

**KNIL Soldier, Anna Wiebrigje (Anne Winnifred) Beetstra,  
stationed at Camp Columbia, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia  
by Claire Smith-Burns, July 2025  
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**Early Life**

My mother, Anna (later known as “Anne Winnifred”<sup>i</sup>) Wiebrigje Beetstra, was born on 24 June 1923 in Oosterzee, Friesland, Netherlands. She was the fifth child and first daughter of Anne (Arnold, as he became known in Canada) Wytzes Beetstra and Antje (Anna) Johannes De Jong. Anna’s father emigrated to Trail, British Columbia, Canada in 1925, joining several of his wife’s siblings who were dairy farmers in that region. Arnold worked hard for two and half years and was finally able to purchase a farm in Trail, BC, and send for his family in Holland. His farm was located at the top of a small mountain and was a dry, rock laden piece of land with a dilapidated house but Arnold eventually renovated the house, built new barns and established flourishing gardens and grasslands for his dairy herd. The “East Trail Dairy,” as it was known, thrived and the family prospered.

Anne, her mother and three older siblings, Wytze (Bill), Johannes (John) and Jan arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia in May 1928. The family (none of whom spoke English) made their way by train across Canada to Trail, BC where they were met by Arnold. When Anne started school in Canada, she did not know English which made for some difficult experiences but she soon became a top student. However, her father felt that girls did not need higher education and forced her to quit school after Grade Nine. The school board was furious to lose such a promising student and tried to convince Anne’s father to change his mind but, being a stubborn Dutchman, he did not relent. Later in life, Anne achieved her Grade 12 matriculation and continued to have a curious mind and loved learning.

Anne’s parents sold their dairy farm in Trail to their oldest son and relocated to a dairy farm in Steveston, BC on Lulu Island (near Vancouver), about 1940. Several of Anne’s maternal uncles and aunts also had dairy farms on Lulu Island. One uncle, Arnold De Jong, became a “Fieldman” for the Christian Reformed Church Immigrant Services. Arnold helped to recruit Dutch immigrants and once they were in Canada, he assisted in finding them employment and helping them adjust to their new home. During World War II, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands relocated to Canada for the safety of herself and children. In February 1944, Uncle Arnold hosted a tea for Princess Juliana; this included a tour of his dairy and cow barns which, apparently, the Princess was keenly interested in! The *Vancouver Sun* reported, “A day in the life of a princess was passed in Vancouver Sunday without pomp or ceremony but partly in the homey atmosphere of a Lulu Island farmhouse. HRH Princess Juliana reviewed no troops but she tramped over a wet field to admire the farmer’s herd... There [in the cow barn] she held court among the cows.”<sup>ii</sup> Of course, Anne, her parents and her young siblings were all invited to the tea and tour.

**Recruitment and Training**

The story goes that the Princess was chatting to Anne W. Beetstra and asked, “Young lady, what are your future plans?” Anne replied that she would like to get involved in the War Effort. To which, the Princess suggested that the Dutch Armed Forces were recruiting women of Dutch descent to serve in administrative roles, particularly with the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger or KNIL).<sup>iii</sup> One catch was that my mother would have to regain her Dutch citizenship (she and all her family were naturalized as Canadians in 1933). The Princess was able to arrange this through the Netherlands Consulate in Vancouver and in June 1944, my mother

revoked her Canadian citizenship and became Dutch once again! Two other women, family friends of the Beetstra's, were also recruited from the Vancouver, BC area, sisters, Alice and Theresa van de Wint.

The female recruits from BC gathered in Victoria and from there, traveled to Montreal, Quebec, meeting up with other women recruited from across Canada for the KNIL. Princess Juliana and her little daughters were at the Montreal train station to see them leave for Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, USA in July 1944, where they trained with

the US  
WACs.  
After  
several

months of training, the Dutch women traveled to San Francisco, California in October 1944 for a month's furlough.

