



DE VLIEGENDE HOLLANDER



WEEKBLAD VERSPREID DOOR DE GEALLIEERDE LUCHTMACHT

No. 35. DONDERDAG 8 JUNI 1944

Landingen der Geallieerden in Normandië

Communiqué No. 1 van het Hoofdkwartier der Geallieerde Expeditie-legers:

“Onder het opperbevel van Generaal Eisenhower zijn Geallieerde zeestrijdkrachten, gesteund door een sterke luchtmacht, vanmorgen begonnen Geallieerde troepen aan land te zetten op de Noordkust van Frankrijk.”

6 Juni 1944 — 9.30 uur.

EISENHOWER TOT EUROPA

Generaal Eisenhower, de opperbevelhebber van de Geallieerde Expeditie-legers, richtte Dinsdagmorgen, 6 Juni, in een radiotoespraak de volgende boodschap tot de bezette landen:

Volken van West-Europa.

Troepen van het geallieerde expeditieleger zijn hedenmorgen op de Fransche kust geland. Deze landing maakt deel uit van het gemeenschappelijke plan der Vereenigde Volken voor de bevrijding van Europa, in samenwerking met onze groote Russische bondgenooten. Voor U allen heb ik deze boodschap:

Minister Gerbrandy spreekt tot het volk van Nederland

Radiotoespraak van 6 Juni.

Mannen en vrouwen van Nederland.

Nu het groote oogenblik gekomen is, waarop de Geallieerde strijdkrachten tot den machtigen aanval zijn overgegaan vanuit het Westen, heb ik enkele zeer ernstige woorden tot U te zeggen. Ik verzoek U hiernaar met de grootst mogelijke aandacht te luisteren en mijn woorden, met inachtneming van alle noodzakelijke veiligheidsmaatregelen, door te geven aan de betrouwbare landgenooten, die niet in de gelegenheid waren naar mij te luisteren.

Nu de Geallieerde moker slag naderkomt op Hitler's Atlantikwall gaat door ons allen een siddering van ontroering. Onze mannen van leger, vloot, luchtmacht en koop-



The Flying Dutchman, a weekly paper delivered by air courtesy of the Allied Air Forces, announces Eisenhower's June, 1944 landing in Normandy. Although some of The Netherlands was liberated in 1944, for the Van Tuyls and their neighbors in the Bommelerwaard the real horrors of war were just beginning. German persecution and vandalism, coupled with Allied bombardments and a cruel winter lay ahead. [Collection: J.N.A. Groenendijk]

Chapter 20

War Comes to Gameren...Again 1930-1945

Starting at the beginning of the 20th century, Bommelerwaard farmers turned their efforts toward intensive horticulture: strawberries became their specialty. By the 1930s, they had transformed their region into *The Garden Basket and Fruit Bowl* of the Netherlands.¹ One of the first to plant strawberries was Otto Leendert van Tuyl.² His son Hendrik remembers how the strawberries were picked and marketed:³

We got up before sunrise and before going to school assisted our father in the fields. The strawberries were brought to the auction and the number of growers increased so fast that you could see a parade of carts, driving from Gameren to Zaltbommel. When strawberries were sold, 7 cents a pound was considered a good price.⁴

But farm life in the Bommelerwaard was still harsh, as the local family doctor observed:⁵

The greater part of the year the families lived in the back part of the house, next to the goat. Only in times of extreme cold would they move into the room with the cook stove. Here were situated the two cupboard-beds for the parents and the older children. The others slept on the loft, that could be reached by a small ladder from the back part of the house.

Fast growing population in the villages, coupled with hard times and low farm prices during the 1930s, led many people to leave the rural areas in search of a better life in the cities.⁶ Many Van Tuyls left the village where their ancestors had dwelled for centuries, bound for fast-growing

¹ Van Tuyl-de Boer, T., "The Story of Arie and Adriana van Tuyl," Wellandport, Ontario, Canada, 1985, pg. 5.

² See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.1.1.1.1.4b.2.5]. He was the son of Hendrik van Tuyl (see chapter 16).

³ Interview with Hendrik van Tuyl [A1.1.1.1.1.4b.2.5b.2].

⁴ Van den Broeke, W. and Bouwens, A. M. C. M., "Op Streek Geraakt, de Economische en Sociale Geschiedenis van een Regio," Tiel, 1992, pg. 69. In 1930 the sales of the horticulture auction amounted 536,000 guilders, four times greater than in 1920. In 1934, plans to enlarge the auction were approved.

⁵ Hoekstra, Sj., "Herinneringen van een huisarts," in : *Arts en Auto*, jaargang 53, 1987, pp. 1434/1435.

⁶ Bommelerwaard Population:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Villages</u>	<u>Zaltbommel</u>
1795	8,759	2,905
1850	13,621	3,488
1900	17,525	3,985
1930	19,047	3,993

cities like Amsterdam, The Hague, and Eindhoven.⁷ Those who stayed suffered from economic recession and increasing unemployment. In Zaltbommel the jobless increased in number from 80 men in 1931 to 219 by 1937.⁸ But in the villages - especially during the winter months - unemployment shot up to more than 1,000 out of the 5,300 men available.⁹ The government tried to solve the unemployment problems by instituting relief projects. In Gameren, laborers were hired to work on the dike. Their meager wages - 2 guilders per week - were increased to 3 guilders, but only as the result of a strike.¹⁰ These starvation-wage programs did little to improve their plight. Many men turned away from farming in search of other ways to make a living. Arie van Tuyl recalled:¹¹

By [the end of the 1930s] I had three brothers (Cornelis, Jan Hendrik and Gerard) who were truck drivers. One brother had a business peddling fruit and vegetables in the city of Eindhoven..... There were not too many service stations yet, only a few gasoline pumps along the way. Most of the trucks on the road were Model T Fords. Most of the troubles along the road could be fixed with a pair of pliers, a piece of wire, or even a wooden shoe. That's how I got a fire stopped in the floor boards (underneath where the exhaust pipe ran): by hauling water out of the ditch with my wooden shoe!

