

www.hoteldesnarcisses.net

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Introduction

During World War II the Swiss Hôtel des Narcisses was turned into a "home for refugees". Its inhabitants were Dutch men and women who had managed to escape from the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Jack van Gorkom, Piet van den Nieuwenhof and their girlfriends Li Batens and Alice Turkstra were among them. This website is dedicated to their courageous escape from Holland, the friends they made in Switzerland and the efforts of the men to help liberate their country.

Hôtel des Narcisses is situated in Chamby on a mountainside above Montreux. It is a beautiful spot with a magnificent view over Lake Geneva and its surrounding mountains. In spite of this, business-wise the hotel was not very successful and in 1942 it became one of the hotels that was rented by the Dutch government-in-exile to house Dutch refugees.

All the people who lived there had risked their lives to come to Switzerland. Most of them were Jewish who had fled for obvious reasons. Some of them were not, like the four main characters of this story. Jack and Piet had escaped to Switzerland as they had become aware that they were being watched by the authorities, who rightfully suspected them of involvement with underground activities, and when they took off, their girlfriends came with them. Finally by the end of 1944, they got the chance to join the allied forces, and so did most of the other Dutchmen in Switzerland.

Holland Occupied

Page 1

Although Piet van den Nieuwenhof and Jack van Gorkom both grew up in the small Dutch city of Dordrecht, they only met when they came to work together at the *Secretarie der Gemeente Dordrecht* (Town Clerk's Office of the Council of Dordrecht) in September 1941. Solid evidence of this period that they served together are the identical references that they received afterwards, which can be found in the section with documents on this website. But until this Town Clerk's Office they had lived their lives in very different worlds, as Jack was a Protestant and Piet a Roman-Catholic.

Uprooted lives

Jack van Gorkom came from an absolutely Calvinist background. His father's family was from Utrecht, where the Protestant roots of the van Gorkom family can be traced back to at least 1600, so nearly the beginning of Calvinism. His mother—and that's a thing he had in common with Piet—was from the very Calvinist province of Zeeland. His place of birth was Weltevreden—an enclave near Batavia, nowadays Djakarta, in the days that Indonesia was a Dutch colony called *Nederlands Oost-Indië* (Dutch East Indies). His date of birth was 2nd February 1921. Jack's father served in the K.N.I.L. (Royal Dutch Indian Army) as head of the joinery workshop in Batavia, where they would look after much of the infantry material, which was mainly made of wood in those days. On 28 November 1926, Jack was baptized in the *Evangelische Gemeente* (Evangelical Congregation) of Batavia. A year later the family returned to Holland, and eventually they ended up in Dordrecht, which was more or less by coincidence as they had no historical ties to this city.

Piet van den Nieuwenhof was a year older than Jack, born in Dordrecht on 8th April 1920. His family, however, was from Geldrop and Nuenen. These are neighbouring villages in the East of the province of Noord-Brabant, not very far from the Dutch-

Belgium border. Just like Belgium, Noord-Brabant is mainly Roman Catholic, certainly in the days that Piet was born. The roots of the family lie in Nuenen, where Piet's forefathers were farmers. As Piet wrote in his memoirs called *The Naked Globe* (2008):

"The van den Nieuwenhof farm was next door to the Protestant church in Nuenen, where Vincent van Gogh's father was the Calvinist minister. Vincent's studio was in the garden of the presbytery and when he looked out of the window he could see the van den Nieuwenhof potato farm. Some of Vincent's paintings feature the van den Nieuwenhof farm, e.g. "The potato diggers". Grandmother was a very social minded person and liked conversations, so often she saw Vincent in the backyard and had a bit of know-how with him, especially when he was in one of his depressions. She became a sort of confidante to him, maybe she overdid and it was too much for Vincent, because he left Nuenen."

Apart from the poetic license, the ages of Vincent van Gogh and Piet's grandmother must have matched quite nicely: Vincent was born in March 1853, while grandmother Maria Kennis was born in July 1852. The parents of Piet's grandfather lived in Geldrop then, but an uncle and aunt of his grandfather still lived on the family farm in Nuenen, also in the two years that Vincent van Gogh spent over there. Forty years later, Piet's parents went to live in Geldrop as well:

"In 1923, the family moved [from Dordrecht] to Geldrop where my father started a bus service between Geldrop and Eindhoven. The company was called E.G.A.D. (*Eerste Geldropse Autobus Dienst*, meaning First Geldrop Bus Service) and the first bus was a T-model Ford, which had to be cranked up to start every time to get it going, which was a hassle during the winter. Starters were not yet invented and before the engine could be cranked up, the spark-plugs had to be taken out and warmed up. If that did not work, local kids were engaged to push the bus till it started. As a reward they could hop in and get a ride around the block.

Due to the ill health of my mother and a growing family it was

decided that I would live with my grandmother and aunt in Dordrecht. So at the tender age of 5 I left home, albeit temporarily, to face the cruel world. My mother was not too happy with that arrangement, the more because the relationship between her and my grandmother was very tense. Grandma was more Catholic than the Pope and my mother being a convert made her, in the eyes of my grandmother, a second class catholic so there was always friction. Just to show how Catholic grandma was, on my fifth or sixth birthday she gave me a miniature altar complete with vestments, missal etc. I had to say mass and give a sermon in which I always threatened them with hell like the Redemptorists used to do.

3 or 4 years later my mother missed me and wanted me back home in Geldrop, so for the next three years I was home and attended the Public School in the village, which was, at least for me comparable to being sent to the centre of Outer Mongolia.

A newcomer in the village, not in the particular dialect group, was always an outsider. My father was known as Henk "The Hollander" because he had a Dordrecht accent. He wore shoes and sometimes a bowtie. Clogs and overalls were the fashion of the day at that time in Geldrop.

What made life hard for me was the fact that we did not belong to the typical Geldrop community. The majority of the people were textile workers. In 1932 there were 9 textile factories, and about 5 other industries in Geldrop. Those not employed in the textile and other industries were small landowners, grocers, bakers and other shopkeepers. My father was none of those, he was a different kind of businessman and did not fit in the socio-economic level of his neighbours. These were the differences that made integration a bit of a problem.

Me being a son of Henk (thank God his name was not Sam) not speaking the dialect and the only one wearing shoes, not clogs, made me a target for ridicule at the local school and this was encouraged by a teacher, who did not like my family. This particular teacher was such a nasty character that I often queried his ancestry."

"In the meantime my father's business was growing and he bought a new autobus, called 'Vulcan'. At that time, a state of the art vehicle directly imported from the U.K. So now apart from maintaining a regular bus service, he could undertake tours.

Youth, sport clubs and other organisations became E.G.A.D. customers and the business prospered. My father employed two drivers and my mother had a live-in domestic aid, and that made our home a crowded house (without guitars). Something had to be done to relief the congestion and the obvious solution was to send me back to my grandmother and aunt in Dordrecht.

My grandmother, a strong willed woman, laid down conditions before accepting me back. She would provide board and lodging but all other expenses had to be paid by my father, including school fees for the R.C. Prep. School. The year was 1933 and I still had 1 year to go before going to High School. It was also the year my grandmother died, ironically on the 17th of October, my mother's birthday. From that date on it was aunt Lucy, me and the 2 cats, Meepy and Moppy. I tackled the 9 subjects of the Prep School with fluctuating success, but I made the grade and in 1934 I entered the R.C. co-educational High School.

A Roman Catholic co-educational High School was ultra revolutionary in a time when segregation of the sexes in any field was the norm. My aunt Lucy had no objections to me exposing my soul and eternal salvation to this very dangerous sex drenched situation, as long as I said my prayers, which I and my fellow students at the St Joseph High School did in 5 languages every day. At the beginning of each language lesson the class had to say the Our Father and Hail Mary in the language of that session: Dutch, French, German, English and Latin.

Apart from that, in summer time we often went canoeing on the river. Rein Erlings and 2 other friends had canoes, we also had and a wind-up grammophone and we listened to the warbly, scratched records of popular music of that time. Now that scenery would not be complete without a cool beer. Good bye, Sobrietas.

We were living in turbulent times, the depression, unemployment, political unrest and the threat of war, they all put

their mark on our daily lives. We had a Nazi Party in Holland, called NSB. They marched on Saturday afternoons through Dordrecht dressed in black shirts and leather belts and got into fights with all the left-wingers in town. For us it was a regular entertainment, especially when the mounted police got involved, who did not hesitate to use their truncheons or sabres to restore order."

And so Piet and Jack did not only have a mother from (Old-)Zeeland in common, but also a fragmented background that had uprooted both of them. While Piet was 5 years old when sent to Dordrecht, and even had to repeat this experience at the age of 12, Jack was 6 when he came from the East Indies to Holland. Jack would never really feel at home in Holland and especially detested the Dutch climate for the rest of his life. After the family had settled in Dordrecht, Jack attended the *Openbare Lagere School No. 1* (Public School No. 1) and in 1934 he went to the Dordrecht H.B.S. (*Hogere Burger School*, Higher Civilian School), which he hated. It was a good education, however, as a H.B.S.-diploma allowed you to enter university. Just like Piet's other friends, Jack had a canoe, and in the higher grades he spent so much time in the nearby marshlands called *Biesbosch* that he had to do an extra year before graduating in the Summer of 1940, just after the German invasion. Piet had finished high school already in 1938.

Page 3

Quo Vadis

"All of a sudden we felt free, but at the same time there was this feeling of insecurity, we had entered the frightening real world. Unemployment, worldwide political unrest and economic stagnation. What to do? Van de Ende, my Dutch teacher who advised me to become a journalist, gave me a copy of *The Washington Post* with an article about Holland, which created the impression that Holland was a country of dykes, cheese, cigars and windmills, nothing about the history or culture. Van de Ende said a good exercise was to educate the Americans and write a

story about the other side of the medal and send it to the youth section of The Washington Post. So in my basic, simple school English I wrote about the history, culture and Dutch industries.

10 days later I received about 60 letters from the States. Van de Ende said, 'you see people read what you write.' Next thing he talked with his friend, Jan Govers, who was the editor of the *Dordtse Courant* to see if there was a vacancy for a cadet. There was not at that moment, so I had to wait till the incumbent Barend Mensen was promoted to Rotterdam, but I could do some what is now known as "work experience". It was not a glamour job. My first task was on Sunday late in the afternoon to collect the results of the 12 soccer matches and deposit them in Govers's letterbox. Having no phone I had to go to the post office and ring every club.

And there were the so boring nothing a do about nothing Council meetings. Barend avoided them like the plague. He said he did not mind them, but it was a good training ground for me to get acquainted with politics. He always gave me a packet of cigarettes if I did the *Gemeente Raad*. All this journalistic activity was very stressful, because I enrolled in a Business College 5 nights a week, plus homework. My priority was the paper and a night out with the boys. Eventually I was expelled.

Then one day I got the call to join the army and defend my fatherland. How proud I was to become a soldier, albeit compulsory. We had conscription in Holland, so there was not much choice. On the 12th of January 1939 I received a card from the *Keuringsraad* (Medical Examination Board) to examine me for my suitability for the Armed Services and by Joe, I was, flat feet and all. Next interview was about the choice of weapon where I wanted to spend my 12 months in the service of my fatherland. At last on the 28th of September 1939 I received a communication that as a common conscript I was a member of the third regiment mounted field artillery.

Mounted, that meant horses and that was not my idea of military service either. I liked pussy cats and dogs. but horses... After the initial horror and reading further I learned they sent me to a school for Military Administration, in Middelburg, a school

where paymasters of all Army sections were trained, it was a 10 months course and we graduated as Sergeant Administrator.

So it was not too bad, the more because we had to wear the uniform of our weapon. It so happened that ours was the most glamorous of the Dutch army, we had jodhpurs with a leather seat, soft leather boots and shining spurs. Irresistible to any female, the only problem was that there were no uniforms. Instead we were issued with a piece of paper, saying that the bearer of it was entitled to walk around in mufti till the uniforms arrived. As far as the attention of girls was concerned, the other guys simply did not exist, we were also issued with a First World War gun, a six shooter, but alas there was no ammunition, but that did not really matter, because one could hit the enemy on the head with this 2 Kg weapon with deadly result.

On the 8th of May 1940 we received our uniforms and on the 10th of May our neighbours marched in uninvited and they brought with them their deadly toys, things like tanks, artillery, motorbikes and their favourite aeroplanes, which they called Luftwaffe."

Page 4

Destruction of Middelburg

"Our army, sabotaged by the NSB and the pacifist socialists did not have a hope in the world to hold the members of the Third Reich. Valliant battles were fought on the Grebbeberg near Arnhem and hundreds of the invaders died trying to cross the river IJssel and in Rotterdam the Marines held the bridge over the Maas for quite a long time. Only a handful Marines survived.

So to avoid further bloodshed Holland capitulated with the exception of the province of Zeeland and that is where Middelburg was and the SDOA (*School voor Dienstplichtig Onderofficier Administrateur*, School for Conscript Warrant Officer Administrator). There was an English cruiser in the harbour of Vlissingen and Regiments of French troops who were pushed from France through Belgium and finished up in Zeeland. The Allies hoped that Zeeland would be a springboard for a contra offensive, but that was a vain hope, the Luftwaffe made sure of that.

The students of the SDOA were billeted with civilians in Middelburg. Half the school went to the East and the other half to the West, a section of the town near a gas reservoir. I was billeted with a doctor with his wife and two children, but after the first wave of attack the doctor and his family disappeared and I was on my own in the house. I lost contact with the school, I did not see anybody and nobody came looking for me, I had to defeat the German army on my own.

I tried to find some of my brother soldiers or an officer but they all seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth, so my survival instinct told me to stay in the house and hope for the best. Suddenly I suffered stomach pain and made a very fast escape to the toilet. While I was sitting there with my jodhpurs around my ankles and the 2 Kg gun around my waist, bombs came raining down.

Stuka's are dive bombers, they come down vertically straight on to their target. One hears a sort of hissing and then wait for the explosion and that went on wave after wave and while I was minding my own painful business a bomb fell three houses down from me. With an unbelievable blast all the windows in the house sprung out their frames, the toilet was shaking like in an earthquake, furniture and crockery flying all over the place, I was covered in glass and all of a sudden my stomach ache was miraculously healed. I pulled up my pants, made sure I had my revolver and made a hasty retreat, ducking in cellars of destroyed homes, if they were not flooded, to escape the Stuka attacks.

Outside there was complete chaos, dead and wounded people laying everywhere, people wandering around in a daze, kids crying and looking for parents, most of the houses in the street on fire, people screaming for help, sirens of fire brigades and ambulances blaring and above all the screaming of the falling bombs. That night was the worst of my life. Relentless the bombing continued all night, with Middelburg ablaze there was no problem for the Stuka pilots to find their target, they were drawn to it like moths to light.

Frightened and aimlessly I wandered through the devastation, not knowing what to do or where to go. I walked into a street which had just been subject to an attack, the whole street was

ablaze. Out of one house I saw a woman on the second floor throwing a baby, which was burning, out of the window and literary splatter to pieces on the road. Burning people were running out of their burning houses and I had to watch helplessly. This scenery is deeply engraved in my mind and still stirs me emotionally when I think of it.

At last I met an officer of the school looking for students, he told me I was the first one he met and said the fellows billeted in the vicinity of the gas reservoir had all perished when a bomb hit the reservoir; there were 75 of them.

The third day Zeeland also capitulated, we were all round up by the German troops and were made Prisoners of War and immediately put to work gathering body parts on the Zeeland dykes, which also had been heavily bombarded. There were overturned ambulances with bodies in them. We were given baskets to gather what we could find, arms, legs, whatever was left of human bodies. Next we had to march, heavily guarded, from Zeeland to 's Hertogenbosch, which is the full width of the province Noord-Brabant. On the way we were fed by the population along the road.

After a week in the POW camp we were released to go back home. That freedom did not last long, because not long after that we all were called up to form the *Opbouw Dienst* (Rebuilding Army). The primary purpose of this call up was to get hold of all the Dutch officers, who were then deported to next door (Germany). The conscripts were put to work clearing ruins; I was sent to Echteld, a small village in the middle of Holland, and because of my 4 days at the SDOA I was made assistant paymaster of the platoon.

Our barracks was an old castle called Weyenburg, built around 1178, complete with a moat, tower and plenty of mice and in the courtyard 6 stables accommodating 10 horses each. They were stabled there awaiting, like practical everything else, blankets, bikes, copper, aluminium, etc, dispatch to the Third Reich."

Girls on pushbikes

"Life in rural Echteld, which is in the centre of a region called The Betuwe, the orchard of Holland, was quite pleasant.

It was a beautiful sunny day in August 1940, half of the Weyenburg residents were on leave, I did not have much to do, so I took my little Kodak box camera and went for a walk to take some pictures of the pretty orchard landscape while meditating on the meaning of life. I was walking deep in thought, in a long lane which led to and from the castle, when in the distance I saw a girl on a bike, her blond hair flying in her pretty face, racing down to the castle. When she was close to me I exercised my authority and said: 'Sorry miss you are not allowed to be on this property. This is a military area'. It did not seem to impress the girl: 'My father is a captain and was the commander here.'

My answer was: 'I could not care less who your father was. Off you go,' after which she got on her bike, but she did not turn around as I expected, but continued her ride, which finished up in a dead end, so I knew she had to come back. When she did I caught her, we introduced each other, her name was Aly, she told me she was on holiday and staying on a farm where her father had been billeted before the capitulation and she had her 2 younger sisters with her.