On 19 November 1944, they boarded a ship with other military personnel, including Australian forces, for the arduous and uncomfortable voyage to Brisbane, Australia, arriving on 3 December 1944. Anne kept a journal of the voyage and relates that they only had seawater in which to bathe for the duration of the trip. She also tells of the cramped quarters and extreme

heat on the ship. Most of the time was spent sitting on the hot metal decks (no deck chairs) as the crowded cabins were registering temperatures of up to 160° F. On their tenth day, the Australian Airforce's mascot, a kangaroo, went missing and it was presumed to have jumped overboard. At the time, Anne was not to describe the course of their journey in her journal but we now know that it was very dangerous and took them through the Straits of Torres.

Anne and her troop-mates were stationed at Camp Columbia which is located in the Brisbane suburb of Wacol. Several of her letters home were saved by her parents and they tell us something of her life, experiences and work at the Camp. From stories she told me (her daughter, Claire Smith-Burns), Anne had several male admirers. One fellow she was dating was a governor of a small island controlled by the Dutch. He lived there with his mother and two sisters but would travel to Camp Columbia every few weeks where my mother would attend dances with him. My mother was annoyed when he did not show up on a weekend he had promised to take her dancing. Later, she found out that the Japanese had invaded the island where he lived, beheaded him in front of his mother and sisters and then taken the women prisoner. My mother saw the mother and sisters after the war; she said that they were all severely malnourished and that the sisters had been used as "comfort women" by the Japanese soldiers: raped repeatedly, and were catatonic when she saw them after they were liberated.

### **Camp Columbia: December 1944 – April 1946**

Excerpts from Anne's letters tell something of her life at Camp Columbia<sup>iv</sup>:



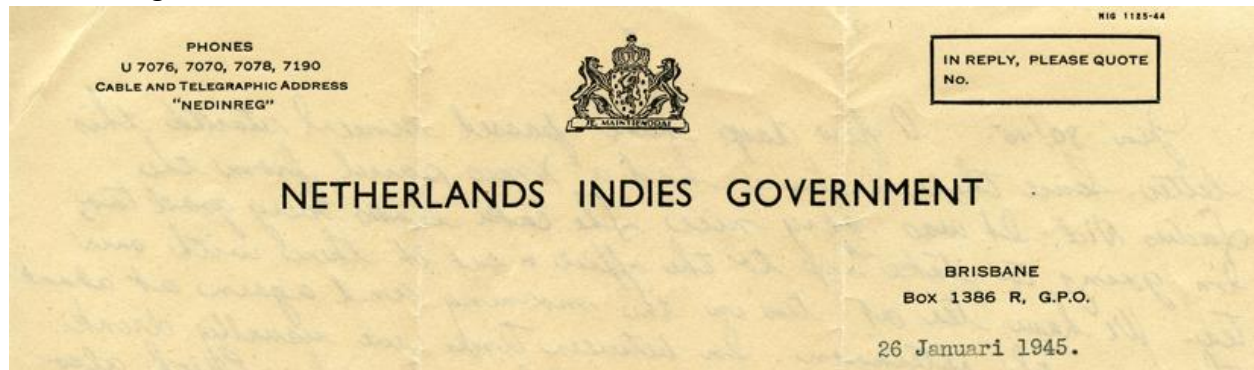
Anne W. Beetstra's Dutch Passport,  
issued in 1944.



*29 December 1944:* "I still like it here, except for one thing, bugs and ants, they are awful. But apart from that it is swell. The mosquitoes also just about drive me nuts."

*3 January 1945:* "Life has been going very much the same here, even over New Years. On Sunday Theresa and I went down to Southport, a two hours drive from here, and there we got such a terrific sunburn that we both spent New Years eve in bed, and I am still suffering from the results.... The Australian sun is terrific, we were only out a short time and were scorched. And there are no trees of any kind of shade at all on the beach either. Well, folks, from the address you will notice we have been promoted. Six or seven pounds more a month! It seems odd to be called Corporal instead of Private now."

*18 January 1945:* "We have been carrying on as usual here, nothing exciting to report. Al, Theresa & I are taking horse back riding lessons, now. It's fun. We are also kept very busy with our Dutch and Malay lessons. The new group of girls arrived yesterday, they were at sea for five weeks, imagine."