Transportation attracted other Van Tuyls. The basketmaker Goossen van Tuyl and some of his sons became fuel dealers.¹² By the end of the 1930s, life in the Bommelerwaard was improving, but only slightly.

Jan van Tuyl, Aspiring Man of Letters

Perhaps the most enterprising Van Tuyl of the 1930s was Jan, the oldest brother of Arie.¹³ After Jan finished school, he went to work in his father's fields. But he had an avid interest in books, and an eagerness to learn.¹⁴ Jan must have visited the bookshop of Arie van Tuyl at the dike in Gameren quite often.¹⁵ As he delivered fruits and vegetables from his father's gardens in Zaltbommel, Jan would gaze upon the offices of the local publishing companies: *Van der Garde* and *Wink*. One day, while delivering to the offices of *Theo Wink*, he said to the maidservant: "Oh, if I could only work here!" To his surprise, she told her employer, and Jan van Tuyl got work as handyman for the publishing company. Later, he went to s'-Hertogenbosch and got a

⁷ See: *Dutch Genealogy*.

⁸ Van den Broeke, pg. 78.

⁹ Staf, C., "Agrarisch Bestemmingsplan Bommelerwaard," 1942, pp. 58-59. In 1937-38, average annual income for the Bommelerwaard was 1144 guilders, compared to 1579 guilders for the country as a whole. People were poorer still in the Bommelerwaard villages, where per capita income was only 1008 guilders [Verkuil, G., "Jan Roseboom trok Waard mee uit de Klei," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 31-03-1993].

¹⁰ Hoekstra, pg. 1656.

¹¹ Van Tuyl-de Boer, pp. 3 and 5. See *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.4.4.1-4]

¹² See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.3.2].

¹³ See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.4.4.1].

¹⁴ Information from Mrs. E. van Tuyl-Hak.

¹⁵ See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.3.4].



Two of the 1930s' most important Van Tuyls from Gameraen could not have been more different:

Otto Leendert van Tuyl, above, right, with wife Aardje, son Leendert, and brother Tennis (note their wooden shoes) led the family into intensive horticulture, specializing in strawberries. To this day, many of his descendants still use his methods - modernized - to grow flowers in controlled environments.

Jan van Tuyl started in his father's fields but later made his mark as a publisher and book seller. An early Van Tuyl intellectual, he was self-educated in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. He is shown here concentrating on his work aboard the *Oranjetrein*, a mobile merchandise mart, during 1934. In 1940, he - and thousands of his countrymen in uniform - fought unsuccessfully to stop the Germans from overrunning their country.

position with the famous bookstore *Heinen*. His thirst for learning led him to enroll in evening courses to supplement his on-the-job training. But Jan van Tuyl's motto was: "*When you know how to do it, you must no longer stay.*"¹⁶ So he moved on during the 1930s to work in bookshops in Amsterdam and Zeeland. The ambitious young book seller got involved in one of the most interesting sales schemes of his time. In 1933 a special railway train - called the *Oranjetrein* - was outfitted as a mobile exposition- and promotion-space. As it pulled into stations across the country, visitors would board to see examples of modern life - everything from tea brewing to gas masks. In 1934 a publishers' organization took over a car on this train, and more than 40 of its members - including Jan van Tuyl - travelled almost four months throughout the country, stopping at 80 cities.¹⁷ Jan met experienced people in the world of publishing, an experience which would greatly expand his horizons. Continuing with his book selling, publishing, journalism, and language studies (he learned Latin, Greek and Hebrew), by April, 1938 he had moved on to one of Europe's centers of culture: Brussels. After a year he moved on to take a post with the bookstore *Bronswijk* in Oostburg, Zeeland, and in the spring of 1939 he married.¹⁸ Jan van Tuyl's future loomed bright. But on the horizon, clouds were brewing.

Jetzt Ist Es Endgultig Aus

With the 1939 German invasion of Poland and Czechoslovakia, war had come to Europe once again. The Netherlands mobilized and Jan van Tuyl - along with tens of thousands of his fellow Dutchmen - was pressed into service. But during its first half year - a period some called "*The Phony War*" - not much fighting took place in Western Europe. That is, not until Hitler invaded Norway and Denmark in April, 1940. This invasion of Scandinavia sparked rumors that Hitler's next target would be The Netherlands. But despite repeated warnings from the Dutch embassy in Berlin, the Dutch government strongly believed that Hitler would respect the Netherlands' neutrality. After all, the Dutch had been neutral during the First World War, and this had benefited Germany. So the Dutch were convinced that Hitler would pass them by. They were almost right.

By 29 October, 1939 the German Army had abandoned plans for invasion of The Netherlands. But the *Luftwaffe* - the German Air Force - objected. Lacking any long range bombing squadrons, they needed forward airfields in Holland for the upcoming war against England.¹⁹ So, during February and March, 1940, the Germans finalized plans for the attack in the West - plans which included invasion of The Netherlands. By May the omens became more and more threatening. On 6 May the British envoy at the Vatican sent a dispatch to London :

¹⁶ Information from his brother Hendrikus van Tuyl [A1.2.4.1.4.7.4.4.12].

¹⁷ Furstner, H. and Van der Stoep, D., "Jaren weten meer dan boeken," Baarn, 1980, pg. 102. Total sales were 8,000 guilders; 10 publishers earned more than their costs, 29 less, and 2 sold nothing. Because of this disappointing result, the publishers didn't participate in following years.

