

Coby van Riel

Personal Experiences in the War of 1940 -1945

10th May 1940

It had been a restless night with planes flying over and the distant sound of shooting. The shooting did not worry me too much. I was only 8 years old and I had never heard any shooting before.

I did not understand why I heard my parents talking in the other room, silently but in an anxious and agitated way. At last, it must have been about 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning that they came to me and my brother to tell us that Holland was at war with Germany. My parents looked sad and worried.

I started to wash and dress myself, when suddenly the shooting had come nearer and louder. There was a commotion outside of people getting out of their houses calling, talking and shouting.



The shop of my parents on the corner

Somebody said you could see them better on the open road leading to the beach. We lived in the west of The Hague, just one street away from Scheveningen, a fishing place and harbour at the North Sea, where the women wore traditional clothes and headdresses.

So everybody started running through the few small streets towards the old locks of the harbour. And there, with now hundreds of people, we stood there, some in silence, some shouting and arguing, some crying, watching this spectacular sight of masses of parachutists falling slowly away from the German planes, the parachutes like huge umbrellas opening and floating down.

With the other children, I started dancing and shouting. For us it was, we thought, a sudden pleasant surprise the adults had dreamed up and staged for us.

Then within minutes the whole scenery changed. There were no parachutists to be seen anymore. Other planes were still coming over and this awful shooting started; awful because the noise was increasing to a terrifying loud almost rhythmic crackle, causing people to panic, scream and cry.

I ran outside forgetting that I had not put my skirt on and instead picked up a children's apron and hastily tied the ends round my waist.

People had come into my mother's chemist shop and everybody talked at once, pointing at the airplanes, which now filled the sky with an almighty heavy droning sound. They came in their thousands and I thought it was all very exciting and perhaps something to celebrate.

Suddenly I saw things slowly falling from the planes. I heard the adults say that they were parachutists and I had learned a new word.



Even the children had stopped dancing around and now I realized that something dreadfully serious had started and the word war started to have a frightening meaning for me. At this moment I noticed that I did not have a skirt on.

I looked up at the planes and again the dropping started, but to my and everybody's horror, there were no people floating down, but bombs and bombs and bombs, whooshing and whistling, their awful sounds, falling in rapid succession, hitting the harbour and houses around us.



My brother Han

Everybody started running back to their houses and I reached my mother's shop "Drogistery" (Separate from but like a chemist, but without prescriptions.) in time, before the bombs hit the very streets we all had been running through. I was very afraid now.

The first casualties were brought into the shop. My mother gave some first aid. My father tried to keep my brother Han and me away from the sight of the crying and injured people. Helas, my mother was not trained to help the more serious injured people and when somebody came to her with blood all over his face, one eye hanging down on his cheek, she started shaking so much, shocked into a state where she could do no more, so that she had to close the shop. This sounds awful, but who are we to judge people's reactions?



Me as a young girl

Fortunately, there was a first aid post not too far away, so that people went there and I guess that by now things were getting organized, as ambulances and fire engines were driving on and off to help where they could.

The bombing went on for four days and we soon got used to react to the sirens. A continuously high and low howling sound announced that an air raid was, imminent, giving people time to get into their houses and protect themselves as best as they could. We used to huddle in a recess under the staircase of the neighbour or stand under the architraves of the doorway which was advised on the radio in emergency bulletins, issued the whole day through.

I got bored with this 'hide and seek' drill and wanted to play with the toys and wooden blocks I had in a large carton box. I turned this box over in one go and the wooden contents clattered on the linoleum floor, making my mother jump and scream. She thought that a bomb had hit our house. Her nerves must have been very shaky to mistake falling blocks for bombs, but I did not get a chance to, play anymore during unsafe periods: The siren gave one long plain sound when the air raid was over, so that people could relax until the next came along.

Rotterdam was bombed heavily and Germany threatened the Dutch government to bomb and flatten all the other big towns. An ultimatum of 12 hours was given. The Dutch had fought courageously but all in vain. Holland surrendered after the 4th day of the war. The bombing stopped and there was an eerie silence. People emerged from their houses to see the bomb damage. My mother had opened her shop again and soon after we saw the first Germans in their uniforms. We all stared at them like they were some aliens out of space. For some reason, I was scared stiff of their helmets and for a long time even after the war, when in a film I saw these helmets nicknamed, "dakpannen" ("roof tiles") they gave me the, shivers as well as having nightmares of German soldiers running after me

which often used to wake me up screaming. But the latter was maybe a result of experiences later in the war.