*26 January 1945:* "I am getting to feel very much at home here, in fact I shall be sorry to leave. The weather here especially suits me perfectly. So nice and warm always.... At night it gets very cool here, I always sleep with a heavy blanket, and even then in the morning it still seems cold.... Right at present I'm sitting at the office, but there isn't any work because my boss is away for a month consequently it is very slack here. There are four girls in this office beside myself, two real Dutch girls, Hils ter Braake and Lies Bolkestein and two Australian girls. We have a good time, especially now. It is getting rather hard for me to concentrate because they are busily arguing about religion, which is quite interesting. Hils is getting married in two weeks, to a Dutch lieutenant. She came over here with the first group of girls from America. She is having quite a time to get her wedding dress and veil, because everything is rationed and hard to get here. After they are married they will live in a little two-room house, with no cooking to worry about and no housework and a laundry right next door. That is a very easy life. Of course she will still be working at the office, but the djonges do all the housework, even to polishing your shoes! We have been pretty well occupied the last few weeks, one of the officers here in my office is teaching Al, Theresa and myself horseback riding. Another one is teaching me to swim properly, and he also took me out rabbit hunting the other day, but we didn't see any rabbits so we just had some target practice. I can shoot pretty straight too.... The countryside here is lovely, we were in a jeep (only a jeep could get over these Burma Roads). And then of course we really are dancing a lot lately, even Theresa is learning, but Alice is still rather stiff."

*30 January 1945:* "...I have had a Xmas parcel from the Ladies Aid. It was very nice. The cake looks very good too, I'm going to take it up to the office to eat it there with our tea. We have tea at ten in the morning and again at about three in the afternoon. In between times we usually drink lemonade. It

Jan van der Pol & Anne W. Beetstra,  
Camp Columbia



makes work very pleasant.... Right now I'm going with a fellow who is a 'Jonkkeer' [translates to 'young lord']. He's awfully nice. His name is Jan [van der Pol]. He just escaped from Holland & has the Dutch cross for bravery. But I just can't be serious about anyone. Over the weekend I went hunting again, and had a swell picnic with steak, fried eggs, tomatoes and sherry. Theo shot a pigeon, which we also ate believe it or not. At the end of the day I was black with dirt & mud from head to foot. And very very tired! We really have fun tho. On Saturday nite I was taken to the Club here by Jan, I danced & danced & ate chicken & drank champagne. We work hard but we play a lot too. I have just come back from the American movies – Dracula – in a jeep. The evenings here are beautiful – a huge moon and the sky is just full of stars.... Tomorrow Al & I are going to Brisbane for the day. Ugh!"

*7 February 1945:* "It is rather hard for me to write tonite because Theresa and Jean are sitting on the bed, studying their Maleisch, and making a lot of noise while they're doing it. The other girls have all gone to the movie. Last Wednesday, it was little Princess Beatrix's birthday, so we had a holiday. Al & I went to Brisbane and did some shopping. I even bought a dress, a white cotton one, and a pair of white shoes. We get about 45 coupons a year for clothes & one dress takes 13, a pair of shoes 8. So you see we can't buy much!... On Friday, Hils is getting married downtown & then having the reception here at camp in the club. It will be the first wedding that I have gone to in Australia.... Last nite it was so darn cold here, that this morning I felt like a block of ice. But it quickly warms up again during the day."

*13 February 1945:* "The days we have been passing away as usual, going to work, and in the evenings we either go to the movies, or stay home to study or write or else just go out for a walk. The other night I went to the American movies with Jan but on the way back we were caught in the rain, and we were completely soaked from head to foot, and to make matters worse, my dress shrank. In your letter Mom you asked if Theresa, Al & I all worked together. We live in the same room, but I work in a different office than Th. & Al. Otherwise we are always together, people are beginning to think we're sisters."



Anne W. Beetstra, Alice van de Wint, Theresa van de Wint at Camp Columbia



*18 February 1945:* "The other nite Jan & I went to Brisbane for dinner and dancing later on, but I am always glad to be back in Kamp again, where we don't have to be dressed up. I'm afraid after I leave the Army I'll never want to wear a hat again – it was bad enough before.... One of the women here had a letter today from her husband in Brabant, Holland. Jan's father was the burgemeester [mayor] there, and his mother & family are still there, so now I hope he will soon hear something about them. It's awful not knowing how your family is, and there are so many people here in that position with families in the Indies and Holland. It makes me feel very lucky to be able to write you."