She was a blonde sportive type with a nice cultured voice and I was hooked. We had an intellectual conversation about Dutch authors, poets and religion. She said she was Dutch Reformed Church and I told her I was Roman Catholic and that difference in religion caused a lot of misery later on. But we seemed to click all right and I made a date to see each other the next day and a soldier's dinner, which is called haché, a stew of carrots, onions and potatoes with bacon and greasy sauce, an award winning dish in any cooking competition. Aly pretended she liked it, after dinner we went for a walk over the dykes and looked at the moon and the stars and we talked poetry and religion. And I concluded that if our relationships was to continue it would be a case of *l'histoire se répète*, based on my mother's experience, she was dumped by her family because of her conversion to Catholicism.

The drama started already a day after we met.

The farmer where Aly and sisters was staying was also a fanatic Dutch Reformed adherent and when he got the picture somehow, he did not waste any time to ring Aly's father to tell him the tragedy of his daughter being involved with a Roman Catholic. During this telephone conversation Dr. Turkstra told the informant to sent Aly and her 2 sisters back post haste, before she could be contaminated with Roman ideas. He also dispatched one of Aly's friends to Echteld whose task it was to try to change her mind, but it was mission impossible. So Aly and her 2 sisters had to peddle back to Zutphen to face an interrogation, but not before I had asked her to marry me, and, without any hesitation she said 'Yes'."

This is the story how Piet met his Alice. In those days, it was a kind of political statement to anglicize your name. Jack's official first name was Jacques for example, and so Aly had changed into Alice.

When it comes to Jack's story, originally it had been his plan to go to the *Koninklijke Militaire Academie* (K.M.A., Royal Military Academy) after finishing high school to become an officer. The German invasion, however, had effectively killed this plan, and so he decided that he wanted to become a sports instructor or physical education teacher. The closest *Sportacademie* was in The Hague, so it was already a good physical exercise to get there, as Jack would do this distance of 40 kilometres by pushbike. The Dutch were a bit tougher then, than they are now, so it was not unusual to make these kind of expeditions on a daily basis. Also, roads were quieter then, as there was less motorised traffic of course in those days. At the end of the first year Jack was forced to give up his education for the plain reason that there was not enough food anymore to fuel the daily physical exercises. On 15 May 1941 he started to work at the airplane factory Aviolanda, which is mentioned on the next page by Piet as well.

Nevertheless, his daily bicycle trips to The Hague had not been completely in vain, albeit for a completely different reason. One

day in The Hague he passed on his bike a girl of his age with a rather exotic look, which no doubt reminded him of days long gone by in Batavia. She was also riding a pushbike, and so he joined her and that would be the start of a 59 years lasting relationship until death parted them. Her first name was Ada, derived from Alida, a name closely related to the name of Piet's girlfriend, Aly. But Jack decided the name Ada did not suit her and picked the middle part of 'Alida' and so the name became Li, which sounded more Asian.

And so it turned out that Piet and Jack had another, crucial thing in common: they both met an Ali(da) on a pushbike.

Page 6

Living dangerously

"In the meantime the Germans had enough of my *Opbouw* (rebuilding) activities to send me home to report to a government employment bureau to find a job and avoid being sent to Germany.

First thing upon my arrival in Dordrecht was to look up Govers and to enquire about the cadetship. Unfortunately the new Nazi minister of Information (read Propaganda), a Dr. Goedewaagen, had decreed that each newspaper could have only a certain number of cadets, based on the number of papers published. The Dordtse Courant had Barend Mensen and that was its quota. But Govers was organising an underground press system and he asked me to join and get some experience for my post war career.

As it was an underground activity it was a very dangerous one, if you were caught it meant a bullet or they exported you to Auschwitz. As there were no radios—they all had been confiscated—our only source of news was the BBC and we listened to that in cellars, in attics on lonely farms on radios which were not handed in, or on crystal or on homemade radio sets. There was sometimes a girl in the cell who knew shorthand, she took the broadcast down in steno, then translated it in Dutch and finally on old mimeo machines the paper was printed and then distributed.

Among underground cells, in that exciting way we kept up with the real progress of the war. One day Govers called me in his office and handed me a bundle of photographs telling me to take them as far away as possible. Reason was that the Gestapo was sniffing around. A few underground cells had been eliminated and they had searched his office. I was not gainfully employed so off I went to Geldrop, 90 kilometres from Dordrecht and pretty safe from the Gestapo, so I thought. The bundle of photos were of the RAF bombarding some German warships, German cities and other war scenes, it were not the kind of pictures you show around the BBQ.

My sister Jeanne (Sjaan) was employed by a doctor in Aalst, not far from Eindhoven. And it so happened that the Ortskommandant, the local prima donna dictator, was billeted with that household, and that was an ideal place to hide some funny pictures because neither the Gestapo, nor the SS would think of raiding the abode of the local commander.

I gave her strict instructions not to look at them, put the whole bundle in a drawer and hide the key. One night her curiosity got the better of her so she took out the whole package, spread them all over the desk to look at. Suddenly a knock on the door and in walked Adolf's representative. He was late and wanted a cup of coffee. Sjaan got a heart stopping panic attack, spread her arm over the desk to swipe the pictures in the drawer. Naturally the Ortskommandant also wanted to have a look.

'Where did you get those?' he asked very sternly in German.

'From my brother,' she shakily said in Dutch.

And quick and smart she made him a cup of coffee and, no, she did not put any poison in it. While Sjaan was brewing the coffee the Ortskommander rang his compatriots in the Gestapo and told them all about the terrorist he had caught, for which he demanded the Iron Cross with leaves. During the time this mini-drama was played in Aalst, I was visiting my sister Marie, who was a patient in Eindhoven Hospital. After this visit I went home to Geldrop and disaster. When I went inside all my brothers and sisters and parents were crying. My first thought was that they were so happy to see me, but that was alas not the case. 'The Germans have been here to pick you up,' my father said. I knew

it was not an invitation for a German dinner of Sauerkraut und Schweinefleisch.

Although the situation was dangerous my father saw me already as a resistant hero and suggested that I escape through the kitchen backdoor and hide in the woods. While he was saying those wise words, the front and back door were smashed open and we got a mini German invasion in our home. Soldiers and Feldwebels everywhere. My mother was breastfeeding my youngest brother Theo, the rest of the siblings were swimming in a flood of tears and lamenting as if they were at The Wailing Wall.

I was bundled in a patrol car and taken to Eindhoven for further interrogation. 'Where did the pictures come from?', 'Who gave them to me?', 'Was I a member of the underground movement?', 'Was I aware what could happen to me if I did not cooperate to establish a new order in Europe and what they can do to people like me?' etc. I was threatened with all sorts of horrible things and had to sign a paper saying that I would never do anything against the Third Reich, after that I could go home. But once one has been interrogated and marked in their books one is also a marked man or woman. In many cases they let you go to follow you and lead them to more suspects.

There was great jubilation when I came home very late that night, they already had written me off. The neighbours were immediately notified that Pete was back, the incident gave me a bit of hero status. Typically my father he did not want an unemployed son hanging around, so he contacted an old friend called Govers, no relative of the Dordrecht one! This Govers had a road building company and was building runways for the Luftwaffe on Welschap airfield in Eindhoven. I got a job as paymaster which was very boring, half the week I had nothing to do but I brought in some money.

There were two incidents during my time there which I will never forget. After work all workers had to line up at the exit gate and in a single line. A big fat obnoxious Feldwebel used to bend his knees to look along the line and shout if anybody was out of step. On one occasion after his shouting session one worker slipped a bit and was out of line, the big fat pig took his revolver and killed him on the spot. But there was another occasion when

the occupiers were taken for a ride. One of the workers went to the German management to ask could he at the end of the day take a wheelbarrow with dirt home. He got permission and everyday he stood there with his wheelbarrow full with dirt as the last man in the line to happily push his wheelbarrow home. Nobody woke up to the fact that it was a different barrow every night and that this genius sold them on the black market.

I did not want to stay in Geldrop, it was not my scene, I said farewell to all my family and returned to the place of my birth. It would be a long time before I saw my family again."

Page 7

Planning the escape

"On my arrival in Dordrecht I went straight to Govers' flat, only to be told by people in the building that he was arrested and the newspaper was closed down. That was the end of my journalistic ambitions.

On the 10th of July 1941, I was called to the Collection Centre for Metals to work as an official by the metal collection. Our friends needed iron, copper, aluminium, brass, in short all sort of metals including church bells, it all had to be handed in for the good of the Third Reich. I did not want to rob my fellow countryman of their possessions, so I brought up all sorts of excuses, amongst others I did no know the difference between ferrous and non-ferrous metals, the centre was too far away from my home, my bike had to surrender as well and I could not walk the distance. I asked for the German supervisor, who listened to my argument and gave me an exemption for my bike. I was one of few people who biked around Dordrecht. The job was not a pleasant task because the people who came to hand in their copper items saw us as Nazis and we copped a lot of abuse. During our time as collection agents we managed every day to keep some small copper or brass items and return to the owners at the end of the day. If we did not know the rightful owners' address, we kept it ourselves rather than assisting our overlords.

The employment was not a long term one. On August 9 the bureau finished its task and I was unemployed again till

September 15, 1941 and then they picked me again to be a bureaucrat at the issue of identity cards, where I had to fingerprint people and I myself was fingerprinting to November 24.

In the section next to me was a fellow called Jack van Gorkom, a very intelligent guy, born in The Dutch East Indies (Java), ready to go to uni but the war stopped that. Jack was a real patriot and wanted to join the Dutch Forces in the UK."

Jack's work at Aviolanda had finished at approximately the same day, on 4th August, as Piet's at the Collection Centre. Subsequently Jack worked in the same department as Piet in the Town Clerk's Office of Dordrecht in exactly the same weeks. This was the moment that they finally met and became friends. Meanwhile Jack was thinking up plans to get out of occupied Holland and even contemplated with another friend the construction of an airplane or the conversion of a canoe into a little submarine. Fortunately he had a father who managed to frustrate the progress they made in the basement of the house of Jack's parents.

"It was now November 1941. The winter was severe, no coal or oil for heating. Food was very scarce, even on the coupons. Hard times ahead. Begin November 1941 the powers to be told me I had to work as a time clerk in a flying boat factory called Aviolanda. This German run (of course) plant made Dornier flying boats for Rommel's Army in North Africa. Those planes were about the same as the British Catalinas. The whole organization was a nest of Nazis and Nazi sympathisers, but at the same time there was a very active and well organised underground cell at work, which sabotaged at a grand scale. The amazing thing was it did not matter how many extra spies they put in the factory, nobody was ever caught in act of sabotage.

The factory was located at the banks of the river Merwede and when a boat was ready it glided via a slipway into the river for a test flight, which were very short ones, because the engines did not work very well with sugar in the tank, so what was the solution? Fill the plane up with workers from the factory floor and

there was a perfect flight. An aeronautical engineer had another good idea. If one made an insertion at a certain depth and angle and filled that up and painted it, that would cause metal fatigue after a few flying hours and a plane with no propellers is not airworthy.

Of course on the administrative side it causes mayhem by forgetting data, filing in the wrong ones, losing the essential papers, etc. I hung in there for 12 months, but it became a bit nerve racking."

According to other sources, the planes were initially sabotaged by inserting pieces of carton in the fuel pipes, which would slowly swell and block them. It is quite likely that Jack made his first contacts with the Dutch Resistance in this same factory when he was employed there several months before. Piet wrote:

"Jack did not feel safe in Holland and on a few occasions he noticed that his house was being watched. He became a bit desperate and thought of all sorts of ways to get out of Holland. Sweden was not an option, caught on a boat with nowhere to go was out. Nearby Dordrecht is a marshland called the Biesbosch, ideal for flying boats. The Dutch underground used it to get escaped flying crews and others back to the UK. Jack approached the underground to be included in one of the flights. That was to no avail because only escaped personnel, government officials and high ranking military were allowed to use that escape route.

It did not last very long anyway. A week after Jack approached the Resistance, the leader of that cell was arrested, taken to his house and there shot in front of his wife and kids.

One Sunday afternoon I was walking with a couple of friends through town when all of a sudden a revolver was pushed in my back and 4 SS-fellows grabbed, kicked me and dragged me to the Ortskommandant post. I had to undress, my wallet was taken, the contents registered, and was interrogated. They wanted names of the Dordtse Courant and Aviolanda people, was I in the underground movement, what was my army regiment, why was I moving up and down between Dordrecht and Geldrop, who gave me the illegal photos etc. I got a good and painful hiding and

could go.

They gave me back my wallet, I checked and there were 20 guilders missing. I said to the *Unteroffizier*, 'There are 20 guilders missing'. He said there were not 20 guilders in the wallet, but I argued the point in a loud voice, which brought the Kommandant out of his next door office. I explained the situation and the officer asked, did he take it? The drama continued when the officer ordered the *Unteroffizier* to empty his pockets and like magic out came my 20 guilders, which was such an embarrassment for the Wehrmacht that with a closed fist he hit the fellow in the face. That incident gave me some respect for the German army, whose members were not all Nazis. The Wehrmacht consisted out of ordinary German citizen, who were conscripted in the army. It was the SS and the Gestapo who were the villains.

An amazing occurrence happened one Sunday in our parish church; the church was half filled with German soldiers, most of them from Bavaria. Now the priest who said mass was a converted Jew, who wore the Star of David over his vestments. It did not make any difference to the soldiers, they went to the front to receive communion like the rest of us. When they left the church there was applause."

While Piet worked at Aviolanda after he and Jack had served at the Town Clerk's Office, Jack was sent to another factory, called N.V. Secpreserve, a company that produced dried food, named *Epava*. He worked here from 8th December 1941 till 7th March 1942 in the wages administration department. Some time after finishing this job, he managed to get away. On 4 June 1942 Jack was officially registered as refugee by the Swiss authorities in Bern, Switzerland. The escape route from Holland to Switzerland was notoriously dangerous and according to some may have cost the lives of perhaps 25 to 50 percent of all people who tried it. Nevertheless, after three months Jack decided to return to Holland, where he ran into his new friend Piet again. Soon they decided to disappear together, taking their girlfriends with them.

The Small Escape

Page 1

Setting Off

Alice, Jack, Li and Piet set off on Wednesday 25 November 1942, a calm, but chilly and grey autumn day with temperatures of 9 degrees Celsius and a little rain, according to the Dutch Bureau of Meteorology. This departure date follows from calculating back from their date of arrival in the Swiss town of Porrentruy. It also corresponds with the notice that Li received from her employer, the Rotterdam Council. Obviously she had not told her boss that she was going to escape. The notice says that her job was officially terminated on Tuesday 24 November, probably meaning that she had left the job that day. The letter can be found on the page with documents. Fortunately the events of those days are described in the memoirs that Piet wrote in 2008.

"Jack van Gorkom became very restless and anxious after a couple of gentlemen in long, black leather coats came to his house to enquire about his whereabouts. After these friendly visits Jack very seldom slept at home. On many occasions I was being followed by a member of the black brotherhood. It was time to do something. And we did something, we decided to go on a "holiday" trip to Switzerland through occupied Belgium and France.

It was no picnic. SS and Gestapo were swarming like locusts all over Europe looking for individuals like us.

Jack told me that he had promised a Jewish refugee in Switzerland that in case he would return to Helvetia he would go to Amsterdam and collect a substantial sum of money. And deliver that to a Jewish family in Lausanne. Apart from that he had a secret mission for an English lady, Mrs. Skene, who lived also in Lausanne. Jack never told me the nature of these missions.

Jack had a girlfriend called Li and as we know I had my girlfriend Alice. We told the girls of our death-defying plan, what it really was. And both girls wanted to come with us, I had

objections and did not want to take Alice with me and have her death on my conscience, but she was most determined and it is impossible to change Alice's mind. Alice was at home at Zutphen and although I had promised her father not to see her there I broke my solemn oath and went to the lion's den and met my future spouse in the forbidden zone and on a cold winter day we walked and talked and cuddled and kissed and it was decided that we would meet the next morning at Zutphen station.

And so next morning, very early, there was Aly. She had written a note to say goodbye to her parents and put that note under the plate on the breakfast table. The housemaid who was going to serve breakfast discovered the note and raised the alarm. Aly's pappa bolted out the house to the railway station to take the first available train to Geldrop, because that is where he thought we would be. There was a mini drama when he insisted to go through the house trying to find her, he returned to base a very sad man.

Aly and I took the train to Utrecht to meet Jack and Li to go to Amsterdam for Jack to do the things he had to do, but in Utrecht the man in disguise, in black leather coat and black hat was following us from platform to platform, which made us a little nervous, so we took different carriages to throw him off the trail. When I looked out of the window the poor Third Reich agent seemed to be lost, because he lost us and so the adventure started."

Page 2

The Small Escape

The gang of four stayed for the night in an Amsterdam hotel. Thursday 26 November 1942 was another calm day, slightly colder, grey and rainy. They took the train to the city of Dordrecht, where both Piet and Jack had grown up. Piet and Alice spent the night separately at Piet's aunts, Lucy's and Plonia's. It is not known where Jack and Li went. It was Friday 27th November when they finally started out on the really dangerous part of the journey, illegally crossing the first of three borders, on yet another chilly and grey Dutch autumn day, this time however

without rain. Piet's memoirs continue here as he has skipped the stop overnight in Dordrecht.

"On his way up and down to Switzerland Jack was greatly assisted by the Belgian and French underground (Maquis) and so we were going to use those contacts again. Along every border there were *passeurs*, people smugglers, who for a price took you over the various borders.

