

A True Story of a Scout in Times of War

Part II

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D-Day: June 6th, 1944

It was a rainy and windy morning, and J. was on his way back from the north. He had to use a ferry to cross the North Sea Canal between IJmuiden and Amsterdam and the mooring place, as well as the boat, was guarded by elderly German soldiers. One of them stepped out into the rain and asked for J.'s identity papers, which he took inside. After checking them - not too thoroughly - and with the ferry being on the other side of the canal, the soldier invited J. to step out of the pouring rain and take shelter in the guard house. J. was told that the "enemy" had landed "somewhere" for another raid, but not on the Dutch coast. The soldier added that he was hoping that this would be the long-expected invasion and that the war would soon be over. After crossing the canal, J. cycled on and he spotted that, despite the bad weather, there was a lot of German activity on the roads and there were more German trucks and troops around than usual. Road-blocks were manned more heavily than normal and every so often, he was stopped and asked for his identity papers. After four hours of fighting the solid wind and rain, he at last reached base - wet through - at about noon. He was greeted by his mates and was told that the Allies had landed in Normandy. This was D-Day and the Invasion had really begun! The great day they had all had been waiting for so long. Some of J.'s mates were busily cleaning their pistols and Sten guns and the Allied aircrew members, waiting for transport, were very excited too. Everyone was listening to the British radio for more news.

But Normandy was a long way off and though everybody rejoiced, no one really expected an imminent Allied arrival. That night they all gathered around the radio and listened to the BBC, but there was very little news, though General Eisenhower's message was repeated often. Winston Churchill spoke and Glen Miller's *Army Air Force Band* seemed to be on the air almost all the time, playing the familiar tunes that they knew so well and would never forget for the rest of their lives.

Soon the excitement died down, the waiting began and life resumed its normal, grey, daily routine. Allied aircrew members were taken along 'the line' to the south, soon to be replaced by others. J. resumed his courier work, covering hundreds more kilometers on his bike.

To the impatient Dutch, it seemed as if it took the Allies in Normandy a hell of a long time to break out of their bridgehead and to get on the move - it seemed to them as if they were going to stay in Normandy forever. But then it happened. The Allied armies suddenly sliced through the German defenses in France and Belgium, like a knife through butter. Paris liberated itself. (This was the ultimate dream of the Resistance, to liberate your own region before the Allies arrived.) Things moved at great speed. Brussels and Antwerp were liberated, on one and the same day. The British and Canadian forces approached the Dutch/Belgian border and the first Dutch city to be liberated by the US army was Maastricht, on September 14th, 1944. The Germans got very nervous and most of the Dutch traitors, very much afraid of what was to come, panicked and fled to Germany, but not all of them.

J., still on the roads, had some extra worries. The Germans flooded large tracts of the Lowlands. Not only were the fields covered by the water, but also the roads and sometimes he had to cycle through water up to the axles of his bicycle's wheels, depending solely on his local knowledge to avoid straying off the road. In addition, the nearer the Allies came, the nearer their air-strips and the more their fighter planes were in evidence, attacking every German vehicle moving along the otherwise deserted roads. Whilst they did not fire at civilians (there was hardly any civilian road transport anyway, all vehicles having been confiscated by the Germans) and they did not bother the lonely cyclist - who waved. Sometimes J. met German convoys, or was overtaken by them; if at that very moment Allied fighter planes attacked, plastering the road with bullets, it was dangerous. J. sometimes had very narrow escapes and once, in his hurry to take cover, he fell off his bike and into a water-filled ditch alongside the road. But this dangerous situation also had its advantages. The German soldiers, manning the check-points or the concrete road blocks, were

paying more attention to the sky and often did not bother to stop the lonely cyclist, a young boy in shorts. Unless, that is, they were augmented by the very dangerous Gestapo in their leather coats and hats, or Dutch traitors in 'civvies' or in uniform.

Sunday, September 17th, 1944

One Saturday in mid-September, J. received orders to carry messages to a "safe house" at a farm in the forests between Utrecht and Arnhem. He was forced by the curfew to spend the night at another "safe house" near Utrecht and the next morning he cycled on.