We noticed their loud bragging voices and soon we learned to understand their language. One of the soldiers entered our shop to buy something and although he was not unfriendly, my mother was trembling while she served him.

Until 1942 I cannot remember that anything dreadful happened to disturb our daily life too much. The only incident was when one Sunday, returning from church, we passed some German bunkers (underground shelters). German soldiers were standing guard at the entrance. We stared at them too long to their liking and to our horror one threatened us with a hand-grenade if we did not move on quickly enough. My mother pushed my brother, who was still looking over his shoulder, and he promptly walked into a lamppost with such a force that he broke some of his teeth. Although in much pain and bleeding he started running, followed by us, afraid the soldier would throw his murder weapon at us.

At some time all Dutch citizens were forbidden to listen to radios and this was constantly checked by the Germans. Most people ignored this and we listened in secret to the English broadcasts.

We were ordered to tape or blacken all the windows in case of air raids from the English and after sunset no light was supposed to shine from the houses onto the streets.

After the Dutch initially lost hope, they soon pulled themselves together and resistance groups were formed all over the country. Whenever a serious thing happened, like a German soldier being murdered etc. a curfew was immediately imposed and everybody had to be in by, if I remember well, at 8 o'clock in the evening.



One day we were ordered to hand in radios, bicycles, cars, any copper, lead, etc. Immediately people had jewelry made of these coins, of which I still have one: A small brooch showing Queen Wilhelmina on a "kwartje" (About 25p) and other things. The only cars that were not requisitioned were those that were needed for business and emergencies. They had to run on wood gas (Gas from burning wood) as there was no petrol available. Of course many Dutch people tried to hide as much as they could.

Jews were ordered to wear a yellow star, the David Star, sewn on to their clothes and they were forbidden to go to cinemas, theatres, concert halls, hotels, cafes and other public places. My own friend, Jetje Stelleman, who lived a couple of houses further on, had to wear her star as well as her whole Jewish family.

It became dangerous to have contact with Jewish people and my mother out of sheer fear told me it was better not to be friends with Jetje anymore as everybody who talked to Jews were considered Jews themselves.

Since then even after the war and up till now (2015) being 83 years old I felt and still feel sad and painful not knowing what happened to Jetje and if she survived the war.



This whole situation lasted until 1942 when suddenly the war became more serious. The Germans started to build a 'tank wall' next to the existing canal. They planned to build it in such a way that it would run parallel, although with a few miles distance from the beach. The beach was partly mined, many 'bunkers' were built and large parts of the beach were made into inaccessible terrain, 'planted' with concrete posts and barbed wire. It was forbidden to the

Dutch to enter the beaches. This whole operation was meant to keep away the British in the event of an invasion.

The next move was to announce that everybody living in this area had to leave their houses in a certain short time. My parents were forced to sell off the contents of the shop as quickly as possible and that meant that they did not get the true value; everything was sold very cheaply. They kept boxes of soap which proved to be very handy as later in the war there was no soap to buy anymore. For my brother and me they kept boxes of liquorice and probably some other useful articles which I don't remember.



Site of my uncle's café where we lived in the cellar.

My uncle and aunt offered us a temporary place to live in, a cellar under their café. My parents accepted as they thought the war would last only a few months. As it happened we lived there for over three years. Children were still allowed to go to school in the now 'German' area, called "Spergebiet", with an "Ausweis" (Permit). I used to go on my scooter which took me an hour to 'peddle' down and an hour to 'peddle' back. I wore my shoes out in a short time.

One day there was a terrific commotion in the area and I did not manage to reach the school. Germans were all over the place, an air raid was going on and there was a lot of shouting and screaming. I got very frightened and turned back home. This was the end of my long journey to school and I went to another school nearer home.

My mother tried to make a home of this unfriendly concrete cellar by partitioning the space with curtains and small carpets on the floor. We slept in one long narrow space, where also one of my cousins slept as my aunt had only 2 bedrooms upstairs.

Later we were joined by the domestic help who was slightly odd. Every evening she started talking in her sleep and shouting, "geef mij maar beschuit met muisjes!" which meant she only wanted to have a Tea-break (breakfast biscuits) with some particular Dutch sweet on it. Now in England called "Dutch Crisp bakes". She used to give me the creeps but soon we all got accustomed to her monotonous cries.