We went from Amsterdam to Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and crossed the Dutch Belgian border in a little village called de Clinge. The price for bringing us over; 1 pound of butter, on the black market worth 50 Australian dollars. Passeurs could be paid in natura, coffee, soap, cigarettes or money. Once in Belgium we went to Antwerp and then to Brussels.

According to Murphy's Law if something can go wrong it will. We boarded a train full with German military and a sprinkling of civilians, standing room only, we thought that during our travels Hitler had thrown in the towel and they all were returning to the Heimat, but no they were all going to fleshpots of Brussels. Now all of a sudden Aly got an urgent call from nature and working her way through masses

of *Soldaten, Feldwebels, Unteroffizieren* and *Offizieren* she made it to the toilet. After finishing powdering her nose, she wanted to get out, but the door would not let her. She knocked, she screamed, she nearly fainted and terrible visions of her future flashed through her mind. Now, what could be worse than being locked up in a Belgian Railways toilet? At last a German Officer, who was also a gentleman, used his bayonet to pry the door open and released her without asking any questions.

So we continued to Brussels and from there via Namur to Charleroi. It was late when we arrived in Namur to change trains to Charleroi. On that very dark station was a guy who was watching us, if we moved he moved too and the situation we were in, at once became very suspicious. We discussed what to do with him and Jack, who was a karate and Jiu Jutsu expert, was thinking of sending him for a while to fairyland, but thought better of it. That action could have more trouble, so we went to the fellow and asked a light for a cigarette. It turned out he was an underground

worker and had his suspicions about us, we told him our story and he became very helpful, gave us details and advice of the situation in that region.

So eventually we arrived in Charleroi, where we had to look up a very patriotic Belgian lady, who was a milliner and used her shop window as a communication channel by displaying her hats in different colours and positions. E.g. a row of red hats in a line meant danger; do not cross the border into France at this point. We went inside and she told us the situation there: because of the many crossings the Germans had strengthened the borders between Belgium and France and dozens of refugees had been trapped. The milliner, unfortunately I forgot her name, said we should return to the Westside of Belgium and cross over near Roubaix."

Years later, in 1954, Jack received a letter from the "Commission de Contrôle de Charleroi" with enquiries concerning the help he had received during the war from the gentlemen Armand Ligoit and Franz Walemme, living at 18 rue Paul Lambert in Marcinelle near Charlerois. The enquiry contained many questions to verify what these two gentlemen had done for Jack and his companions.

Page 3

The four were already late in Namur, when they still had to travel on to Charleroi, so they must have spent the night in Charleroi. This is in agreement with Piet's remark below that they lost two days and it also corresponds with Alice's memory. This means that it was Saturday 28 November 1942, when they travelled back from Charlerois to the West of Belgium heading for Roubaix. It was exactly the same weather as the day before, with temperatures of about 7-8 degrees Celsius, no rain and no wind, going by the closest weather stations in Vlissingen and Maastricht at the southern border of Holland.

"Very disappointing, losing time and two more days exposed to danger, we made it to Roubaix and crossed the Belgium-French border late at night at that point. We then proceeded to Lille

where we encountered another dangerous situation.

Jack had a "safe" house in Lille, but he had been there during daytime. Now it was very late and dark and the whole city blacked-out. Jack was disorientated, he had no clue where we were. Roaming around in Lille we saw a house where a little light was shining through and off we went to that saving light, the door was open so we walked in.

Surprise, surprise we landed in the *Ortskommandatur*, the regional headquarters. Refugees and fugitives would not dare to walk in the German inner sanctum, so they were not surprised or suspicious. We told them we were *Gastarbeiter* (immigrant workers) and had lost our way, Jack knew the name of the street where the safe house was and very politely the Unteroffizier showed us how to get there. We said "Danke schön" and gave them a pound of coffee, we said we did not need. Germans love Kaffee and after we gave it to them, they would have let us go even if we were on our way to send Hitler to the seventh heaven, we even shook hands and once outside bolted like racehorses in the Melbourne Cup to our safe house.

The safe house was a Dutch family, who owned a butter factory, a safe place because it was where the Germans got their butter from. The husband assisted many Jewish couples on their escape. The situation there was a sort of Schindler's List-scenario. We had a much needed shower, a decent meal and a good night's rest.

The next day we were up and away to Avesnes, and met some Maquis workers Jack knew. Uneventful we arrived in Avesnes ready for the big trip to Nancy. Signs of tension in the group began to show. The anxiety, the rush, the cold, tiredness, it all had an influence, but we were now approaching the French-Swiss border and freedom that was the great motivation to go on in spite of the hardships."

This next day after the night in Lille was Sunday 29 November. The journey to Avesnes was actually a detour as it is more to the West. From there it went to Nancy, where they would stay the following night.

It was Monday 30 November 1942 when they left Nancy for the most scary part of the journey, crossing the border that separated occupied Europe from neutral Switzerland. They took a train south to Dijon, changed for Besançon and from there they went in the direction of Mulhouse. Approximately halfway they got off the train, most likely in Montbéliard, which is only 10 kilometres from the Swiss border. The last bit they had to walk, although Alice remembers that they got a ride by horse and cart as well. They finally ended up in a village called Glay, going by details of Li that were recorded in 1942 by the Dutch Legation in Bern. This record can nowadays be found in the Dutch National Archive in The Hague. Considering that the four of them were heading for the Dutch Legation in Bern, it made sense to cross the border in this region. In the vicinity of Glay, Piet's memoirs continue.

"On his previous trip Jack was helped by the students of a protestant seminary and a bit further by workers of a paper mill, both establishments were in a valley and the Swiss border was on top of the mountain, it turned out to be the hardest part of the trip.

We went down to the seminary but on the way down the Maquis had posted their members to warn escapees of the danger. The seminary students had been shot and the paper mill was now a German border post. Where to go? We were the plural adult version of Hansel and Gretel and Jack had forgotten to put the marbles down. We backed up again and saw the light in a farmhouse.

We knocked on the door and the farmer saw who we were, we were not the first refugees and straight away said he could not help us, because assisting an escapee was punishable by death and he knew too well how many local people had been shot. We looked through the open door into the house and saw and heard they were praying the rosary. As we needed a prayer as well, we asked if we could join them. We were invited inside and prayed the *salve, Marie, pleine de grâce* etc. Aly in Dutch and I in French, Li and Jack who were not Catholics bowed their heads and I

presume said their own prayers.

After the rosary they made something for us to eat and said *bon voyage*. We pleaded with them to guide us up the mountain. "Non monsieur, non." The farmer's son took pity on us and said that he would bring us a short distance on the mountain and direct us how to go avoiding our friends and their puppy dogs.

It was a cold and cloudy night with full moon. The farmer's son said not to take bush paths but stick to the undergrowth. So up we went as silent as possible we hardly dared to breathe. In the not too far distance we heard the Alsatians wildly barking and expected to be nipped by them at any moment, sometimes we heard noises behind and in front of us, which was frightening, but our guide told us *un lapin*, a rabbit, wished us all the best and disappeared in the bush after telling us how to go.

Up we went scratching our hands, legs and faces, tearing our clothing. We crawled, and crawled it seemed to us if we were climbing Mount Everest, out of breath and tired we kept on crawling through the unforgiving undergrowth. Suddenly we stopped in our tracks because we saw a searchlight sweeping from left to right and back. We ducked and hardly dared to lift our heads.

I do not know how long we were laying there but the tension was too great and Jack said I'll make a run for it, but if he did the other three of us decided to go with him. We waited till the searchlight swung away from us, we stood up and raced to the flat part of the mountain and the four of us fell flat on our faces. At that moment Jack yelled out "We are here!"

We had been victims of an optical illusion. What we thought was a search light, was the whitewashed foundation of an old farm and with the clouds moving in front of the moon it gave the illusion of a moving searchlight—as Dr Knofelbacher says: quote *Die ganze Welt ist eine Illusion* unquote, but then again he might have never fallen flat on his face on a brick wall."

The spot where they crossed the border is approximately halfway between Glay and Grandfontaine on the map below. The little red

balloon marks the location of the paper mill, which is mentioned at the top of this page.

Page 5

Journey's End

The day that the gang of four entered Switzerland was still Monday 30 November 1942, although it was already late.

"The ruins of the old farmhouse marked the border between France and Switzerland, so we were in *der Schweiz*, but not safe, because the Swiss had declared a 15km zone from the border as a forbidden zone: a *Zône Interdite*; any illegal person caught by the Swiss gendarmerie were handed over to their German friends and probably shot. Jewish families never crossed as a family, the children were given to other refugees and husband and wife crossed separately, so that in case any of them would be arrested some family members would survive."

A comment should be added here. Switzerland had completely closed its borders for refugees on 13 August 1942. From then on, border police and the military would *refouler* anyone who was not a *political* refugee. The word *refouler* means 'to force back, to turn away'. The concept of political refugee was not precisely defined, but it certainly did not apply to Jewish people. On 29 December 1942 the rules were made even harsher and from then on this so-called *zône interdite* was introduced, so four weeks *after* our four friends crossed the Swiss border. The general policy of sending away people, which had started well before the introduction of the *zône interdite*, has been properly acknowledged by the so-called Bergier Commission, which published in 1999 an extensive report called "Switzerland and Refugees in the Nazi Era". [Click here for the report](#); see Conclusions, paragraph 4, page 263.

Piet's memoires continue:

"We had landed near a little village called Grandfontaine. As we came from a blacked-out Europe, it was a bit strange to see in the distance a fully lit-up village. We finished up in an orchard apparently used as the local lover's lane. We interrupted a couple in their lovemaking activity and asked for the house of the local priest. We thought he would be a safe bet and not betray us.

We found the presbytery but the priest was at choir practice, so we huddled in the doorway, waiting for his homecoming. When he did come home and saw us he knew that we were not tourists. He did not say very much, but invited us in and put us in front of the fire to thaw us out. While he was making something to eat, not a word was said, the less the better, he did not want to finish up in jail.

When we had recovered from our mountain climbing and moonshine sonata, the reverend told us to go to the next town Porrentruy or in Swiss German Putrut. There was a railway station and we could catch the train to Bern. But what without Swiss Francs?

We had to reach the Dutch Legation in Bern. Once you had reported to the Dutch authorities, you were safe. So in the middle of the night we marched to Porrentruy very relieved and happy that we escaped out of the hell of Nazi occupied Europe.

Although it was very early in the morning that we arrived on the station, there were already a few commuters on the platform waiting for the Bern train. The platform was in full glare, the kiosks opened and to our unbelievable surprise we saw bananas, chocolates, cigarettes and other things we had not seen for 2 years, but we could only look.

The train was shunted in front of the platform and passengers boarded. We had decided to take 4 different seats in 2 carriages so as not to attract attention. While passengers were boarding the Swiss Army Police had arrived and with bayonet on their rifle walked up and down the platform. I thought it was safer to hide in the toilet, but walking through the carriage a soldier on the platform kept space with me and when I came out of the toilet he was in the carriage to welcome me. "Monsieur vos papiers s.v.p." Of course there were no *papiers*. The same story in the other carriages. We were taken out of the train and marched with an

escort of the Swiss army, two brave warriors with their guns in front, two at the back and one of each side of us, what do you expect? A bunch of dangerous criminals like us warrant a well armed escort.

For the locals it was nothing new, every day refugees were caught and marched through the town. We were taken to the local army post, separated and interrogated. We thought it would be an advantage to say that we were married, so the four of us individually said so, but that threw the whole military machinery in chaos. After the interrogation the girls were taken to a convent and Jack and I to the local jail.

In Switzerland at that time the jails were private enterprise. The jailer got a certain amount for each prisoner and that system was open to abuse and corruption on a grand scale. All cells were unisex. Jack and I were in a cell for 4 people, there were 9 of us, including 3 women. The famous resistance French General Giraud had also been a guest in that 5-star establishment. He had scratched his name on the wall, Jack and I put our names under his.

The food was not even fit for a dog, but if one had the money you could order a three course dinner from the next door hotel. One of our fellow criminals was a gentleman by the name of Huib Dupon. Huib was related to Philips, the electronics king. We will meet Huib on many more occasions in our exciting, blood curling, heart attack provoking tale."

Page 6

"Our time in jail gave us the opportunity to review our progress so far and how to handle the Swiss bureaucrats whose judgment could mean life or death. Jack said, "You know the Swiss have still their Embassy in Holland and are able to check everything we tell them and if they through their enquiries discover that we are not married, we might upset them, we are liars and they could send us back to the neighbours."

Next interview in jail with a captain and a major, we came clean and confessed that it was only to improve our chances to stay in their beautiful country. They never commented but went to the

girls convent and asked them "Are you married?" "Of course", Li and Aly said, they thought it was a trick question, in the land of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Tell with an apple on his head one can expect silly questions. "Of course we are married" both girls said. "Die Herrschaften (that are Jack and I) sagen" that you are still single. We were incommunicado with the girls and they did not know of the changing of the mind. Next they did what every woman would do: burst out in tears.

The captain and the major made a hasty retreat (the first one in Swiss military history) to the jail, they were not in a jovial mood and really put the pressure on, but we stuck to our guns. In order to resolve the problem we were taken to the girls convent for a tête-à-tête and the marriage problem was resolved much to the relief of the officials, who went to the nearest restaurant for a cheese fondue, while we were put back in that overcrowded and stinking cell in the city jail and fisted on 2 dry sardines and two slices of stale Dr. Vogel bread.

Every day we lived in fear that we would be issued with a deportation order. We tried to ring the Dutch Embassy but that request was refused. Huib Dupon was the first one who was taken out; we did not know what happened to him. Next day Jack and I got the call, we met the girls and the four of us were marched to the railway station and with guards we were transported to Büren an der Aare.

There was a reception centre with about 3,000 refugees, mainly Jewish, how could you feed a mass of people like that? There was no heating, latrines were long distances away from the barracks. We slept on straw in bunks with one blanket, so close together one could hardly turn around. The stench was horrible, in the washing barracks the water was frozen. In the middle of the night in midwinter nobody ventured out to go to the latrine; you opened the barrack door put your bum outside and did your business.

The cream of European intelligentsia was in Büren. Russian professors, artists from the Prater in Vienna, painters, doctors of every speciality, singer Joseph Schmid, the world champion chess player, they came from every country in occupied Europe, we all shared the hunger and the intense cold and misery. Many people

died in Büren in the land of the Red Cross.

It was 2 days before Christmas and the four of us were the only non-Jews in the camp and wanted to celebrate Christmas. The camp potatoes were stored in a dug out cellar with on both sides an armed guard, Jack observed that there were no guards during the night and one night he managed to get in the cellar and came back with a dozen potatoes.

We also had a visit of the local parish priest, who next day came back with 4 tins of sardines, a tin of red cabbage, some chocolates and somehow we managed to obtain a couple of onions. Aly and Li made a salad out of those ingredients and that was our unforgettable Christmas dinner, we sang some carols and with tears streaming from our eyes embraced and wished each other a Happy Christmas. It was a very real Christmas."

According to a kind of resume that Piet had to fill in at some time during the war, the imprisonment in Porrentruy must have lasted six days, starting on 1 December 1942 and finishing on 6 December.

Page 7

"Dr. Hessel Turkstra, Alice's father, had a doctorate in Mathematics, he was principal of the *Christelijke Lyceum*, a prestigious private school in Zutphen and lectured at the *Vrije Universiteit* (Independent University) in Amsterdam. He also had lecture tours in Switzerland and consequently he had many connections in that country.

Alice remembered one very clearly, a Frau Dr. Kurz, president of the *Christliche Friedensdienst* (Christian Peace Movement). The visiting priest put Alice in touch with this lady and she arranged to have us released and transferred to Dutch internee camps.

Those camps were managed by Swiss Authorities (*Zentralleitung der Arbeitslager* or short the Z.L.), but financed by the Dutch Government in exile in London and exclusively for Dutch refugees. There were two labour camps, one in Cossonay and one in St Cergue. In Chamby sur Montreux was an old resort hotel, Hôtel des Narcisses, looking out over Lake Geneva. This

was a camp for elderly people, single girls, married couples and people in bad health and that is where Aly and Li went. Jack and I were sent to Cossonay."



The day of the release from the camp in Büren an der Aare was 11 January 1943, a Monday. Together with the four friends more Dutch people were released, as shown on the photo. Third, fourth, fifth and sixth person from the left are Li, Jack, Alice and Piet. At the far right you see Beppie and Huib Dupon. Next to Beppie stand Mrs and Mr Devries.

Apart from above-mentioned efforts of Frau Dr. Kurz, also the Dutch Legation in Bern had been working hard to transfer all Dutch refugees from *Auffanglager* like Büren an der Aare to the Dutch hotel camps. The Legation had only learned in December 1942 which Dutch people were held in these internment camps. In 1999 the shocking nature of the camp in Büren was fully acknowledged by the Bergier Commission, which we already mentioned before in this chapter. In 1999 this official Swiss

Commission published an extensive report called "Switzerland and Refugees in the Nazi Era". [Click here for the report](#). On page 156 of the report you will find details about Büren.

Here the story of the escape from occupation and repression more or less ends. What follows is the tale of two years of waiting until finally the time had come to put an end to World War II.