This was a day never to be forgotten: A splendid late summer day, a brilliant, cloudless blue sky, sunny and warm. Sticking to the back roads and forest paths and passing through several hamlets and villages where the population was going to church, J. really enjoyed the ride, the scenery and the weather. It reminded him of the old, peaceful days and of the summer camps he had enjoyed in this area and which, as a consequence, he knew so well. It was so nice and quiet that he almost forgot that there was a war on. But within minutes, the whole atmosphere changed. Cycling on, he suddenly heard the air-raid alarm being sounded in some distant village and a little later he heard the familiar drone of planes coming from the west, accompanied by the sound of German anti-aircraft guns. It was nothing unusual on a clear day like this; no doubt, the US Air Force was on one of its usual trips to Germany. Yet this time it seemed different. Fighter planes roared over at very low altitude and they were firing like mad. There were also seldom-seen twin engine bombers, flying unusually low and bombing in the vicinity. Loud explosions replaced the peace and quiet of the Sunday morning. Standing on top of a hill he saw German installations on fire or being blown-up. The German ack-ack was silenced. Apparently, barracks, camps, roads and railway lines were being bombed and destroyed.

J. watched with increasing interest and understood that this was something different, not just another raid on Germany. He cycled on, taking cover if necessary, but not too often as he did not want to be late. The deserted cycle path was leading through open terrain as well as through forests. He saw nothing when he went into a forest, but the drone of the airplanes was by now very unusual. Almost at his destination, he got to a place where the scenery changed. The forest ended and cycle path continued, cutting through an extensive, deserted tract of moorland. But this time the familiar open space was not deserted at all. To his surprise, he saw a large number of low-flying planes, of a kind that he had never seen before. These were Dakota transport planes. He stopped to have a better look and to his surprise, he saw men jumping from the planes and floating down on their parachutes. And their planes were not even on fire or crashing! So why? Very unusual! Some of the planes were towing other planes, then the cables were cut and these gliders came down and landed! Men jumped out of them and suddenly strange open small cars (he was later to learn that these were the famous Jeeps), small motorbikes and anti-tank guns emerged from the gliders. Watching and wondering, it suddenly dawned on him that he was in the middle of an airborne operation! They had come at last! this was the great moment, this was the Liberation so longed-for!

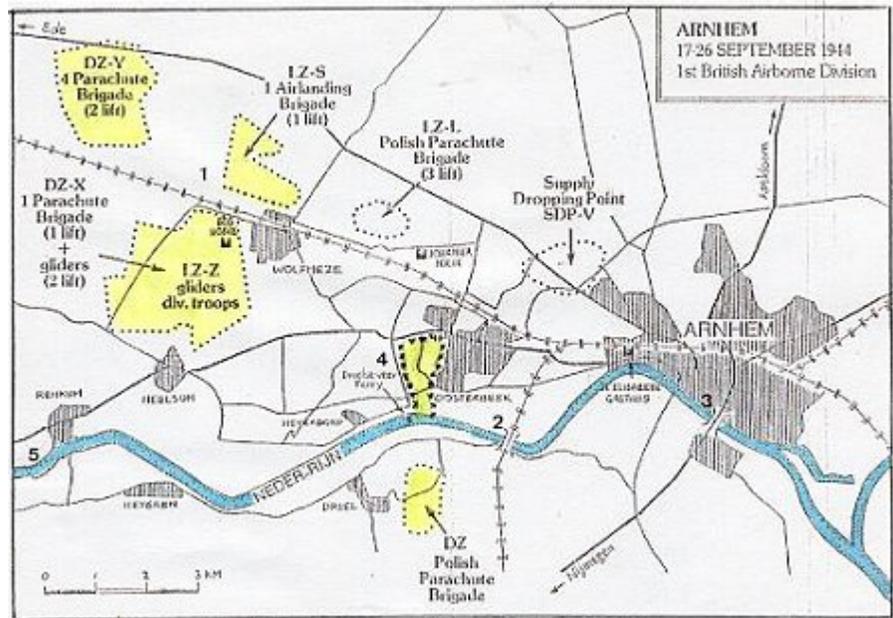
Everywhere he saw paratroopers reaching the ground, but however much he would have liked to have talked to them, there was no time to stop and stare. More so as he was now very near his destination and had to deliver his mail. So he cycled on, waving at the soldiers he met. Arriving at the place, he found that the paratroopers had already liberated the otherwise quiet and lonely farm. The Resistance men and women were arming themselves with their hidden Sten guns and pistols and the few airmen in residence were very enthusiastic and also armed.