A brother of my mother and aunt and my Uncle Luuk came to live with us as well, so another bed was added to the row.

When the raids on people started, whereby boys from 16 years of age to men of 42 years old were picked up to be sent to labour camps in Germany, the son of our neighbour a student in economics joined us as well in our dormitory.

Depressing were the big drainpipes along the walls and the unavoidable noise that came from them at certain times plus the fact that there were only 2 small windows looking out into a small brick walled-area meant to catch the surplus rain water from the garden. We could only look and see some sky.

At a later time in the last winter of the war the Germans started, apart from their plan to starve the entire population in the West of the country, (as a punishment after the railways went on strike) to inundate the west as well with the result that our brick 'holes' overflowed and every morning our

cellar was flooded with an inch or two of water. The-scooping out and mopping up was a tedious job. We had to take care not to leave shoes, carpets, etc on the floor. The resulting dampness was not very healthy and my parents had a lasting struggle to fight off mildew and mould of the furniture.

Another disgusting thing was that we had to cope with a flea epidemic. When I was doing my homework at my mother's dressing table (my brother used the dining room table), I could see them jump on the towels and I became quite an expert in catching these vermin at the cost of time spent on my homework.

We had our evening meals together upstairs with the rest of the family, which by now had extended to 13 people, including the neighbours, to save fuel as there was not much left to burn.

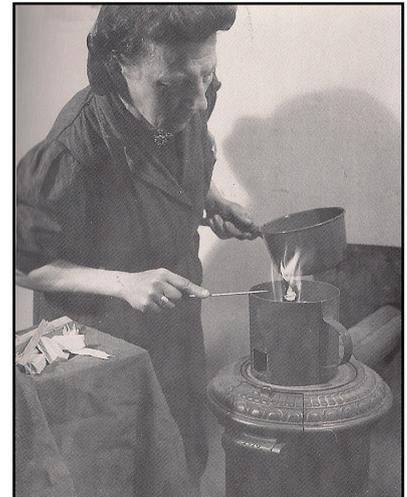
My aunt used a large wood-stove in the café called "Goliath" and in the living room a very small one called "Mayo" but nicknamed "David". The latter was made purposely for people to buy, a very economic stove to warm up just one room.

One day when my aunt heated too large a kettle of water on this "Mayo," she accidentally knocked it over and the near boiling water severely scolded her legs, too bad in that time as very few medicines were available. She was in agonizing pain and it took weeks for the wounds to heal.

One day towards sunset my Father and Brother Han were spotted by neighbours while they demolished ("sloopten") a wooden door for firewood in our "Mayo " from one of the bicycle sheds in the ally-way at the back of our and neighbours houses, which was highly punishable.

Luckily one of our close and trustworthy neighbours called Henk Overzee came up with a brilliant idea to prevent a probably less trustworthy person to call the police, for all of our family and friends quickly to go outside to give my father and Han the opportunity to mix with us and go inside straight away, while leaving the desired door behind of course which next day had disappeared, very likely stolen by somebody else in need

People got their fuel for these stoves by cutting down any wood in sight. Many trees in the woods were felled and sawn into logs and pieces, despite the German's ban to do so.



Lighting the Mayo

The last severely cold winter made people steal every bit of timber from empty houses. Doors, window-frames, even the wooden blocks between the rails of the 'trams' (electric street-cars) were broken up and taken away.

So we spent most of the time of the late afternoons and evenings with 13 people together in one room. As there was no electricity anymore the boys took it in turns to peddle bikes, put up in bike pedestals, to provide some light. We had still some candles, but soon we all had to get used to go to bed at a very early time. This was a blessing in disguise because of the increasing food shortage. People became so weak, that lying in bed and sleep as long as possible, meant saving the body's energy.

We queued every day on the street waiting for the organised "Central Kitchen" to bring food (for which we got coupons) in big metal containers, which were not cleaned properly, on open Lorries. The food in the containers was not too bad, mainly either soup or stew but too little and not much meat or fat in it.

We waited patiently sometimes for an hour or more because the deliveries were often held up by air-raids or other disturbances, it was nothing unusual to see people faint. Sometimes the Lorries did not turn up until the next day. In the summer on a hot day it meant that the food had gone off, but nevertheless we took it and ate it.