Life in Exile

Page 1

Camp Life

Single male Dutch refugees in Switzerland were subjected to forced labour in special camps. Elderly people, single girls, married couples and people in bad health were allowed to stay in former hotels. As Piet and Alice as well as Jack and Li were not married yet, they were separated. The girls had to stay in Hôtel des Narcisses in the small village of Chamby, high up on the mountainside above Montreux. It was once a very fancy hotel with a beautiful panoramic view over Lake Geneva, but from a business perspective it had never been successful, probably because it is just a little too far away from Montreux and the lake, despite the little train station right in front of the hotel.

Chamby itself is little more than a hamlet and quite unknown, although as a matter of fact it seems to play a role in Ernest Hemingway's classic *A Farewell to Arms*. In the fifth part of the book the two main characters of the story live for a while in a small pension, which is situated close to a station at the Montreux-Oberland-Bernois railway track, a little above the Chernex station. It is very likely that this is Chamby, although Hemingway does not actually mention its name. His main characters live in the pension during the autumn and winter of 1917-18. By coincidence Aimée Dostoyevsky, daughter of another famous writer, stayed in the Hôtel des Narcisses in the winter of 1918 to recover from a severe tonsillitis, which she caught while tracing the tracks of her father when writing his biography. This little fact about Dostoyevski's daughter comes from real life, however, and is not a literary invention.

In 1943 and also in real life, Piet and Jack were sent to a labour camp in Cossonay, shown on the map at the bottom of this page and the next. In his memoirs Piet described life in the labour camp extensively.

"Cossonay was not a Swiss resort. The amenities were shocking, the food was bad and insufficient and the work conditions were harsh; we had to dry a swamp. The management consisted of a *Lager Kommandant* (camp commander), a Swiss German Air Force officer, called Bachmann, and an *Arbeitsleiter* (works manager) who was a Swiss Italian, by the name of Botticelli and his Alsatian.

The swamp was about half an hour walk from the camp. That meant getting up at six o'clock in the morning, get a wash, if the water was not frozen, a parade to pay tribute to the *Schweize Fahne* (the Swiss flag), then a breakfast one would not give to a dog and then we were on our way, to take out tree stumps, hacking them away with a pick. If we could not get it out of the frozen ground we called the Dynamite Boys. They came and put dynamite underneath and blew it up. Even if it was not necessary the boys were called, because the Swiss *Arbeitsleiter* would blow his whistle and we had to disappear out of the area.

The swamp was surrounded by low hills and some sort of dykes. On top of one was a tavern and most of us sought refuge in that establishment for a quick Pernod. When Botticelli blew his whistle to indicate the coast was clear and we had to go back to work, hardly anybody was there. He always was accompanied by his German Shepherd and sent the dog out to find us. There were too many of us, so the dog got confused. One day he woke up to the reality where we were, so he talked to the innkeeper and threatened him with the *Polizei* if he ever served drinks to us.

The inn had a big cellar so that is where the inn keeper subsequently hid us, when Botticelli came to see if we were there. It was an empty pub, according to the publican. He had a Pernod himself unaware that he sat on top of us.

We also sabotaged the works. Small 15 cm culverts were dug across the field ending up in 40 cm pipes which drained the water away. It never happened because at the end we blocked the pipes, which should drain the water into the collectors. As a new *Arbeitsleiter* said it was "Alles für die Katze".

Nearly seventy years later, history has proven that all efforts had been 'for the cats' indeed. In September 2007 Wim van Bemmelen

visited Cossonay, as his uncle Cor van Bommel had been interned in the Cossonay camp for several months in 1942. Wim discovered that the Swiss have given the former swamp back to nature. Piet continues:

"The Dutch refugees came in different waves. First were the Jews, then Dutch officers, followed by students who refused to sign a loyalty declaration with the Germans, and then the odd-bods like us.

With the students came the student tradition of initiation for every newcomer. It was sometimes very cruel, but it created a bit of diversion from the dreadful camp life. There was a 'Blood Council' comprising of a chairman and two 'councillors', behind them three masked executioners. The members of the blood council were all jurists and although the whole procedure was a joke, it had a professional atmosphere. The newcomer was unaware of this till on the fourth day of his arrival, at three o'clock at night, he was taken out of his bed, brought to the dining room to face his tormentors. On a winter night with 6 degrees below zero that was not a picnic, neither for us, all residents of the barrack about 20 of us had to attend.

The victim was interrogated for the reasons why he came to the Schweiz and then he had to give a speech on a subject set by the blood council e.g. the sex life of ants or what did he do to get rid of Hitler and that sort of silly title. Some guys, mainly students, did a good and funny job, but still had to run naked around the camp, in spite of the temperature and the hour of the night. There were other punishments, which should never be revealed.

There was a purpose in this madness namely to detect any spies, who infiltrated refugees camps. Jack and I were exempt by the blood council because Jack went through this the first time he was in the camp and I because I came with Jack."

Page 2

"The camp had six barracks for refugees, one for the commandant and works manager, a kitchen barrack and the latrine, which was the latest in design and comfort: six 40 gallon

drums in a row and over the top a plank to sit on, it was indeed a very relaxing place to go to and meditate amid the smell of Switzerland's finest roses, however accidents sometimes did happen, like a bird falling of its perch.

In their goodness and generosity the leaders of the Z.L. gave us fortnightly *Urlaub* (leave). We were free to go anywhere provided that we were back in the fortress on time on Sunday night. Most of the Jewish guys were business men in Holland and had money at their disposal, so off they went to Lausanne for a good weekend, they also bought food stuff and chocolates and condensed Carnation milk to supplement their meagre dinners in the camp. There were a couple of fellows who, like Jack and I, did not have any Swiss francs. So they found some girlfriends who out of pity supplied them with all sort of goodies. One notorious fellow managed to keep 3 girl friends and his locker looked like the corner store.

The journey to the fleshpots every fortnight was pretty easy, but the return trip was a different story. Our camp, Cossonay, was on top of a mountain and the station, Cossonay-Gare, was down below. To get there we had to use the funiculaire. A funiculaire is 2 carriages tied up on a steel cable. Underneath each carriage is a large water tank. When the carriage came to the top of the mountain the tank is filled with water the weight of the water plus passengers is heavy enough to pull the car at the bottom to the top, because when the carriage arrived at the bottom all the water was drained out of the tank. Greenpeace would be happy with this system: no pollution, no noise.

This transport method is all right during the day when there is normal traffic up and down. Come Sunday night when all good Swiss burgers are laying underneath their heavy doonas dreaming of Wilhelm Tell and forty-plus poor refugees have to make it to their place of residence after an exhausting weekend. They are all at the bottom and want to go up. The water tank of the top car is filled with water, but there are no adventurous travellers for the downward journey, up and down goes the contraption till we have come midway, when it reaches its equilibrium and a full stop. "All out" is the cry, out we go to push the damned thing, but when it moves one has to be quick to hop in otherwise it disappears in the

clouds and one has to climb the mountain, no pleasure at 11 o'clock on a dark cold night plus the prospect of an *Urlaubssperre* (no leave for 2 weekends)."

Someone dedicated a special website to this funiculaire: www.funimag.com.

"The Swiss are a remarkable people all 8 million of them, they speak 4 different languages, their government is truly democratic, all important issues are put through a referendum, they never go to war and in case there should be a conflict, their armed forces can be mobilized within 12 hours because every soldier take his gear home and is enrolled in a local regiment. They also munch muesli which they successfully imposed on the world, no meal is complete without cheese, they even eat the holes and they swear alliance to the *Schweize Fhane*, their flag is their national symbol and is very much revered."

Page 3

"During the war-games Switzerland was in a difficult position. It was completely surrounded by the fighting dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, and their neutrality was sometimes in danger especially when it seemed that those two fellows were winning.

That happened twice and a full alert was sounded. Our camp commandant Bachman was called to arms and a replacement had to be found, the Z.L. was really scratching the bottom of the human resources barrel, but found a candidate in the person of *der Kaufmann Heinrich*.

The Z.L. registered all their clients, as normal, by their family name first and Christian name next, so our new camp head referred to himself as "Ich, der Kaufmann Heinrich", it was quite clear to us that *der Kaufmann Heinrich* was not *Mensa material* and consequently his commandant was a shamble.

Kaufmann Heinrich started his tenure by selecting a personal servant and for that position he choose Dr. Meerscham, a Jewish Dutch neurosurgeon, who simply loved the job because he did not have to go the dreaded *Arbeitsfeld*, but one thing he had to do

was every morning to empty Kaufmann Heinrich's potty and he always did that in the middle of the morning parade, as soon as the Schweize Fahne crawled up the flagpole. Meerschamwam came out of Kaufmann's hut with the potty in his out-stretched arm and marched to the latrine and back in front of the assembled troops, it was really a sight to be hold.

Even Alice got in trouble with der Herr Kaufmann. One Sunday I was one of the unlucky ones who did not make it to jump in the funiculaire and with six other inmates climbed the mountain to the camp where we arrived 45 minutes too late, with Kaufmann half frozen stiff standing at the camp gate exercising his mighty authority as follows, "Der van den Nieuwenhof Peter zweimal keine Urlaub", and so he repeated that mantra another five times for the other fellows.

So I informed Alice that for four weeks I would not turn up, well Alice did not take this sitting down and wrote a four page letter to der Kaufmann Heinrich, telling him we had to make wedding arrangements, life was already tough for us refugees etc. etc. But to no avail he returned the same letter to her with the following message, "Mein liebes Fräulein, Auch Ich war einmal jung, aber meine Eltern legte wert der auf, das ich immer rechtzeitig zu Hause war, Der Kaufmann Heinrich" (Dear Miss, once I was young too, but my parents always insisted that I came home in time).

This man was a simple farmer and should have never given a position as this. One of his worries was the danger we posed for "die Landmädel" (country girls). Sometimes we were called up by the Dutch Embassy in Bern and then we had to get approval from him, that was always accompanied by the warning not to touch the "Landmädel". He said he knew that if we had to do some business in town it was business with "Kurze Rocke" (short skirts).

Once we blackballed him because we were not happy with the rubbish which went for food. Everybody in the camp turned their head to the other side when we passed him. Nobody, absolutely nobody said a word to him. On the parade ground he held speeches explaining he could not do anything about the food situation because the Z.L. did not give him enough money. He was under enormous stress, he never had a job like this and did

not know how to handle it, so in the end he suggested one morning that the next Saturday he would take us out for "Bruderschaft" drinks to the local for drinkies at his own personal expense.

Jack and I felt sorry for the old man. It must have cost him a fortune. The evening finished up him being drunk, he was like a wet rag. We put him in a coffee trolley and pulled him back to the camp, which took hours because nobody was sober. In the morning at the parade when he came out of his hut we all shouted "Good morning, Herr Kaufmann", as Meerschwam appeared with 2 potties.

So there are many more Herr Kaufmann stories, which are not revealed in these sacred scriptures."

Page 4

Alice's Chamby Survival

"While I was experiencing my combat de l'existence in Cossonay under de guidance of Kaufmann Heinrich, Alice and other guests were subject to the whims of Fraulein Fleury. Fraulein Fleury's gender has never been positively established. She walked like Mussolini when he inspected his troops, she had a booming voice which could be heard at the sixth floor of the hotel, she had hair growing at the wrong places and she and the camp commandant were thieves of the first order.

When new supplies came in, they were the first ones in the storeroom to take what they wanted and more to sell; remember all things were rationed. There was always a shortage of milk, butter, sugar and oil; there was never enough food, because it was pinched by the management.

The residents of the camp consisted for 90% out of Jews, Some were atheists, others were kosher and a portion kept only the main Jewish feast days. Alice and later I were appointed *Shabbat goys*. Friday nights after sunset Alice raced around and up and down six floors to switch off the lights and light candles, she might be on floor 2 and a woman on floor 6 had to warm milk for her baby, up went the cry "Frau Nieuwenhof, come here please to

switch off the gas." There were non-kosher Jews on that floor but they were not allowed to touch it, so up went Alice. On the way down there was always somebody who wanted something from the grocery shop at the M.O.B. station.

The Jewish feastsdays like Yom Kippur, Chanukah, Bar Mitzvah, weddings, etcetera were always busy days and all the work was voluntary. Sometimes you were invited for a Kosher meal, but then fish heads on the menu did not do very much for the appetite.

When the feast of the Atonement (Yom Kippur) was there, no Jew was allowed to have any possessions, bar those basic ones for his sustenance, so for a token amount of one franc I bought all their goods, which they bought back after the feast. It was legal and everything was written in contracts, but I am still owned some francs.

Aly also was pursuing her conversion and joined a Marian congregation where she met Philomena Caduff. Philomena assisted in the household of Dr Delhaas, who was the rector of a Dutch boarding school in Glion and as it turned out was a friend of her father. It was always a pleasant experience to visit the Delhaases, away from Kaufmann Heinrich and Fraulein Fleury."

After Piet and Alice had moved to other places, Jack and Li took over the role of Shabbat goy. The M.O.B.-station was the train station of the Montreux-Oberland Bernois railway company. Chamby is still a station on the line from Montreux to Gstaad and Lenk im Simmental. The Dutch boarding school was the Prinses Beatrix Lyceum, which was housed in the former Hôtel du Parc in Glion. This Dutch Lyceum had been founded in Flims-Waldhaus, in the East of Switzerland, just before the war, but was moved to the surroundings of Montreux a few years later.

Page 5

"Jack and Li were talking about getting married, another fellow in Cossonay took the step already and Aly and I started talking about tying the knot. It was a risky step being refugees in a foreign country with no idea what the future would hold.

So after a lot of discussions and advice from Beppie and Huib Dupon we decided to step in holy matrimony and were married on June 12, 1943 in the Montreux Council Chambers with 2 council cleaners in white bridal overalls as witnesses. Three days later on June 15, 1943 we had the church wedding in the Sacre Coeur Church also in Montreux.

The time before we were united in holy matrimony was very tense, we had to have permission of the bureaucrats in the Dutch Legation in Bern and they took their time, after all it was not their wedding, papers had to be signed, telephone calls to be made and then after the bureaucrats blessing, came the question of dress.

A Jewish lady refugee had asked friends in Holland to send over some of her possessions, the friends in their logical Dutch wisdom sent over for this well and truly married lady her wedding dress. It happened to be the same size as Alice's. Unfortunately there was no petticoat, and an acquaintance gave Alice 2 short petticoats out of which she made one long one.

As Alice was robed in white, protocol dictated that I had to be in black and that was a problem, but with the cooperation of fellow refugees, locals and parish priest we assembled an outfit which could be taken as a wedding costume. The black shoes came from the parish priest, two sizes too small so I had to double up my toes. The white shirt from a camp-mate, it was too big but with the wise use of safety pins at the back the front looked all right. Likewise the vest, more safety pins. The trousers were also treated with safety pins and a belt. Now the piece de resistance was the hat. Nobody had a top hat but somebody magically produced a bowler hat. The only problem was that when I put it on it covered my ears and eyes, so I had to keep the contraption in my hands in stead of on my head.

An unknown admirer shot out of the gathered spectators and pushed an enormous bouquet of red roses in my hand. Alice could not take it because she had her bridal bouquet, but the roses were Godsend because I used them to conceal the damned bowler hat."

Jack and Li married in Montreux that same Tuesday 15 June 1943. Li had just turned 21 the day before. The letter from the

Dutch Legation, allowing her to marry as soon as she would turn 21, can be found on the documents page.

Piet and Alice were allowed a honeymoon, which they spent in Ascona on the banks of the Lago Maggiore, in the Swiss Italian canton of Tessin. Jack and Li stayed closer and spent their honeymoon in a little hotel higher up the mountains above Montreux in Les Avants.

Page 6

The Beginning of Married Life

"Even honeymoons, like the real moons, set down and it was back to the Z.L. camps. Aly to Grand Hôtel des Narcisses and me to the drain pipes of Cossonay. Albeit temporarily, because now as a married man I could join my spouse at Chamby.

The challenge of every refugee was to somehow get out of the dreaded labour camps and there were a number of possibilities how that could be achieved. One could get a doctor's certificate saying camp life was killing the applicant and only outside living could save his life, request study leave, get married like we and a couple of other people did, escape the camp and try to reach the UK via occupied France, Spain and Portugal or get sponsored.

The fellows who tried to reach the UK made it over the Pyrenees all right, but many finished up in a Spanish concentration camp called Miranda, which was not better than its German counterpart.

It did not take us long to produce son No. 1. On March 9, 1944 our first son Raymond Willem Joseph was born. By that time both the Z.L. and the Netherlands Consulate had worked their way through the mountain of (un)necessary paperwork and I was transferred from Cossonay to Chamby to start my role as husband, father and Shabbat goy albeit not for long."

Ray van den Nieuwenhof was certainly not the only child born in exile. Already on 30 November 1943 Louise was born, daughter of Jack and Li van Gorkom. In early 1944 Huib and Beppie Dupon got their daughter Patty and at about the same time Jenny was

born, daughter of Sal and To Schnitzer, who belonged to the same circle of friends as well.

Some time after son Ray was born, Alice produced a baby album in which she describes to Ray the events of those days as well. A few edited fragments illustrate war-time family life.

"Then Ray, the day came that we were to go home which was the same day as your baptism. This could not happen earlier because you were not allowed to leave the hospital before you were ten days old.

When you were 40 hours old Herr Vikar Reidy took some photos of you, they are colour photos but can not be processed until after the war.

