she did not want me to have anything done to my nose as she was used to it.

On 9 September 1947 I saw Tineke again at the quay in New York, coming down the gangway carrying a box containing her microscope. When I silently held her hand in the train from Manhattan to New Brunswick, it was as though seven years had suddenly melted away. We got married the very next day. We did hematology research together, and had two daughters. It's not as if we are trying to defy time or anything, but we are still trying to catch up on those 7 years, 3 months and 26 days.'

War is always idiotic

'I learnt in captivity that I could live without possessions, except for paper and a pencil, and I no longer fear death, although I am a bit curious about it. When I think back to those times, the main feeling that surfaces is, 'I already wrote about that, didn't I?' In particular, I think about Schippers, a strong, broad-shouldered Indonesian lad with the sweetest character, who was placed next to me one afternoon in the sick barracks in camp Osaka with pneumonia. He was given a cup of chocolate milk, and said "This is the best!" He died that night.

'And I often think how idiotic war always is, idiotic more than anything. I'm not one for nightmares, I don't dream about the camps, but I do keep thinking 'How much longer?' and wake up feeling a bit troubled. The dream is always vague, but brings back the feeling of the camps. 'Why did I survive while others did not?', I think quite often, and I don't want to lose time.'





Herman Romans van Schaik.

'No one can understand my story about the Dutch East Indies. It was such a different world!'

Herman Romans van Schaik survived the atrocities of the Bersiap period in Surabaya.

After the Japanese capitulation on 17 August 1945, Sukarno declared the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. The Netherlands, however, wanted a return to its former power. When the Dutch flag was raised at the Simpang Club in Surabaya, it provoked the fury of the Indonesian freedom fighters. They plundered the Japanese weapon depots, signalling the start of a bloody period of struggle, the Bersiap period.

Herman Romans van Schaik (84) was captured by the nationalists in Surabaya and witnessed the atrocities they carried out on 15 October 1945, 'Bloody Monday', at the Simpang Club and the prison in the Werfstraat, when many Dutch and Indo-Dutch were murdered. He has always kept the memory of that time safely locked away and has only decided to speak about it now because the story is virtually unknown to most Dutch people.

A wealthy youth

'I was born on 24 June 1929 in the village of Kedurus, six kilometres from Surabaya. My father was a rich Indo-Dutchman and had a large farm with at least a hundred cows. As a child, I was surrounded by wealth and completely cared for by servants. In 1938, my mother passed away. After her death, I was brought up by my Javanese amah

(nursemaid). My father gave her permission to smack me if I was disobedient. I was a naughty child, playing in the river for hours and making her wait with the dinner so that she was quite right to get angry with me. She spoke to me in Javanese. Even though I was only small, I was sensitive to the colonial hierarchy. The lighter your skin, the higher your position, so I looked down on her as a child. I regret that terribly now. If I saw her now, I'd get on my knees and ask her to forgive me for my rude behaviour towards her then. She deserves a fortune for what she taught me!

Interrogated by the Japanese secret police

'In 1941 my father was mobilised with the home reserves. He and my eldest brother, Robert, started collecting weapons so that if we were liberated, they could join in the fight. They were immediately arrested by the Kempetai, the Japanese secret police, at the beginning of the war. They were interrogated for a long time because they were suspected of being in possession of weapons. The weapons were never found, but my brother was sentenced to life imprisonment and my father was sent to the Werfstraat prison in Surabaya. The Japanese got my oldest cousin to run the farm and supply them with milk. My brother Willem and I were also picked up by the Kempetai and subjected to a number of interrogations and beatings. But I could not tell them anything, not even when they held a sword to my neck. Apart from the fact that I missed my father and brother badly, the Japanese didn't cause me any more trouble in a physical sense after that.'

The Bersiap period in Surabaya

'I was absolutely overjoyed to see my father again after the Japanese capitulation. But five days later, my father, my brother Willem and I were taken prisoner by the nationalists. They called themselves 'freedom fighters', but they were just 'rampokkers', armed robbers who raided houses. At the beginning of September 1945, they arrived in a lorry to take us to be registered. We were only allowed to take what was absolutely necessary for the journey, so I took a pillowcase with some clothes in it. There were thirty of us locked up without food in a

house in Kedurus, a sort of camp for extremists. My father and brother were taken away soon after. At the beginning of October 1945, I was taken by lorry, together with a childhood friend from my village, Nono Lassae, to the Simpang club.

At the club, a group of young, strident nationalists armed with Samurai swords interrogated me in Javanese. Fortunately, I spoke good Javanese thanks to my amah and told them straight away that my second mother was full-blood Javanese. That made them believe I was harmless. They kept me in the prison for two weeks, making me work in the big garden and do odd jobs. It was strictly forbidden for the prisoners to talk to each other. On 15 October 1945, a lorry arrived full of Dutch men who had been arrested. They were made to strip to their underwear and stand on what had been a roller-skating arena next to the Simpang club. Then, a group of frenzied nationalists beat them up with bamboo spears and wrote the letters N.I.C.A. in tar on their bodies. I didn't know what that meant at the time, but on 3 April 1944 the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration or 'N.I.C.A.' had been set up in Australia. This was the organisation responsible for civil governance and justice on Dutch East Indian territory that had been won back from the Japanese. In the eyes of the nationalists, however, the N.I.C.A. were all traitors.

The ground was covered with slain bodies. Those who were still alive were taken to the toilets in the Simpang club and chopped to pieces with axes and knives. I heard the screams and groans of people being slaughtered. You hardly dared look because you knew you could be next. The ground was awash with blood and strewn with severed limbs. One toilet bowl contained a head, and I had to clear away the ripped trunk of a body with the guts spilling out. Nono Lassae and I had to put the body parts in petrol cans and load them onto a lorry. You did anything you had to in order to survive the bloodbath.'

Werfstraat prison

'The next day another twenty five boys including Nono Lassae and I, were taken by lorry to the Werfstraat prison. Two rows of angry nationa-

lists with bamboo spears and knives were waiting for us outside the gates. To reach the prison, we were forced to jump over their razor sharp bamboo sticks, while they beat us. My pillowcase was now a life-saver as I used it to fend off the blows. They still managed to hit me off-balance and I fell outside the two rows. I ran as fast as I could towards the gates and leapt through them. Only six of the boys on my transport survived it. We were put into a tiny cell with at least twenty other people. We received appalling treatment and almost nothing to eat.'