How I hated to see the bakery shop "Steenbeek," where people worked voluntary or forcibly for the guarding Germans. Once I peeped through the open doors to see these delicious custard slices. Hoping with many other children that one of the cakes would come to us in a miraculous way, we hung on until a soldier chased us away, slamming the doors in our face. For some reason I forgot the food was not delivered as usual in the "Regentesselaan" but instead in the "Kootwijkstraat", a street parallel to the street where I lived.



Getting the last morsels out of the gamellen

Large mess-tins like the small tins as used in the Army and the Navy, called "gamellen" delivered the food. They were on a sort of flat trailer and as soon as all the people in the queue got their portions in their small saucepans and other containers, the hungry children climbed on the trailer. I joined as well and we tried to get the last morsels out of the "gamellen", scraping and licking with our bare hands. It soon developed into a huge fight between some gangs of children, joined by myself as well, until pelting of stones to each other started to prevent one getting more than somebody else.

Suddenly I felt very sad and down by all this going on. I stopped, decided to give up and went home. My parents knew nothing about this fighting for these bits of food and I never told them.

People started to go to the farms and nurseries on bikes most of them without tyres, or on foot, often long distances to exchange their linen, silver or any other valuables for food. Many farmers got very rich and also a bad name for taking advantage of these terrible situations. On top of that, very often people fell in a trap when returning home, German soldiers were waiting to order these poor people to hand over all they had, including bicycles.

It was very disheartening indeed. I had my own very personal disappointment when after a whole day trying at the nurseries in "Westland"; I came home exhausted and empty handed.



Another time my classmates and I stole potatoes with plants and all what used to be flowerbeds in one of the great parks, "Zuiderpark", when suddenly one of us cried out, "run, run, they have seen us, they are coming after us!" I did not wait and ran as fast as I could, looking back once just to see that what looked like running uniforms behind us.

I managed to get home, proudly presenting my prey to my parents. To my utter shock and surprise they were

furious with me. They said they could not possibly keep stolen goods and my father took me back to the park where I had pulled out the potatoes. He told me to wait near the entrance of the park. What he did or where he left the potatoes I cannot remember, but that was my last effort to solve a food crisis.

Aardappelen							
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Aardappelen							
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
Aardappelen							
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
ALGEMEEN							
241	246	251	256	261	266	271	276
ALGEMEEN							
242	248	252	257	262	268	272	277
ALGEMEEN							
243	248	255	258	263	268	275	278
ALGEMEEN							
244	249	254	259	264	269	274	279
ALGEMEEN							
245	250	255	260	265	270	275	280
BOTER							
41 ^A	42 ^A	43 ^A	44 ^A	45 ^A	46 ^A	47 ^A	48 ^A
41 ^B	42 ^B	43 ^B	44 ^B	45 ^B	46 ^B	47 ^B	48 ^B
BOTER							
RESERVE							
B97	B98	B99	B100	B101	B102	B103	B104
TAPTEMLK							
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48

Identification cards and ration cards were distributed (but many false ones were printed by people, with the latter we were able to occasionally buy a loaf of bread, called “Regeringsbrood”, Government bread made from rye or wheat, which was very hard, probably because of shortages of yeast and fuel to bake. Also butter or vegetables, etc. but soon there was nothing left in the shop and in the last winter, which was called “Hongerwinter” (Hunger Winter) even with the ration cards there was nothing to buy. I still have the old ration cards.

The black market was thriving, I remember my uncle offering one guilder for one potato to one of his customers, a

potato merchant but the man could not help him.

We started to eat tulip bulbs nettles, grass and sugar beet, Together with the “Linsen” (Lentil) Soup of the Central Kitchen my stomach refused to keep this peculiar bitter tasting mixture inside. Every evening I woke up being sick and with my imitating the sirens in my sleep and wetting my bed. The doctor told my mother the last was a sign of physical weakness. I must have given my parents a lot of anxiety and worry. I felt very ashamed of the bed wetting and tried to clean and dry secretly.

New clothes were hard to get. My mother paid 23 guilders for 1 shapeless cotton vest and pants of an awful green colour for me. People became very handy and economic. They made do with old clothes repairing them endlessly, turning the material of old coats inside out, so that they looked nearly new, making skirts from men's old trousers, etc.

They kept up the spirit and the resistance groups fought bravely underground.