On the 18th March at half past two in the afternoon the taxi came to take us to the church. I had gone to communion in the morning so the Vikar had come to Collonge. Ton Smulders would be the godfather, he was doing his final exams at the Lyceum in Glion. Philomena Caduff, a Swiss girl who was with the family Delhaas, would be the godmother. At three o'clock we were at the church where Mr. and Mrs. Delhaas were waiting. Then, dear Ray, you were baptised where your mama also had been baptised." "Around 4 o'clock we arrived at Chamby. On the way we had bought a splendid little bath for you, Ray, and papa had bought some tasty cakes to celebrate our homecoming. When we arrived at our room Jack and Li van Gorkom were there to welcome us. Our room was wonderful, so light and full of sun. The loveliest of all was your little cot which we had made ourselves. We had been given the basket, but papa had made legs for it and painted them dark brown and I had lined it with material of blue flowers..."

Collonge was the name of the private hospital in Territet, a little south east of Montreux. As mentioned before, mr. Delhaas was the director of the Prinses Beatrix Lyceum in Glion. Alice was baptised in Montreux as well, as she had recently been converted from the Protestant to the Roman-Catholic church. Very unfortunately, those rare colour photos were lost.

"Now began our life in Chamby. The first week I only fed and bathed you. Nestlé sent you your first formula and in Collonge you got buttermilk. At first you gained 15 grams but after two days you lost weight which made me very unhappy. Then I put you in the bath with the water too hot, you didn't like that, you poor little thing.

Yes, Ray, the first seven months were not easy, you lived in a refugee camp with scenes of arguments, hysteria, egoism, and humour! Especially with a little mite like you there were always problems. We weren't allowed to boil your nappies (which we did anyway), then there wasn't enough milk or sugar. One evening we left the light on too long and another morning the door to the office was locked and we couldn't cook.

We had a doctor who also knew very little about babies. You had some little spots and according to him it was eczema. When madam Besançon (the midwife from Collogne) said it was because of the boiling of the nappies we were reassured. We always followed her advice.

The first four months you were not chubby but you were very healthy. On madam Besançon's advice I didn't overfeed you. After five weeks we discovered that you had three hernias (a navel and two inguinal hernias). The doctor didn't want to do anything about it and then assured us that at twelve months you would need an operation. On Madam Besançon's advice we bought some binders which the doctor then also thought was necessary! In seven months they had disappeared!

At three months the medical staff almost starved you as you had terrible diarrhoea and you were only allowed rice water and tea. Consequently you lost a lot of weight. I then played up and finally got Eledon (formula). So Ray there was something every day, but still you couldn't have had it better anywhere else. The air was so healthy at 750 meters above sea level. You were outside a lot and looked like a healthy little Dutchman.

Your papa was such a caring father, if we couldn't get powder, cottonwool or boracic lotion in Chamby, he would go quickly to Montreux to buy the best baby product there. We also couldn't

get fruit and so Ray all our money went on you. We were not unhappy about that, we were so happy to give you the best of the best. We also had Nutramalt and gave that to you instead of sugar, this was also on Madam Besançon's advise. Papa and I are both convinced that this is the reason that you were so healthy, you never got sick, you were strong and thrived. Very quickly you rolled on to your tummy and could not go into your little cot anymore. You then got a Z.L.-cot.

Then the day came that papa had to go to Zurich. It was Saturday the 5th of August and exactly one year since we had been together in Chamby. Papa went to work in the garden of the Epileptic Institute in Zurich. Mama and you were left behind. Things got worse because we had to give up our lovely room and move to a small cubicle. There, the neighbours were very noisy and not at all helpful, so I was left to do everything alone. Papa would normally have done all the nasty little odd jobs. Happily he came home on leave a couple of times and all was well for a few days.

That was your first seven months, Ray, and after that we started a very very different life."

Page 8

Piet's memoires are complimentary to Alice's story and match perfectly.

"Grand Hôtel des Narcisses was not a fit and proper place to bring up children, so we turned to Frau Kurz for assistance, Frau Kurz was the president of the international *Christliche Friedensdienst* (Christian Peace Movement). She was well known in Switzerland, very influential and with connections in the higher echelons of the Swiss Government. She promised to look into the matter and within a fortnight the solution was found.

Alice was offered residence in the St. Andreas castle of the von Schulthess-Rechberg family in Cham (canton Zug). There she got a wing of the castle and because she was expecting baby No. 2, a nurse as well. Frau von Schulthess was a granddaughter of the co-founder of the Nestlé Company.

Frau Kurz managed to get me a place in the *Schweizerische Anstalt für Epileptische* (Swiss Institute for Epileptics) in Zurich, where I was employed in the orchard. Because of the Frau Kurz connection, I was a guest of the management and at mealtimes I sat at the management table. One of my colleagues was Huib Dupon, my old cellmate of Putrut prison.

We picked apples and pears and mixed with our very mentally disturbed colleagues till the day Adolf's associates became a threat to our Swiss hosts, who promptly mobilized their bows and arrows forces, resulting in a shortage of staff in the Anstalt.

I was asked to sit in with the patients of the criminal insane section. The criminals reminded me much of the stables in Echteld, a corridor with on both sides six padded cells and one unpadded one for the attendant (me) and instead of horses I had to look after about ten insane patients, which was quite an experience for me.

Physical diseases are sometimes painful but the torment of insanity is worse, the constant screaming and running up and down, non-stop like an animal in a cage, is terrifying and went on day and night. After ten days I asked to be released, any longer and I would have been a patient myself.

The Anstalt was pioneering electro-shock treatment. There were a couple of American doctors to study the procedure. I was asked to assist in the preparation of the patients, which consisted in putting insulation clay on their temples and forcing a rolled up towel in their mouth, to prevent them to bite off their tongue when the shock was delivered. The after-shock scenario was not a pretty sight either. The patient's body literally shrunk and went into spasms and the poor sick man lost his memory for a couple of weeks, walking like a zombie through the Anstalt, not knowing whether he was Arthur or Martha.

I have not seen any female patients for electro-shock during my watch in that section. Maybe females are shock-proof.

Next assignment was "teaching" a class of Down Syndrome children. With no qualifications in that field whatsoever I used to play with them to keep them busy. It was a most gratifying experience, because all those ten kids were lovely, very loyal and easy to manage.

My Anstalt life came to an end when Southern France was liberated and the Military Attache at the Dutch Legation called us up to go to the U.K., pick up our arms and fight for the liberation of the fatherland from our German neighbours or sail to the Dutch East-Indies to get rid of the Sushi Eaters."

Page 9

In Ray's baby book, Alice also wrote extensively about her stay with the Von Schulthess family.

"What a change that was for us Ray! Living in the camp in the morning and in the afternoon in this little paradise. Mr. von Schulthess had picked us up in Bern after we had had a pleasant few hours with Frau Kurz. From Zug we went in a taxi to Cham.

It was like your mama was in a dream. First we went through an entrance door which led to a square, we then came to a huge iron door and rang the bell. It was opened by Lisina, the oldest daughter, behind her were Addy (Adrienne) and Mungie (Monika). We were still not in the house but in a courtyard with several doors leading on to it. Finally at the end of the courtyard there was the main entrance where Frau van Schulthess greeted us very warmly.

She escorted us to our room. It was like a dream walking through several hallways and large salons until we came to a beautiful room which had been prepared for the two of us. It was called the Chapel Room because the Chapel was close by. Next to the bedroom was a bathroom. For you there was a lovely blue bed and you obviously felt at home in it. This was our introduction to the castle and I felt as much at home as you did. One window looked out onto the Chapel and the other onto the garden and Lake Zug.

Together we went downstairs to the dining room to have dinner with Herr and Frau von Schulthess and the three daughters. Madam put you in the highchair but you didn't like it at all. After dinner we both quickly crept into our beds.

The following morning we were woken by the sound of the Chapel bell where a Mass was being held. It was the beginning of

a beautiful day. We spent the whole day in the garden where you could spend hours wandering around. The garden ran down to the lake where there was a marvellous boathouse, called "Castellino".

They also had a large vegetable garden where they employed five gardeners summer and winter! They cultivated among other things magnificent orchids. I went from one astonishment to the other. The Von Schulthess family were just lovely to us.

The first weekend papa came and he thought one thing more beautiful than the next. We went into the garden looking for nuts, shaking the trees so that they would fall down. Papa came every weekend and then on Mondays he went with Herr von Schulthess and Lisina to Zurich. He looked forward to every weekend. This went on until November. The family spent the winter during the war in Zurich, because the castle was too big to heat. Before the war they were in America, China and Japan where Herr von Schulthess did business in silk.

31st of October we left for Zurich. Here also it was as cosy as Cham, only not as big. We had a lovely room looking onto the neighbour's garden. There was also a garden here but of course very small compared to Cham. The bathroom was one floor up and in the attic there was a laundry. We were now close to papa and he could come every afternoon. We walked a lot here, Ray, every morning and afternoon we walked to town and saw many beautiful things. It was very different to the 2 years in Chamby where we didn't remember what a city was anymore.

Then on the 21st December the day came that papa was to go to England. We had waited two years for this day and now it was here. We knew about it one week before so we did a lot of shopping, we were very busy. Every day the three of us went to town and at night papa and mama went to the *Schauspielhaus* or the movie theatre.

Thursday morning the 21st December the train would leave. There were plus or minus 80 people leaving from Zurich, some to Holland and some to England. They were all volunteers. Daddy was so happy that he now could do something for Holland! On the other hand he found it difficult to leave you and your mama behind. The worst moment was when papa said goodbye to you, I really had to leave the room then. The train left 'swinging' as it

were. On the platform there were many poor little mothers bathed in tears."

Destination of Piet and the other men was the Swiss border town of Les Verrières from where they would travel on to Paris to report to the Allied authorities.

Page 10

When Piet van den Nieuwenhof left Zurich on 21 December 1944 to report for duty, Alice was left behind and was going to stay alone for a long time. She was not the only woman with child in this situation though. Huib Dupon had gone, leaving behind Beppie who was living in Zurich as well, and also Jack van Gorkom had left for Paris. As Jack's wife Li was still living in Hôtel des Narcisses, Alice and Li started to write letters to each other. By a stroke of luck the letters of Li have been preserved, the first of which was written after Jack's departure and before Christmas, so between 21 and 25 December 1944.

"The heating here is very poor and the electrical wiring has been changed so that we can't use the electricity in our room any more. No heater, stove or immersion heater and you know what that means. Anyway, we do comfort ourselves with the thought that the people in Holland are a lot worse off.

Jack left very calmly. I'm glad, for him it is much better. Now he has a purpose, and he can look to the future, as all this time here has been wasted.

Flip Groenendijk just fainted. They say she is pregnant. Her husband is in detention and was not allowed away with the others. You probably know that she is back here again. They had been hiding somewhere. I find it really sad for her to be in this situation.

Alice, now you will write a bit more he? Are you happy? How is Ray? Send a photo of him if you can. Aren't they getting cute? Now that Jack is gone, Wiesje says all day "papa" and if I say "where is papa then" she looks intensely and says "hm, hm". Whatever that means, I don't know but apparently it means 'you

know that better than me'. She got a rocking horse from us for her birthday and she sits on it so proudly."

On 11 January 1945—as a matter of fact exactly two years after the release from the refugee camp in Büren an der Aare—Li writes a second letter. The name Wiesje is the old Dutch version of the name Louise.

"Thank you for your letter dated 4th January. Have you heard anything from Piet? I received a letter from Jack from Lyon which he wrote on the 23rd December. According to the unofficial reports, they had been in Paris until the 3rd of January, then to Lille and now they must be in Brussels. They are going to Brabant, apparently to Breda. Furthermore we have heard that Sampie Noach and Frenk have been medically discharged and therefore they stayed in Paris. It is so annoying that we hardly get any mail, he? In the beginning it is worse. For me it is not that bad, as I'm not staying here anyway. In Spring I'm going away with Wiesje to France, Belgium or Holland. I'm not even thinking about staying here, saying thank you for receiving my own money! Happily Wiesje is not so little anymore, so it will be easier.

These days I have a radio in my room. That is a real comfort. It is next to my bed and all I need to do is put out my hand to change the station. How spoilt am I? It costs 13 franks a month. We had it when Jack was still here and now I don't want to give it up, otherwise I can't bear to be in the room even, though it is expensive for just me.

We are again waiting for an answer about what is to happen to us. The Legation has telegraphed to England again about what they should do with us. Even though they had an answer previously that they should do the same with us, as they did with other women in the same circumstances. That means *résidence forcée* and an allowance of 9 francs per day. They certainly don't want that! Once again we will wait and see.

You ask what Wiesje eats. Now she has 220 mls of milk with a slice of bread with butter and sugar, 11 o'clock greens with potato, in the afternoon the same as the morning and then at

night 300 grams of porridge. She eats well at the moment except for the milk. She has been walking for a while but gets into everything so I have to be with her all the time. She babbles different words the whole day long.

I no longer have my room but I asked for that myself as it was too big and unc cosy without Jack and besides this room is warmer.

I can understand that you are missing conversations with other Dutch. That would for me also be an unpleasant thing of being free. But apart from that everything is better than here.

How is Beppie's little child? Have you seen her yet?

What do you think about your future? Do you want to follow Piet, or will you stay here? I can't stand it here anymore. I live only for the day that I will leave here. In Holland at the moment it is dreadful. You can now send mail there again. However you must write 'occupied' or 'free region'. At the moment I am listening to *Radio Oranje* and they are just announcing the traitors of The Hague. Isn't it 'wonderful' that they announce everything on the radio.

Now, Alice, I'm going to end here, I have actually a lot more to write, but at the moment I can't think of it. I'm just as busy as you; I start on lots of things and don't finish anything. That's so annoying, he?"

Page 11

On 27 January 1945 Li writes another letter to Alice.

" I have received postcards from Jack. Every day one from the 25th December until the 1st January. A week ago Thursday was the last one and since then I haven't heard from him again. He didn't write very cheerfully. He is terribly disappointed and would prefer to just come right back here. He wrote that on the 3rd January they should go to Lille but until now they haven't heard anything out of Lille. Here they say that a section has gone directly to Brussels and I am so afraid that Jack is with them and then I won't get any mail at all. It's as if I now have a delayed reaction. These last few days I feel so down, a feeling I have never had before, and to feel like that even though the war is

going well. The Russians are so close to Berlin that it's impossible for it to take much longer.

I'm enclosing a photo of Wiesje. Do you think she is bigger? I had a whole lot taken and the best ones I have enlarged. They have all gone to Jack, hopefully he will get them. A boy from the second group has taken them with him.

Now something else. This morning the wives of the volunteers were summoned to Devries as he had an official notice from the Legation about us. An official communication will be coming in a few days. It said that we had to register our names and the place where we want to go in *résidence forcée*. For sure there is nothing yet, but there is talk that we will get it. I want to ask you if you would like it if I asked to go to Zurich. I have temporarily put Montreux because at least I have some acquaintances here. Now I'm thinking it's not worth it because, if you are going back to Cham I would be better off in Montreux, which is familiar to me.

What is happening to us leaves me cold. It is so annoying though that we have so little money now. Mostly I would prefer to take off with Wiesje and go to France. However as long as the food situation remains bad it is not possible. Don't you get any mail from Piet at all when he is away? Not even from the army mail services? If that is the case then you must be laughing at me for complaining, but I can't help it, I feel so dreadful. Thankfully I have Wiesje otherwise I couldn't cope. On the other hand if I didn't have her I wouldn't be here anymore. Do you understand the women without children, who remain here just calmly waiting it out? If they don't go away on their own steam you would think that they could volunteer for something for example the Red Cross Column."

"The second group" to which Li refers, had arrived in Paris on Sunday 21 January 1945, as can be learned from the diary that Piet van den Nieuwenhof kept while he was in Paris. The village of Terneuzen, mentioned below, is in the Dutch province of Zeeland, where the family of Jack's mother lived.

Li wrote a next letter to Alice on 12 February.

"You nearly didn't get a letter from me from Switzerland. I'll tell you from the beginning.

Wednesday morning I received a postcard posted in Switzerland from Jack from Les Verrières. You can imagine how surprised I was. He wrote that he was in French Verrières and he was coming to pick me up. He had four days off, had arranged a room in Terneuzen at his aunt's and there was enough coal and food to eat. Permission from the Mayor that I could live in Terneuzen and permission from the military that I was allowed to come. Furthermore it said that I had one day to arrange with the Legation and the Swiss that I could leave.

Devries immediately rang the Legation to see if it could be organised but he promptly got the answer that no one was allowed to repatriate and they couldn't locate any of my papers, therefore it was impossible and they even had to forbid it.

Ulrich (Seeburger was unfortunately not there) said that the Swiss could do nothing for me if the Legation didn't want to give permission, so I was stuck. Jack had also put a telephone number on the card of someone who lived on the border and who did messages for him and had also posted the card. Jack had also written to the Legation, but they acted as if they didn't know anything about it.

Devries then rang that telephone number and said that I couldn't legally come, could they pass the message to Jack and if there was a message from him to ring back. At midday Ulrich took a call but didn't tell me. I understood what had happened and then rang myself and got the answer that the customs officer had just rung and said that I could speak to Jack the next day at 1.30PM. I then went to Ulrich and asked for leave but didn't get it. Meanwhile they (friends) had packed my bags and organised everything so that I could illegally go across the border. They took up a collection for my journey as I hardly had any money."

Page 12

"At the last minute Sal Schnitzer said that he would also go and so on Thursday morning before seven we left for Verrières and arrived safely at midday. My suitcase and the pram were sent

ahead and were already there. (I currently have one of those little sporty prams for Wiesje). I only had Wiesje and a bag with me and Sal also had a bag. We went somewhere to eat and at one o'clock we went to the border. I had a false leave pass with me on which was written "Besuch an ihrem Mann im Arbeitslager" and Sal had nothing.