¹⁸ Information from Mrs. E. van Tuyl-Hak. His bride was Egberdina Hak from Haaften.

¹⁹ Deighton, L., "Blitzkrieg," London, 1979, pp. 215-216.

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*The Vatican expects a German offensive in the West to begin this week. But they have had similar expectations before, so I do not attach particular faith to their present prediction. They say that it may include not only the Maginot Line and Holland and Belgium, but even Switzerland.*²⁰

Around 10 PM in the evening of 9 May the Dutch military attache in Berlin received a message from a secret informer: *Mein Lieber Freund, jetzt ist es wirklich endgultig aus.*²¹ The attache informed The Hague by telephone: *"Tomorrow morning, at daybreak."*²²

Hitler had planned the assault for 03:55 hours, twenty minutes before sunrise.²³ At that moment a combined operation would start: a land invasion coupled with bombing raids on airfields near the big cities in the western part of the country. The mission of the *Luftwaffe* would be to destroy the Dutch air force and to capture the airfields around The Hague and Rotterdam in the process. The German ground troops were to quickly take The Hague, the Dutch government, and - above all - Queen Wilhelmina.²⁴

Invasion

During the first hours of the invasion, German troops advanced rapidly into Brabant and other eastern areas of The Netherlands. In their haste to retreat northward in the face of the invading Germans, Dutch troops destroyed the bridges crossing the Maas and the Waal, including the bridge at Zaltbommel:²⁵

The family Van Hees was having lunch, it was warm and the kitchen door was open. Suddenly they heard a gigantic explosion, the table flew into the air, and the whole room was covered with dust and cement. Bob van Dijk was walking in the street and also heard the explosion. He saw fragments flying over the top of the chestnut trees and fled into a house. Later, outside, he heard : "they have blown up the bridge."

At that moment Jan van Tuyl, now a conscripted sergeant in the mounted artillery at Ypenburg, waited on high alert at this most important of the three airfields near The Hague.²⁶ Around 4 AM, approaching bombers were reported, and only minutes later the first bombs exploded:²⁷

²⁰ De Beus, J.G., "Morgen bij het aanbreken van de dag," Rotterdam, 1978, pg. 88.

²¹ De Beus, pg. 101.

²² De Beus, pg. 102.

²³ De Jong, L., "Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog," deel 3, Den Haag, 1970, pg. 3.

²⁴ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 3.

²⁵ "Denkend aan Holland," jubilee issue 75 years *Haagse Post*, 02-04-1988, pg. 52.

²⁶ Information from Mrs. E. van Tuyl-Hak. Ypenburg was defended by a batallion of grenadiers (about 1000 men), 8 light armored cars, 20 machine gun posts and several platoons of anti-aircraft artillery. The air force consisted of army *Pathfinders* (12 antiquated planes) and two platoons of fighters: 9 D-21s and 11 Douglas fighters (De Jong, pp. 12-13).

²⁷ Brongers, E. & Amersfoort, H., "De slag om de residentie 1940," Baarn, 1983, pg. 31; memories of an officer.

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High in the air we heard planes approaching. We guessed they were Germans heading for England. But the noise became stronger and we could see the planes clearly now, coming lower and lower, flying in large circles. Suddenly the anti-aircraft guns at Ypenburg started firing and through the exploding grenades the planes attacked like eagles looking for their prey.

Almost immediately the Dutch fighter planes took off to attack the invaders. But after just one hour, the Dutch air force gave up their counterattack, due to lack of gasoline and ammunition. Eight Dutch fighters were shot down; others made forced landings.²⁸

Jan van Tuyl and his fellow soldiers continued firing, destroying 16 German Junkers that had landed on the runway.²⁹ The second and third waves were also badly hit by the Dutch defenders, so the rest of the Junkers made forced landings in the meadows near the airfield or tried to find another target.³⁰ Because Ypenburg and the two other airfields near The Hague were so heavily defended, two-thirds of the invading division did not even bother to leave its home base.^{31, 32} But despite initial failure, scattered groups of paratroopers, together with airborne troops which had landed in the meadows, finally captured the airfield:³³

Coming from the south they forced a group of Dutch prisoners to walk in front and under that shelter they encircled my command post. Hearing the prisoners shout "Don't shoot, because they will kill us," I decided to cease fire.

Around 7:15 AM the airfield - with the exception of a small defense line on the northern side - was occupied by the Germans. Of the approximately 1000 Dutch defenders, only 13 were killed.³⁴

But despite the ineffective Dutch defense, the larger military objectives of this invasion at Ypenburg eluded the Germans, thanks to a number of foul-ups on their part. After their initial defeat, the Dutch command decided to retake Ypenburg. In the face of heavy resistance from the Germans, Dutch grenadiers recaptured Ypenburg - but only at the cost of their commander's life.³⁵ The Germans withdrew toward Rotterdam, intending to join the assaults near the bridges in the center of the city and at the airfield south of the harbor.³⁶

²⁸ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 13.

²⁹ Amersfoort, H., and Kamphuis, P., "Mei 1940, de strijd op Nederlands grondgebied," Den Haag, 1990, pg. 153. Also: Brongers, pg. 36.

³⁰ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 14.

³¹ The other fields were Valkenburg and Ockenburg, which were successfully defended - or so heavily damaged - that planes could not land on them.

³² Amersfoort, pg. 166.

³³ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 16; quoting the Dutch commander at Ypenburg.

³⁴ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 16.

³⁵ De Jong, deel 3, pg. 126.

³⁶ De Jong, deel 3, pp. 220-221. On 10 May a young soldier from Gameren, Jan van Steenberg, was killed at the Waalhaven airfield (Van Alphen, J. and Van Voorthuizen, J., "De Bommelerwaard 1939-1945," Zaltbommel, 1983, pg.7).