Sir Winston Churchill kept our hopes up with his calm speeches on the radio and to us he became our hero. We loved to hear the sound of the Big Ben at the start of the broadcasts.

The resistance groups printed their own news-bulletins and there was a widespread network of workers, who secretly and often at great risk distributed this welcome news.

Once I had to take an important message, hidden under the sole in my shoe a few streets further on. Children were not suspected and quite reliable as they considered this trust from the adults as to be very proud of. Moreover, they had become to dislike the Germans as much as the adults.

When I was 12 years old or so, in 1944, I went to a grammar school in the City. It was a long walk; it must have been 35 or 40 minutes. The thing I liked about it was that with the other children we passed a shop which used to sell ice -cream before the war. Now they sold what we called "shaving-cream," a very light, fluffy substance, 25 cent per portion put in a cup or mug you had to bring yourself. It gave a feeling if you had eaten a huge meal. The only difference was it did not last long. Only now have I learnt that this “Shaving cream” was made from the juice of Sugar beet.

In the City for the first time homes and a bookshop of a Jewish family burned. Raids on Jewish people had been going on for a while already and now the Germans unexpectedly started picking up boys and men from the street and after announcing that every boy and man between the age of 16-42 had to go to certain centres to be send to labour camps in Germany, they would suddenly scoop through streets, knocking and ramming doors, dragging boys and men from their hiding places.



Salvaging wood from the derelict buildings for their fires.

My cousin and neighbour's son tried to hide on a shelf at the top over a cupboard, "Sammy" the dog had seen them go in there and would not stop barking, so they had to find another hiding place.

I remember the Jewish owner of the corner second-hand furniture shop next to our cafe, suddenly taken away and us children staring unbelievably through the window.

Only one more time we managed to get our relatives together to have a birthday party. We forgot the war and we were dancing, singing and we did some sketches. We were enjoying ourselves tremendously and decided to do the conga round the billiards in the cafe. Then suddenly, shock-horror, a loud knocking on the door and shouting in German to open the door.

We all stood there silent and nailed to the floor. On order of my uncle we tiptoed quickly down into the cellar and while we were all sitting or half lying on the staircase peeping through the space under the door, we heard my uncle open the door and invite the German soldiers straight to the bar and assuring them that the noise must have come from the cinema next door. He kept on talking to them and pouring them any drinks he was still lucky to have.

When we heard the Germans change from angrily shouting into cheerful laughter, we relaxed a little but stayed silent, till after what seemed like hours, at last the soldiers, a little drunk, left the cafe.

We just continued our party, whispering our songs and tiptoeing through the cafe without putting on any lights. This was exciting as well, but my uncle did not want to take the risk of the soldiers coming back and soon we retired, most of us in the cellar. It looked like a hospital, everybody sleeping in beds or on the floor in one long row and to my aunt this was a good excuse to dress herself up as a Red Cross nurse very early next morning to wake everybody up with a sponge of cold water from her bowl. Everybody was drenched. We followed this up with a great pillow fight and I still remember the whole party as one of the best we ever had.

We drifted into 1944 and the war situation became grave and grim.

The raids on people were intensified. A few times the cinema was raided and many men were taken away. At school the boys of the higher forms were picked up. One day on a Tuesday in September there was a commotion and there were rumours through the whole town that the liberators were practically on our doorsteps and people got so excited that they actually believed that the end of the war was there.

They started dancing and singing in the streets, ignoring the warnings of the cautiously minded. As it happened it was a false alarm and the Germans reacted by shooting and arresting people all over the place. Many lost their lives that day. This tragic day was to be called and still referred to as "Dolle Dinsdag" (Mad Tuesday). My mother started looking for my brother and me, but we managed to get home safely. After all this our school closed down.

The winter turned out to be very cold and hard indeed and the food shortage became even worse, as the Germans had decided to starve the population as mentioned before. As proper coffins were difficult to get by and no cars or petrol were available not even wood-gas anymore, people who died had to be buried, carried in rough wooden coffin-like boxes on hand-carts.

However, apart from starvation, very few illnesses occurred and people did not give up. They did not moan, but courageously plodded on with their daily lives which were often broken up by bombings and V1s.

On New Years Eve 1944 we saw one of them go wrong. It stopped high in the sky, its huge flames spouting. We stood stunned, except me screaming non-stop.