At exactly one thirty we were at the border control, where Jack was waiting at the boom gate. At that moment he just walked around it and we stood talking for half an hour. The customs officer was next to us but he was a fine fellow and he allowed us to talk in Dutch. He (Jack) was even allowed to give letters for people here in the hotel. Jack was in the allied uniform with a beret with the Netherlands lion on it. He looked normal, not better or worse. He is stationed somewhere near de Schelde in Belgium and could go to Holland every weekend."

As Li's letter was dated 12th February 1945, the Thursday that they went to Les Verrières must have been 8 February. This date is in perfect agreement with the dates on her forged leave pass, which can be found on the page with documents. Apparently the leave pass worked, despite of the fact that it is full of errors: the family name of Li and Louise is misspelled, so is Louise's first name, the German that is used is wrong and even the stamp seems to be erratic, as it says "Home pour internés", while it reads "Home pour réfugiés" on the other two permits on this site.

The place somewhere at the river Schelde in Belgium where Jack was quartered, was near a tiny village called Vracene, as can be learned from a laissez passer that is also shown on the page with documents. Vrasene with an 's' as it is nowadays called, actually neighbours the village of De Klinge, the Belgium counterpart of Clinge, where Piet, Alice, Li and Jack had crossed the border in November 1942. Li continues:

"He had been to Zeeland and had put everything in order. Wiesje would have enough to eat. Everyday a can of milk, fresh vegetables, chocolate and other things and I would be having better food then here in Chamby. He showed me the papers, only

I couldn't get out. In French Verrières everything was organised, customs there knew that I was coming and that was fine with them. We kept talking about how I would cross the border and agreed that I would try at night with Sal to cross illegally. Jack couldn't do anything as he was in uniform and if were caught on Swiss territory he would be interned and be classified as a deserter. Therefore this was a risk.

If it wasn't going to work then he would go to Paris and from there request that I could leave legally. So that is what we did. We then returned to the village and rang up one of the boys from the camp there and one of them came and told us the way. At five o'clock we collected the baggage from the station and went on our way. It was impossible. Sal carried my suitcase that was impossible to lift and one bag. I carried Wiesje on my arm and my handbag as well as another big bag. We were just at the beginning of the street when I couldn't go any further. We were just in front of the barracks.

The soldier in front of it came and asked where we wanted to go. Sal said we wanted to rent a room, but then the soldier indicated back to the station where there was a hotel. However as we couldn't drag the baggage any further I told him how it really was. Then we had to accompany him to the barracks and they did all in their power to let me cross the border but it didn't work out because the Legation said that I must absolutely come back. I then had to find somewhere to sleep and Sal went into the clink.

The next day at 8 o'clock I was supposed to go back to Chamby but I didn't go because at night I had hope again that I still could get away. They just gave me the opportunity to go, but I didn't want to leave my baggage behind. With just Wiesje it would have been very easy especially as they were all being helpful. The Swiss were exceptionally kind and one soldier had a big argument with the person from the camp who had brought the message from the Legation to say that it was impossible to go. That soldier was furious that he didn't bring me across the border but the boy from the camp promised me that as soon as things were better he would help me across. Then Jack would no longer be there and I wasn't game to just go to France without help with the baggage.

For the last five days Sal has been in jail and is probably

coming back tomorrow. Anyway to continue, in the morning when I didn't take the 8 o'clock train, the camp leader (a very nice man) came to me and helped me onto the 11 o'clock train. He had rung the Swiss Legation and told me that they actually wanted to detain me, but he had organised for me to go back to Chamby because of Wiesje and I would have no further trouble. Furthermore the Legation had given the message that if I didn't go back quietly they would lock me up in a train and send me to an international camp where I would be with Italians, Poles and God knows who else. (The compensation money they will surely put in their own pockets.)

Anyway, now I'm here again but Jack and I have agreed that if it doesn't work out he will go to Paris and request for me to leave. Then I will just go legally. So I'm just waiting and seeing but if it takes too long, its better that I still go illegally. How? I will see. Anyway, I'll just sit it and wait it out and in the meantime prepare myself for the departure.

Next month Jack is training to be an officer, then he will be instructor for sport and jiu-jitsu. He was saying that Antwerp is uninhabitable and that per day 1100 people are killed by V-2 that is dropped on every part of town. He also had not received any mail from me even though I write at least three times each week.

Now Alice I'll end here, write back quickly and tell me how it is with you. Oh, yes, Leib Simons has gone to France via Les Verrières Illegally. I heard that there."

Also Piet van den Nieuwenhof describes in his diary that Leib came to Paris illegally with the second group. He met him in Paris the day after his arrival.

Page 13

On 6 March 1945 Li wrote another letter to Alice.

"How are you? It's getting close, hey? Let me know as soon as the baby arrives. My, the time flies. Last year Ray wasn't even here. Oh yes, don't let me forget to congratulate you on Rays birthday. I wish him a better future then we have and hope he

becomes a fine little man. Give him a cuddle for me.

Jack rang me from Les Verrières a week after I got back. He had gone to Paris to see if anything could be done, but the Legation there said that it had to be arranged from Bern. He then spoke to the Swiss consul in Pontarlier who was going back to Switzerland, and he promised him that he would have me out of Switzerland in three days! Furthermore he brought the document which said that I was allowed to be in the Netherlands.

Then once again Jack went to Les Verrières and thought that I had received the letter and could leave. In that letter there were all sorts of instructions what I should do if I wasn't allowed to leave and how I could go illegally. He would then go to the border at Verrières and wait from 1 o'clock till 11 o'clock. I didn't go as I had never received the letter so he rang me up. I knew nothing about it and I told him that I couldn't come as I was unprepared. So once again he had to return to Belgium. He was twelve days overdue. He was crushed, all that time he had tried absolutely everything but nothing worked. I found it dreadful that he had now to return like that but nothing could be done about it. Now we have arranged that he will come again in six weeks. Therefore Friday in three weeks."

As shown on the page with documents, Jack obtained a laissez passer to return to his unit that was valid between 16 and 21 February 1945. This was indeed one week after the meeting at the border in Les Verrières.

"If then I still have no papers, I'll try again. Anyway, the ambassador can't validate the papers as he has orders that no one is permitted to go back. Permission can only be given by the Minister for Justice, to whom I have now sent a telegram. However I don't expect much.

Just wait and knit! I'm knitting like crazy an outfit for Wiesje as she should not fall short of anything. I just hope that Jack has not got into trouble as that would be worse. I've ended up here under house arrest for two weeks which ends on Monday. However I'm allowed to go to the dentist twice a week and I'm also allowed to wander around the area here so it means nothing.

Sal got 9 days prison and then 4 weeks house arrest. They didn't punish him because he wanted to cross the border as they couldn't prove that, but just because he was in Verrières. For me they counted extenuating circumstances, as I was under my husband's instructions. It's easy when you are married hey, then he is responsible for your actions!

Now Alice I will keep you informed, if anything happens you'll hear about it. Oh yes, did you get the little pyjamas? When I got your letter I asked Mrs. Dreese and she said that she would send them.

Last bit of news, Mrs. Grajower is expecting a baby and is really happy. Nice he? Mrs. Rosenthal is expecting her third child and of course you know about Mrs. Pels."

Page 14

On 9 March 1945 it was Ray van den Nieuwenhof's first birthday. His mother wrote another little story for him in his baby album.

"Hoorah! It's Ray's birthday, finally the day has come. How mama had longed for this day. In the morning your chair was decorated with flowers and paper. From mama you got a silver cup and a cowbell rattle. Of course mama sang to you, "Oh how happy we are today." The postman brought three packages for you. One from Aunt Philomena (a tasty packet of biscuits) From Aunt Margery Vuely a little pair of shoes and from Sister Heidi from the villa two pairs of socks. At lunch time you were allowed to eat with us. In your honour Frau von Schulthess had ordered a big cake with Ray written on it. You really liked it. On the table there were so many presents you didn't know which one to open first. From Frau von Schulthess a toy and a silver spoon. From Mungie a pair of socks and from Addy some knee socks. Lisina had knitted a little pair of bed socks for you. It rained all day so I couldn't take any photos but five o'clock in the afternoon the sun came out and I managed to take two.

The following day Aunt Beppie came with Patty. Patty brought you a nice big ball and from Aunt Beppie you got some farmer pants. You played together very nicely in the playpen until Patty

hit you on the head with your new rattle, which of course you didn't like. From daddy you got a real telegram, how important hey? It came a few days late but that was not daddy's fault. Daddy wrote that he hoped that the next year we would be together. Now Ray that's what we hope as well hey?"

Piet van den Nieuwenhof wrote in his diary entry of Saturday 17 March 1945 that he was furious, as he had been told that day that his telegram had been returned with "address unknown". On 13 April 1945 Li wrote her next letter to Alice.

"How are you? Many thanks for your fat letter. It all went very quickly. Just have a good rest. You'll have your hands full when the nurse goes away.

What do you think about Zutphen being free? Your parents live there, don't they? It did suffer, but not that much, I think. I would really like it if they made progress because in the big cities it is terrible. There the people are dying on the streets from hunger. Can you even think about it? It is dreadful.

Fifty people from Theresienstadt have come here. I think I've already written to you about that. Of the original group there are not many left. They all just leave freely, or disappear. Oh yes you'll be surprised, Weinbergen has gone. They were transferred to another camp which they didn't want to go to, so they just up and left, to France to her parents. No one knew anything about it, not even Devries. Grajower is free. Coronel on sick leave. Devries will get *résidence forcée*. The families Bak and Salzman Noach and Schnitzer will probably leave for Belgium at the end of the month. Laufer is free and she will be too soon. There are more that I believe you don't know.

You see, many disappear. Gasson is in Mt Pellerin. Laufer is with the Polish Column and is therefore now free and gets 650 Francs a month for man, woman and child while they are not even gone yet. They get this sent straight from London and they all get it. Also Faigenbaum (he is also free) and Dreese. The women are still in the camp but are coming out en mass. Now they pay from that money their bed and board and there remains a lot over. While our men are already four months away and

haven't seen a cent. Wonderful arrangement that is!

Yesterday there was news from Keyzer that the Swiss are happy for us to leave but they have to wait for an answer from London to confirm if our men really are in service. Drag it out as long as possible of course. While Dr Keyzer has personally said to Mrs Israël that he believed her and me that they are in service, but it depends on the Swiss. We can of course show the letters which have "in active service" written on them, but no, if they wait for an answer from London they can wait until next year.

André de Metz is already at the front and left at the same time as Jack. You understand that I don't like that idea because perhaps Jack is also there. He wrote that his hands and feet are tied because if it wasn't so I would no longer be in Switzerland. He can't leave. His last letter was written on the 14th March.

Now I still plan to go away. There has been an answer from London that travel requests are not granted because of severed Allied travel conditions. Now the 28th this Belgium Convoy is going to Brussels and I feel like smuggling with them. Don't talk about it however, of course Beppie is allowed to know. I still don't know if I will do it but I think I will. It appears not to be too difficult. I hope that Jack comes soon, then my baggage will go with Schnitzer and I will go illegally. We will wait and see.

How is Ray with his new brother? Is he jealous or is it just normal for him? He is of course behaving as the big brother, hey? Is he starting to walk a little? Is the little one progressing well? It's great for you that Piet works in London. You will now see him soon. Maybe he will get leave to come to Switzerland. The two Watermans have left as volunteers and have taken 14 days leave here in Switzerland. I don't know if they are military, but I believe not.

Now Alice I wish you all the best with the two kids and if I take off you'll hear about it."

Page 15

On 29 April 1945, Li wrote her last letter from Chamby to Alice.

"As you can see I'm still here. The Schnitzers did go and tomorrow I will get confirmation if my suitcase went with them. You can understand that I will feel greatly reassured if my stuff is in Brussels. Now I only have some summer things for both of us. I didn't dare to go myself as there was a lot of control before the train departed and in every letter Jack writes that I shouldn't go illegally but wait for him.

How are you? Packed up again? Thanks for the photo, I think Andy looks just like Ray or does it just seem like that on the photo? I think it would be very busy having two little kiddies like that.

Your parents have been liberated haven't they? They live in Zutphen don't they? Aren't you curious about them? I'm so worried about my family. It is so appalling in the occupied territory that I wonder if I'll ever see them again. I'm glued to the radio all day to hear the news, but am constantly devastated by it. It is also so dreadful what one hears about the concentration camps, it is sickening to hear about it, let alone to have lived it. Can you understand that people exist who can do these things? According to me the Krauts have sown the seeds of such terrible hate that for generations they will be despised as the most inferior race in the world.

There are all sorts of rumours that Mussolini, Hitler and Göring are dead, which is such a shame that they should have such an easy death. I would wish them the worst a human could bare.

That's enough of that; this letter will not be stimulating like this. Résidence forcée is now being worked on for Mrs. Israël and me. I've asked for Genève, you see as it is near the border. I do believe that we will get it. According to M. Seeburger it will be the second week in May because Dr. Keyser has written a recommendation. Now we will have to wait, it doesn't interest me anymore. For me the most important thing is to get to Holland, however it will also be good to get out of the camp as it doesn't agree with me anymore. Most of the people now are from Theresienstad and us old Chambians can't get on with them, as bad as that is.

I'm getting regular mail from Jack, he writes every two or three days and they all arrive. He is in Holland but I don't know what he

does. Since he has been gone he has only received one letter from me which I had sent by airmail via London. That's really hard on him as he has been anxious about me that I have left illegally."

Alice's last letter to Li was returned to Cham, as Li had finally disappeared out of Switzerland. She and Louise had been picked up by Jack after illegally crossing the border at Les Verrières on 23 May 1945. Alice remained in Switzerland, waiting for Piet, who was trying to get her to England. The Von Schulthess family in Cham thought that her chances to be allowed to come to England would be better, if she would be living on her own again, so Alice moved back to Montreux in the Summer of 1945. After some weeks she found a place to stay in a little house on the premises of a hotel in Caux sur Montreux.

Call of Duty

Page 1

Together with many other men, Piet van den Nieuwenhof and Jack van Gorkom left Switzerland on Thursday 21 December 1944 to travel to France. Their destination was Paris, where they would report for military service. Alice van den Nieuwenhof is quoted writing that they did this voluntary, and this will have been how it was actually perceived by everyone. Officially though military service was mandatory for all young Dutch men living abroad. At the same time the Dutch government in exile had no means to enforce this regulation, and so the vast majority of conscripts never showed up.

From a study by historian Agnes Dessing ("Tulpen voor Wilhelmina") can be learned that 480 men in total reported in Paris. 300 of them were selected to travel on to the battle front. The other 180 went to London. Jack belonged to the group of 300. His story is told on page 8 of this section. As Piet wanted to serve in the Dutch East or West Indies, he went to England. Soon after his departure from Switzerland, he started keeping a diary.

The Diary of Piet van den Nieuwenhof

"Thursday 21st December 1944. Departure from Zürich to Les Verrières.

Arrival in Pontarlier via Verrières 21st Dec. 16.45.

Friday 22nd December 1944. Depart Pontarlier 16.30.

Saturday 23rd December 1944. 9.30 in Dijon, 18.30 depart Dijon, arrive at night in Chagny.

Sunday 24th December 1944. 23.45 arrive Paris.

Monday 25th December 1944. At 11 o'clock finally in bed.

Monday 1st January 1945. Glenn Miller in the Olympia theatre in Paris. Missed the last metro, so 'walked in' the New Year. Walked for one and a half hours along the Seine to the Bois de Boulogne.

Tuesday 2nd January 1945. Went to the New Year ball of the socialists in the back streets of Paris. Marigny theatre. The Merchant of Venice.

Wednesday 3rd January 1945. Depart Paris at 22.00. Train derailed.

Thursday 4th January 1945. 10.00 arrive in Lille. By freight truck through to Fournès. Sleep on straw with one blanket. The camp was only set up four days ago. Everything badly organised. Shocking cold."

Fournès-en-Weppes is a little village near Lille, close to the French-Belgium border. More or less by coincidence this is also close to where Piet, Jack, Alice and Li crossed the border in November 1942. Jack was in Fournès on the same day and was officially enlisted that day. It seems that Piet and Jack were already in different units then. Piet probably refers to Jack's unit in his entry of 7th January.

"Friday 5th January 1945. We spend the day doing exercises. Went to sick parade in the morning. 400 men from Nijmegen, Eindhoven and Den Bosch arrive. Foundation of the new Dutch army. Cabaret with [Max] Tailleur. We receive the information that the "Indies"-group will go back to Paris on Monday.

Saturday 6th January 1945. Back to sick parade for injury since Zurich. Exercises. Excellent food but little to eat. Lose my trusty nail scissors and suitcase key. In Fournès the business is absolutely unorganised. Kitchen task excellent work.

Sunday 7th January 1945. Exercises. 11.00 visit the church. Again wait in the cold to collect food and wash tins. Like every other day. Afternoon free. Bored and hungry. One contingent from Switzerland travel through to Holland to the training camps. We have to prepare for the return to Paris. Wake at 5 o'clock.

Monday 8th January 1945. Wake at 5am. Don't leave from Fournès for Lille until 8 o'clock by lorries. Arrived just too late. Train left at 8.05. Must wait until 13.00. Walk from pillar to post. 15.45 leave Lille. Make the trip in the baggage net.