Rotterdam and Capitulation

By the time the Germans reached the suburbs of Rotterdam, Queen Wilhelmina - who they had been ordered to capture - had fled to England.³⁷ Although Dutch troops were engaged in bloody battles in the center and northeast of the country, and at the bridges in and about Rotterdam, it soon became clear that the German military power would be too great for them to resist. The last straw for the Dutch was the near-destruction of Rotterdam. From the beginning of the German invasion, desperate fighting had raged at the bridges in the center of this port city. Although the local German commander - who was engaged in surrender negotiations with the Dutch - tried to prevent it, the *Luftwaffe* dropped high-explosive bombs close to the northern bridgehead. A margarine warehouse caught fire and the burning fat spread the flames. Fire destroyed 1.1 square miles of central Rotterdam.³⁸ Around 24,000 houses and many other buildings went up in flames. Hundreds of civilians were killed.^{39, 40} After hearing German threats to bomb other Dutch cities, the Dutch commander-in-chief on 15 May ordered his field commanders to surrender. Around 7 PM the Dutch population was informed about the capitulation by radio.⁴¹ In Zaltbommel - which had actually suffered little to this point :⁴²

From the steps of the town hall (of Zaltbommel) our fellow-citizen Philips announced the surrender of The Netherlands. People were relieved, in any case our boys could not be killed anymore.

An Occupied Nation

The capitulation was a bitter shock for many of the Dutch, but they tried to make the best of it. That first summer wasn't so bad, but then nobody knew what was to come. All over the country, workers repaired damage and within months the bridges at Hedel and Zaltbommel were in full operation again. At the end of May the soldiers came home and Jan van Tuyl returned to his books, becoming a salesman for well known publishing companies like *Meulenhof* and *Van Holkema & Warendorf*.⁴³ But by May, 1942, Hitler had decided to round up all Dutch officers and non-commissioned officers who had been in active service during the invasion of 1940. Many surrendered voluntarily, but Jan van Tuyl decided to go into hiding.⁴⁴ He returned to Belgium. In Antwerp Jan made the acquaintance of a German publisher's divorced wife, and it

³⁷ The commander, Von Sponeck, was blamed by Hitler for the unsuccessful attack on The Hague. Later, he was assigned to the Eastern front in Russia. While there, he ordered his troops to retreat, causing Hitler to court-martial him. He was executed in July, 1944 (Brongers, pg. 247).

³⁸ Deighton, pp. 222-225.

³⁹ De Jong, deel 3, pp. 365/366.

⁴⁰ Deighton, pg. 225. There is no doubt that the bombing was a result of a hurry-up policy on the part of the Germans. They wanted to conclude the fighting in The Netherlands quickly, so that their armor and motorized infantry could be pushed into service in Belgium and France.

⁴¹ De Jong, deel 3, pp. 343-375. Zeeland was not included in the surrender; the fighting - including French troops - continued there until 18 May.

⁴² Van Santen, H.P., "Dagboek September 1938 - Januari 1946," in : *Tussen de Voorn en Loevestein*, jaargang XXXI, nummer 88, maart 1995, pg. 8.

⁴³ Information from Mrs. E. van Tuyl-Hak.

⁴⁴ De Jong, deel 4, pp. 926/927.

was through her that he was able to reenter the publishing business.⁴⁵ But Jan van Tuyl's countrymen did not have quite so easy a time under German occupation.

In the early days of occupation, farmers were among the first to be confronted with oppressive rules and regulations. All over the country, the Germans consolidated their control of the food supply by installing local boards: *Plaatselijke Bureauhouders voor de Voedselvoorziening* (agencies for the food supply). They registered all the farmers, their property, and produce. Farmers were obliged to convert meadows into arable land, to deliver horses to the Germans, and to produce food not only for The Netherlands, but also for Germany and for the German army. "*I hate to say it, but this [increased demand for food] had a very positive economic effect, causing the [farm] prices to increase immediately,*" recalled Hendrik van Tuyl.⁴⁶

Farmers were allowed to keep part of their production for their own consumption. Many tried to produce more than their quota, and to hold back the excess. Part of this surplus found its way to the black market, but most of it was used to help those in hiding and other local people:⁴⁷

*We managed to harvest a lot of these potatoes. We also managed to get some of these potatoes in our own warehouse, where the Dutch people could get them at night.*⁴⁸

As the war dragged on, it became increasingly difficult for farmers to produce even the minimum amount of food required. Even the Germans suffered shortages. Arie van Tuyl was working with his brother Hen during the last year of the war:⁴⁹

My brother and I were responsible for getting the vegetables, like potatoes, onions and cabbage, out of "no-man's land." The Germans wanted those vegetables very badly to feed their own armies....One night there was a noise outside the house. There was a knock on the door and then came in three dirty-looking SS-ers with guns over their shoulders. They wanted my brother to go with them to pick up a load of potatoes. It didn't look good but I offered to go along with them, so my brother could stay home with his wife and little daughter. What a night that was! There were three big trucks - guarded by ten Germans, each with a gun - that had to be loaded.... It was a foggy night but we were not allowed to use any lights going over the narrow dikes..... We were just across the river from the Canadian army. They could easily have heard us. I was expecting a burst of machine-gun fire at any time, which is usually what happened during the daytime. Up to this day I have never forgotten that night. Luckily nothing did happen and we got our three loads of potatoes.

⁴⁵ Information from Mrs. E. van Tuyl-Hak. After the liberation of Belgium in 1944 he had a bookstore in Antwerp, but in September 1945 he returned to The Netherlands.