My great hero

'On 9 November 1945, the British issued the nationalists with an ultimatum. They had to hand over their weapons, release the prisoners, and their leaders had to give themselves up. The nationalists ignored the ultimatum. This meant that the two thousand plus Dutch prisoners in the Werfstraat prison were as good as dead. According to a leaked plan, we were all going to be poisoned the next day. A Dutch



Jack Boer

interpreter and former KNIL officer, Jack Boer, decided to join a British squadron in the port as a volunteer and organised a spectacular rescue operation right before the ultimatum expired. The British gave him a tank and three trucks, a British uniform and ten Gurkha soldiers to help liberate us.

In the morning we heard a loud bang and a lot of firing. The locks on our cell doors were shot off and the doors opened. We saw a hole in the outside wall that had been blasted out by a tank. I'll never forget Jack Boer in his hat and green uniform, standing in the prison, pistol in hand, shouting "Boys, you're free!". He is my great hero, and along with more than two thousand other people, I owe him my life. We saw how the Gurkhas slit the throats of the prison guards with their curved knives, and all I could think was 'Justice at last!'

We were transported by lorry to camp A, a building in the port of Surabaya belonging to the navy, where I was reunited with my father

and brother Willem. It turned out they had also been in the Werfstraat prison. Just five days after the Japanese capitulation, my father had been taken back to the same prison, only to be regarded as an enemy by his former cellmates because he was an Indo.'

Working on the reconstruction of New Guinea

'I still think it's terrible that we were driven out of Java by the Indonesians after the war. They hated the Indo-Dutch just as much as the Dutch. Our farm had been plundered, and there was nothing left. After the liberation, my brother Robert had gone straight into the navy security forces, which meant he was on the nationalists' blacklist. When sovereignty was handed over in 1949, he was smuggled out of the country and into New Guinea. From there, he emigrated to Australia because he didn't want to live in the Netherlands. My father abandoned his family and went off with a younger woman. It was no longer safe for me to stay in Surabaya because my brother had worked for the abhorred intelligence service. At the age of eighteen, there was nothing else for me to do but to let the Department of Economic and Technical Affairs (DETA) send me out to work on the reconstruction of New Guinea. I earned 1.50 guilders a day before tax, with free travel to New Guinea and food and lodging in a barracks on the Oranjelaan in Hollandia. I worked for the hydrography department, measuring water debit from the water supply for the newly planned cities and villages. I could work well with the Papuans and helped build an airfield in the Baliem valley. We would roast fish over a fire on the beach and hunt crocodiles and wild boar. When the Indonesians arrived there too, we no longer felt safe, and in 1962 the entire community of Hollandia was evacuated to the Netherlands.'

How I tried to forget

'In the Netherlands, there was no support for victims as there is today. I thought, 'It's either sink or swim, so I'm going to carry on fighting!' I would get myself to sleep by thinking up a story. I imagined that I was the general of a huge army charged with taking decisions that were difficult but fair. That was how I tried to forget what had hap-

pened. Luckily I found lodgings at the house of a widow with three children in The Hague. She helped me find my way around and as an Indo-Dutch boy, I couldn't have managed without her. We got married in 1987. In New Guinea I was a public servant, but, here, an official from The Hague city council said I had to take a job as a fitter and turner. I refused and applied to the Dutch Postal Service to work in the sorting office. Someone at the personnel department saw that I had been to college and said I could apply to the Dutch Ministry of Waterways and Public Works. Quite by chance, as I was walking along the corridor at the Ministry, I was spotted by one of my New Guinea acquaintances who got me an interview with the department responsible for construction work in the harbour at Hook of Holland. So, I became a Dutch public official after all and I am now on a good pension. I keep busy with hobbies, such as sanding hundreds of wooden fishing floats by hand and I'm currently making Maori wall hangings from bone and shells from New Zealand. I watch the Dutch East Indies commemoration on television. I don't attend it any more, it would be too tiring for me. I don't hate the Indonesians, but they took their revenge on the wrong people.

I never sought contact with other people from that time, because there is no one who would understand my story. It was a completely different world. My wife is the only one who understands what it was like in Surabaya during the Bersiap period, because it has caused me so many sleepless nights. She often says, "The war is finished, we have to look forward!" In this country, she is the one who enabled me to become a person in my own right. Now she is ill with an infection in her leg so she can scarcely walk. I love her with all my heart and I want to be there for her as much as I can. That's how we support each other, through thick and thin.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Theo Doorman plays with his tin soldiers.

In my dreams I'm escaping from a burning Catalina

At the age of six, Theo Doorman survived a Japanese attack on a Catalina flying boat off the coast of Australia.

Theo Doorman is the son of the renowned rear admiral Karel Doorman who died in 1942 at the Battle of the Java Sea. As a six-year-old boy, Theo and his mother were also targeted by the Japanese, and managed to escape with the aid of a Catalina flying boat. They landed off the coast of Australia and just as everyone thought they were safe they were attacked by Japanese fighter planes. Theo remembers what happened as if it were yesterday.

Letters to Alexandria

'On the eve of the Battle of the Java Sea, my father wrote a letter to say goodbye to my grandparents in Alexandria because he did not expect to survive what would be the last attempt at repelling the Japanese invasion fleet. My father's ship, the De Ruyter, was sunk and only a small number of the crew survived. In accordance with naval tradition, my father chose to go down with his ship. My mother was his second wife, and I was their only child, but he also had two sons and a daughter from his first marriage. I was born in the Naval hospital in Den Helder on 24 July 1935. In 1937 I left for the Dutch East Indies with my mother. My earliest memories of life with my father go back to the beginning of 1941.'