*21 February 1945:* "You asked me how long your letters take. Well the V-mails take about a month, but the other letter you said you wrote hasn't arrived yet. The ordinary mail, I think, takes longer. The clothes probably will take a few months, just like the photo. Right now I'm having a summer uniform made, they are of lovely material and look very smart. Also our winter uniform is very well tailored and nice looking. Our uniforms are much better than the Australian girls. So when they are ready I won't have to wear my civilian clothes so much, they are getting rather worn out, as you can imagine. So Bowdina is coming too! She's crazy to give up such a good job, because she most likely will not get another one like it here. None of us did. Theresa just sits & types all day, whereas before at home she was a private secretary. I am a bit better off, in that respect. Sometimes I think it has been well worth my while to come here, but other times, like tonite, I wonder. Today I was given six days "string arrest" for violating some camp rules, I didn't know existed. Quite a few girls got it. We haven't a guard house for girls yet, so I'm just confined to barracks, fortunately for me. Once a week in the evening we have lessons in Malay, and we have also learned how to operate the switchboard, you know "Operator." It's fun, I think. We also have lessons in Dutch Army regulations. Alice & I still go to Dutch lessons too – my head sometimes feels as though my brains will come out of my ears! It keeps us busy."

*29 March 1945:* "It is just about half past five, in another hour we have dinner, and then tonight lessons for about an hour, so I thought I would write a little before going up to the Mess Hall.... We get from Friday to Monday, inclusive off from work [for Easter.] But as yet we don't know what to do. Most likely we will just stay in Camp. Last Sunday Jan & I went horseback riding and explored the country here. Its very nice once you get out far enough. We went to a very old farm – over a hundred years old, the house was, there they invited us in to have tea and something to eat. It was very 'gezellig' [pleasant]. They had sheep, cows, chickens and horses. It was one of the few really nice farms around here, but it also was rundown, as yet I really haven't seen a prosperous looking place here. But they do say that Queensland is

one of the most backward states in Australia. Someday I hope it will be possible to go to Sydney or Melbourne on leave. After we had seen this farm we brought the horses back and I went further by motorbike and had dinner at an Australian Camp. Right now I am sharing a room with an allerliefst Friese meisje [sweetest Frisian girl], her name is Sitske Postma. Alice and Theresa live a few huts away from me now. Pretty soon I think and fear that we will have to move into a barrack again. Just like in Amerika. Absolutely no privacy. The fourth group just arrived too, from the US. Only eleven of them. Anne van Baggen came with them, she had to stay behind last time because she suddenly got appendicitis."

*12 April 1945:* "The weather has had a very cold spell, I didn't think it could get so darn cold here, and then it isn't even winter yet. I go to bed with socks, flannel pajamas and three heavy blankets. And then at first in the mornings in the office, brrrr, it's hard to type, my hands get so stiff. Theresa has been dragging me out of bed at 6 o'clock every morning for the past week to play tennis. Can you imagine me getting up that early?... On Saturday nite I went to a musical concert in Bris. with one of the boys from here. It was a treat to hear some good music again, it was wonderful. And on Sunday we went swimming although it was rather chilly.... Jan & I still go together but of course, I sometimes go out with other boys too. Which reminds me, could you sometime send a good shaving brush to me? It's impossible to get brushes here, Jan hasn't got a good one anymore."