He delivered his mail to the commander and was left with a problem. What should he do next? Was it his duty to return to base or could he stay? Would it still be possible to return? But his dilemma was solved. A British officer, map in hand, was asking the Resistance people exactly where he was. The Dutchmen apparently did not understand his questions and so J. stepped forward, pointed on the map and showed the officer where he was standing. The officer, pleased to have found someone that understood him, asked J. many more questions and got his replies. When his men brought in two German prisoners, he tried to interrogate them, but the Germans

obviously did not understand the questions, so J. translated them into German and their replies back into English. This delighted the British officer, who was even more pleased to discover that J. was able to read maps and without hesitation pinpointed where they were. So he told J. to stay with him as he could do with an interpreter and guide. J. was given a Resistance armband, a pistol and a Sten gun and soon he was very busily "otherwise engaged".

Arnhem Dropping Zones

- 1) J., coming from the north, meets the British Paratroopers
- 2) The Railway Bridge: Blown-up by the Germans on September 17th when the British stormed it
- 3) The main road bridge which the Airbornes, led by John Frost, reached, controlled and defended, but could not take
- 4) The last stand in Oosterbeek from which the survivors retreated across the river during the dark night of September 26th/27th. They were assisted by, and ferried across by the Poles and the American Paratroopers holding the south bank
- 5) The October crossing organized and led by the Resistance, operating in the German-occupied territory north of the river



Market Garden

When the Allied soldiers arrived, they were welcomed with great enthusiasm by a delighted population, who greeted them as the Liberators come at last. The Eindhoven Scouts and Guides were the first in the country to reappear in the open and in uniform.

The population in the dropping areas was also delighted.

And so was J.. When he met the Airbornes, he too was over the moon. He also thought that Liberation had come and that the war would be over soon and, in a couple of days, he might be back home. He was overwhelmed by what he saw. Like everybody else, he thought that the Liberation had begun. He was delighted and excited that he could be of service and that all his training had not been in vain and - after all - he was 18 years old and his teenage life had been completely destroyed by an enemy that he hated. Everything was new and unexpected. The arms, the Jeeps, the small motorbikes and the food (for the first time since 1940 he ate real chocolate bars and chewed gum!), but above all the presence of soldiers, the Liberators! He was grateful for the fact that he was not only able to speak to them, but could also assist them, which, after all, was what he had been trained for. He was kept busy and when the soldiers started moving into Arnhem, he found that the officer he was now attached to belonged to one of the sections that had to stay behind, to man and defend the western flank and to secure the dropping zones for the forces due to arrive the next day.

At first there was a rather relaxed atmosphere, until the Germans recovered and began attacking from all sides. J. was soon to discover what real war was like and how he had not been trained to

cope with it. He had learned to handle and to fire a pistol and a Sten gun and how to throw a hand grenade, but that was about all. Later, he often used to say that he owed his life to Scouting techniques such as stalking, prowling, hiding, crawling and how to sit still for endless hours without moving. After three days, the German tanks had over-run the dropping zones, which were cut-off from the Oosterbeek section. Some of the paratroopers managed to fight their way into Oosterbeek, but others had to surrender, whilst others still were isolated and surrounded and under constant enemy fire.