Tongtong

'When the war broke out, my father was 52, my mother was 30 and I was 6. We lived in the Javastraat in Surabaya. During the long periods that my father spent at sea, my mother and I stayed in a holiday house in a village in the mountains called Patjet. After Pearl Harbor, my father sent us to live there permanently so that we would be safe. When the De Ruyter docked in Surabaya, we would go to meet him. In February 1942, Baroness Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, the wife of my father's adjutant, came to stay with us with her baby. I can remember the threat of war quite clearly because of the precautions we had to



My certificate with my blood group and my tag.

take. I was given a British army helmet and we were all issued with an emergency bag containing bandages, a certificate showing our blood group and a tag with our name and address on it. In Surabaya they raised my father's bed so we could hide under it and in Patjet they dug out a shelter. If there was an air raid, they warned us by beating the tongtong, a wooden block normally used for crushing rice.'

Saying goodbye to my father

'I know from my mother that my father was a courteous, straightforward man, quick-witted and rather strict but very funny in a sarcastic way. In 1941, when he was home for Christmas, he gave me a metal fighter plane with folding wheels and some tin soldiers. In the photo I have of my father and me together on New Year's eve 1941, I have a broken arm from falling out of a tree. My mother wrote that after my father had returned from a naval action in the Badung Strait on 20 February 1942, we had said goodbye to him in the driveway of our house and then he had given our two parrots to the neighbours. It was clear that he was certain he would never see the house again.'



Theo with his father Karel Doorman, 1941.

The Battle of the Java Sea

'The Battle of the Java Sea was fought in the afternoon and evening of 27 February 1942. The telephone lines were closed and it wasn't until late afternoon on 28 February that my mother heard from the neighbours that my father's ship had gone down. My father had told her that if there was an emergency, she should go straight to the Dutch naval headquarters in Surabaya. My mother quickly packed an emergency suitcase and put in a box of toys for me, including the tin soldiers and the toy plane. Mrs Van Tuyll drove us to Surabaya, where we slept at the home of some acquaintances because a Japanese map had been found with a circle marking our house. Commandant Koenraad told her that she probably wouldn't see her husband again and advised her to evacuate to Australia. We drove in a motor convoy through the Javanese mountains and down to the south coast. Four Catalinas were waiting for us on a lake near Tulungagung, with their tails hanging over the bank. We were helped into the flying boat through the gun turret in the tail of the plane. We took off just before sunset. We flew through the night and landed the following morning in Roebuck Bay near the village of Broome in North West Australia.'

A short-lived freedom

'With our four Catalinas and five Dornier flying boats, we were lying in the bay near a long pier waiting for the fuel supply boat to arrive. All twenty-four of us thought we had reached safety and because it was hot in the plane, many of the passengers climbed out of the cockpit and on to the wings. I was playing between the gun turrets with my tin soldiers and toy plane. Suddenly I heard plane engines and saw the shadow of a Zero, a Japanese fighter plane, as it swooped down over us. As quick as a flash, my mother pushed me into the flying boat and under a canvas bunk and lay on top of me to protect me. In the second Japanese attack, a number of people were wounded. One passenger's head was bleeding, and my mother tried to dress it with the bandage from the emergency bag. Above us, the wing of the plane was on fire. My mother dragged me through the plane to the cockpit. Mrs Lacomblé, the wife of the commandant on my

father's ship, was lying wounded at the bottom of the stairs leading to the cockpit. She said, "You go on. I can't swim!" Some of the other women were wounded as well, and their husbands stayed behind with them. My mother jumped out of the cockpit into the water and I saw her dress swell up like a balloon as she hit the water. I jumped in straight after her, but the current was too strong and I was pulled under the burning wing of the plane. I managed to get out from under it, but I had lost sight of my mother. Through the smoke from the burning oil, I could make out the head of twelve-year-old Rob Lacomblé. We swam on together. When we heard the engines of the Zeros roaring again overhead, we dived under water. Suddenly I felt a stab of pain in my side.'

Saved by the Americans

'After an hour, we were fished out of the water by an American sloop. Ten minutes later my mother was pulled on board, alive and well. She saw that I had a cut above my eye and wanted to clean it up with the handkerchief from my pocket. The handkerchief was soaked in blood. I had apparently been hit by something that had grazed my side and made two holes in the shorts I was wearing, which I still have after all these years. We landed on the pier near a goods train used for transporting mother of pearl. We climbed onto the first of the flat trucks; on the last truck we could see the bodies of some of the passengers who had died in the attack. At the airport we were bandaged and taken to a small plane which flew us to Port Hedland, further to the South. Of the 48 Dutch passengers on the Catalina, 32 women and children had been killed.'

Times Square

'After a few days, we were flown in Lockheed planes to Perth. From there, we sailed on to Melbourne, where we stayed for a few months. At the end of May 1942 we left Sydney on a KPM passenger ship, the M.S. Ruys, which sailed to Panama and then on to New York. There, my mother and I were taken in by the Philips family. My grandfather was able to transfer money from Alexandria through the Philips orga-



Photo: Ellen Lock.

Theo Doorman in his study, April 2012.

nization. In 1944 my mother was married again, to a Dutch naval engineer called Hans Woltjer who had escaped to England during the war to join the allied forces. They had met each other just after the attack in Broome, which he had witnessed from the pier. On Victory in Europe Day, V-E Day, on 8 May 1945, I stood with my mother in the exuberant crowds on Times Square in New York. We joined in the 'ticker tape parade', with shreds of telephone books and telex tapes raining down on us. When the Dutch East Indies was liberated on 15 August 1945, I was lying in a hospital just outside New York with polio. Fortunately I recovered in time to join in the celebrations in New York when Japan surrendered on 2 September 1945.'

The missing pieces

'The older I get, the more I understand what happened on that terrible day. You tend to suppress the worst things, but as time goes by, pieces of the puzzle that you couldn't see as a six year old start

falling into place. For instance, I only understood later that Ms Van Tuyll was expecting her second child, which was part of the reason she stayed behind. That probably saved her life. It is unlikely that she and the baby would have survived the attack. After a ceremony at the airfield in Valkenburg in which my 93 year-old mother christened a newly-restored Catalina with my father's name, a man in Australia sent me an email asking for information about the attack in Broome for his doctoral thesis. I wrote back that my mother's memory was failing and that I couldn't probably be of any help to him because at that time I was playing with my tin soldiers and toy plane. He sent me photos of them, asking, "Are these the soldiers and plane you were talking about?" Then in 2007, when my wife and I attended the commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the Japanese attack, the Broome Historical Museum kindly lent me white gloves and allowed me to hold one of my soldiers in my hands again for a while.'