*22 May 1945:* "From Saturday to Sunday evening, we were up in mountains, Theresa, Alice, Willie, Tina and myself. It is about fifty miles from here, it really is a summer resort but even at this time of year, the country is beautiful. It was such fun, except there were too many Australian Army men – poor fellows they tried so hard to make us go out with them but it was no go. We went up there to have a nice quiet weekend so we were rather unfriendly, I'm afraid. On Saturday evening, just to be polite, we did go to their dance, but it was annoying. They don't know how to have fun. Anyway we walked home in the rain – 1 ½ miles. That was the limit. So from then on we're determined not to be polite anymore. On Sunday morning we got up at about 8:30, had a good breakfast and were ready to go for a nice walk – by ourselves – but who should be waiting there again – but those men, they were already standing in the front waiting to go with us. So we sneaked out the back and went nicely on our way. We walked for two hours, it was so nice. But it was rather funny, every once in a while some other Australians would catch up to us and try to talk to us, but we always got rid of them quickly, finally another group came along and passed, without saying a word, we were so surprised Theresa said, 'They are pleasantly unfriendly, isn't that beautiful?' Later when we came back at the hotel, those same boys were there, and right away one of them came over & said he could understand Dutch so he had heard everything we said, from then on we're called the 'unfriendly Dutch.' But everything ended up all right. Just before dinner three of our own boys came up, so in the afternoon an old guide took us for a long, long, hike.... We went down about 1100 ft. thru jungle & mud, it was so steep, I practically slid down on my seat all the way, much to their amusement. It was so slippery, I couldn't stay on my feet. It was beautiful down there, moss covered trees little lakes and palm trees. There was also a gorgeous waterfall. Wilhelmina took moving pictures of the whole trip. When we came home at night, I was covered from head to foot with red mud. Right now, I'm sitting very nicely in our own recreation room. It is just for us girls, and it's so comfortable. We have a bar with cold drinks, coffee and tea. There are little tables & easy chairs scattered thru the room, bookcases & twilight lamps. Very cozy. There are beautiful flowers on every table right now, and the woodwork is gorgeous. It's a lovely place to sit in the evenings, reading, writing, playing ping-pong, writing, or just chatting.... It is now 10:30, time for the room to close – the girls are singing Hollandsch liederen [Dutch songs]. It sounds very nice, but it is difficult to write."

*11 June 1945:* "It is just after 5 o'clock, and I am sitting on my bed, listening to the rain as it comes down on the roof. It has been raining steadily the last two days – and hard too. It is so terribly muddy and creeks running everywhere. But as you know, I like the rain. Yesterday I went for a long walk while it was pouring down, with one of the boys here. People must think we're crazy, but I enjoyed it very much. Jan came home from his holidays, looking much better. He'll be leaving again this week for another camp, where they have to have a course on jungle warfare.... All the girls are coming in from work, soaking wet and shivering, it is so darn cold here, and we have no heaters or nothing. So the only thing to do is to go to bed. By five o'clock it's quite dark now."

*17 June 1945:* "It is almost bedtime again - & we have had such a busy day that I really long to crawl in. This morning Theresa, Al, Willie, two other girls & myself went to church in Brisbane. It was such a beautiful day, just like a nice warm spring day at home.... After church, we had dinner in the Dutch Club in town, & then we went for a walk in the park. Today was the first time I knew Brisbane had a park. It is very nice too. All kinds of animals, especially kangaroos. They are such ungainly animals. And in the afternoon the band played, so we sat on the grass & listened to that for a while. And then after having dinner in one of Brisbane's very dirty little restaurants we camp back to Camp. On Sundays everything is closed in town, & crowds of people wandering around everywhere, not knowing what to do. Last nite a few of us went out to the Australian airport here, where the officers were having a dancing party. We had a super time. Usually they bore me stiff but last nite for a change they were quite interesting. And now that all the boys we used to go out with here are gone, it is very quiet in Camp. Jan & the others left yesterday, for further training in another camp.... Don't get too surprised, but the fellow Theresa did go out with was Mohammedan. She only goes out with him once in a while. When is Pars coming or has he found a way out? If he could see the bar up here and the way the girls as well as the men here drink liquor as tho it was tea, he would be shocked to death."