⁴⁶ Information from Hendrik van Tuyl [A1.1.1.1.1.4b.2.5b.2].

⁴⁷ Baijense, B., "Smokkelen," in *De Toeren*, 30-04-1992.

⁴⁸ Van Tuyl-de Boer, pg. 12.

⁴⁹ Van Tuyl-de Boer, pp. 12/13.

A Time of Terror

Although the theater of war did not return to The Netherlands until 1944, the Bommelerwaard felt the side effects of conflict throughout the war. About 25 Allied planes - bombers as well as fighters - crashed in the Bommelerwaard during those terrible years. German planes that had been shot down after skirmishes with Allied fighters also fell on the villages.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most terrifying were the V-1 *Buzz Bombs*. These monsters often fell short of their intended targets in England, making Dutch villages their unintended victims.⁵¹ But not all the aerial terror was of German origin. In June, 1944 a British flier landed by parachute in a meadow halfway between Gameren and Kerkwijk. With the aid of the resistance he was able to return to England. But his plane crashed south of the Maas at Vlijmen, killing 8 people and destroying 32 houses.⁵²

Despite the bombs, V-1s, and plane crashes, the majority of the casualties in the Bommelerwaard - as in the rest of The Netherlands - were perpetrated by the German troops. Members of the Resistance, innocent civilians, and most of all the Jewish citizens, suffered heavy losses. The Germans, as they had done throughout their occupied territories, initiated a hunt for Jews to deport to death camps. Dutch citizens were required to fill out registration forms detailing their ancestry: any genealogical impurity could condemn them.⁵³ One of the most tragic episodes in the Bommelerwaard was the raid on a Zaltbommel hotel where several Jewish families had found refuge after the deportations started.⁵⁴ In the early evening of 8 July, 1944, German soldiers encircled the *Hotel Gottschalk* in the center of Zaltbommel. In front of this hotel stood a deaf man from Zuilichem who could not hear their orders. The Germans shot him dead. Soldiers then rushed into the hotel and immediately killed the owner, Harrie van der Laak. They also shot Mary Wolff, a Jewish girl from Amsterdam who was engaged to marry Harrie's son. Three other women were arrested. But despite their search, the Germans were not able to find what they had come for: seven Jewish refugees. The trembling fugitives had hidden themselves in a small place beneath a new floor, in a space prepared for the day when their presence would be betrayed. Two days later the seven fugitives fled during the night to safety elsewhere. They all survived the war. Two of the fleeing seven, Arnold Hes and his wife Rosa Kahn, walked early in the morning to Gameren where they hid themselves between piles of bricks at the brick factory. Later that morning they found refuge in the church tower, assisted by the local policeman Piet Spin and Piet van Utrecht. After crossing the Waal and hiding at the brick factory in Haaften, they finally found refuge in Almkerk, where they stayed until the end of the war.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Van Alphen, pp. 9-15.

⁵¹ Van Alphen, pp. 17-20.

⁵² *De Toren*, 23-06-1994.

⁵³ Ironically, these forms - many of which are today on file in the *Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* in the Hague - provide a valuable source of data for family history researchers.

⁵⁴ Not all the Jews were Dutch nationals. Many had come from Germany seeking asylum in the land where those of their faith had been granted refuge for centuries.

⁵⁵ Keser, H., "De Overval op Hotel Gottschalk," in : *De Toren*, 23-06, 30-06, 07-07 and 14-07-1994.

September 1944

On 8 June, 1944, *Die Vliegende Hollander*, a resistance newspaper, trumpeted the Allied invasion at Normandy: *Eisenhower tot Europa*. By September, the military situation had changed dramatically. German troops withdrew from Brabant into the Bommelerwaard and ordered the evacuation of Zaltbommel. On 6 September most of its citizens had to leave their homes, abandoning most of their possessions.⁵⁶ *It was a desolate procession. One saw an endless line of hand-carts, bicycles, horses and wagons move on the country roads.*⁵⁷

In September, 1944, British and Polish airborne troops launched an offensive called *Operation Market Garden*, whose objective was to secure the bridges across the Waal at Nijmegen and the Neder Rijn at Arnhem. Immediately after these airborne landings near Oosterbeek and the battles for the bridges at Nijmegen and Arnhem, a second evacuation took place in the Bommelerwaard. On 24 September the villagers of Kerkdriel, Alem, and Rossum and other places in the southeastern part of the waard were ordered to leave. Many did not return before the end of May, 1945.⁵⁸ The people in the villages along the Waal - Gameren, Nieuwaal, Zuilichem, and Brakel - were not evacuated. The Germans needed these villagers for agricultural production, food distribution, and other activities.⁵⁹ Hendrik van Tuyl was among those pressed into service:⁶⁰

Many times we were summoned to transport food. They were long and exhausting trips. I once returned with others from Culemborg, on a high wagon loaded with grain. I was so tired that I tumbled off my wagon. Suddenly a car with Germans passed. They stopped and threatened me with a gun. I was forced to offload the grain. With an empty wagon I returned to Gameren, and did I have a lot to explain! After the airborne droppings near Oosterbeek I was ordered with others to transport ammunition to the theater of war. We went with our wagons to Renkum and stayed there for some days, sleeping in an open barn. Then we had to reload the wagons again before we returned to Geldermalsen. I wanted to go home, and during the night I saw my chance. [While I was looking] after the horses, the soldiers were sleeping - drunk. I stole a horse and galloped away.

That autumn and winter many men were ordered to assist the Germans with construction of trenches and shelters. When they didn't get enough hands, the Germans started terrorizing the citizens:⁶¹

I was paying a visit to my fiance, when German soldiers arrived at her house. I fled through the back door and although a soldier shot at me, I was able to hide in the watercourse behind the farm. Later that night I returned home and decided to go into hiding, which I did in Andel, west of the Bommelerwaard.