Thrown back in time

'When I was younger, I was prone to nightmares, especially in times of stress, which could probably be traced back to the heat in the flying boat during the attack. On more than one occasion I have woken out of the same nightmare screaming; "Let me out!" In my dreams I was thrown back in time, often I was still under the burning wing of the plane and desperate to get away as fast as possible. During my military service with the Dutch Royal Navy after secondary school and also during sailing trips, I woke a lot of people up with my noise. I am sorry that I only really knew my father for such a short, turbulent time, and I cherish the memories I have of him. For many people, he has come to represent the struggle in the Dutch East Indies. But whenever I attend a commemoration service, I also always think of those who served under his command and who died with him.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.



Adriaan van Dis amidst his half sisters.

Van Dis on the warpath

I carry the war in me, as it were, because I went through a kind of war at home.

Writer and television presenter Adriaan van Dis' most recent book, 'On the warpath in Japan', was written following his visit to that country. When the Japanese Emperor came to the Netherlands on a State visit, Van Dis was invited to the dinner held in the Royal Palace on Dam Square. According to Van Dis, 'On the warpath in Japan' can definitely be classed as a 'second generation book', and he has finally come to see himself as the child of parents who were directly affected by the Second World War.

A childhood split between rice and potatoes

'My father came from an old colonial family. His wife left him during the war. He worked on the Sumatra railway and was interned in a reception camp in Palembang on Sumatra after the war. My mother had lost her husband, and was interned in the same camp with her three daughters. They were both looking for the partner they had lost and in 1946, as a result of that search, I was born in the village of Bergen on the North Holland coast in a house of people who all came from the former Dutch East Indies. Which brings me straight to the heart of the matter that has often troubled me, and that is the question, 'Where exactly do you belong?' Do I belong with those who were repatriated to the Netherlands and who were defined chiefly by their past, or do I belong to the forward-looking Netherlands where I was born shortly after the war as a child of the peace. My three older sisters from my mother's previous marriage had dark, Asian skin. You couldn't

see from looking at me that I had a colonial background, but for the inhabitants of that village by the sea, I represented the house for repatriated people which was also known as 'the blue colony'. People from the former Dutch East Indies were called 'blues' and in an entirely blond Dutch environment, I belonged with the 'blues', but in the eyes of the 'blues', of course, I was one of those Dutch people because I was considered to be an outsider. My childhood was split between rice and potatoes. That's why it still makes me angry when people are categorised and labelled; real life situations are never as clear and simple as they look.'

The third world war

'It was one of the readers of my first book 'Nathan Sid' who awakened my interest in the Second World War. In the book, I described a father marooned on a piece of wreckage who drifted for two days in the Indian Ocean. A reader wrote to me with a lot of questions concerning the story, 'Was the ship in the story the 'Junyo Maru'? And surely the railway was the Pekanbaru Railway?' When I asked my mother, she suddenly remembered something vaguely about it. For me, this was all uncharted territory and the fact that I knew so little made me very curious. It was only then that I started to read more about it and in doing so, I began to get a better understanding of my father.

They had talked about the war at home, but never in real terms. Always in phrases like 'That gave the Japs something to think about', or 'That had the Japs fooled.' My mother went to reunions with her daughters. We often had visitors too, so-called uncles and aunts, who had been in the camp with my parents. As a child, I thought of it as having been an exceptionally jolly scouting club where lots of very exciting things happened. I didn't know the true story.

In our house, we were always preoccupied with the next war, the third world war. My parents were very concerned about the Korean war. They had the basement dug out and filled with mattresses and

supplies of coffee, jars of pear and sour cherry preserves and 'White Cat' batteries connected to bicycle lamps. When Hungary was invaded in '56, no one was better prepared for war than us. The basement windows were protected from atomic radiation by hessian sacks filled with sand. I always thought it was a shame that the Russians didn't come because we were completely ready for them. So in that sense I knew very well what war was - war was something you had to be totally prepared for.'

My father's war

'The war was still very much in evidence in the coastal village of Bergen aan Zee. The bunkers were still there and Germans with parts of their legs missing would come and visit. You see, the whole village had been caught up in the war and the houses on the boulevard had been demolished because they were in a no-go area. Some of the villagers had collaborated and you didn't go to their shops. We bought our vegetables eight kilometres down the road instead.

My mother's first husband may have been a war hero, but that was no help to us because he was dead. And though my father had survived and had a story to tell, he never told it.

At home, the war was on-going because of my father. He would have terrible fits of rage and lash out at anything and everything. Let's just say we had to renew the wallpaper at least three times a year because it had had food thrown at it. Even though as a rule we never threw food away because they had known too much hunger for that, my father would still throw it at the wall. He couldn't control his temper but he would always try to make up for it afterwards. That's something that only began to trouble me later in life: a father who can beat you unconscious in a bout of temper and then burden you with his feelings of guilt. Much of the tenderness and love that my father undeniably possessed was concealed behind his temper. That was very difficult to understand. In fact, it was only with professional help that I could start to understand it all. In 'My Father's War' (Indische

Duinen), I created a story for myself which would allow me to love that part of my father. I talked about him to my mother. At that time, we knew nothing of the effects of war on people. Yes, maybe if you'd heard of the psychiatrist Professor Bastiaans and his work with camp survivors, but we hadn't. As far as we were concerned, my father didn't work because he had a weak heart, and his heart problems stemmed from his time in a camp. This meant he had lost his status. He was a proud man and it was probably agony to him that he was no longer fit for anything.'

'Greedy double ration kids'

'Everything in our house was viewed in terms of the war. Anything that happened to you or anything you had to tell was immediately belittled in the face of their experience that had been so much more important. You knew it was no use expecting sympathy for a grazed knee, because there were some in the house who had nearly died of starvation. It was no use complaining about rough boys who surrounded you and more or less forced you to spend your milk money on sweets, because what they had experienced was far worse. The feeling that there was something more important than your world and your suffering was very strong. We may have been living in the Netherlands and we may have been Dutch, but at home it was always 'those Dutch people' and we weren't part of them. Those Dutch people were the people who had presented my father with a bill after he left the service. He had to pay for his military uniform because he had been wearing it when he entered the camp, and after the camp, it had to be repaid. They were the same people who for years had withheld payment of my mother's pension. They were the bureaucrats. They were the Dutch people who had no understanding of what had happened in the Dutch East Indies. The other children in the school playground called my sisters 'greedy double ration kids'. In short, we came up against a wall of Dutch people who were preoccupied with their own worries and their own post-war reconstruction and who were not at all interested in those who had arrived from the Dutch East Indies.'