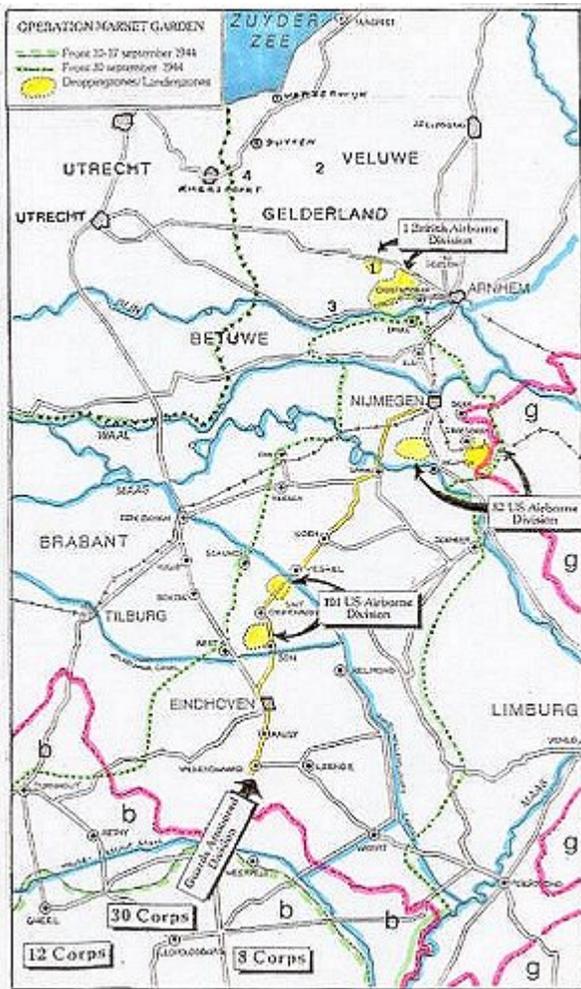
The company to which J. was attached soon found that it was impossible to reach Oosterbeek. They retreated into the forest, but in whatever direction they moved, they detected Germans. The Germans themselves were not so eager to enter the forest, but prevented the British soldiers from leaving. Sometimes there were snipers sitting in the treetops and it was hard to spot them. It was impossible to move in the daytime and so they hid until dark, only to find that the men got scattered. One evening J. and the officer were together and alone, listening to the din of the battle further to the east. They had been hungry for days, but found a container containing rations and ammo. Thinking about it, it dawned on J. that the situation had changed in a drastic way - there would be no quick, pleasant and cheerful Liberation. Untrained as he was, he considered being under constant fire a terrifying experience and above all he realized that if he fell into German hands as a "Bolshevik terrorist" he would be shot immediately. Most frightening of all, was that there were Dutch SS forces around. He could hear their voices and he knew that they would have no mercy.

German activities died down, there was no more fighting in the vicinity, though they heard the sounds of battle to the east, where the paratroopers were defending the perimeter in Oosterbeek. They decided to head north during the following night. Moving carefully, they reached the main road from Ede to Arnhem, which was guarded in the daytime and along which German transport was moving at night. After a long wait, they managed to cross the road and get into the forest on the other side.

As luck would have it, J. had not only been summer camping in this area, but as a kid he had been on holiday in this region with his parents, so he knew the forests well. He also knew some "safe houses" in the region. The two moved slowly and carefully and only at night - their shoes wrapped in old jute bags to keep down any noise. They often took cover, lying still for hours, Sten guns always at the ready. In this way, they managed to avoid the Germans, but only covered very small distances. After many days - out of food and water, their clothing wet-through and torn, they reached one of the "safe houses" at long last. It was, as the crow flies, about 25 kilometers from the battle zone. They were welcomed, but it was decided that the officer and J. could not stay, and that very night they were taken further north, to another place where they were hidden in the forest and fed by the Underground. At last, tired and exhausted, they had some proper food and a normal night's sleep.

Escape!

J. and the British Officer now had company - two Canadian airmen, who had been waiting to be taken south. In the days that followed, a few more paratroopers arrived. What J. did not know was that the Resistance was in regular radio contact with the Allied Forces and the former Resistance in the liberated area south of the River Rhine. More British soldiers had managed to escape to the north and were hiding in the dense forests. Some still had their firearms, whilst others had re-armed themselves with guns they had found in the bushes. They were all hidden and fed by the Underground. The Underground Command and the British officers present decided that the time had come to move the men southwards again and to make arrangements with the Army on the south bank for a river crossing.



Operation Market-Garden

The red line shows the border between the Netherlands and Belgium (b) and Germany (g)

The yellow areas were the American and British paratroopers dropping zones

The green dotted line within the Belgian frontier, shows the front line between 10th - 17th September, 1944

The green line with small black dots the front line on September 30th, 1944

And the green line with larger dots the front line on May 5th, 1945, when the Germans surrendered.