⁵⁶ Van Alphen, pg. 156; Peters, C.H.J., "Gelderland bevrijd," Hulst, 1994, pg. 14.

⁵⁷ Van der Starre, J., "Nazi Terreur in de Bommelerwaard," Utrecht, 1945, pg. 15.

⁵⁸ Peters, pp. 14/15.

⁵⁹ Peters, pp. 55 and 78.

⁶⁰ Information from Hendrik van Tuyl [A1.1.1.1.1.4b.2.5b.2].

⁶¹ Information from Hendrik van Tuyl [A1.1.1.1.1.4b.2.5b.2].

A villager from Nieuwaal, Jobke Ekelmans, wasn't so lucky: he was mortally wounded during such a raid.⁶²

A Precision Bombardment

The area along the Waal from Heerewaarden to Brakel was of importance to the Germans because it lay on their supply and transport route, so they defended it heavily.⁶³ Half way between Gameren and Zaltbommel the Germans dug an antitank ditch: they also built a stronghold near the ferry at the Kluit in Gameren.⁶⁴ Around 100 soldiers of the *Uebersetzstab Nord* and the *Kriegsmarine* - along with their many boats - occupied the village, supported by anti-aircraft artillery and 88 mm artillery.⁶⁵ The Germans counted a total strength of approximately 4,000 men in the Bommelerwaard.⁶⁶ Their commander was Lt.General Reinhard of the 88th Corps of *Heeresgruppe H*, who had his headquarters in the *Stoutenhof*, the villa built by the family De Jong, which at that time was owned by the Secretary of Gameren.⁶⁷ In December, 1944 Reinhard was very busy preparing an offensive against the Allied troops in Brabant, but when the German offensive in the Belgian Ardennes faltered, his offensive was canceled.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the villa in Gameren was a center of German military activities. "[There was much coming and going of] high [ranking], properly dressed officers with shining polished boots and red stripes on their trousers," remembers Piet van Tuyl, who lived as a boy on a farm opposite of the villa.⁶⁹ Through intelligence channels, the Allies knew about this German headquarters. On 31 December, 1944 Piet and his family were sitting in their kitchen. Suddenly, they heard the unmistakable sound of approaching aircraft:⁷⁰

Because my father did not trust it, he ordered us into the cellar. Just in time, because we heard heavy explosions; Allied dive-bombers attacked the Stoutenhof. Coming from the south, they turned above the Waal and attacked from the north. According to my father - who went to see how the land lay - the first attack was without result. But the second assault was a precision bombardment; almost only the target was destroyed. Some bombs dropped on the Del [the village green] and some on the open meadows behind the villa.

No civilians were wounded during this attack, nor was General Reinhard, who did not actually live in the Stoutenhof. How many Germans were killed would never be known, but it may have

⁶² Verkuil, G., "Vader had zich verborgen tussen de snijbonen," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 21-09-1994; Van Alphen, pg. 87.

⁶³ Peters, pg. 74.

⁶⁴ Van Wijk, P.C., "Een reisverslag uit 1944," in : *Extra Nieuws*, 08-03-1995.

⁶⁵ Van Alphen, pp. 83-85; Van Wijk, *Extra Nieuws*, 01-03-1995. According to Hendrik van Tuyl, not only Germans, but also Russian (Georgian) troops occupied Gameren.

⁶⁶ Van Wijk, 01-03-1995.

⁶⁷ Van Alphen, pg. 31; Van der Starre, pp. 100/101; Van Wijk, 01-03-1995.

⁶⁸ Bollen, H. and Vroemen, P., "Canadezen in actie," Uitgeverij Terra, 1994, pg. 72.

⁶⁹ Verkuil, G., "Oudejaarsdag 1944 vernielden bommen Duits hoofdkwartier in Gameren," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 28-12-1994. See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.1.1.1.1.3.1.1.3.7].

⁷⁰ Piet van Tuyl, in : Verkuil, 28-12-1994.

been as many as 30.⁷¹ After this debacle, the Germans moved their headquarters to Brakel.⁷²

The morning after the bombing found the *Grune Polizei* in Gameren conducting a house-to-house search, searching for evidence that the *Resistance* was involved in the attack. The frightened villagers feared executions, but nothing of the kind happened, thanks to the intervention of General Reinhard himself. Declaring that "...this [information pinpointing the headquarters] did not come from Gameren, but rather from Deil," he preemptively put an end to further bloodshed.⁷³

The people of the Bommelerwaard did not know until much later how close they had come to total disaster. In October, 1944 the Allies attacked the area north of the Waal. The Germans resorted to the time-honored defense ploy: they breached the dikes! With the whole area inundated for months, terrible fights raged on the small dikes and even on the water. Fearing attacks from the south, the Germans also prepared plans for the inundation of the entire Bommelerwaard and Tielerwaard (*Plan Salamander*). Fortunately, this plan was not executed, because - among other reasons - General Reinhard and the other German commanders argued that they too would be hampered by the water.⁷⁴ So the war-weary farming villages along the Waal were at least spared the scourge of flood.

Van Tuyls Along the Front

As it had been during so many previous wars, the Bommelerwaard was once again a military front - a front, however, full of civilians. Villages along the Maas like Ammerzoden, Hedel, and Kerkdriel were almost completely destroyed. On 18 January, 1944, Ammerzoden was hit by more than 1,000 artillery shells.⁷⁵ Gameren was a frequent target of heavy shelling.⁷⁶ On 10 March, 1944 the village counted 12 dead and 11 wounded.⁷⁷ Bombing also claimed victims: in January a sister of Gerda de Hoop was killed,⁷⁸ and on 2 February a refugee from Well died in an Allied bombing raid on Gameren.⁷⁹ In Zaltbommel, three citizens met their end on 19 February. Among them was Jacob Martinus van Tuyl and his 2-year old niece.⁸⁰

⁷¹ Van Alphen, pg. 31, estimated 7 killed. Gerda de Hoop-de Jongh placed the death toll at 25 to 30.