On the warpath

'I didn't experience the war at first-hand, but I carry it in me as it were, because I went through a kind of war at home. I felt the need to talk to my father as a writer because I had never been able to talk to him as a child. In 'My Father's War', I have tried to recreate that past. I try to bring my father back to life and confront him with what I believe. The only way you can really get to grips with the past is by writing a story that can help you live with the future. And that was why I so urgently needed to write. I started writing because I had had an exceptionally strict upbringing at the hands of a man who kept me under surveillance for eighteen hours a day. Although he died when I was ten, he still raced through my head like a wild bogeyman. To save myself from going under, I had to create a kind of defence for myself, not by denigrating him, but by initiating an imaginary conversation between us. That way I could tell not only my own story, but all the other uncles' and aunts' stories that had seeped into every fibre of my being. I wanted to pass those stories on too.'

Second generation

'I have always warned against appropriation by the so-called second generation of their parents experiences of the war. We shouldn't derive our identity from what our parents suffered. I am not pathetic and I am not a victim. But I did grow up in an East Indian tradition of story-telling during long 'rice table' meals where it was common to tell the most exaggerated of stories. That has been a rich source for my writing. My father did not or could not talk about the war at that time. I noticed that, as a writer, I still felt the need to tell the story precisely because my parents maintained such a difficult silence on the subject. But maybe also because I felt I had been shut out of their war. That may sound a bit strange, but if you are the only post-war child in a family where there is always someone around who has witnessed the war, you also become jealous of it. I wanted so much to belong to their war. I'm glad I was born in peace time of course, but as a child, I longed to be part of their world. Besides, I had also noticed that a lot of lies were told about the war. People who are not

listened to will start exaggerating to pump up their story, and people who are listened to start competing with each other for who suffered the most, as if being a victim is something to be proud of. It was after I had seen the war in Mozambique during my travels that I started working on 'My Father's War'. That war made me realise that war had played a part in shaping who I was after all. Before, I had always said, "It has nothing to do with me!" and I refused to portray myself as a damaged second-generation victim. But when I started writing about it and kicking against it, I realised that it had affected me more than I cared to admit. That's why 'My Father's War' has such a strong ironic undertone.'

Face to face with the enemy

"On the warpath in Japan' can probably be seen as my second generation book. It is a brief history, a kind of pamphlet, of my impressions of my visit to Japan. I had been invited by an organization for the promotion of Dutch books in Japan and I had also been asked to be the speaker at the official opening of the Japanese-Dutch Institute in Japan. 'My Father's War' has already been translated into eight languages, but if there's one country where I would really like it to be published, it would be Japan. I would like them to read how their war continued like a ticking bomb for so long in our particular family. How the war shaped and deformed us.

At the gatherings in Japan, I spoke to war veterans the same age as my father. It affected me deeply when I met a man who had worked on the same railway as my father. He had been a kind of technical clerk constantly worrying about reinforcing the railway banks or the lack of nails. He described how he dealt with the problems that arose from trying to lay a railway line through the jungle, but he never once mentioned a human being. When I asked about the people, he didn't understand the question. He could only focus on the technical construction of the railway. That really upset me. I had my facts, and he had his; there were two truths. My truth, that a lot of people died, is an incontrovertible truth, but even so, he appeared to have serious

doubts about it. I was listening to someone who had dutifully followed orders and who was convinced that he had carried out useful work in the Pacific. A bit similar to the way the colonials in the Dutch East Indies saw themselves. They also believed their presence was a good thing, that it benefited the local inhabitants, and that they had a crucial role to play.

I felt more at ease speaking to the sons and daughters of the Japanese who had been interned after the war by the allies. I could tell my story to them without being pitied; it felt more like I was exchanging news with members of the same club. Most of their stories were about parents whose behaviour was a bit odd. As though imprisonment has such a damaging effect on your emotions that you become incapable of showing affection to your children. As though affection was something dangerous, something that made you weak. As though their fathers had internalised the enemy and become like them.'

Survivors

'My mother is a typical survivor and part of her survival appears to depend on not allowing herself to look back at what happened with emotion. And because she does not permit that for herself, I would never dare to broach the subject. We are not close enough for that. She is a very strong woman, even though you feel there's something else underneath. She's hardened herself against it. I am not my mother's therapist. If people need to be in denial in order to live and they can keep that up until they're ninety, that's fine. Why should people always have to break down, expose their vulnerability or burst into tears? Perhaps the interview with my mother in 'On the warpath in Japan' is so short because I want to protect her. I only wanted her to tell me the things that I needed as a kind of mental luggage to take to Japan. What I find particularly exciting is that I keep hearing new things from my mother. At the age of 53, I have only just heard for the first time that once when she tried to protect her daughter, my mother was hit across the cheek with the barrel of a rifle, or, for example, that her first husband was three-quarters Javanese. In colonial circles,

people are apparently embarrassed about their background in the same way as they are embarrassed about what happened to them during the war. Of course we all want to be strong boys and girls who are not bothered by anything, but unfortunately, we sometimes are!’

Another kind of damage

‘I notice that events such as the Japanese Emperor’s visit affect my mother much more deeply than she cares to show. When the television cameras focus in on all those people crying on Dam Square, it opens old wounds.

In the end, that visit and all the attention it received really saddened her. Apologies are never enough. You cannot make reparation for what happened; no material compensation can make it good. But maybe telling stories can help in some way. Give people back their stories. Make sure that their stories do not go unrecognized. Make sure that their stories become known. Perhaps that’s part of what I’m also trying to do!’