Nobody told me off. Then suddenly the V1 turned and came down a couple of streets further on, destroying most of the houses, killing and maiming many people. Windows were broken over a wide area.

Very frightening were the V1's often exploding at launching, causing great damage at the houses. When that happened the Germans had only 15 minutes to escape. The launching pads were at the "Frederik Hendrik plein" (square) where nearby I used to live. My brother Han who one day passed this square, witnessed one such an explosion and ran away with the flying away Germans along the "Spergebiet" (border of no entrance or exit without permission "Ausweis") down the for us well-known "Johan de Witlaan".

A few other places were for instance "Clingendaal" a military area and barracks in the district Benoordenhout where "Seyss-Inquart", by Hitler given the title of "Rijkscommissaris", had his headquarters.

I think the cause was that people were undernourished by the increasing shortage of food which started to effect people's behaviour.

I'll never forget the quarrel between my parents and uncle and aunt, something about the talk of our family better to stay some time in the cellar where we lived to give them some privacy in there own living-space. At some point the quarrel and shouting between my uncle and father got out of control which frightened me. Luckily my mother came in between and stopped them as they all noticed that I was there watching and listening in fear.

My mother then took our own family down into the cellar where we all calmed down. Luckily this episode never occurred again, but for a while it left a strain between the families. We still had to live together for about another 4 or 5 months until the liberation, a time we did not know then how long that would be.

We all started losing weight rapidly. My uncle Luuk, the brother of my mother who had come to live with us became very ill. One morning he was taken to hospital; he died soon after of starvation and cancer of the stomach. My parents became ill as well and their voices changed. I was told later that this often happens to severely underfed people.

The doctor came in and from my hidden place behind my bed I heard her (woman doctor) say that they (my parents) better die, as she could not do anything for them. It would help if they could only have some broth every day to stay alive. I went straight away to a chicken-farm and asked the farmer if he could give me a chicken and I explained the situation. He was not very friendly and as he wanted to shut the door, I put my foot inside and promised him a small loaf of bread in exchange. How I did not know, because I knew even though my father's job was to deliver bread, there was no bread anymore. So whatever I said, it was in vain and the man forced me to pull my foot back and slammed the door close.

Next I chose the biggest pan from my aunt's kitchen and went to the well known dairy "van Grieken" that was taken over by the Germans and used as kitchen and canteen. I remembered the lovely smell of cooked food, when I passed the building every day on the way to school. Two soldiers stood guard and I asked them politely and friendly whether they could give me some food for my sick parents. At first they laughed and teased me, but when I kept on nagging them, they got very angry and told me that if the Queen, that "swinehund" had not left the country we would have had plenty of food.

When they pointed their guns at me, threatening to shoot, I ran off, the empty pan under my arm. Coming home my parents were not at all pleased and told me however much they appreciated my thoughts and efforts, I was not to do this again. Somehow my parents managed to stay alive.

Only a few times we were lucky to obtain a bag of grain from unknown source to me, probably the black market. We had to sort out the grain as mouse droppings were included. This was a time consuming job, but we didn't mind as time was one of the few things we had plenty of. We made fun of it by making a game to see who was first to finish his or her portion and who had the most droppings.

My aunt would grind the grain and bake the most delicious bread with it or "roggepap", a kind of porridge made with water which tasted so lovely, that we thought we would like to eat it for ever even after the war would be finished.

There was nothing to buy in the food shops anymore and the only things available at the greengrocers were bunches of parsley for which my mother had to pay 6 guilders each which was about £6.00, a lot of money at that time and customers were allowed to buy only 3 to 6 bunches.

However times became worse and the only highlight was one evening when it was already dark and we were sitting together around the light of one precious candle when we heard a sudden knocking and banging on the window. It gave us a start, because we never knew whether it would be a raid or somebody trying to find a hiding place while escaping from the cinema next door: Sometimes this cinema was raided by the German soldiers to pick up young men.

Well, after my brother, a cousin and the neighbour's son hastily had left the room to go to their hiding places, my uncle dared to slightly open the curtains and shout "Who is there?" To our great surprise and joy my uncle and cousin from Arnhem in the east of Holland had managed to get to us

by dodging the Germans, travelling by night and hiding in the daytime. We all laughed, cried and hugged each other, knowing how dangerous such a journey was. They took the risk though because they had heard that the situation in the west was very bad and that many people were dying of starvation. As there was no means of contact either by telephone or mail, which was blocked or stopped by the German occupiers, they decided to see for themselves.