Tuesday 9th January 1945. Arrive at Gare du Nord in Paris at 4am. I feel sick, wait a long time for the baggage (the goods wagon was decoupled) and on the bus. 5.30 leave Gare du Nord for Hôtel-Dieu. Fall in bed totally exhausted. Splitting headache. Ted examined me and gave me an aspirin. Heavy snowfall. Paris all white."

Page 2

The Hôtel-Dieu where Piet's group was lodged, is actually a very famous and old hospital on the Ile de la Cité, right next to the Notre Dame. It explains why there is a radiology and dental unit the hotel, as can be read below. Apparently Hôtel-Dieu was used to house troops at the end of World War II. The photo of 13 January, mentioned below, has survived time and can be found on the [photo page 2](#).

"Wednesday 10th January 1945. Stay in bed all day. Have a cold and temperature of 38.8. Strong headache. Examined by the doctor from the mission. Have to have an X-ray. Receive 100 francs and 2 packets Gauloises (cigarettes). Rumours about departure etc. According to a telegram from London 120 men are in order. Letters arrive from Switzerland. Awful homesickness.

Friday 12th January 1945. Examined in the dental unit of the

Hôtel-Dieu. X-rayed in the radiology department. Have to come back tomorrow. In the afternoon saw a show at Olympia with Edy Fick. Evening Shakespeare's "Much Ado about Nothing" in Martigny theatre. Donald Wolfit. Paris snowed under.

Saturday 13th January 1945. Stayed in bed until 10.45 with headache and throat pain. There will be a photo taken in the courtyard of the Hôtel-Dieu. Originally it was to be in front of the Notre Dame.

The bad hygiene situation in the clinic of the Hôtel-Dieu keeps me from going to the dentist.

Spend the rest of the day in the *Abie*. In the evening we go with a whole crowd to café "La Bière" where we eat sandwiches. The beef steaks that Zeeuwen talked about were not to be seen. On departure four of us stayed behind and arranged to meet tomorrow evening. In the end we had a nightcap in a backstreet pub.

In La Bière I was offered 2500 frank for my jumper.

According to a telegram from London we will go to the Patriotic School in Paris. For 4 to 6 weeks. Huib is still waiting and seeing.

Sunday 14th January 1945. Go at 9.45 in the morning to High Mass in Notre Dame. Spend the rest of the time sleeping in the *Abie* and talking about the possibilities. The food is pronounced bad. Hans and Brusse set up a bar. In the evening we eat in La Bière with Putman Cramer, Ted and Bob. Beef steak, potatoes and haricot beans. 125 francs.

Monday 15th January 1945. X-ray at 3.30. Visit the clinic. Radiography unsuccessful. Have to take another one. Lunch very bad. Can't eat it. In the afternoon to the Philips building for the X-ray. Warned in the metro that there isn't any electricity. Got out at Champs-Élysées and visited 2 exhibitions. One by the French army and the other by the English Women's Volunteer Corps.

Tuesday 16th January 1945. Stay in bed until 1pm. Don't eat. New rumours about departure. Decide today to visit lots of important landmarks. At 2 o'clock go to La Bière to eat ham. Am

incredibly hungry. After that I want to visit the RAF exhibition in La Fayette but come just too late. It closes at 5pm. Conquer myself and join in eating. Stay home for the rest of the evening and go early to bed. I have a yearning to get out of this city. Tomorrow we hear when we depart. Think a lot about Alice and Ray.

Wednesday 17th January 1945. The food is a little better, at least there is butter. Therefore I get up early and shave. The important news is not mentioned. At 12.30 I go with Putman Cramer to Versailles to visit the palace. The palace makes an overwhelming and unforgettable impression on me, especially the Royal Chapel, the room of mirrors, la salle de (?) with the paintings with (?) figures. It is all magnificent but still it makes a confused impression. Many (?) are (?) and the Germans have taken some parts out of the frames and panels. The ceiling frescos are gloriously beautiful. However we don't see much as everything is covered by fragments. We make the tour with a group of Americans.

Thursday 18th January 1945. Get up at 9am due to the "better" breakfast and then go back to sleep. First the room is cleaned. In the afternoon I go with Putman Cramer and Ted to the Trocadero and visit "La Misère de l'Homme". Religion, art, social life of all of mankind, too much to see in one afternoon. Human development, skeletons, embryos, etc. Visit the Eifel tower. Very hungry, no money. Early to bed.

Friday 19th January 1945. Stay in the Abie all day. I only go and eat a cream cake at the baker across the road. In the evening we get 3 packets Troupe and a packet tobacco. I try to sell these. The market is oversold due to the oversupply. I'll wait a few days. Argument with the waitress. She spilt a bowl of soup over my pants. Lose my temper. Clean my pants and borrow money from van Leeuwen and Lans. Go to bed early. Still no news. The moral is getting worse. Waiting boring. Borrow money and go and eat with Zeeuwen at La Bière.

Saturday 20th January 1945. Stay all day bored stiff in bed. Outside a heavy snowstorm. In the afternoon eat a cream cake again at the baker across the road. Office personnel on strike. Go on the black market, sell cigarettes in La Bière and earn 5 francs, per packet, from which I eat. Mushrooms, lungs. Bob gives me 55 francs. Second convoy should arrive tonight.

Sunday 21st January 1945. With Fick to high Mass at Notre Dame. In the evening get *vette bek* [greasy fast food] with Bob, Piet and Putman Cramer. Up to my ears in black market goods. Sell Troupe and earn 80 francs. Eat for 220 francs. We leave on Tuesday night. They say. Second convoy from Switzerland arrives.

Monday 22nd January 1945. Spend the whole morning looking for Leib who has come with the convoy illegally. Search all over Paris, but don't find him. Eat truffles with cream. Arrange with Edy to meet at 7 o'clock in La Parse. There I meet Leib. Go to La Bière to eat. Leib tells me about Alice. Go with him to Gare de Lyon to pick up the suitcases."

The second convoy is also mentioned in the letter that Li van Gorkom wrote to Alice van den Nieuwenhof on 27th January. In the next letter to Alice she mentioned as well that Leib had travelled to Paris illegally with the second convoy.

Page 3

"Tuesday 23rd January 1945. I'm busy preparing for the journey, write letters that go by courier to Zurich and Geldrop. Photos to Geldrop. Take a bath. Hear that we are going on a collective visa to England and ring Leib to warn him. He is trying everything to come with us.

10.10 Leave for Gare du Nord in American lorries. Rations are handed out. With Bob and Putman in a coupe. Waiting..... Adieu Paris. Don't want this any more.

Wednesday 24th January 1945. Depart Paris 1.30am via

Beauvais. They say we will be in Le Havre at 8 tonight. Lans and I organise a train cabaret. It's a hit. Even Vos sings a tune. Attempt to sleep. Many train stops. Shunting. Cold.

Thursday 25th January 1945. Train trip to Le Havre. Lose all sense of time and place. Extremely tired. Nevertheless the atmosphere remains good. We have endless amounts of food with us.

Friday 26th January 1945. Stay in my berth until 10.30. Had a wonderful sleep. No breakfast. Go on deck. Beautiful day, a little misty. My first time ever on sea. We sail in a convoy without escort. Calm sea. At 12.30 we were introduced to the American soldiers kitchen. The pinnacle of super organisation. English coast in sight. At 15.38 we steam into the harbour of Portland. Transfer onto a coastal boat, which brings us to land. Bob and I step hand in hand on English soil. By lorry to the fort of Portland. Turns out that we have landed in the wrong harbour. Our destination was supposed to be Southampton, where our lost baggage had been sent to. The Poles went to Southampton instead of us. The Americans have specially sent a catering unit out. On arrival there is an abundance of food again, afterwards a medical check. 8pm we eat again and 10pm in bed. Bob and I drive Koen mad. We laugh the whole day.

Saturday 27th January 1945. We get up early so we can leave by 9am. There is a case of typhus, so we need yet another medical and our departure is delayed. There is an endless amount of food. 27 men give themselves indigestion. They give us the best of the best. We have an endless supply of tea and cake. At 4pm the order comes for us to leave for London. After tea to the station. Of course we get there too late and we return to the fort. (I let Lans, Bob, have my sleeping bag. Signed: Bob Lans.)

Sunday 28th January 1945. Depart Portland at 12.00 on the Southern Railway. Change in Weymouth. Arrive at Waterloo Station at 6.15. Nicely heated train. Pleasant journey. Get picked up at Waterloo station by busses, mostly driven by female bus

drivers. Go to barracks outside of London. Left hand traffic is an unusual sensation. Fill in landing card and other paperwork. Meet other Dutchmen from Sweden.

Monday 29th January 1945. Don't feel well. Cold and stomach ache, stay in bed. I have to go to the sick bay. Enema. 10 cigarettes. Care in this "Auffangslager" can not be compared with the equivalent camp in Switzerland. Good care, good warm food, radio and everything neat and tidy. How long we will stay here is still in question. Suitcases still missing.

Tuesday 30th January 1945. I still have to stay in bed. Information that quarantine which we had to go to because of typhus outbreak has been terminated. From tomorrow on ten people leave for the Patriotic School each day. According to Bob the suitcases are already in England. However they have to be cleared by customs. I hope to be out of here quickly so I can finally get news from Alice. The Swedish Dutch tell juicy stories about their experiences. Take a bath and feel much better.

Wednesday 31st January 1945. Still in the hospital. Get an enema for the second time. We can buy chocolate. Moral in the group is excellent, still everyone is looking forward to the "liberation" from the camp. Colourful evening, sixth ranking artist. A complete fiasco. Talk with the married men about their women coming over. All are pessimistic. Also on this occasion we can expect the famous 'speediness' of the Netherlands authorities.

Thursday 1st February 1945. Hospital suits me. The doctor is keeping me in bed for the time being. They are still looking for the suitcases. Every day 20 to 30 men go to the Patriotic School. Our turn will be on Tuesday. The Swiss Dutch give a cosy evening which is a total failure. The only good thing was the redemptionist. The Swedes amuse us again with their stories.

Friday 2nd February 1945. Today again nothing particular happens. The normal rumours about cases, women out of Switzerland and the Patriotic school do the rounds. Edy Fick

reckons that our women will be with us before six months are up. The number of sick people in the hospital becomes greater everyday. The doctor presses on my abdomen once everyday.

Saturday 3rd February 1945. I've become an ambulant patient. The speech by Colonel De Blicck is useless. Many words are used but little is said. In the end we still don't know anything. The same bullshit as in Paris. Concrete answers are not forth coming. Afterwards the commander of the Patriotic School speaks, welcoming us etc. Waiting is becoming tedious. Everyone is hooked on *Vluf*."

Apparently Vluf was some card game. Geldrop is the village where most of Piet's family lived.

Page 4

"Sunday 4th February 1945. Mass in the theatre hall of the Reception Centre. In the evening "Desert Victory" in Norwegian. Production fails due to a fault in the projector. Before the film a Swedish Dutchman gave a provocative address. Spoke about the riff raff. Etc. There are tensions. The people who had stayed behind in France have arrived with suitcases and the ones who went back to Switzerland.

Monday 5th February 1945. I've been discharged out of sick bay. The names of those who are going to the Patriotic School tomorrow have been announced. The order is arbitrary. The Haarsma brothers are also going and are giving a farewell dinner. The ham which 'fell off the back of a truck' is finished off with grapefruit and Nescafé. Some of the suitcases are inspected by customs. Long wait in the theatre hall.

Tuesday 6th February 1945. The Haarsma brothers leave for the Patriotic School. Hang around the theatre hall all day for the waiting for the inspection of the suitcases. I hand everything over to customs. Waiting and waiting to leave for the Patriotic School.

Wednesday 7th February 1945. Finally my turn comes around. Leave tomorrow. Adieu Reception Centre.

Thursday 8th February 1945. Leave for the Royal Patriotic School in Wandsworth, London. Start afresh with waiting. The midday gang go straight to the government."

Piet refers to the Administration of the Dutch government in exile, consisting of Queen Wilhelmina and her cabinet, who were in London.

"**Friday 9th February 1945.** Waiting..... bored. Vluf and other card games are out of fashion. Tonight to the movies. Eating is the only pleasant change.

Saturday 10th February 1945. Waiting, waiting. Still haven't been interrogated.

Sunday 11th February 1945. Mass in the chapel. The interrogations continue. My turn still hasn't come around. We all attempt to discover if there is any sort of system in the way it works. Presume it's totally random. Receive 10 shilling and chocolate.

Monday 12th February 1945. Waiting, eating, waiting. Get cigarettes, waiting. We, the left behind are beginning to grumble. Hear all possible and impossible rumours about what will happen when we get out of here.

Tuesday 13th February 1945. "Begin to entertain suicide plans"!! Still not interrogated. Take a sadistic pleasure in waiting for the new comers and painting a hideous picture of the Patriotic School. Their cheerful and joyous beaming faces drop. Tell them there is a cemetery behind the chapel for suicide victims.

Wednesday 14th February 1945. Interrogation from 2.30 to 4pm and 4.30 to 5.15.

Thursday 15th February 1945. Patriotic School.

Friday 16th February 1945. Bob goes away. Stay behind with Ted, Parrel, Gentel, Kappeijne van de Capelle. We are close to desperation and begin to feel like war criminals.

Saturday 17th February 1945. My name has finally appeared on the board in front of the immigration room and my stay in the Patriotic School has come to an end. Accommodated in the United Nations Forces Club. Meet Jan Hillige. Go with him to the New Gallery-film about Chopin "A Song to Remember". Visit colonel De Blieck at the Ministry for Colonies. Don't get much wiser there. Get the feeling it is a clique. The ministry is very primitively housed. We have to sleep on the floor. Sleep uncomfortably. Lose my fountain pen.

Sunday 18th February 1945. Meet Dr. Huijsmans from Eindhoven on the way to the church. Go to Mass in a half destroyed church in Farm Street. Visit the Netherlands House and Oranjehaven. Immerse ourselves in what the future holds for us. Expect a lot, however everything is uncertain. Eat at the club which is fantastically good. Spend the evening in the library. Go with Soejono to dine at Chopsticks Chinese restaurant. Visit after that 'the flying bomb' and wander around Piccadilly Circus. The moral standard lower than in Paris.."

Page 5

"Monday 19th February 1945. Report at the Department of Colonies. The outcome of the discussion very unfavourable. Possibilities for me in the East Indies limited. Receive 5 pound advance. Sign. Meet Huib. He abuses me and says there are better and other possibilities. We are going to look for these. Tea in Piccadilly Hotel.

Tuesday 20th February 1945. With Huib we begin to check out all the addresses. Father Dito, The Netherlands Air Force, Information, etc. Was actually expected to go to Wolverhampton

today, but there are no more uniforms. Must return to various people tomorrow. Send a telegram to Alice. Send news to Dordt and bring a letter to Dr. Huijsmans. Visit an exhibition of Russian art. Tea in Piccadilly Hotel. Go and eat with Soejono in the Chinese restaurant and hang around Piccadilly Circus. Bob also has bad luck."

The Dutch colony of the East Indies is nowadays Indonesia. "Information" refers to the R.V.D., the *Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst* or Dutch state information service. Dordt is the locally used name for the city of Dordrecht.

"Wednesday 21st February 1945. Of course I'm late again for the meeting with Huib and go straight to Lieutenant van Rossem. He can't promise me anything positive. Tomorrow I have to hand in a 500 word article. Visit Father Dito. Have to submit a report about the trip and departure from Switzerland and reception here at Department of Colonies. He promises his co-operation. Spend the day running around from one ministry to another.

Thursday 22nd February 1945. Submit my article about Paris to Lieutenant Van Rossem, have to type it. (Result not until the chief comes back from Holland). Ring up Father Dito, he isn't home so go looking for him at the Dorchester Hotel. After a lot of phoning and searching I finally find him at home in his flat. He has talked about my case to the new minister of Colonies (Overseas Territories) and tomorrow I have to report to Swaab. Get some tips from H. Klein. Visit the R.V.D. Go with Soejono to the Windmill at Piccadilly. Every day people go to Wolverhampton.

Saturday 24th February 1945. Meet Bob and go with him to the Y.M.C.A. in Park Lane. Move house from the United Nations Forces Club to the Y.M.C.A. Bob still has problems. Everyone leaves for Wolverhampton, we are the only ones left in London. I understand that Dr. Huijsmans who spoke to me last week at Piccadilly, has become Finance Minister. Evening showing of the film "The housekeepers Daughter". Ring Father Dito at 4.30. He guarantees me that he will make sure that I don't go.

Recommends to me that I follow up the advice of Colonies. I feel uneasy.

Sunday 25th February 1945. Go to Mass at Westminster Cathedral. Eat at the club and meet Soejono. He suggests that I come and live at his place. We hire a taxi and I move to Carlton Court, Inverness Terrace, where we have a nice room. Before dinner we wanted to go with the tube to St James Square but we got out at St James Park and I see Big Ben.

Monday 26th February 1945. For the first time in 2 months I have once again slept beautifully in a good bed. Don't get up until 10.30. We take the underground to the club and I hear from Ted that Huib will be at the Piccadilly Hotel at 4. Meet Huib and discuss the possibilities and difficulties. Take Bob to the Consulate.

Tuesday 27th February 1945. Stay in bed until 11.30 and then we go dining at the club, after that to the Colonies Ministry. Ask the secretary for an interview with the Minister. Continue to seek at the Finance Ministry Esquire Doude van Troostwijk. Hand over Leib's letter. Have to phone tomorrow. Visit St. Paul's Cathedral. Eat at the club and afterwards go to "Arsenic and old Lace" at Leicester Square.