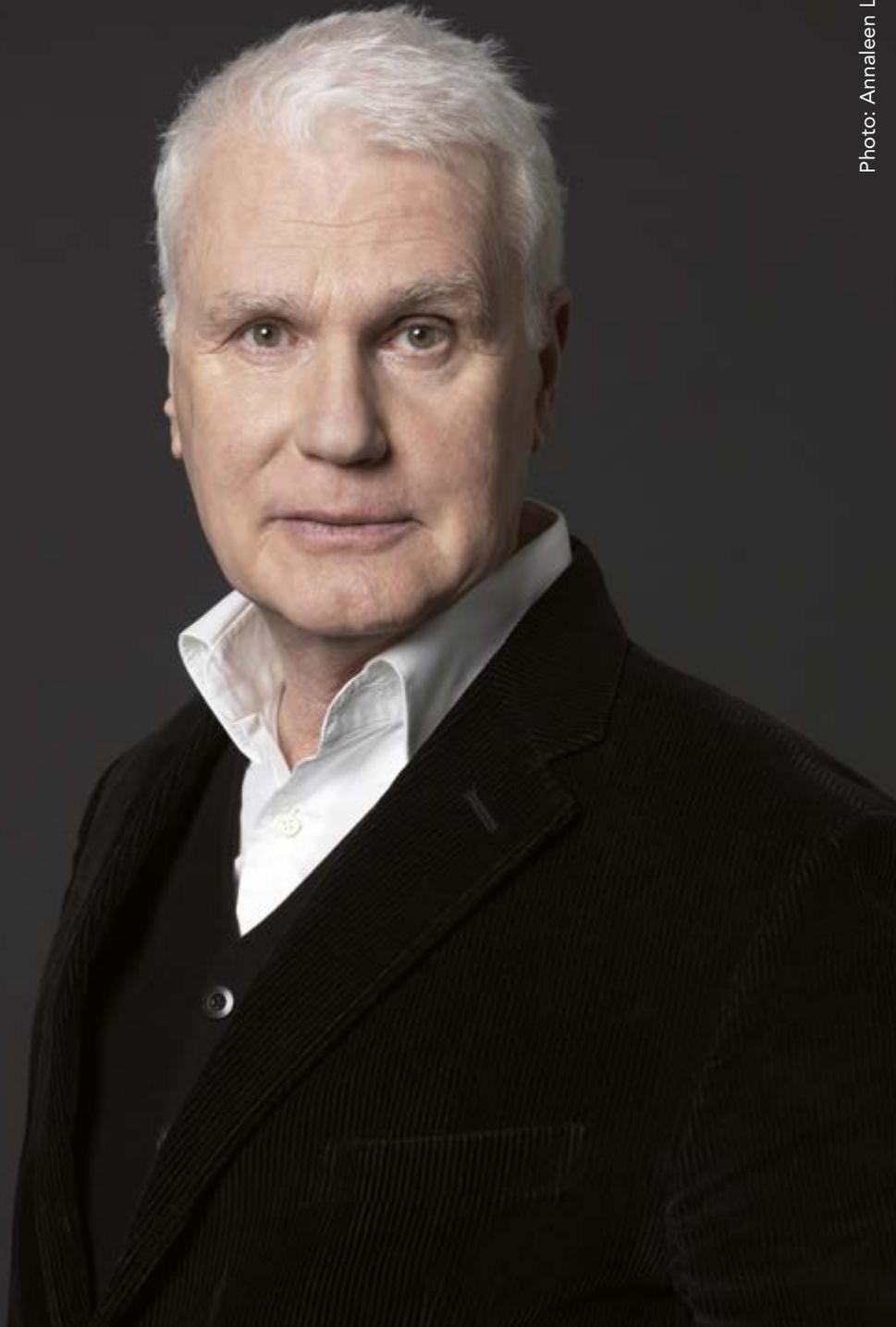


Photo: Annaleen Louwes.



The captain gave the signal to abandon ship

Seaman Frits de Jong survived
a Japanese attack.

During the war, the Dutch merchant navy could not avoid getting caught up in the fighting. In spite of the obvious danger, many merchant ships continued to operate. Keeping the shipping routes open was of vital importance for the civilian population. But for the merchant ships, there was no escaping the war. In 1944, the Dutch freighter SS Tjisalak was torpedoed by the Japanese in the Indian Ocean.

Frits de Jong was one of the few to survive the disaster. In his words, 'When I was seventeen, I went to the naval college on the island of Texel, where I met my first girlfriend, Nelly. I was the only one in my family who was still in the Netherlands. My father had left my mother when I was two. My mother had died young, and one by one, my four older sisters had emigrated to the Dutch East Indies. After I finished my training it wasn't easy to find work, so I trained as a wireless operator. My first job was as fourth mate and wireless operator for the Royal Interocean Lines. After a couple of years, I was promoted to first mate and wireless operator on board the Tjisalak. Sailing on regular services in Asia made it easy for me to visit my sisters.'

The attack

On 7 March 1944, the Tjissalak set sail from Melbourne to Colombo with a full cargo of flour. In total, there were 103 people on board: 15 officers, 10 gunners, 51 Chinese crew members, 5 first class passengers and 22 sailors of the Dutch East Indies as deck passengers. On 26 March 1944, the ship was torpedoed by the Japanese.

‘There was an enormous bang and the ship immediately listed to one side and we had to grab hold of something to stop us falling. It was complete chaos, everything happened within a few seconds. Water and fuel oil streamed over the bridge and everything came tumbling down from the masts. The steam pipes burst and there was steam everywhere. The Tjissalak started sinking fast and the captain gave the signal to abandon ship. By this time, the second mate and the gunners were firing at the periscope of the Japanese submarine. Finally they had to get into the life boats. I tried to get a couple of the Chinese to take the oars but they just sat there in a daze and wouldn’t listen so we floated about helplessly.

Our lifeboat had only just got clear of the Tjissalak when the ship made a sound like a deep sigh and disappeared into the waves. I had sailed on her for years and I felt incredibly bad about losing her. We did a count of everyone in the lifeboats and found that, with the exception of one passenger, everyone had been saved. That one passenger had probably been on deck and died immediately when the torpedo hit.’

