

# The Dutch Liberation

*by Casey Vriesendorp, Esq.*

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*The following is my recollection of the years before the Dutch Liberation.*

My parents and I lived in The Hague on the coast of the North Sea. We lived in a three-storey house, as part of about 20 attached dwellings, so-called row housing, like a horizontal apartment. The backyards were separated by fences or hedges. When rumours began to circulate about an upcoming World War and the Germans, ordinary folks like us were instigated to go to war, and you might say we were forced by this guy called Adolf Hitler. The young people were forced to take up arms, as well as the majority of German citizens.

Well, anyway, to return to my story, after those rumors started the Dutch government and our local city administration told the population to prepare for the worst. This was sometime between 1941 and 1942. The government started excavating back yards, building bomb shelters right across the backyards of the row houses. They excavated about 20 feet down, almost the size of a hockey arena, similar to tornado shelters in the United States.

Every house in the row had its own private entrance. The inside of the shelter was one big arena with some storage spaces as well as some very small cooking places and a few cots around the sides.

A seaside fishing village close to The Hague was abandoned as the German Army drove the people out. The German Army of engineers began excavation in the beaches and dunes to build their bunkers and rocket ranges, as well as building a heavy concrete wall between the city and the village. They were very well patrolled by the army, almost like the wall in Berlin between East and West Germany.

The German Army had not yet touched our city, and left us, at least for the moment, free. But then things got a little more serious in France and Belgium. The Germans started to take more property until they reached our country and started confiscating properties and take possession of big houses of well-to-do folks. The same had happened to my grandparents' home. They walked in and just took over, and the Germans did not care. They just allowed them two small rooms. They had taken my grandfather's horses, all 20 of them. Those horses, for which my grandfather was caretaker as well as trainer, so that the Royal Family could ride

them safely, happened to belong to the Dutch Royal Family. One good thing: my grandparents lived in a country village near the main residence of the Royal Family. It was during that time that our Queen went to live in the United Kingdom. The Queen sent her younger children to Ottawa, Canada.

Returning to my story and back to the family, when things looked more serious my parents had shipped my younger brother, five years old, to another part of the Netherlands, which the Germans had not reached at that time, to some of our relatives. Meanwhile, back in the city, my mother was expecting my sister, in 1942. My father had been hired or forced by city council to pick up a hard hat or helmet to start patrolling some neighbourhoods in conjunction with regular police, just in case of trouble.

The fishermen that lost their boats thus suffered a loss of livelihood and were literally homeless. The Germans had confiscated their fishing boats to be used to attack English and American naval ships in the North Sea between England and the mainland of Europe. While my father was kept busy patrolling, my mother was in great distress with my baby sister almost ready to be born. There was a curfew where no one was allowed out after 5 p.m. People were not allowed to meet with more than one person at a time. These rules all happened after more military entered our city. The Hague was about the same size as Sherbrooke before adding the suburbs.

In the meantime, I had also been taken to friends somewhere in the country. I cannot remember too much since I was only eight years old. Much later I remember my parents had milk and stuff smuggled in. It was sold for outrageously high black-market prizes because the people farming took a very high risk to do this. The German military and Nazis had occupied our city.

Before all this happened, the city's sanitation department had delivered metal garbage cans to the population. They were to be converted into small stoves for heat in the winter. There was no heating fuel to be found anywhere. The power had been cut off and we suffered many other hardships. As for the lights, some ingenious families had mounted a bicycle with small motors and very small generators on the bicycle for lighting. We would ride the bikes in the dark as they gave us a little light, like headlights on a

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car. Anyways, we had mounted a bike in the house, to be peddled by someone in the family when light was needed.

During 1944 there was no food in the city, so some people started to eat tulip bulbs, believe it or not. The bulbs were like layered onions. Towards the end of 1944 I was able to return to the city and stay with an aunt whose husband was a banker and had managed to come through those years in not-too-bad shape. I stayed there until the war ended and the occupiers were driven out by Canadians about halfway through 1945, probably in May.

There was still not much food around, so afterwards neutral countries like Sweden and Norway flew to our country to drop food packets out of their airplanes. Of course, folks started to fight among themselves to get hold of a loaf of bread or something. Some people killed themselves, because after almost three years without food, they indulged, which proved to be a mistake. Their bodies could not digest. I could not blame those people. Finally, things went slowly back to normal. After a few months following liberation things started to turn kind of tense again politically. This time it was pure and simple, when the city council got back together, they had found my parents' names on membership lists of a certain political party. In Canada we might call it a bit to the left.

My parents were rounded up and sent to a concentration camp, by our own Dutch citizens. It was due to their names appearing on the membership list of an offending political party. My dad was in a camp for almost two years and my mother in a different prison camp somewhere in the country for a year and a half. Meanwhile, my brothers and sister were all over the country. Finally, around 1949, my family became reunited. My family had been released from the camps, after an apology from the Dutch Government. And yet, we were all still in poor shape. As time went by things went gradually back to normal. During those times schooling was at a minimum, if you were lucky enough to find an operating school.

My brother joined the Dutch Air Force, when he was called. At a certain age you were called to serve in the armed forces, by Holland. Now somewhat of a sour note: at the time I was to be called to serve the Country, I decided to emigrate to Canada, as it was already in the works. I left Holland just before the call to serve. I am not a coward, but it just so happened that my ship to Canada was leaving. So, I never served in the Dutch Armed Forces.

This is my experience from Holland during the German occupation.

Note: I am happy to say my sister, born in 1942, came through the German occupation. She has her own family and now has grandchildren. She was born just after the Liberation of the Hague. Some of the fishermen went back to fishing in the North Sea with the help of the Dutch Government.

As a youngster I would sneak out to the bomb shelter to watch the dog fights between the allied forces the German planes taking place in the sky. There also were big guns hidden in the beaches and dunes ready to shoot at the allied airplanes.

Two years after the war we would travel the farm country to find and collect all kinds of downed planes or shrapnel. We would take them home as treasures. We were just kids and we thought of it as an adventure looking for treasures. Our parents did not see it quite the way we did, and we were punished for our lack of judgement.

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