*24 June 1945 [Anne's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday]:* "Yesterday morning at about 10:30 (we always have tea) – I was sitting there chewing on a dry cookie, when one of the girls put a beautifully iced cake in front of me, with 22 candles – and on it was written 'Happy birthday, Anne.'... One of the Australian girls who also works for us gave me a beautiful real opal stone, another surprise.... Yesterday afternoon I went for a long drive with some men from our office. We went all the way down to a place called Cleveland – on the seashore. The weather was perfect, and the country is so nice. Down there we watched the fishermen- my they're optimists aren't they! They sit there and hope they'll get a nibble for hours & yet never give up. After breathing in some of that fresh sea air we had dinner there in a very good restaurant – surprisingly modern. The food was the best I've tasted since I came to Australia. This morning I was planning on going to church – but I was so interested in cleaning my room & polishing my shoes, it was 11:00 o'clock before I knew it, so it was too late. So instead Theresa & I went up to the Recreation Hut & had a delicious cup of coffee. For the rest of the afternoon we sat outside the Club listening to some good music. All in all it was a very pleasant day. Those 60 girls from England arrived too. My, what a difference it is here now. Before we were just a small group of girls here but now things are beginning to change. It's getting to be more of an Army now. Oh me – life was so pleasant. They look so different from us in their heavy British uniforms."

*2 July 1945:* "Yesterday was Dominion Day in Canada and we really celebrated it here too. There are seven or eight girls here from Canada, some of them can't speak Dutch at all. Yesterday us Canadians were invited out to a tea party in honour of Sir Ernest McMillan – he is on a conducting tour here,<sup>v</sup> and as he is Canadian, they thought it would be nice if we should be there. Of course we were all eager to go

– there were also a number of Canadian Army boys there – one of the officers knows Jan [Anne’s brother who was serving in the Canadian Army] well – they went thru the same courses together in Ottawa.... The home we went to was about an hour’s drive from here – it was a beautiful home on the seashore. And it was a perfect day, just like summer, so of course there were a lot of pictures taken. I hope I get some of them, because there were several in which Sir Ernest has his arm around me & someone else - & another in which we are all singing *Oh Canada* & he is standing in front conducting [note: these photos were not in Anne W. Beetstra’s collection]. After tea we all got in a truck and were driven to a fruit farm, a gorgeous place, where we were shown all around the banana orchards & many other kinds of fruit trees – but the names are rather hard to remember. It was really funny, we were all of course loaded down with fruit – one kind of which we had the most is a fruit called ‘custard apple’ by the Australians. As it happened none of us liked it, so when we arrived in Brisbane again, here we all stood on the Street corner giving them away to passers by – even Sir Ernest was handing them out as fast as he was able. Tomorrow we are invited to a concert he is conducting here. Oh yes, that nite, after the party was all over, some of us girls with the boys went & had dinner and danced in the Dutch Club. Jeepers it was so nice to be with them again, & we had such a grand time. Most of the boys come from Vancouver. I had given up all hope of ever meeting a Canadian here. Sir Ernest also wanted us to give him our folks’ addresses so he could send you a message when he gets back to Canada, but I haven’t done it yet. Poor man, he’ll be terribly busy, if everyone does it.... I told you before that I am now in charge of a typing section, so my work is quite a bit more interesting.... In this letter I am going to enclose some snaps which were taken in Kamp last summer, which will give you a general idea what the place looks like. It is very hard to describe the place, so I thought the pictures would make a better job.... There are a lot of men & women here from Holland now – the place is overcrowded with them.... All in all they [the boys] aren’t very good looking, I mean in build & features. Also most of them are Catholics, coming from South Holland. Most of them have had quite a hard time and are very glad to be here.... The mosquitoes are biting me all over, I’m all bumps [note: Anne caught Malaria while overseas in either Australia or Indonesia; her blood type was O-Negative and she was a universal donor who was asked to give blood regularly but after contracting Malaria, she could no longer be a blood donor].... According to the news tonite, Australian forces have already landed on Balikpapan – getting closer to their goal all the time! Well I must stop writing now – I still have my Malay lesson to study, and tomorrow morning we have to get up early & march. There is always something to do.”