The road marked in yellow, starting south of Eindhoven, was the one the 2nd British Army had to take from the Belgian/Dutch border to Nijmegen. As it was under constant German fire, it was nicknamed "Hell's Highway"

- 1) Is where J. met the British Paratroopers
- 2) The forest where J. and the British officer evaded capture in September/October, 1944
- 3) The point the Rhine was crossed in October, 1944
- 4) J.'s Unit's position on May 5th, 1945, when the Germans surrendered and the war in this region ended

From all over the forest area soldiers were led to a hiding place near the village of Otterlo, where some 40 paratroopers were gathered with a number of Underground men and women, all well armed. During the night, some trucks with Red Crosses arrived and took them away to a place near Renkum where they met yet more men; in total there were about 80 or 90 men ready to make the crossing. The night chosen was that of 22nd/23rd of October, 1944. Everyone had to blacken their hands and faces and J. (still in his shorts), his knees. They emptied their pockets, to remove everything that might make a sound, and shoes and boots were wrapped in torn blankets. As arranged with the Army, heavy guns on the south bank suddenly opened a deafening fire, which was to go on until the last of the men had reached the south bank. At the same time, on the south bank two machine-guns fired into the air and their tracer bullets formed a large 'V', indicating the place where the boats were waiting. It must have been very confusing for the Germans.

The move to the river began. As they walked to the river bank, an open road had to be crossed, guarded by a German soldier. But he was watching the 'V' 'fireworks display' and did not notice one of the paratroopers approaching him from behind: his throat was slit. When they had almost reached the water and were about to give light signals to report their presence, an SS-patrol appeared. They were taken under fire and all the Germans were killed. The noise of the artillery and the two heavy machine-guns was such that the incident was not even noticed by any other Germans who might have been near on that dark night. Most of the Underground men said their good-byes and disappeared into the dark to return to their posts. The boats arrived and the men were ferried to the other side, undetected by the Germans. They climbed the dyke on the river bank, descended it on the other side, and came to a farm building. Here they were welcomed by British soldiers and former Dutch Underground men and women, now Dutch Army personnel. They were fed and J. enjoyed the thick corned-beef sandwiches and mugs of steaming cocoa they were given. He had tasted neither for years.

Army trucks arrived and they were driven to the city of Nijmegen where they were given billets and, after having taken showers, they hit the sack and slept soundly and well.

The next morning they had some medical tests. All the British soldiers got new uniforms, but J. only managed to get a set of underwear and an army jersey, and had to put his dirty shorts back on again. The Dutchmen were told that they would be joining the Dutch Army, a part of which was made up of former Resistance groups. The paratroopers were told that, that very afternoon, they would be flown back to their bases in England, to go on a well-earned leave. J.'s officer spoke to some of the other British officers present and told J. that he had told them of what J. had done, that he was fluent in English, German (and Dutch of course) and was an excellent map reader. That afternoon J. and the officer said their goodbyes in the presence of a sergeant of the Military Police. J. was never to see the British Officer again.

When the plane had left, the sergeant escorted J. to a Jeep and drove him to a building on the Nijmegen outskirts. He was taken to a room where he met a British and a Dutch Military Police major. He was thoroughly interrogated and screened and had to answer many questions. He told them about his courier services for the 'Pilot Escape Line' and he mentioned some names and locations of the "safe-houses" in the now-liberated part of the country. An MP Sergeant was called in and was told to take J. for a meal, one that J. enjoyed very much indeed; afterwards, he was taken back to the interrogation room. To his surprise, apart from the two majors, there was another man in uniform, whom he recognized as the commander of one of the "safe-houses" in the vicinity. The man recognized him too and it was a pleasant meeting. The majors tested his English and German and the British major told him he was to be given a choice. He could either join the new Dutch Army which was being formed, or he could join the British Major's section as an interpreter/guide/map-reader, explaining that this would mean that he would mainly be operating behind the lines and would do little or no real fighting. Now J. was not a hero and he had been badly shocked by the fighting he had had to endure, and anyway he was much more interested in the role of interpreter, so this was what he chose. He was able to have a shower and a medic gave him a tetanus jab. But the doctor also said that J. was overtired and under-fed and ought to have a few days rest and good food before assuming his new task. His dirty clothes were taken away and he was given fresh underclothes and an army uniform. He was told that though he would be serving in the Military Police he would not be an MP, but an auxiliary, which meant that he would not be wearing the MP's red cap, but a black beret instead. Also, he was allowed to keep his German Schmeisser machine-pistol, which pleased him, as it was a better and a more reliable weapon than the Sten gun, but took the same ammo.