Wednesday 28th February 1945. I'm at the Koloniën at 10 o'clock. Can't speak to Minister van Mook. Have to come next Monday and speak to the new Minister. I'm slowly feeling 'on the rocks'. Try to ring Doude van Troostwijk. At 11.30 go to Jan Maas to meet Huib. Ring up the Consulate. Meet Bob in the afternoon."

Page 6

Thursday 1st March 1945. We get up at 11.00 and eat raisin rolls from the baker on the corner. The daily trek to St. James's Square. Today I was terribly homesick for Alice and was dreadfully depressed.

Saturday 3rd March 1945. Another day of sleeping late. Only get up at 2.30 and just for a change take a bath. I sort out my 2 month old washing. The tea in the club is like breakfast and dinner. Just for a change Soejono and I eat at Ling Nam, which I have been madly searching for. While searching I meet Bob, in Hong Kong with his lady sergeant. He is going to Suriname. I'm feeling hopelessly lonely. D. tells of the possibilities of a job at the American Mission in occupied Germany.

Sunday 4th March 1945. I try to find a Catholic church in the neighbourhood of our boarding house. First run into a Synagogue, then a Greek Orthodox and then a Reformed church. The only Catholic church in the area is bombed out. In retrospect it turns out that the service was held in a side building, behind the ruin. At the club there is dancing. The girls are sitting along the wall waiting for the gentlemen who remain calmly sitting in the armchairs.

Monday 5th March 1945. I believe that this has been the most successful day that I have had since I've been in London. Namely I had an interview with Minister Schmutzer and I believe that he can arrange for the contract that I signed to be cancelled. Receive from the paymaster 13 pound of which 3 pound advance had been taken out. Apart from that I enquired at the war office and I could immediately get an administrative job. I find out about the Committee on Civil Administration in Germany. Send a telegram to Alice. Receive from her a letter at Colonies. In the series "To pass the time films" we see "Hangover Square".

Friday 9th March 1945. Today it is a year since Ray's birth. The time really has flown. I hope that Alice sends me a telegram and therefore ring up the Consulate and the Legation. This afternoon I visited Madame Tussaud's. At night I hear in *Oranjehaven*, that tomorrow I must go to Colonel De Blicck. Stay until 10pm in Oranjehaven, this is one of the few times that I have visited Oranjehaven.

During the war Oranjehaven was a famous meeting point for the

Dutch in London, founded on the personal initiative of Queen Wilhelmina. It was located at 23 Hyde Park Place, along the Bayswater Road, facing Hyde Park.

Saturday 10th March 1945. I'm extraordinarily surprised that there isn't any mail from Alice, not even a telegram. At 10.30 I go to the Ministry of Colonies. De Blicck and Van der Horst attempt weak arguments to convince me to stay at Colonies. I insist on being discharged, however, and they give up. It is too late to take any further steps, so I put it off until Monday. I go to the film at the club, where I should meet Leeuwen, Haarsma and Aelberse. Can't see them though. In the end I go with Putman Cramer to the Y.M.C.A. and from there to Inverness Terrace.

Monday 12th March 1945. Of course I get up much too late and my first task is to go to the Consulate for money. Of course I meet Bob there. I am in the 4 pound category and have to manage to live on that. We let ourselves go through London in a taxi and I get out at the Air Force. Van Rossem not at home. Spend a very pleasant evening with Putman and John Gelders at Oranjehaven. Bob is unavailable and stays with his lady sergeant.

Tuesday 13th March 1945. Try to get a voucher for a cigarette ration at Colonies. I am out of the administration though. Ring up van Rossem, can't reach him. Go looking for a letter from Alice and find one at the Internal Ministry. Incredibly dated 30th January 1945 and posted in Lyon. Meet Ritsema and he gives me information about the Marines. He makes me feel enthusiastic and I intend to get further information tomorrow. Go home tonight at 8pm to organise my business.

Wednesday 14th March 1945. Take a lovely morning walk with Soejono through Hyde Park and then go to Van Rossem. He has no time, can't see me and leaves me to a lieutenant who gives me some small talk about vacancies, skills etc. It means that I should suit myself, and I go try my luck at the Marines. But first I must have my discharge from Colonies which I must get from Recruiting. I decide to work for Captain Koevoets. He sends me to

Major Zouteriks.

Thursday 15th March 1945. So now I finally have a destiny. I am employed by the Second Division of the Department of War with good prospects, now begins the coming and going to organise it all. For 9 days I have to go to Sutherland House to do a course, so goodbye nice little room at Inverness Terrace."

Page 7

Friday 16th March 1945. Unbelievable, but I'm at Sutherland House at 9am and must go from there to the uniform officer to get my uniform. After a four year break I now wear the Queen's dress. It takes some getting used too especially the beret, which doesn't suit me so I buy a field service cap. The sleeping arrangements are not particularly ideal. I have to sleep on a hard timber plank in a stinking room. I handle it like a man.

Saturday 17th March 1945. I understand that the telegram that I sent Alice on Ray's birthday came back as 'unknown address'. I am dreadfully angry but because of my duty hours I can't complain at the telegraph office. In the morning I have to peel potatoes and in the afternoon we are free to hang around London. In the evening a small show at the club."

The issue with the telegram is also mentioned by Alice van den Nieuwenhof in her last entry in the baby album of son Ray.

Monday 19th March 1945. Today it's Sjaan's birthday and it's the first day of the nine day training at Sutherland House. We spend the morning doing exercises. I have trouble getting up and miss breakfast. In the afternoon theory of military discipline and ranks. I find my stay here terrible. Still no telegram from Zurich. After a bath and dinner, I go to the club where I would write to Alice, and nothing comes of it again.

Wednesday 21st March 1945. Still no telegram. Today I've been away exactly 3 months. Exercises. House duties and other

odd jobs fill the day's programme. I'm counting the days until I can get away. I even manage to stay home in the evening and begin to write.

Thursday 22nd March 1945. Receive a telegram from Alice and two postcards from Geldrop. Move from Sutherland House to Zetland House. I'm informed that I start at the Department of War on Monday.

Friday 23rd March 1945. Exercise and gymnastics in the morning. In the late afternoon took part in the funeral of an underground fighter. Send telegram to Alice.

Monday 26th March 1945. Finally receive a telegram about the birth of Andy. Telegraph straight back. Also receive two postcards from Sjaan. Today my first day at the Ministry. In the beginning it takes bit of getting used to. In the afternoon, military medical.

Tuesday 27th March 1945. Second workday at the second division of the Department of War. There is still not a lot to do: report from the Consulate and from Gibraltar. Everything is awkward and I still haven't got a lot to do. Delivering letters, sending packages, etc. etc. I really hope I will get other things to do because this is not the meaning. Today I'm very active.

Wednesday 28th March 1945. Today I'm at the office very early. First time in my life that I've been somewhere too early.

Thursday 29th March 1945. Complain at the post office about the returned telegram of the 5th of March. Get a letter from Henk. Send a telegram to Von Schulthess. At the office I have to type a new R.B.K.L. Discover that I am entitled to 5 pound *entrée de campagne*.

Friday 30th March 1945. An extraordinary beautiful sunny morning, it's a shame to now be shut up in an office... (unfinished sentence)

Monday 16th April 1945. Receive a telegram from Alice saying she wants to come over. With Instructions. To me the possibilities seem insurmountable.

Wednesday 18th April 1945. Send a telegram to Alice re. her telegram. Discuss with Lieutenant Bloem the possibility of eventual employment at the department of War.

Sjaan was Piet's sister. 'Entré de campagne' means 'joining the campaign', and was apparently some reward for joining the army. The possibility of eventual employment refers to Alice.

Saturday 28th April 1945. Cabaret in the U.N.F.C. and afterwards to "Stage Door Canteen". Rumours abound over the capitulation of Germany. Collect provisions of coffee, soap and chocolate.

Monday 30th April 1945. Receive a packet of cigarettes as a gift on Princess Day. We move from 750 to 758.

Wednesday 2nd May 1945. Excitement whilst on duty. It is said that Germany has capitulated.

Saturday 5th May 1945. I give Elias a letter and money for Soejono and at Piccadilly we see "The Fifth Chair" as well as the horrors of the camps in Belsen and Buchenwald.

Monday 7th May 1945. The most idiotic day of my life. Drink whisky for the first time. Feel quite right and get drunk in the tube.

Tuesday 8th May 1945. Officially V-day. I have no understanding of time and place. I still feel drunk. See the King, Queen and Princesses. Piccadilly and Leicester Square lit up with search lights. Londoners are crazy.

Wednesday 9th May 1945. Feast continues. Terrible days. A lot of drinking and very little sleep. Many English are of the opinion

'there's no peace, only fighting is over'.

Thursday 10th May 1945. The first day (back in the office) is disagreeable. Everyone has a hangover."

Page 8

The active service of Jack van Gorkom

Jack van Gorkom took another route to Paris than Piet van den Nieuwenhof and Huib Dupon did, as he had stayed behind in Hôtel des Narcisses, when his mates were transferred to the *Schweizerische Anstalt für Epileptische* in Zurich. One of the documents on this website is the permit that allowed Jack to travel to Geneva and leave the country on 21 December 1944. He had to report to the military police post on train station Genève-Cornavin and so he did, according to the stamp on the paper. It means that his route to Paris differed from the one taken by Piet and Huib, as Piet crossed the Swiss-French border in Les Verrières, which is quite a distance to the north.

Among the documents there is also Jack's Army Book, in which is written that he officially enlisted as a member of the Allied Forces in Fournès on 4 January 1945. The date is confirmed by a statement from the Dutch Ministry of Defence, drawn up in 1975, and also by a statement from the State pension fund. Fournès is close to Lille as well as the French-Belgium border, and therefore also very close to the place where Jack and his friends crossed the border in the opposite direction during their escape in November 1942. In December 1944 a training camp had been founded in Fournès by the Dutch military command to train the members of the *Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten* (Internal Forces), mostly former members of the Dutch resistance. Apparently, this was also the place where all Dutch recruits from Paris were taken on 3 January, as the diary of Piet shows. He mentions the bad organisation, the cold and the lack of food. It will not have been different for Jack's unit. The letters of Li van Gorkom to Alice van den Nieuwenhof on pages 10 and 11 of Life in Exile mention the

transportation in the direction of Lille on 3 January too.

Piet also wrote in his diary about units that moved on to the training camps in Holland. This is probably a reference to Jack's unit. As a matter of fact, those units did not go all the way to Holland, but were quartered at the Belgium-Dutch border for a while, where the new service men were assigned to a new battalion, that had been founded in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen on 18 December 1944 as *Wachtbataljon III* (Guarding Battalion III). Zeeuws-Vlaanderen is the most southern part of the Dutch province of Zeeland. On 2 January 1945 the name of the battalion was changed to I-3 R.I., meaning 1st Battalion of the 3rd Regiment Infantry. It operated under British command, who referred to it as the Paris Batt.

Going by the statement from the Defence department, Jack "stayed behind while on leave" from 6 February onwards. This was not considered an offence, it seems, as his return on 18 February is marked as "voluntarily reporting back". It is in this period that he travelled back to the French-Swiss border at Les Verrières with the intent to smuggle his wife Li and daughter Louise over the border, back to Holland. Li tells all about his two attempts to do so in her letters of 12 February and 6 March to Alice on page 11, 12 and 13 of Life in Exile. The first attempt was on 7 February. The second on 15 or 16 February. Among the documents on this site a laissez passer can be found that shows that Jack started the return journey to his unit on 16 February after both attempts had failed. It took him two days, therefore, to make it back. His absence of 12 days was later deducted from his pension. As active service counted double for the pension build-up, it was even a price of 24 days that he has paid.

The same laissez passer shows that battalion I-3 R.I. was quartered at Vracene, nowadays written as Vrasene, a little Belgian village in the vicinity of Antwerp, near the river Schelde and also very close to the village of Clinge where Jack and his friends once had crossed the Dutch-Belgium border in November 1942. On 10, 11 or 12 March—depending on the source the

information comes from—the battalion was moved to the province of Zeeland and came under the command of the *Prinses Irene Brigade*. This Brigade was founded in England in 1941 and serves till the day of today as icon of all Dutchmen that took part in the liberation of the Netherlands by the Allied Forces. Jack's unit was quartered on the island of Tholen. This was right at the battle front, as the Germans were still occupying large parts of the Netherlands, including the island of Schouwen-Duiveland, which is immediately next to Tholen.

One month later, the Prinses Irene Brigade itself was relocated to the East, and battalion I-3 R.I. came under the command of the 1st Canadian Army. On 5 May 1945 the Germans officially surrendered and on 8 May 1945 The 1st Canadian Army made its very festive, historical entry into The Hague, an image very often used, whenever attention is paid to the liberation of Holland. This entry was headed by the Dutch Prinses Irene Brigade, but ironically and quite confusing, the Dutch Battalion I-3 R.I. was part of the Canadian forces then. So, Jack finally returned to The Hague as a 'Canadian'.

Meanwhile, Jack was very worried that Li would try to come back to Holland on her own. Three days after the glorious entry in The Hague he simply took off without leave and travelled another time to Les Verrières. It was on 23 May that he finally succeeded to get Li and Louise illegally across the border and bring them back to Holland. After this, he reported back to his unit on 2 June, but this time it was regarded desertion, meaning that he had to spend some days in jail. Shortly afterwards the battalion I-3 R.I. went on transport to Germany, where they were part of the occupation forces. According to a source on the internet, it was the battalion's assignment to look after German prisoners of war in Mönchengladbach, just across the Dutch border.

On 8 August 1945, Jack's contract was finally finished. It must have been a contract for half a year, as he had enlisted on 4 January. Therefore the contract should have ended on 4 July, but

if you add up his days of absence in February and May, you get exactly the date of 8 August.

Call of Duty

For the Netherlands the war officially ended on the 5th May 1945, when the Germans army in Holland surrendered. From then on Holland was free again and so were the Dutch citizens. It would take years, however, before life returned to normal again. Meanwhile, not only lives and cities had been shattered, but also many dreams of those who had survived World War II.

Piet and Alice van den Nieuwenhof

For Piet van den Nieuwenhof it was the end of his dream to become a journalist. Neither did the end of the war mean his immediate return home. On the contrary, he remained in London for another two years. Alice van den Nieuwenhof had to wait as well. She had to stay in Switzerland for more than half a year before she was allowed to come over to England and have her family reunited. Meanwhile she was completely on her own with her two little boys Ray and Andy. It had been decided that Alice's chances to be allowed to go to England would be better if she were living on her own and so she spent the months after the liberation in a house on the premises of a hotel in Caux sur Montreux; a beautiful but lonely place to live. She had to stay there until early 1946 before she and her sons were finally granted permission to move to London. She did this in style by British war plane.

In 1947 the family finally returned to Holland. They went to The Hague, where Piet's friend Leib Simons offered him a job at his whole sale firm *Haags Staalkantoor N.V.* (The Hague Steel Office Pty). Two girls were born in The Hague: Marijke and Bernadette. But Alice was not happy anymore in little, crowded Holland after having lived abroad for five years. On 28th March 1951, Piet, Alice and children emigrated to Australia and from 1955 onwards they would live in the same house for more than fifty years in Toongabbie, Sydney. In Australia four more children were born: Anthony, John, Stephen and Therese. Piet finally came to work for American Express, a job that he enjoyed and which gave him the opportunity to travel abroad. He died in Blacktown, Sydney, on 28

February 2009 at the age of nearly 89.

During the last months of Piet's life, eldest son Ray made an effort to have his father awarded a medal for his war service. As a result Piet received the *Mobilisatie Oorlogskruis* (Mobilisation War Cross), granted to him by the Dutch Ministry of Defence on 5th March 2009—five days after his death. The medal was presented to Alice by the Dutch Consul-General in a ceremony at St Hedwig Village, Blacktown, where she lives. A little report can be found in the [Blacktown Sun](#).

Jack and Li van Gorkom

For Jack van Gorkom it was the end of his dream to become a sports instructor or physical education teacher. He was less lucky than Piet and had great trouble to find employment after his army contract had ended on 8th August 1945. He also suffered from what he had seen during his months of active service; something one would call Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome nowadays, a condition that did not have a name or face in those days. In the end he had little choice but to enlist again as an *Oorlogsvrijwilliger* (war volunteer), and so he served another two years in the Amsterdam regiment 2-11 R.I.

With the help of Jack, Li van Gorkom had left Switzerland illegally on 23 May 1945. After her return to Holland with daughter Louise, she moved in with her parents, who lived in Rotterdam at the time. In May 1946 Johanna was born and two months later Li and her parents moved to The Hague, where Jack and Li managed to find their own place to live. In 1947 Ineke was born in The Hague and in 1949 Dick. So by then, the score between Piet and Jack was more or less equal, both having four children now, of whom two were born in The Hague and the eldest in Switzerland. In the mean time, Jack had left the army in September 1947 and found an administrative job as a civil servant at the Council in The Hague.

In Jack and Li's case, it was Jack who did not want to stay in Holland. Inspired by the emigration of Piet and Alice, they too

started to make plans and finally on the 16th October 1959 they emigrated to Australia as well, where they were met by their old friends. In 1960 a fifth child, John, was born in Penrith, a Western suburb of Sydney. The van Gorkom family, however, returned to Holland after five years where Jack and Li went to live in Delft. Jack died in Delft on 2 January 2000 at the age of nearly 79. Since 2005, Li (Ada) lives in nursing home Eben Haëzer in Amsterdam.