28 July 1945: “Last Saturday afternoon, full of good intentions, I rented a horse for the afternoon. Of course, I haven’t ridden one for a long time, not since last summer with Jan. So – finally I got on the horse, & then he wouldn’t go fast enough, so I give him a prod in the ribs - & off we went – thru trees, bushes, ditches, everything, he wouldn’t stop, and me hanging on for dear life, wondering whether I should jump or see it thru to the finish. The horse was definitely wild – I couldn’t do anything with it. Finally after having knocked over more trees than a bulldozer, I got him cornered between the fence and a guard with a bayonet (who looked more scared than I). That was the end of a ‘perfect afternoon.’ Afterwards the man who rented me the horse, had the nerve to tell me that it was a new horse and he wasn’t sure what it was like! So, today I tried again – and rode all afternoon, and now I feel very sore in certain places! But it is fun, you see so much more of the country. Otherwise we haven’t been doing anything interesting. Just working very hard. I haven’t been so busy at the office, have I already written to you that I am now head of the archives and typing room? There are four Australian and three Dutch girls. But time flies. I’ll be taking leave around September, if I’m still here then. I don’t think it will happen



that soon. If possible, Willie, Alice, Theresa, and I would like to go to Melbourne or Sydney together.... Jan is coming back from Jungle Training on Tuesday. I'm looking forward to it. Not just him, but the other boys too; they're all so nice. And then they'll probably go north.... This letter is an awful mixture of languages – it's a wonder there isn't any Maleisch in it! I'm sitting in Theresa's room right now we're making some hot chocolate. Tomorrow is Sunday – we're going to town for lunch with an Australian family."



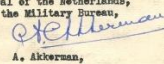
*14 September 1945:* "I have just come back from a glorious four days at Southport, which is about 50 miles from here. Willie vander Berg & I went together. We did nothing but lay on the beach all day and soak in the sun.... We stayed at a private home, whose owners were away so we had the place to ourselves. Except for the old caretaker, who always brought us breakfast in bed in the mornings. Wasn't that super! He really knew how to make tea. There was one funny thing which I really must tell you about. It was the bathtub. As you know – Brisbane houses have no central heating so they have all different ways of heating the water. This one really topped them all. The bathtub was built in, & right at the end also built in between the wall & the tub was a stove. First you had to start the stove & then keep on putting sticks in until the water which ran in pipes around the center, go hot. This takes ages, & by the time the water finally comes in the tub most of the heat is gone. Honestly it just took all the pleasure out of taking a bath. It's really primitive.... Jan is still at Darwin, on his way to Sumatra, I think.... Today someone told me I was beginning to pick up the Australian accent, & that's terrible, so it's time we moved to the Indies. Which will be anytime now. Isn't it terrible the way the Japs treated the prisoners – we are wondering what we'll see in the Indies. They say it's pretty gruesome. It will be quite a difference from this camp, because this is really a luxury camp in comparison with Australian camps. The Dutch love comfort too much."

*17 September 1945:* "Every now and then it's time to pack. Our room is so bare now—without the mats, etc. If we could leave right now, it wouldn't be so bad, but the date has been postponed again today. A dozen days from now, four or five small Dutch boats are leaving there. Old tugs. It won't be a pleasant trip for them, because they're taking a longer detour around Australia, as the other route isn't safe enough. And then there are so many people. As far as I can tell, I'll not be in the first shipment. Today, a few of our girls arrived in Batavia by plane. It was such a shame for them, that while they were travelling the motors broke down, so they had to throw all extra baggage out, and you know how it is usually you take your best things with you.... Alice and Theresa still haven't been promoted, and I feel sorry for them, because if we ever get to Dutch territory, their salaries, especially those of the Royal Netherlands Army, will be much lower. In six months, I'll be dismissed. Now that we're almost there, I'm dreading it; we'll have to fend for ourselves again.... You know in some ways here, we get very spoiled. We always do what we want & get what we want, life in a Camp like this is so different to home life. And at times, you're bound to forget the value of certain things. It will be difficult to re-adjust ourselves to civilian life. I've been perfectly happy here, but I also realize that its time we moved on. Maybe in the Indies, life will be a little more normal. I'll never be any more than a Sgt. – goodness knows it's hard enough to get that rank. To get higher you have to specialize in something, or be married to some big shot with lots of pull."