Behind the Frontlines

J. was taken to the Military Police building and handed over to the captain under whom he was to serve. He ate, slept, ate and slept again. Feeling a bit fitter, he was introduced to his new mates. J.'s new task was to be part of a unit of "Four in a Jeep", an interrogation team consisting of an MP Officer, and two MP Sergeants, all Canadians. J. was to be the fourth man and to act as their interpreter, map-reader and general factotum. He also met the other interpreters, one Dutch boy from Eindhoven and some Flemish boys from Antwerp and found that they all were Scouts. He also discovered that some of the British and Canadian MPs were Scouts too.

The city of Nijmegen had been devastated and was in ruins. This was partly due to a mistake made by the US Air Force. Some time before *Operation Market-Garden*, the bombers had been sent to bomb the German city of Kleve/Kleef east of Nijmegen. Despite the daylight, the planes dropped their bombs on the Nijmegen city centre, killing many civilians, including many school children. Further damage had been done during the September street fighting. In fact Nijmegen was to be a front-line city from September 1944 until April 1945 and was under constant enemy fire. The war was still near, the Germans were not too far away and their artillery was not only trying to hit the bridge but was also firing shells into the city.

Civilians not essential to the running of the city had been evacuated to safer places in Belgium, but the police, some civil servants, technical staff, the former Underground or Resistance and the

resurfaced Scouts and Rover Scouts - if not by now in the army - had stayed behind. Rover Scouts in particular were rendering all kinds of services to the Allies, and they were also running the postal service and food distribution to the remaining Dutch. In fact, they ran the central kitchens which fed the civilian workers, the former Resistance and the Scouts.

They also ran *The Scout Club*. This was open to Scouts of all nationalities and during the evening hours off-duty Allied soldiers - Britons, Americans, Canadians, Belgians and Dutch - gathered in the club, had a pleasant time and made many friends, as did J. during the months to come. He felt very much at home again. All over the liberated part of the country, Scouts and Guides had immediately reappeared and, as much as possible, were in uniform. Since 1941 they had all grown and sometimes outgrown their original uniforms. Cub Scouts, now of Scout age, were in uniforms too tight for them, Scouts and Guides too, were in uniforms almost bursting in the seams. Others just wore a hat or an army beret and a neckerchief, as it was impossible for them to wear their uniforms anymore, so they had given their old uniforms to younger members, whom they fitted very well. Those who had no original Scout hats, were provided with army berets by the many British and Canadian Scouts serving in the armies. So they all, more or less, looked like Scouts or Guides whilst they were performing their many tasks in the post offices, the hospitals, and the refugee camps.



A Rover Scout Den, used as a "safe house" and an arms depot for the Underground. The Rovers met all through the war here and were never detected. Photo taken winter 1944/1945

Though he felt really free and really liberated, there was still something that worried J.. After he had left home for good he had managed to see his father now and then, but his father did not know where his hiding place was and J. had no doubt that his parents, not knowing what had happened to him and not aware of where he was now, might be worried. And there was no possibility to send them a message.

Interrogations

J.'s duties varied. The captain and the two sergeants he was with sometimes had to interrogate and sort-out German POWs just behind the frontline. To do this the captain sat behind a table in a tent or a house and J. had to usher in the prisoners. Officers, as J. learned, were always to be interrogated by an officer of a higher rank. So, if officers were to be questioned, he had to establish their rank first. If their rank was Hauptmann (a captain) or higher, J. informed his captain before taking the POWs in. The latter took off his jacket, opened a field trunk and put on another jacket with the insignia of an officer of a rank just one higher than the prisoner's. So that was the game they played! J. had to translate, work he very much enjoyed doing.

On other occasions, the teams went to compounds harboring recently-taken prisoners. Before the investigations started, J. and Dutch and Belgian boys like him were sent in amongst the POWs. As they were dressed in British or Canadian uniforms, no one could tell that they were not Britons or Canadians. Amongst the prisoners, there were probably SS-men and some might be non-German volunteers, who had removed the insignia showing that they were not Germans from their uniforms, hoping to pass themselves off as genuine Germans. The Dutch, the Flemish and the French boys were told to lazily stroll amongst the prisoners, to keep their ears wide open, to stop now and then and smoke a fag and to speak little or, if absolutely necessary, to speak English only. They listened to the prisoners' conversations and soon detected small groups of prisoners sitting around speaking Dutch, Flemish, French, or some other language. These men were very surprised to be spoken to in their mother tongue and to be told to get up. They were then taken to special camps, commanded and guarded by former Resistance fighters, who were now also

dressed in Allied uniforms. These traitors did not have a pleasant time and after the war had to appear in courts to be tried for high treason.