They had brought 2 suitcases with food, emergency rations like "zeekaak", and a very hard biscuit, normally eaten by people who used to be at sea for a long time.

There was much to talk about, exchange all the latest news and to hear that all our other relatives in Arnhem were safe and sound.

As it had taken my uncle and cousin a few days to reach us, they were now very tired and dirty. They had something to eat and drink, went to bed and slept for many hours.

The next day after they'd had a long soak in the bath (my cousin had to be scrubbed clean!) they left after again hugging each other and us thanking them gratefully. The food they'd brought sustained us, for several days feeding 13 people: my uncle, aunt and their 2 children, my parents, my brother and I, another uncle and the neighbours mother, father and son, Annie the servant (plus 1 small dog).

Help for the undernourished children came from IKOR (Or IKB according to my Brothers diary of the war), an international church organization. All children had to come to certain centres to be examined by doctors. We were divided into A, B or C groups; the C groups being the worst off children. My brother and I were placed in C and three times a week we were asked to come to the Centre and bring a small saucepan to be filled with porridge or stew.

The problem was that as soon as we came home the whole family ate from this little portion. As soon as the committee of IKB (International Kerk Bureau) got to know this, they let the children stay in the Centre to eat everything there and then. That was much better.

A kind butcher called Mr Beusekom, who's shop was in the Nunspeetlaan asked my mother if she would allow my brother and me to have a lunch of some soup every Wednesday in his shop. Of course she gratefully accepted and we were surprised and pleased to see real pieces of meat in the soup. Some children's stomachs were not used to proper food anymore and they were sick straight away but ate it again! Soon my brother and I became a little stronger.

The English started bombing Germany, joined by the Canadians and Americans. Every night we could hear the droning of hundreds of planes going over and we knew the war could not last much longer now.

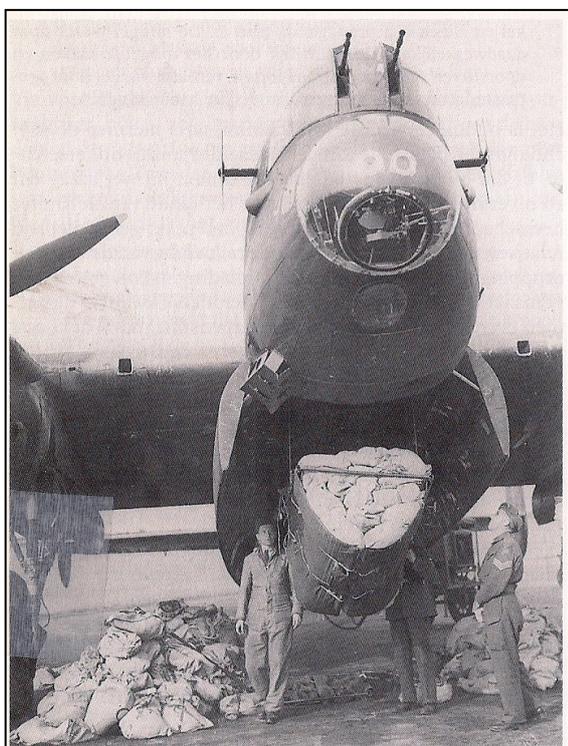
The centre of Rotterdam was bombed; the Northern parts of The Hague also; we could see this from a distance. Tragic was that the English bombers confused two districts. They should have bombed "Benoordenhout," where there was a large concentration of the notorious Gestapo Headquarters. Instead they bombed "Bezuidenhout," a quiet residential district.

My mother happened to be there visiting a cousin of mine who had her first baby in a maternity hospital 2 days before. There were many casualties and my mother and other visitors were told to lie under the beds, as the bombing was severe.

However, my mother could not stand it any longer and at her own risk, she ran out of the hospital back home. How she ever got safely through, I don't know. The next day my cousin and her husband with their new born baby came to us as the hospital was bombed flat and my cousin had to flee with the baby, only to find her own home gone, and then walked with her husband and baby to where we lived, a distance of about an hour. (I don't know if somebody helped them). She had

absolutely nothing left and a friend of mine and I went round to other mothers who we knew had babies to ask for some clothes and nappies.