That is the last letter from Camp Columbia. There is a gap in the letters with the next one from Batavia, dated 31 December 1945. The Dutch KNIL women went from the luxury and safety of Camp Columbia to living in a "Klooster" (Convent) in Batavia (now Jakarta) amidst the civil war that had broken out in Indonesia. Life was dangerous, food was scarce and consisted mainly of rice. In Indonesia, Anne worked

as secretary to the Food Administrator of the Netherlands East Indies. She was finally able to journey home to Vancouver, BC, via the freighter *SS Manoeran* in mid-April 1946 via the Suez Canal, with a short stay in Egypt, and landing in New York City on 8 May 1946. The ship's passenger list has many of the KNIL women listed. From New York, she traveled by train to Vancouver, BC.



 <b>ONTSLAG BEWYS</b>		<b>DISCHARGE CERTIFICATE</b>	
HIERMEDE VERLEEN IK MET INGANG VAN HEDEN		I HEREWITH GRANT, EFFECTIVE FROM THIS DATE	
			
<b>Sargeant BEETSTRA, Anna Winifred</b>			
GEBOREN 24 Juni 1923 te Oosterzee, Nederland DIE BIJ DE NEDERLANDSCHE STRIJDKRACHTEN ONDER DE WAPENEN IS GEWEEST VAN 29-6-'44 TOT 5-8-'46 EERVOL ONTSLAG UIT DEN MILITAIREN DIENST.	BORN June 24, 1923 at Oosterzee, the Netherlands WHO WAS IN ACTIVE SERVICE WITH THE NETHERLANDS FIGHTING FORCES FROM 29-6-'44 UNTIL 5-8-'46 HONOURABLE DISCHARGE FROM MILITARY SERVICE		
For the Consul-General of the Netherlands, For the Head of the Military Bureau,  <b>A. Akkerman,</b> Captain.			
MONTREAL, 5 Augustus 1946			

### Life After KNIL Service

While in Indonesia, Anne had become engaged to a much older man, Louis Hochberg, an American production manager with Goodyear Rubber. Louis traveled quite a bit in his job and always brought back expensive gifts for my mother. He also owned a lovely house in Batavia with a large staff of servants.



Left: Anne W. Beetstra & Louis Hochberg, Batavia

Right: Louis Hochberg's residence in Batavia



However, after arriving home, Anne was anxious to turn over a new leaf and get back into civilian life. She broke off her engagement with Louis Hochberg and obtained a job with BC Packers (a fish processing company) where she was the personal secretary to the Manager, Ken Fraser. Through Ken, she met his cousin, Gordon "Dallas" C. Smith. They married in 1951 and had three children, Claire, Janice and Gordon. In 1973, Anne and Dal wanted to do some travelling so Anne applied for her Canadian passport. Much to her surprise, she was told that she was not a Canadian citizen since she had revoked her citizenship when she joined the KNIL! She recovered her Canadian citizenship in 1974 but that meant that all three of her children were born of a Netherlands-citizen mother. This loophole allowed Claire, Janice, Claire's daughter, Hazel and her son, Joaquin to gain their Netherlands citizenship.

Anne passed away of cancer in 1994. Her daughter, Claire, has her KNIL Army trunk and remembers all the interesting souvenirs that Anne brought home from Australia and Indonesia, some of which the family still treasures.

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<sup>i</sup> Anna Wiebrigje Beetstra will be referred to as "Anne" in this story.

<sup>ii</sup> *Vancouver Sun* newspaper, 7 February 1944, p. 1

<sup>iii</sup> The KNIL were recruiting Dutch men and women from Canada, the US, the Dutch colonies and other places due to the fact that the Netherlands was occupied by the Nazi forces making it impossible to recruit directly from Holland.

<sup>iv</sup> Letters in the possession of and transcribed by Claire Smith-Burns, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada; several sections were written in Dutch and were translated with the assistance of Google Translate.

<sup>v</sup> "At the invitation of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, MacMillan toured that country for three months in 1945 conducting 30 concerts in the continental state capitals of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane;" Library & Archives Canada, [https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/lac-bac/sir\\_ernest\\_macmillan-ef/www.lac-bac.gc.ca/4/6/m7-213-e.html?nodisclaimer=1](https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/lac-bac/sir_ernest_macmillan-ef/www.lac-bac.gc.ca/4/6/m7-213-e.html?nodisclaimer=1).