Now and then, large numbers of prisoners had to be shipped to POW camps in Great Britain. Large convoys of army trucks and jeeps with armed guards, headed for the Belgian port of Ostend, where the prisoners were loaded into landing craft and taken to one of the British Channel ports. Sometimes J.'s officer was in command of such a convoy, which is how J. went abroad for the very first time in his life when he crossed the Dutch/Belgian border.

During the early years of the occupation, when the Germans still expected to invade, to defeat and to occupy England, their favorite song was *Wir Fahren Gegen England* (We Are Sailing For England). Now it so happened that when the Canadian Army, assisted by the *Witte Brigade* (the White Brigade, the Flemish Underground), had conquered and liberated the port of Ostend, some members of the White Brigade had found a gramophone record of that song. Under Canadian command, these White Brigaders were in charge of the port and the embarking of the POWs. Each time a fleet of landing craft left the port the White Brigaders played the record which, thanks to the public address system rigged by the German Navy, could be heard loud and clear all over the port. And so at last the Germans "Sailed to England" whilst their song was being played! The Belgian White Brigaders - and J. too - sang it at the top of their voices and shouted, in German, all kinds of funny or insulting remarks.

A Reunion

After handing over the POWs, the convoy was disbanded. The trucks had to load equipment and stores and return to the front line, led and guided by only one of the Jeeps. The other Jeeps went off separately. During one of these trips, J.'s captain had to report to an HQ in Brussels for a conference. The other sergeants, who had been there before and knew the delights of the big city, went their separate ways to enjoy their leisure and pleasure, so J. took a walk, admired Brussels and long before the actual time to report back, returned to the HQ. He entered the hall and spoke to the sergeant at the desk, who happened to be a Dutchman belonging to the *Brigade Princess Irene*, which had been founded in England as early as 1940 and consisted of not only Dutchmen living all over the world and called up by the Government in Exile, but also men who, from May 1940 onwards, had managed to escape to England. The Desk Sergeant was pleased to meet someone who had recently come from the occupied territory, so they had a long and pleasant conversation. When he asked J.'s name he said: "We have got a Dutch major here with the very same name, could you be related?" When J. denied the possibility, the sergeant said that there was no harm in going and taking a look - so J. went upstairs, knocked at the major's door, entered, and to his surprise saw his missing brother behind the desk! It was a moment that goes beyond description. Totally flabbergasted and breathless they stiffened and stared and could not utter a word. This was too good to be true, but it was true! It was a fantastic reunion. When the first surprise was over, J. went to find his officer and tell him the good news. The captain told him that they would have to stay the night, as his conference was to continue the next morning, but that he too wanted to meet J.'s brother and so the three of them together went to a mess for an evening meal.

There was so much to say. J.'s brother told them his story:

In May 1940, when he was a sergeant, he had been stationed in the extreme southwestern part of the Netherlands and had been out of reach of the fighting, so, when the Netherlands had had to surrender, there was not a German in sight. Not wanting to wait until the Germans arrived to take them prisoners and transport them to some camp in Germany, he and a number of his men had decided to move into Belgium. They had marched south along the Belgian coast until they got stuck on the Dunkirk beaches, where they had joined the remainder of the British Expeditionary Force which was being lifted from the beaches and shipped back to England. So they reached Great Britain and groups like theirs had formed the *Royal Brigade Princess Irene*.

J. was dumbfounded to see his brother, he had never expected to see him again and he and his parents had got used to the idea that he was dead. The brother, who had had no news from home in all that time, was even more surprised, seeing his brother J., 10 years his junior, in the uniform of a Canadian sergeant. Then it was J.'s turn to tell his story. J. only regretted having to tell his brother that their other brother had been killed in a gun battle with the Germans. Furthermore, they both worried about their parents in Amsterdam.