The world needs to know about this

The Japanese submarine surfaced. De Jong continues, ‘The Japanese told us to get on board and hand over all our life jackets and jewelry. When I climbed onto the submarine, I heard them say in Japanese, “Okii nè, okii nè; big, big!” At 1 metre 90, I had heard those words often during my trips in Asia. Apparently distracted from their routine by how tall I was, they forgot to confiscate my watch and ring and I was the only one left in possession of a life jacket. They did take

the large knife though that was tied to the outside of my life jacket. Amazingly, I was the only one of the 102 prisoners who was not robbed of everything. "How was it possible?" But it turned out that the Japanese had not taken everyone on board to save them. On the contrary, 'We were forced to squat down on the deck at the front and back of the boat. One by one, we were made to walk to the edge of the boat to be either shot or beheaded and thrown into the sea. A bullet hit the back of my head and I fell into the water. I lost a lot of blood and if it hadn't been for my life jacket, I would certainly have died. I pretended I was dead and floated on the water, sometimes losing consciousness. Determined, I thought, 'I have to survive this, because the world needs to know what murderous beasts they are.'" After five hours in the water, De Jong found four other survivors. They were rescued two hours later by an American ship. Because the best doctors at the time were to be found in New York, he sailed to America on the first available passenger ship.

Emergency operation

In New York, he underwent an emergency operation. 'A brain surgeon advised me, "You must have an operation as soon as possible or you'll be dead within a month." I was fully conscious during the operation. They asked me a question every fifteen minutes and the operation went on for four hours. Afterwards, my headache was so appalling, I wanted to jump out of the window. The surgeon was kind and arranged for me to recuperate in a beautiful neighbourhood out of town. Gradually I started to work half days for the same shipping company at their office in New York. I carried my address on a piece of paper in my breast pocket because I would still black out sometimes. Then one day, completely out of the blue, I was arrested by the US immigration service and interned on Ellis Island. The shipping company had forgotten to inform them about my operation so I was considered to be an illegal alien. After a couple of months, I managed to persuade the prison doctor that I had had an operation on my brain. I was released on condition that I left the United States within a month.'

Home

By that time, the war was over and De Jong could return to Amsterdam and start work at the offices of the shipping company there. With tears in his eyes, he continues, 'One day my old girlfriend Nelly phoned the office to ask which hospital I was in. I happened to answer the phone and at first we were speechless with surprise. She had just got divorced. We were married within the week and we had 50 happy years together. She died in 1995.' Now, at the age of 100, Frits de Jong states, 'I would have liked to live in the Dutch East Indies but life in the tropics was too much for my wife. I built a beautiful house for us on the island of Texel. Her family came from Texel, so she felt at home there. I came to terms with my story by writing it all down, which really helped. My hands are shaky now but I still use the typewriter every day and I also play the keyboard. When you get to my age, it's important to keep busy every day.'



Photo: Ellen Lock



Toos Blokland engaged with Hennie Oosterloo 1942.

They can't touch my innermost being

Toos Blokland kept a diary in the camps
at Darmo-district and Halmaheira.

During her time in the Japanese camps, Toos Blokland used scraps of paper to keep a diary which survived the Japanese inspections. She kept it from the occupying forces by hiding it in her mattress. Her diary is a crystal clear record of her experiences in the camps at Darmo district in Surabaya and Halmaheira in Semarang. It now forms the basis for her story, which begins when she was nineteen.

Calm before the storm

'My father was headmaster of the Dutch trade school in Surabaya, where I was born into a protestant family on 2 May 1923. As a child, I wanted to grow up to be a writer. I was eighteen and working as an executive secretary at Javastaal Stokvis when the Japanese occupied the city in March 1942. We listened with my father to a broadcast by the Governor General on the radio. The streets were threateningly silent, the calm before the storm.'

Imprisoned

'My father was put in prison and we were permitted to visit him on 29 April 1942, which was the Emperor of Japan's birthday. He was very happy to hear that I had got engaged to Hennie Oosterloo, whom I had known since elementary school. We had to move house because our house was requisitioned to be a Japanese officer's post. When my brother Johan turned sixteen, he and my fiancé were sent together to a men's camp. Later in 1942 my mother had to report with us to the Darmo district in Surabaya, where we were assigned a room on Reiniersz Boulevard. I took as many pens and sheets of paper as

I could with me to the camp, so that I could keep a diary. I always hid it in my mattress and fortunately it was never discovered or my mother and I would have been beaten because it was forbidden to smuggle messages out of the camp. All photo books, pencils, pens or paper would be destroyed and burnt.'



Moeder, little Toos and the amahs (nursemaids).

Obsession

'On 28 February 1944, my mother was instructed to get ready to leave with her children. We were loaded into open trucks and driven to the station where we were crammed into boiling hot cattle wagons with the air vents covered. The babies and children wet all over you and cried incessantly. We were taken to the women's camp at Halmaheira in Semarang. The camp consisted of about a hundred

simple kampong houses on either side of the Halmaheira road and surrounded by a two meter high bamboo fence. It was a lot worse than in Surabaya. The toilet would flood at night and you would have to literally walk through the shit in your bare feet while it was swarming with biting insects. There were flies everywhere; all over our wounds and anything that was rotting. We stank of sweat, but they only turned the water on for three hours in the morning. There was always a fight for water and it was impossible to get a wash. The Japanese said we could have a spoonful more rice if we caught a hundred flies in a day. If you're hungry, you'll do it. Whenever I see a fly now, I automatically go after it. It's an obsession left over from the camp that I'll never shake off. We were always hungry. We were only allowed a level ladleful of blue sago porridge in the morning and a level ladleful of white rice in the afternoon. Any cat, rat, frog, snail, snake or other living creature we could catch disappeared into the soup to provide us with something in the way of protein.'

In the last ten

'One day some cars drove into the camp full of Japanese officers. They sat down at a long table and the young women had to walk past them. They said they were looking for waitresses for a restaurant. First, they picked out a hundred girls. Because I was a bit older, I recognized the lust in their eyes. Afterwards, I told my mother "They're picking girls to work in a brothel!", but she wouldn't believe me. During the second round, I was chosen as one of twenty-five girls. In the end, I was in the last ten. As soon as I saw the girls' mothers burst into tears, I knew it wasn't good. I ran away as fast as I could and hid behind a tree. Then I ran to my bed, stuck two onions in my armpits, crawled under the horse blankets and pretended I was ill. I had learned the onion trick from an Indonesian herbalist. A few weeks later, my best friend, who had also been chosen, arrived back in the camp. She said "I'm so glad you weren't there, it was horrific. We were raped several times a day." In other camps the women rebelled and the girls weren't taken. Unfortunately, in our camp the women were too trusting.'