⁷² Verkuil, 28-12-1994.

⁷³ Van Alphen, pg. 31. Reinhard probably had information about the activities of a resistance group in Deil, and was either jumping to the conclusion that they were responsible, or using them as a scapegoat to prevent reprisals by his men in Gameren.

⁷⁴ Van Hemmen, F., "Ooievaar brengt zondvloed; december 1944-maart 1945," Kesteren, 1995, pp. 89/90 and 105. The German generals were right. This is exactly what happened north of the Waal.

⁷⁵ *Tussen de Voorn en Loevestein*, jaargang XXXI, nr. 88, maart 1995, pg. 3.

⁷⁶ Peters, pg. 74.

⁷⁷ Van Santen, pg. 13.

⁷⁸ Information from Gerda de Hoop-de Jongh.

⁷⁹ Letter from B.Baijense to J. Groenendijk, 03-02-1993.

⁸⁰ Van Santen, pg. 13; Keser, H., "Verduisterde Jaren," Zaltbommel, 1995, pp. 5 and 18. Jacob's 2 year old niece was Gozina Comelia van Tuyl [See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.3.2.2, and A1.2.4.1.4.7.3.2.4.1].

A Bridge Too Far...



Retreating Dutch forces destroyed the bridge at Zaltbommel - a key truck and train crossing of the River Waal - in 1940. It was soon rebuilt by the conquering Germans, and played a key role in the north-south transportation network throughout the war.

In the War's final weeks - during April, 1945 - a combined force of British and Dutch (including the *Prinses Irene Brigade*) attempted to recapture this vital objective. Attacking from the south, the Allies crossed the Maas, established a bridgehead at Hedel, but were met by fanatical German opposition. A veteran of that battle recalled:

We defended the bridgehead with 300 men against a German force majeure of 1200 men. Before the counterattack we were under heavy fire. The 88 mm shells caused an enormous noise. And the assailants kept coming, running into our fire. It wasn't pleasant. The older German prisoners were happy that it was over, but the younger ones - sometimes 15, 16 years old and badly equipped - were still very fanatic.

The "fanatic" German opposition did not last much longer. On 6 May, they capitulated, leaving many soldiers to flee for their lives - often on stolen horses or bicycles.

Reference: Kers, B., "Irenebrigade veteraan J.Kuneman maakte gevechten bij Hedel mee," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 12-04-1995.

In January 1945 the Germans - expecting an Allied attack from the south - decided to evacuate the villages along the Maas. Some evacuees came to Gameren and other villages along the Waal, on foot, with few possessions, nearly freezing as they came.⁸¹ Throughout the frozen winter, the evacuees walked from Zaltbommel to Houten (near Utrecht) where they were then transported by train - in cattle cars - to Friesland.⁸² By the end of January two thirds of the Bommelerwaard had been evacuated; only in Gameren, Zuilichem and Brakel were people allowed to stay.⁸³ Naturally, many refugees found their way to homes in these villages: among them, some Clarissen nuns. Sister Paula, a member of this order, remembered:⁸⁴

Some high farm carts arrived on which the elderly found space. We nuns had to walk. On our way to Zaltbommel we walked on wooden shoes, [the ones] we used while working in the garden. It was freezing very hard and the snow stuck to our wooden shoes. During that terrible journey we regularly had to take shelter in the ditches because of the heavy shelling.

In Kerkwijk, some fleeing nuns met up with Evert van Tuyl from Gameren, who was assisting a family there with its evacuation:⁸⁵

We were just on our way, when we saw five nuns nearing from Ammerzoden, totally exhausted. It was freezing and snowing and they were in a very bad condition. The nuns were very glad to find a place on my cart... The nuns worried about a place to pass the night but the minister [at Gameren] welcomed them in the rectory. Another group from Ammerzoden found refuge in the Reformed church.

So it was that the besieged people of Gameren offered shelter and sustenance to their desperate countrymen.

The War's Violent Last Weeks

The Allied attack on the Bommelerwaard never came. Unlike their Spanish and French predecessors in earlier centuries, the Allied commanders chose not to pass through Zaltbommel and Utrecht, but rather to direct their attacks toward the eastern part of the country. But still, raids and reconnoitering patrols took their toll. Civilian authorities cooperated in the never-ending search for hidden Allied pilots, *onderduikers*⁸⁶ and members of the *Resistance*.

During the final weeks of the war, numerous acts of fanaticism and retribution were perpetrated by the German occupation forces. In Gameren on 23 April, 1945, Evert van Tuyl and some other

⁸¹ Peters, pg. 77; Van Alphen, pp. 75/76.

⁸² Peters, pg. 77.

⁸³ Peters, pg. 78.

⁸⁴ Verkuil, G., "Maanden lang zaten we met ons bord op schoot," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 16-11-1994.

⁸⁵ Verkuil, G., "Tijdens evacuatie vonden katholieken en hervormden elkaar," in : *Brabants Dagblad*, 25-01-1995. See: *Dutch Genealogy*, [A1.2.4.1.4.7.4.4.10].