As it became clear to the Germans that they were losing the war, they allowed English planes to drop parcels with food at certain times and certain places, known as Operation "Manna! The Americans did the same known as operation "Chowhound". This was a tremendous sight. Everybody was out in the streets and many of them on rooftops to see these low flying planes dropping the food parcels on parachutes, a very moving sight indeed. I felt like crying and laughing at the same time like everybody else. It was as if there was no difference in class or age.



We were, and still are very grateful for having been saved just in time from starvation.

The food was distributed. We were given corned beef, biscuits and chocolate. We were warned to eat small portions and slowly in order to let our stomachs get used to this proper food again.

Soon an assignment of Swedish bread arrived, baked after the flour had been dropped, and never in my life has bread tasted so delicious anymore. At last the typical hunger stomach pains disappeared.

People were getting excited once more with the end of war in sight but after the experience of "Dolle Dinsdag" everybody kept quiet in fear of German reprisals.

At last on the 5th of May 1945 our allied liberators came rolling in with their tanks and again people were out on the street but this time it was real and they

could let go and sing and dance with thousands of people going down the streets. It was like one big family party. My mother had called me out of my bed as the news came through in the evening at perhaps 7 or 8 o'clock.

I saw the soldiers on the tanks, showered with masses of flowers, girls climbing onto the tanks and kissing our liberators. I saw the German soldiers taken prisoner and their Dutch girls all their hair shaved off run the gauntlet between rows of booing and shouting people.

It was amazing to see all the red, white and blue and orange flags, which people had managed to hide all those years and now waving them or draping the houses.

Very slowly after many parties and celebrations people went back to normal. It took many months to have a house of our own in Scheveningen again. (A Dutch Harbour by the sea in The Hague)

As it took a little while for the English to take over from the Germans in that area, only the schools were opened and my brother and I got our "Ausweis" to enter and later a permit from the English and once again we had a long way to walk to school and back home.

It also took a while to get food in the shops and unfortunately people still died from the starvation period before the end of the war.

It was very strange and eerie to see all the empty, plundered and damaged houses. After school time my brother and I went into some of the empty houses and we got the shock of our lives to find beds and German uniforms under the broken up floorboards.

One day a very sad thing happened when my brother Han, myself and 2 sons of the neighbours, a close family of our family, went to school and despite the warning not to take the shortcut via the open field with the hidden mines, the elder son Bobbie Ruis did just that. He stepped on a mine and was instantly killed. His little brother ran home and told his mother that he had seen Bobbie suddenly fly into the sky. The little boy had no idea that something very serious had happened. It was a big shock to the parents of the boys, relatives, us and many more people who had known them.

I took it on me to try to get my parents a house to live in. They had decided not to go back to the old house and not to have a shop anymore.

So when people started to come back I asked them to tell me the name and address of their landlords which they were very reluctant to do so, as they were all still very afraid and suspicious of questions, even asked by children. One



Modern day photo of the family home bottom left.

lady who was so scared, that I had to put my foot in the door (I got very used to this tactic) was at last convinced that my family's only aim was to live in peace as ordinary neighbours. She gave me the information I wanted and lo and behold I met this very kind landlord who gave me a whole bunch of keys of several houses.

My mother managed to get a day permit and we chose a house we liked best and was the least damaged. Also here, there were remains of a German's 'den' under the floorboards.

After the English had done their last duties and the Germans were taken prisoner, the area was free again and soon all the houses were occupied.

One nastier thing happened. The water in the canal near the tank-wall was contaminated. We did not know this and we never knew if this was done deliberately or not. As children used to play there every day and many swam in the water there was soon an epidemic of scabies which was very itchy and painful. My brother and I caught it as well. We had to be covered with a certain sulphur cream which we got from the Health Authorities. We had to sleep with this cream on us and the next day we had to be scrubbed with a hard brush and lots of soapy water. Our pyjamas and underwear we had worn that night had to be burned and we were asked to bring mattresses and bed linen to Health Centres to be burned.

However my mother cleaned everything herself and surprisingly we did not get this scabies back for a second time.

Our lives went slowly back to normal. The war was past and we all hoped for a better world and an everlasting peace.

Now I feel very sad that since 1945 wars happen in different countries all over the world.

Why can't people live peacefully together?

Now the situations in the world are very risky, dangerous and threatening.

I hope and pray that we will never have a third world war but it is very worrying.