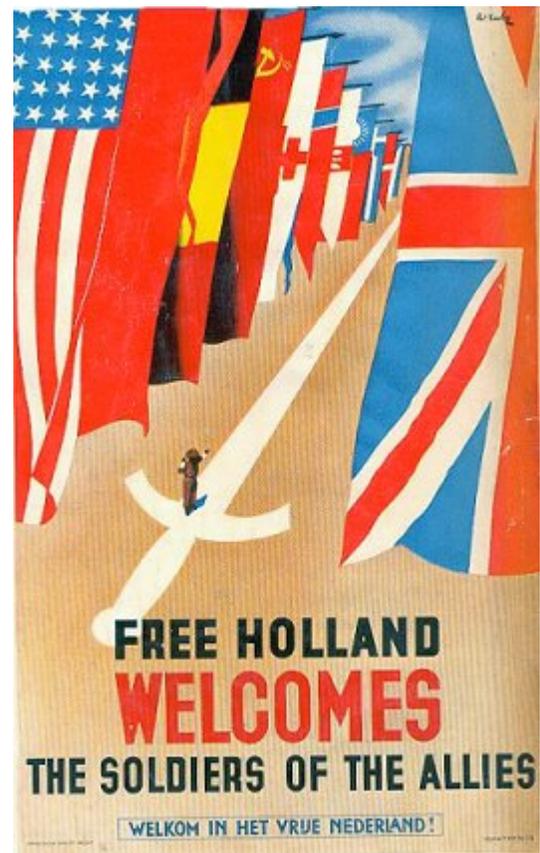
The population of the big cities in the western part of the Netherlands was undergoing what was later called 'The Starvation' or 'Hunger Winter'. Their parents knew that one son had been killed, one son was said to be missing, presumably killed, and one son had faded away into the Resistance, present whereabouts unknown. They did not know that the one was in the liberated part of the country, serving in the Canadian Army, nor that the eldest was alive and well and in Brussels. The brothers promised each other to make it a race home, who would be there first? (J. won.) After that, the brothers met again on a few occasions, but more or less lost track of each other, until they ran into each other again in Apeldoorn in April 1945.

Crossing the Rhine and going West

J.'s unit crossed the Rhine a couple of days later. He observed how damaged and - above all - deserted the German towns and villages were, not a living person in sight. They drove through the almost totally destroyed city of Emmerich, in places still burning. Again, no one was to be seen and they headed north through its ruins until, after about 6 kilometers, they hit the Dutch/German border and entered the Dutch border city of Heerenberg. What a difference! The road block was wide open, there were armed Dutch Resistance men on duty and from a pole flew a very large red, white and blue Dutch tricolor and there were posters saying, "The Dutch Resistance Welcomes the Allies".

But most impressive of all, after seeing deserted German villages and towns from the border into the city of 's Heerenberg, was that there were now hundreds of civilians waving flags and cheering the passing transport. There was damage in the city and in the following villages, but they were not deserted, and everywhere civilians were cheering and Dutch national flags were flying from almost every house and building - with a smattering of British flags too. Everywhere armed Resistance men were in evidence, but what struck J. most of all were the many Scouts and Guides he saw almost everywhere and, just like in the previously liberated south, they were in some sort of a uniform. During the many stops, J. spoke to them whenever possible. But the convoy did not really halt until it had reached the city Doetinchem. In its vicinity, there was a large compound harboring hundreds of German POWs, guarded by Canadians and the Resistance. Amongst them were also young boys belonging to the Hitler *Jugend*. Whilst most German soldiers were only too pleased to be taken prisoner, these HJs were still fanatically fighting to defend Führer and Fatherland and did not want to give up, so were even more dangerous than the regular soldiers. The interrogators were busy all the time and so was J.

Again, the Dutch and Flemish SS-men and others in German uniforms were separated from the crowd. J., in the little time off he had, discovered a school building which was not only used as the Resistance HQ, but also the place where, under guard, they locked up the



A poster, secretly printed during the German occupation, and affixed to walls as soon as the Allied soldiers arrived.

traitors or NSBers who had been arrested. J. met Scouts rendering services to the Red Cross, the Resistance and the Canadians.

The operations went swiftly, but not swift enough in J.'s and other Dutchmen's opinions.

J.'s unit arrived at the city of Apeldoorn on the eastside of the forest area. Canadian HQ and Dutch HQ had taken up residence in the Royal Palace on the edge of the forests. Whilst his officer went inside, J. stayed outside and talked to some Dutch soldiers. They told him that a Dutch major with the same surname was somewhere in the Palace, so he went into the building and was shown to a room where the major was and so the brothers met once more after so many weeks.