⁸⁶ *Onderduikers* - literally "under-divers" - were persons in hiding from the authorities, usually through the connivance of some sympathetic citizen. Many *onderduikers* were fugitive Jews. Perhaps the most famous *onderduikers* were the family of Anne Frank, whose diary became famous after the war.

boys were standing on the dike when they saw two German soldiers pedaling over from Nieuwaal. One of the soldiers had two mines hanging from his bike:⁸⁷

They walked down from the dike and entered the church tower, sending away some people who tried to rescue some valuables. Shortly afterward, we heard a dull explosion and there was no longer a tower and neither was there a church.

One day later, German soldiers destroyed the old windmill at Gameren.⁸⁸ In two days Gameren had lost two of its oldest and most historic buildings, the church and the mill, both of which dated from the 14th century. There was absolutely no military purpose for their destruction. The son of the miller, thirteen year old Marinus van Ballegooijen, who was at home with the flu, witnessed the destruction of the mill next door:^{89, 90}

Early in the afternoon some German soldiers arrived and warned us that we had one hour to vacate the house and the mill. They then went to Nieuwaal where they blew up the church and also to Zuilichem to inform the miller there about their intentions. But they did not return to Zuilichem, probably because they had used all their explosives in Gameren and Nieuwaal. While the soldiers were in Nieuwaal, we - with the help of friends and neighbors - put as much as we could into safekeeping. Around three o'clock the soldiers returned and carried boxes with ammunition into the mill. We were forced to keep distance and standing in the Burgerstraat we saw the soldiers hiding behind the dike. Then with an enormous explosion the mill collapsed, its wings falling on top of the ruins. Two days later my father [saw] the Ortskommandant in Zaltbommel [who] apologized for the act of terror, stating that it was carried out by three young whipper-snappers who acted on their own behalf.

Perhaps chagrined at the senseless destruction being carried out by his men, this same *Ortskommandant* had some days earlier signed an agreement with leading citizens of Zaltbommel, promising to prevent the destruction of their cathedral-like *Sint Maarten's* church, which had already been planted with explosives.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Verkuil, G., *Brabants Dagblad*, 18-01-1994. The following items were rescued: the pulpit, the baptismal font, 2 copper candles, 2 mural decorations, and the bible. Because the tower fell into the church, the building was totally demolished. After the war the decision was taken to rebuild a new church further inland, on the *Del* [the village green]. It was dedicated in 1954.

⁸⁸ Verkuil, G., *Brabants Dagblad*, 18-01-1994.

⁸⁹ He later married Roelofke van Tuijl [A1.1.1.1.1.3.10.1.2].

⁹⁰ Information from Marinus van Ballegooijen. These soldiers were probably also responsible for the destruction that same day of a house near the *Kluit* and one of the chimneys of the brick factory. After the war collaborators were brought in to rebuild the chimney (Keser, H., "Over de wederopbouw in 1945," in : *De Toren*, 10-08-1995).

⁹¹ Van Alphen, pp. 181-185.

Gameren's Windmill ~ A Casualty of War

Before 23 April, 1944:



An unfortunate casualty of the War's final weeks, Gameren's windmill was destroyed on 23 April, 1945 in a callous act of vandalism perpetrated by German soldiers. The village lost its centuries-old church the same way. There was absolutely no military motive for this destruction.

After 23 April, 1944:



Liberation

The Van Tuyls - along with most of their countrymen - had suffered mightily during the war's final months.⁹² By late March, 1945, General Montgomery - whose failed attempts to cross the Rhine at Nijmegen and Arnhem had prolonged the suffering of the Dutch people - finally succeeded. Under massive air cover, his troops crossed into enemy territory at Wesel, just upstream from Nijmegen. The Allies quickly drove toward Berlin, and by 4 May, the German troops yielded to Montgomery.⁹³ On 6 May, 1945 the German troops in The Netherlands capitulated. A proclamation issued by D.W. van Dam van Brakel, commander in the Bommelerwaard of the *Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten* (combined resistance organizations), read:⁹⁴

After five years of occupation the hated enemy is now forced to leave our country. The power of the allied armies was too great and after a tough, successful battle the usurper is beaten, his country occupied and his army destroyed. Her Majesty the Queen has returned and so the holy symbol of Dutch independence is in our midst again. The Netherlands has risen once more.

The Dutch underground, so long suppressed by the occupying forces, took immediate action against collaborators and Germans. A Canadian General in charge of troops that poured in to occupy The Netherlands and restore order after the surrender recalled:⁹⁵

My first problem was with the Dutch underground. They were armed and wanted to shoot every German, Dutch quisling and collaborator they could lay their hands on. In several towns German soldiers and collaborators were executed before I could put a stop to it. It was hard to blame the Dutch. They had been through hell...

But the Canadians - and other Allied troops - were heartily welcomed by the long-suffering Dutch people. One of the underground papers rolled out the welcome mat:⁹⁶

A hearty welcome to you, soldiers of the Allied Armies. Five years ago foreign troops overran our country. They came as usurpers and oppressors. We hated to see them walk through our streets and live in our houses. Now again foreign troops march along our canals and enter our homes. This time they have come as our friends, as our liberators....We only want to say thank you with all our hearts. God bless you all!

Once again, the Bommelerwaard and its people - including countless Van Tuyls - had survived military conquest, and lived to see the oppressors driven from their land.

⁹² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 29, pg. 1023. An estimated 200,000 Dutch civilians had been killed during the 5 years their country was occupied.

⁹³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition, vol. 29, pp. 1020-1021. The official surrender was signed at General Eisenhower's headquarters on 8 May.

⁹⁴ Keser, H., "Bevrijding," in *De Toren*, 03-05-1984.

⁹⁵ Gilbert, M. "The Day the War Ended," 1995, pg. 153. This source references the statements of Canadian General Harry Foster.

⁹⁶ Houwaart, D., "Trouw, een ondergrondse krant," Kampen, 1978 (3e jaargang, liberation issue).