A mind to forgive

'My mother taught me to be forgiving. She always showed respect. She suffered from uterine prolapse which meant she couldn't bow properly to the Japanese. Once when she was standing next to me, only half bowed, she was beaten hard with a baton. I stayed bowed, cursing to myself, burning with hatred for that soldier. Despite her pain, she remained very calm and understanding and said, "Toos, he is no more than a child missing his mother!" I couldn't accept that but I endured the pain and hunger and grief because I always thought there was something deep inside me that they couldn't touch. However cruel they were, they couldn't break me. At one point in Halmaheira, we were all so sick they brought in a Dutch doctor, Dr De Vries, who had been in the Werfstraat prison in Surabaya with my fiancé, and who told me that Hennie was still alive. It was the good Dr De Vries who also removed my mother's uterus, for which she was taken to Semarang hospital. My poor sick little brother Wim missed her terribly during that time. At the beginning of 1945, my twelve-year-old brother Arie had to go over to the men's camp as well. He stood in an open truck with the tears streaming from his big brown eyes, down his cheeks. That parting was too awful.'

Hardly liberated at all

'When the war ended, we hardly noticed it in Halmaheira. After a few days, a small plane painted red, white and blue flew over the camp. For the rest, nothing changed. It wasn't until 23 August 1945 that the Japanese camp commandant said that we were free. My sister Janie, who was seriously ill, was taken to hospital where she slowly regained her strength. On 1 September 1945, I got some money by selling an old blouse to an Indonesian man, and went out of the camp to have my hair cut and eat Chinese food. You couldn't stay away long though because of the risk of attack by the nationalists.

The Japanese soldiers were ordered to protect the camp. One night, it was surrounded by hordes of furious nationalists who attacked with bamboo spears, sabers and gunfire. From all four watch towers,



Family portrait, from left to right: Toos, Arie, mother, Johan, father, Jannie, in the chair Corrie and Wim has not been born yet, June 1932.

the Japanese directed the machine guns at the onrushing fighters. After a fierce battle, the attackers retreated. That night, we were terrified. The nationalists were in a complete frenzy, incensed with rage! We nursed the wounded Japanese soldiers on the tables we used for cutting vegetables. The next day through the gate I saw them throwing a huge pile of dead nationalists onto trucks, where they landed with a dull thud. I'll never forget that sound. I asked one of the Japanese guards, "What are you going to do with all those bodies?" He said they would throw them in the river. That terrible night, the river ran red.'



Photo: Ellen Lock.

Toos Blokland, summer 2014.

A bouquet of thistles

'During the Bersiap period, Halmaheira became a reception camp for both men and women. You could get a pass to travel free and under Japanese guard to visit family in other camps. One day, my brother Johan suddenly appeared and we fell into each other's arms. The day before, my mother had taken my sisters and my brothers Arie and Wim to Surabaya to look for my father. Johan asked me if I wanted to go and find my fiancé in Bandung and we got permission to leave for three days. When my father arrived in Halmaheira the next day to look for us, there was no one to meet him. We all ended up just missing each other that day. The first British troops arrived on 20 October 1945 and took control of the camp shortly after. My father felt it was getting far too dangerous and wanted to leave for the Netherlands, but I wanted to stay in the Dutch East Indies with Hennie. My father agreed on condition that we married. By chance, a pastor had just arrived in the camp. I got married in an old dress with a bunch of thistles for a wedding bouquet. During the ceremony, we sat on the sandy ground along with everyone in the camp. Our guests provided the drink as a wedding present by bartering their possessions. We sang all the old camp songs, drank far too much and fell asleep as bride and groom.'

A feeling of foreboding

'The next day, my father took my brothers to look for my mother and sisters. He found them in the Wilhelmina convent just as the whole camp was getting ready to leave. On the dangerous journey to the port, the convoy was to be protected by British soldiers. As they were loading the trucks, they called "Women and children first." Suddenly my father had a feeling of foreboding and said to my mother, "Give me a blouse and a scarf." By dressing as a woman, he managed to get into the first truck with my mother. While my family were boarding the ship, the last truck with the men was hit by Molotov cocktails and went up in flames, burning them alive. My father had had the narrowest of escapes, and they all reached the Netherlands safely via Singapore. I stayed behind in the Dutch East Indies with Hennie.'

Only sand

'Only my brother Wim and sister Jannie are still alive. My sister Corrie never really got over the camp and spent her life in various clinics. As a girl of fourteen in the Japanese camp, she had to work cleaning the offices and was probably abused. When I was older and living in South Africa, I also suffered a complete collapse and was admitted to a clinic where I was given eighteen electroshock treatments for war trauma. Even then I thought, 'They can rob me of everything, but they will never touch my innermost being.' In the end I came out of it successfully thanks to a kind psychiatrist who taught me to look after myself better and shield myself from things. I followed my daughter's advice and had my war diary published. I would love to attend the Dutch East Indies Commemoration one time on 15 August but I'm ninety-one years old and the journey would be too much for me. I always watch it on television though. I used to cry a lot, but now I laugh things off. I have a lot of physical complaints but I'm still incredibly grateful that I survived, and also for my children, my house, my dog and my birds. I can enjoy the birds in my garden now for hours. In the camp I didn't see a single tree or flower for three years. There was only sand.'



tell me a thousand times or more and every time I'll be in tears

by Leo Vroman: Peace

The Sociale Verzekeringsbank and the Dutch Pension and Benefit Board would like to offer their clients and staff the gift of this book in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the official end of the Second World War. The book is an anthology of interviews that appeared in *Aanspraak* from 1997 to 2014. *Aanspraak* is a quarterly magazine for Dutch members of the resistance and victims of war within and outside the Netherlands.

The Sociale Verzekeringsbank and the Pension and Benefit Board are together responsible for providing financial support to members of the resistance and victims of war, or their surviving family members, who suffered during the Second World War and the Bersiap period in the former Dutch East Indies (the post-war period of disturbances from August 15, 1945 to December 27, 1949).

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